

THE ENTREPRENEUR'S JOURNEY



A DIGITAL EXHIBITION
HIGHLIGHTING THE
WORCESTER ALBANIAN
COMMUNITY

The Entrepreneur's Journey

A Digital Exhibition Highlighting the Worcester Albanian Community

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This report represents the work of four WPI undergraduate students submitted to the faculty as evidence of completion of a degree requirement. WPI routinely publishes these reports on its web site without editorial or peer review. The opinions presented in this report do not necessarily represent the opinions of WPI. For more information about the projects program at WPI, see <http://www.wpi.edu/Academics/Projects>

ABSTRACT

Immigrant entrepreneurs are vital to the US economy, accounting for 25% of new ventures in 2017. In Worcester, 36% of business owners are foreign-born. Albanian entrepreneurs have a longstanding economic influence in Worcester that deserves recognition due to their contribution to the city's vitality. In cooperation with the Worcester Albanian Business Network, we conducted in-depth interviews with 11 Albanian entrepreneurs in Worcester who represent a wide range of industries and enterprises. These interviews are the foundation of a digital exhibition highlighting their journeys into and through entrepreneurship. These stories are designed to inspire, mentor, and support other entrepreneurs, while bolstering a sense of appreciation for immigrant entrepreneurship.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We are grateful to everyone who has helped and supported us on this journey. We would like to extend our appreciation to Ardian Preci, our project sponsor, who gave us an amazing opportunity to explore the Albanian community in Worcester. It has been a pleasure to create this exhibition with and for you.

Thank you to our advisors, Professors Leslie Dodson and Robert Hersh, for providing us much-needed guidance on this unfamiliar journey, and for always pushing us to improve our project.

Thank you to our amazing entrepreneurs for allowing us to into your worlds and sharing your stories with us. We are so inspired by your success, bravery, and determination. We truly could not have completed this project without you!

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Immigrants are the foundation of the United States economy. Data from the New American Economy Research Fund indicates that 45% of the top-500 largest companies by total revenue in America were immigrant-owned businesses in 2019, and together they employ 13.5 million people (New American Fortune 500 in 2019, 2019). Moreover, immigrant populations are critical to maintaining growing and vibrant metro areas, and research supports claims that immigrant entrepreneurship is on the rise; many metropolitan areas experienced a “significant increase in the number of immigrant entrepreneurs” from 2014 to 2017 (Immigrants and the Growth of America’s Largest Cities, 2019, para. 5). Despite the contributions of immigrants to the economic vitality of the country, current perceptions of immigration still center around the fears that immigrants will take away jobs and are a threat to the American way of life (Young, 2017).

There are certain traits that entrepreneurs possess to achieve the entrepreneurial mindset. Accion, a nonprofit community lender dedicated to helping entrepreneurs generate income and achieve financial success through business ownership around the world, claims there are five common characteristics needed to cultivate an entrepreneurial mindset:

Accion's 5 Characteristics of the Entrepreneurial Mindset

1. ***Positive Mental Attitude***

Creative Mindset 2.

3. ***Persuasive Communication Ability***

Self-Motivation and Drive 4.

5. ***Tenacity and Ability to learn from failure***

These characteristics alone do not guarantee success, as other external factors affect this, as well. Specifically, immigrant entrepreneurs are at a disadvantage, despite possessing many of the five common characteristics needed to cultivate an entrepreneurial mindset, due to external factors such as xenophobia and anti-immigrant biases that have existed in the United States for centuries.

Those external factors influence the motivations of immigrant entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurship can be divided into two distinct types: necessity-driven versus opportunity-driven. When an immigrant is left with no viable options in the job market, it is necessary for them to become self-employed to sustain themselves (Malerba & Ferreira, 2020).

Alternatively, seeking self-employment out of desire and opportunity is opportunity-driven entrepreneurship. In the early 20th century, a majority of immigrant entrepreneurs pursued necessity-driven entrepreneurship, but U.S Census Bureau data show that this is no longer the case (Malerba & Ferreira, 2020).

Worcester, Massachusetts is home to a prosperous immigrant population: 36% of Worcester business owners are foreign-born, indicating the contribution immigrants make to the Worcester economy (The Immigrant Entrepreneur in Worcester, 2018). Worcester's industrial history has contributed to it becoming a hub for immigration. In fact, the first wave of Albanian immigrants found their way to Massachusetts because they

were looking for economic opportunities during the Industrial Revolution (Zeko-Underwood, 2019).

We collaborated with the Worcester Albanian Business Network (WABN) to recognize Albanian entrepreneurs' contributions to the economy and vitality of Worcester. This entailed identifying Albanian entrepreneurs in Worcester and creating a digital exhibition of their stories with the intent to inspire, mentor, and support other entrepreneurs, while bolstering a sense of appreciation for immigrant entrepreneurship in the United States as a whole. The entrepreneurs featured in the digital exhibition represent first-generation Albanian-Americans. Each entrepreneur began their unique journey in Albania and found their way to Worcester, MA.

OBJECTIVES

1

Explore in detail the diverse experiences of a select number of Albanian entrepreneurs in the Worcester region.

2

Create individual storyworlds for each entrepreneur.

3

Curate the digital exhibition to convey individual stories and the collective entrepreneurial experience.

Findings

Each of our eleven entrepreneurs exhibit Accion's five traits of the entrepreneurial mindset. The first, a **positive mental attitude**, served for more than just challenges. Oriola Koci, co-owner of Livia's Dish and Altea's Eatery likes to think of challenges as opportunities; "those kinds of challenges trigger more excitement. And I think that the way you address things makes a big difference in how they end up becoming a problem, an issue, or just a bump in the road." This positive mentality came from being an immigrant, as well. Kreuza Disho, co-owner of the Dippin' Donuts cafes, remembers that her father *"gave us a lot of strength. He told us, no matter how many difficulties we would see in our way, we had to find a positive. No matter how much we would struggle, we had to find the force to fight back."*

The second trait, being **persuasive** is usually a less obvious entrepreneurial characteristic, but Orieta Kristo, owner of Horizon Insurance, knows she has it and likes to use it. *"I graduated in marketing and I always wanted to be in sales, I'm very good with people. I started my career*

at State Street Accounting, and it was horrible all I was doing was crunching numbers all day and I didn't see anybody it was horrible." Rather, Orieta wanted to be in a job where she could use her talents in communication skills. Other entrepreneurs, like Valon Dalipi, co-owner of the STOP Café Pizza & Grille, had to work on his persuasive communication for years before becoming an entrepreneur. He worked as a delivery driver, which *"helped me a lot to learn how to communicate with people in English."*

We found that entrepreneurs rely on their creativity just as much as their positive attitude and communication abilities; Greta Bajrami used her **creative mentality** to market Golden Group Roofing and make it a multi-million-dollar business. *"Everybody that heard it thought I was crazy. They're like, What? You are 21 years old, you are [an] Albanian girl. What do you know about roofing?"* Greta prevailed, despite the criticism, because of her creativity.

Exhibiting Accion's fourth characteristic of **self-motivation and drive**, Irida was driven to create Catalyst Insurance because she wanted freedom to choose her own

schedule and make a work-life balance after she had her first daughter. *"I realized that I wasn't really there; I was putting in a lot of hours at work, and I was missing some really great milestones that I should have been there for."* Adela Tego, co-owner of the coffee mug, came to America because her family *"felt that America was the place where we wanted to be. And we fought, we fought very hard. And they kept telling us, you got to have good grades, you got to make sure you study hard. Because we didn't win the lottery."*

The fifth trait, being **tenacious**, was a clear similarity among the immigrant entrepreneurs. When Erion and Olta Kodra started Strategic Behavioral Solutions, they found ran into financial and staffing issues. *"A finance problem, which is always first in a business, and also a lack of experience in how to operate and hire people at the same time; those were kind of the biggest challenges."* Yet, they were just about able to get through their hard times when COVID-19 up-ended all their progress. Nevertheless, Erion believes the business will be able to survive the pandemic, holding to the tenacious mindset that *"what doesn't kill you only makes you stronger."*

Recommendations

The team documented potential avenues of expansion at the end of the semester, and outlined helpful information for future work. In addition to the online profiles, the team developed a catalog that offers an analysis of each entrepreneur profile. The team also created a style guide outlining how the profiles were built (i.e., font, color, general layout, most effective interview questions) and recommendations for the future expansion of the exhibition.

Continue to Create Profiles

The team recommends that the WABN continue to produce profiles of Albanian entrepreneurs in Worcester. We scratched the surface of Worcester-Albanian entrepreneurs and more stories and facets should be highlighted. We provide our list of sample questions to use in these interviews, which span questions about the entrepreneurs' family history, experiences that influenced their entrepreneurial mindset, as well as their present endeavors and how they created their businesses. We found that it is vital to have a comprehensive understanding of both the journey to entrepreneurship and the journey in entrepreneurship. One's motivations for becoming an entrepreneur

can come from anywhere, and those motivations and attitudes brought to the start of entrepreneurship further influence one's journey within it.

Expand the Exhibition

We noticed several areas for future research that would benefit the exhibition:

1. Explore transformational stories
2. Investigate second- and third-generation Albanian entrepreneurs
3. Focus a sample on part-time Albanian entrepreneurs

Transformational stories of immigrant entrepreneurs would recognize immigrants who had professional, scientific, or specialized careers in Albania but lost their credentials to continue pursuing that career when they arrived in the United States—which happened to many of our entrepreneurs' parents.

While transformational stories are more likely to be found in the older generation of Albanian entrepreneurs, investigating the newer generations—the American-born Albanian entrepreneurs in Worcester—would provide yet another perspective to our exhibition. Their attitudes, motivations, and approaches to entrepreneurship might differ from first-generation Albanian-Americans.

We recommend using a purposive sampling strategy to find part-time entrepreneurs, or those who have at least one other job and do not rely on their entrepreneurial venture as their sole source of income. This sample would add another facet of entrepreneurship to the exhibition while also giving recognition to those who are less likely to receive it than large corporations or small-to-medium enterprises.

Use Many Communications Channels

Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, we could only communicate with entrepreneurs through email and Zoom, which resulted in cases of bad internet connections, insufficient knowledge of Zoom, and email miscommunications. In the future, the team advises attempting to speak over the phone with the entrepreneur for scheduling and contact purposes, as we found this to be easier than email in some cases. We recommend using as many communication channels as possible, including visiting entrepreneurs' shops, restaurants, and businesses when it is safe to do so, to develop personal connections and trust with the interviewees.

AUTHORSHIP

All team members contributed equally to editing each section.

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Approach - Emily

Profiles - Alyssa

Recommendations - Vignesh

Introduction - All

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Growing Opposition to Immigration - Bella

Journey From Albania to Worcester - Emily

Stories of Immigrant Entrepreneurs - Alyssa

Storytelling Through Digital Exhibitions - Vignesh

Approach:

Examine diverse experiences of a select group of Albanian entrepreneurs in Worcester - Bella

Create individual storyworlds of each entrepreneur - Alyssa

Curate a digital exhibition to convey individual stories and the collective entrepreneurial experience - Emily & Vignesh

Profiles

Orieta Kristo - Emily

Oriola Koci - Alyssa

Kreuzza Disho - Bella

Eva and Bersan Shqina - Emily

Greta Bajrami - Bella

Erion Kodra - Alyssa

Adela Tego - Emily

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Recommendations - All

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INTRODUCTION



INTRODUCTION

Immigrants, persons who have come to a different country to live permanently (Cambridge dictionary), are the foundation of the United States economy and immigrants are more likely to become entrepreneurs than US-born citizens (New American Fortune 500 in 2019, 2019). An entrepreneur can be defined as, "a person who organizes and manages any enterprise, especially a business, usually with considerable initiative and risk" (Nelson, 2012). Data from the New American Economy Research Fund indicates that 45% of the top-500 largest companies by total revenue in America were immigrant-owned businesses in 2019, and together they employ 13.5 million people (New American Fortune 500 in 2019, 2019). Moreover, immigrant populations are critical to maintaining and growing vibrant metro areas, and research supports claims that immigrant entrepreneurship, an individual who, as a recent arrivals in the country, start a business as a mean of economic survival, is on the rise; many metropolitan areas experienced a "significant increase in the number of immigrant entrepreneurs" from 2014 to 2017 (Williams, 2016; Immigrants and the Growth of America's Largest Cities, 2019, para. 5).



Figure 1: "Immigrant entrepreneurs create more jobs than their American counterparts" Quartz Magazine. Picture taken by Stephen Lam (2020).

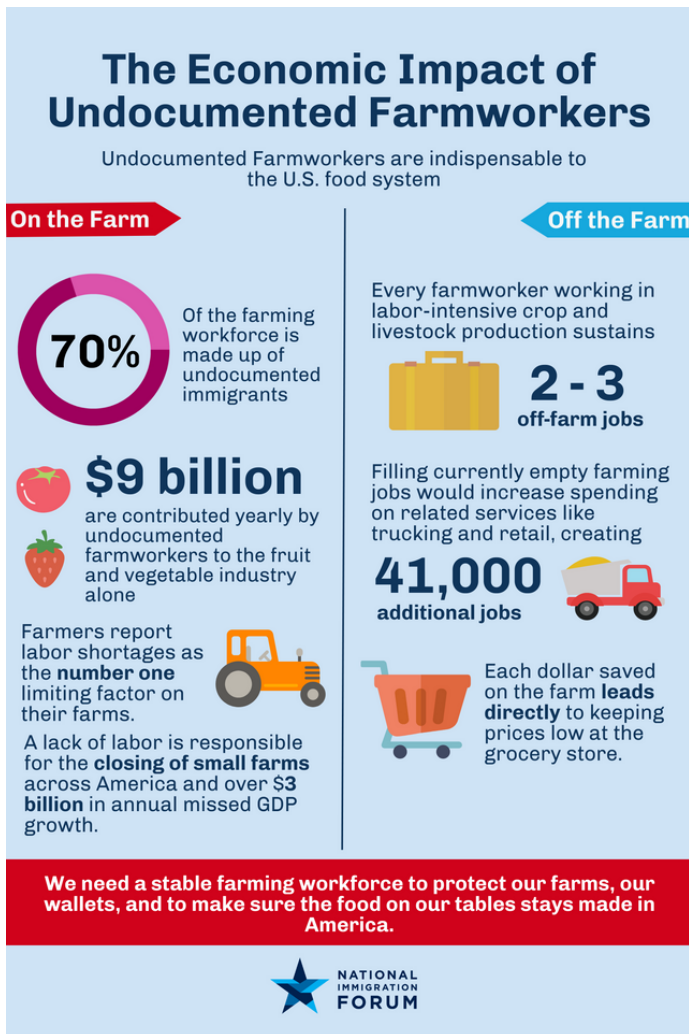


Figure 2: The Economic Impact of Undocumented Farmworkers. Retrieved from Zak (2020).



In 2017 alone, immigrant households earned a total of \$1.3 trillion in wages and contributed more than \$973 billion in spending dollars (Immigrants and the Growth of America's Largest Cities, 2019). The massive spending power of immigrants in the United States contributes to keeping local businesses and larger companies open. Despite the contributions of immigrants to the economic vitality of the country, perceptions of immigration still center around fears that immigrants will take away jobs and are a threat to the American way of life (Young, 2017). While as of 2015 the United States is home to more immigrants than any other country in the world, the Trump administration repeatedly called for an end to the Diversity Visa Program, which allows many people from countries with low immigration rates to apply for a visa lottery to obtain legal, permanent residency in the U.S. (Ibe, 2019). This anti-immigrant sentiment is comparable to nativism—or the idea of protecting the interests of US-born residents over those

of immigrants—exhibited in United States politics for more than two centuries. Worcester, Massachusetts, is home to a prosperous immigrant population. Some 22% of the city's 186,000 residents are foreign-born (The Immigrant Entrepreneur in Worcester, 2018). Of that population, Albanians make up 6.3%, or roughly 2,500 people of Worcester's foreign-born population (The Immigrant Entrepreneur in Worcester, 2018).



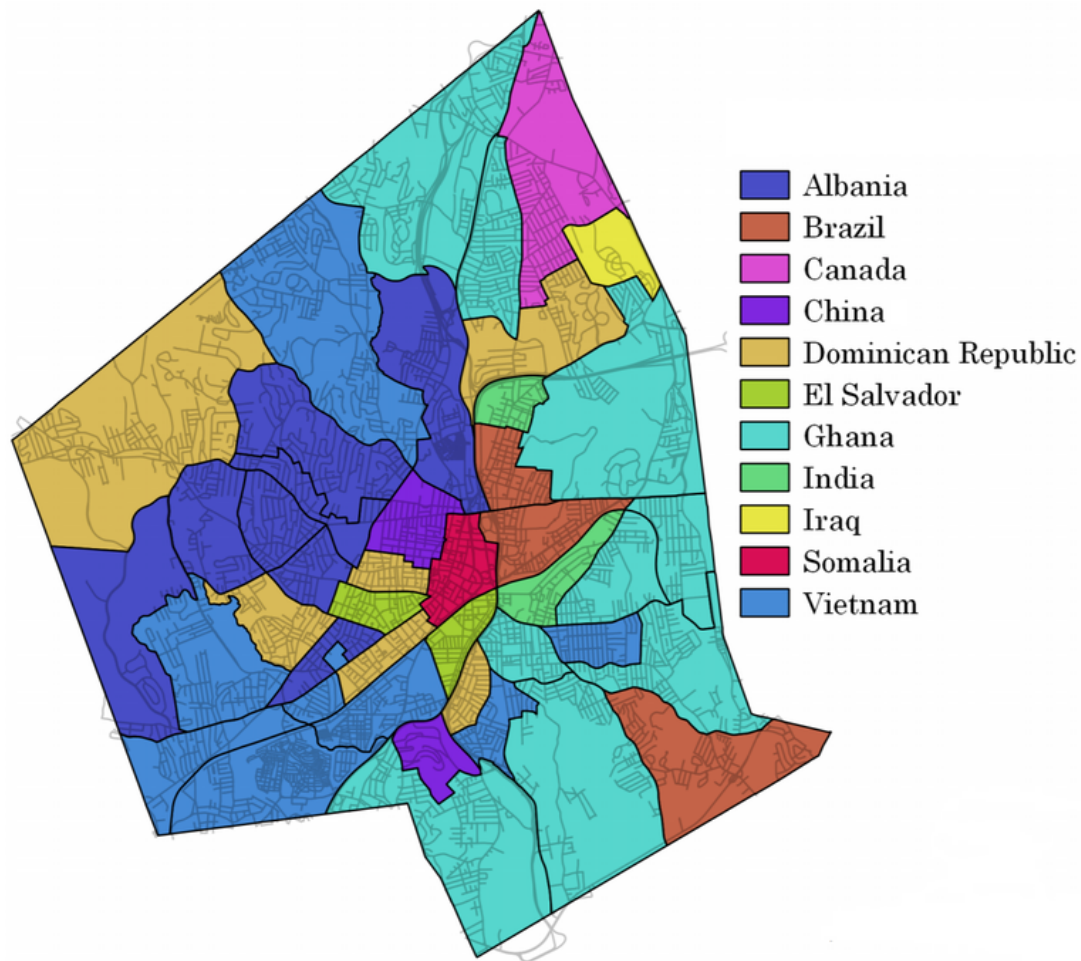


Figure 3: Map of Worcester demographics. Adapted from The Immigrant Entrepreneur in Worcester (2018).

Thirty-six percent of Worcester business owners are foreign-born, indicating the significant contribution immigrants make to the Worcester economy (The Immigrant Entrepreneur in Worcester, 2018). Worcester's history has largely contributed to it becoming the hub for immigration that it is today. The first wave of Albanian immigrants found their way to Massachusetts because they were looking for economic opportunities in the Industrial Revolution (Zeko-Underwood, 2019). The revolution boosted Worcester's population by 236%—or 68,000 people in the 40 years after the American Civil War—with foreign-born newcomers outnumbering the US-born newcomers (Industrialization, n.d.). However, most Albanian immigration to Worcester and Massachusetts in general, came in the third wave of the Albanian diaspora, after the communist regime in Albania fell in 1990. These immigrants sought to reconnect with family from the first and second waves post-World War 2 and maintain a sense of Albanian community (Zeko-Underwood, 2019).



A number of them also pursued their own business ideas and continue to contribute to Worcester's industrial, self-made reputation.

The goal of our project was to profile Albanian entrepreneurs in Worcester to create a digital exhibition of their stories to inspire, mentor, and support other entrepreneurs while bolstering a sense of appreciation for immigrant entrepreneurship in the United States as a whole.

We conducted multiple in-depth key informant interviews with Albanian immigrant entrepreneurs. We created a compelling exhibit of individual and collective immigrant entrepreneur experiences using videos, audio, and quotes from interviews along with photos provided by the entrepreneurs.

Our aim was to highlight the successes and tribulations of the Albanian immigrant entrepreneurs in the hopes that this exhibition could serve to inspire or motivate other aspiring entrepreneurs, either in the Albanian-Worcester community or outside.



Figure 4: The Albanian Festival in Worcester, MA. Retrieved from the Albanian Community of Worcester Facebook page (2019).



CONTEXT

Entrepreneurship and Immigration

Entrepreneurship's Elusive Definition

It is difficult to define entrepreneurship in a way that does not either diminish it or make it incomprehensible. The definition of immigrant entrepreneurship is even more complex. There is no “consistent definition of the term [entrepreneurship] across the universe of studies on the topic” (Gutterman, 2012, pg. 2). When trying to discern between entrepreneurs and small business owners or managers, “no significant differentiating features” exist, so the most accepted classification, albeit broad, is that entrepreneurship involves the creation of something new (Gutterman, 2012, pg. 3). This classification has its origins in the 1800s, deriving from the French term “entreprendre,” meaning “an undertaking” (Carlen, 2016, pg. 1). Author John Carlen, who explores the evolution of the entrepreneur from the early 19th century to modern day, has

observed that entrepreneurs are people who pursue economic prosperity by entering new markets, which they achieve through many different routes. In attempts to provide clarity, researchers have developed various classifications of entrepreneurship, such as: **full- or part-time entrepreneurship, social entrepreneurship, or necessity vs. opportunity-based entrepreneurship.**

Types of Entrepreneurship:

Full or Part-time

Social

Necessity vs Opportunity

Full-time entrepreneurs carry more personal financial risk by relying solely on the success of their newfound ventures for income and are found to more likely rely on support, whether financially or mentally than part-time entrepreneurs (Starting a Business, 2010). Part-time entrepreneurs may rely on a separate income from other jobs or endeavors while their business grows gradually (Starting a Business, 2010). People also often start part-time businesses rather than full-time ventures “because they do not know their true entrepreneurial ability ahead of time” (Petrova, 2010, pg. 1). This expert opinion resonates particularly with immigrant entrepreneurs, who may have found that a lack of entrepreneurial experience led them initially to a part-time venture. Looking into the definition of social entrepreneurship, authors Martin and Osberg describe a social entrepreneur as one who “neither anticipates nor

organizes to create substantial financial profit” (Martin & Osberg, 2007). Their creation lies not within a product for monetary gain, but a movement that will promote social wellbeing (Rahim & Mohtar, 2015). Social entrepreneurship is a topic that has been debated for decades, some arguing it is reserved for non-profit organizations, others citing the fact that a company that prioritizes their social impact on employees and customers alike, at the risk of their economic gain, while still taking in a profit, can be categorized as a social entrepreneur (Rahim & Mohtar, 2015). In that sense, any entrepreneur who remains socially conscious, whilst still looking to make money, can be considered a social entrepreneur. However, scholars have still yet to agree on an established definition.

The Entrepreneurial Mindset

According to Neil Patel, a successful entrepreneur and former Forbes contributor, 90% of startups fail (Patel, 2015). The Small Business Association (SBA) further reports that approximately two-thirds of all small businesses that have employees survive for roughly two and a half years, while half of small businesses survive for more than five years, as depicted in Figure 5. An SBA report reveals that these rates are relatively equal across most industries: manufacturing, construction, hotels, and food industry (SBA Office of Advocacy, 2012).

In their book *The Startup Playbook*, two longtime founders of various successful and failed companies, Rajat Bhargava and Will Herman, suggest that people who tend to succeed in self-starting professions exhibit traits such as curiosity and passion for what they do, being a visionary while also being open-minded and realistic, and being

competitive by nature (Bhargava & Herman, 2020). Accion, a nonprofit community lender dedicated to helping entrepreneurs generate income and achieve financial success through business ownership around the world, corroborates these findings. The Accion mission

statement says: "Our work helps people, small businesses, and communities grow and thrive. We challenge and engage the industry, its leaders, and its regulators to achieve a financially inclusive world" (Accion).

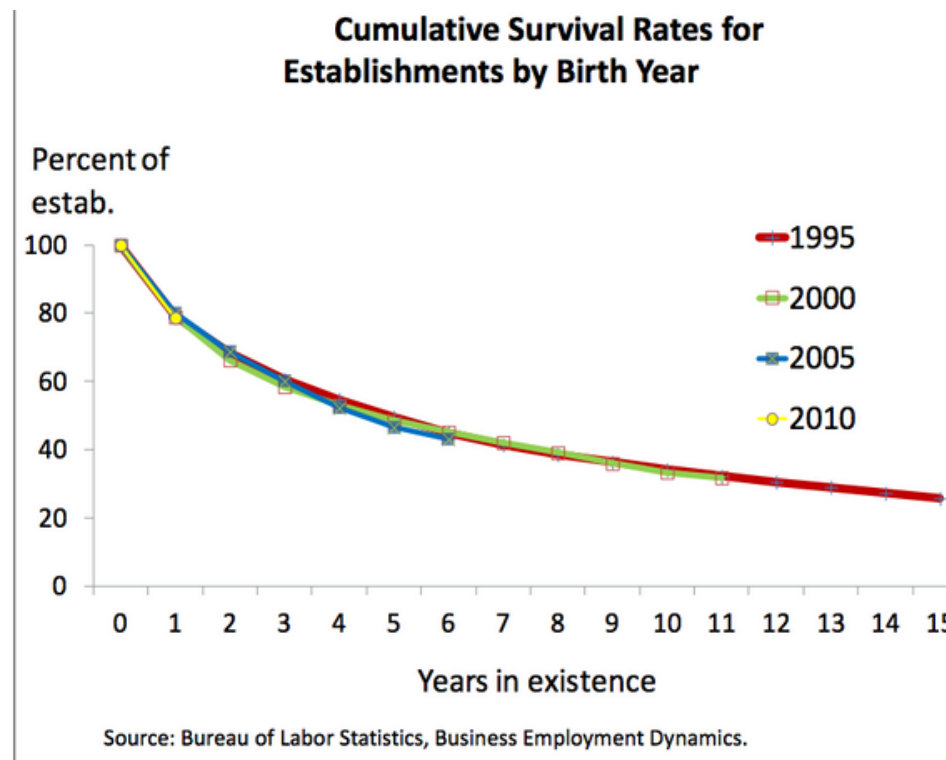


Figure 5 : Graph of Small Business Survival Rate. Adapted from the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2012).

Accion fulfills their mission statement by offering support and targeted coaching for startups (Accion). Accion further claims there are five common characteristics needed to cultivate an entrepreneurial mindset: 1) a positive mental attitude, 2) a creative mentality, 3) persuasive communication ability, 4) self-motivation and drive, and 5) tenacity and ability to learn from failure (Entrepreneurial Mindset, Accion 2020).



Accion's 5 Characteristics of the Entrepreneurial Mindset

1. ***Positive Mental Attitude***

Creative Mindset 2.

3. ***Persuasive
Communication Ability***

***Self-Motivation and
Drive*** 4.

5. ***Tenacity and Ability
to learn from failure***

The first characteristic, *a positive mental attitude*, refers to the ability to respond to challenges with a reformative, or assistive attitude, rather than “wallowing in the mistakes,” and think quickly to resolve the issues (Entrepreneurial Mindset, 2020).

A creative mindset is the basis of entrepreneurship; looking for “novel ideas” and underserved markets is key to a successful business venture; entrepreneurs inherently have this trait, by taking the chance to start their own venture rather than working for someone else’s.

In order to get creative business ideas off the ground, a *persuasive communication skill* is required to market and garner support (Entrepreneurial Mindset, 2020).

According to the author of “Achieving Longevity: How Great Firms Prosper through Entrepreneurial Thinking,” the ability to recognize opportunities is what sets entrepreneurs apart from the rest. It is a “precondition for

entrepreneurial action” (Dewald, 2016, pg. 106). *Self-motivation and drive*, aids in an entrepreneur’s ability to identify opportunities (Entrepreneurial Mindset, 2020). When an idea becomes outdated, an entrepreneur acts quickly to adapt to the changing world, to ensure the stability of their and their employees’ careers in the future, rather than stubbornly sticking with a plan that currently thrives but may become obsolete.

In addition to having this opportunity-identification ability, entrepreneurs must be willing to act on opportunities and they must be willing to take risks despite the possibility of failure. This encapsulates characteristic five, *tenacity and ability to learn from failure*.

Entrepreneurs are generally tenacious, and recognize that failure is inevitable,” and mistakes will be made (Entrepreneurial Mindset, 2020). It has been found that early successes, or “positive risk experience[s]” can lead

to increased exploration of newfound opportunities, because positive risk experiences foster the idea that “what has been done in the past can be done again” (Dewald, 2016, pg. 107). These characteristics, alone, do not guarantee success, as other external factors have an effect. Immigrant entrepreneurs, specifically, are at a disadvantage, despite possessing many of the five common characteristics needed to cultivate an entrepreneurial mindset, due to external factors such as xenophobia and anti-immigrant biases that have existed in the United States for centuries.



Growing Opposition to Immigration

The National Populism Movement

Immigrants are “widely regarded as highly entrepreneurial and essential for economic growth and innovation,” which means that they tend to create more job opportunities and revenue by working for themselves and starting new businesses (Malerba & Ferreira, 2020, para. 3). As of 2017, immigrant businesses accounted for 25% of new American ventures in the United States, making them integral to the economy (Kerr & Kerr, 2017).

The idea of the American “melting pot” has been a longstanding, traditional image of the nation (Bhattacharya & Groznik, 2008). But in reality, this perception does not reflect the political beliefs held by a significant portion of the country. Immigration has become an increasingly polarizing and divisive issue in the United States that is debated for its impact on jobs, taxes, crime, schools, cultural norms, and social harmony, and is exacerbated by a national populism movement in the U.S.

Immigration Drives Population Growth in the Sunbelt, Pacific Northwest, and Mountain States

Share of total adult population growth from foreign-born adults from 1990 to 2012

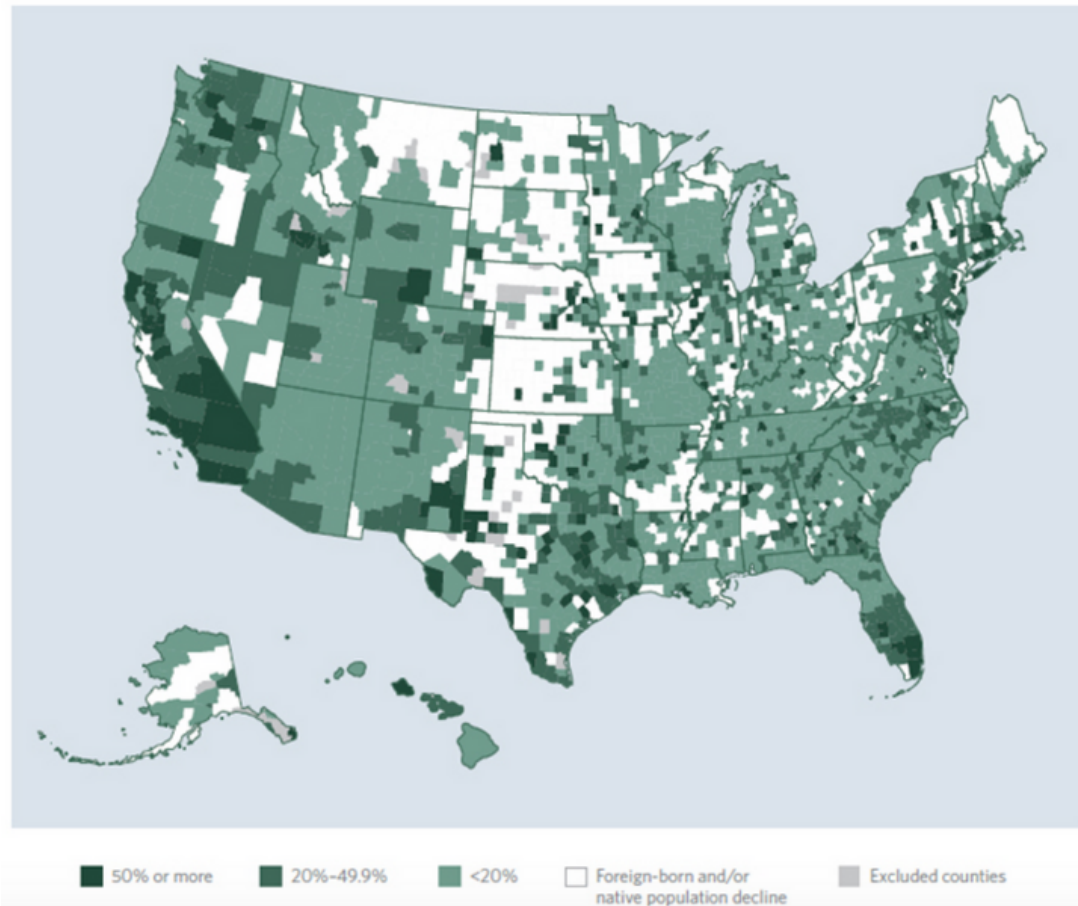


Figure 6: Immigration Based Population Growth, 1990-2012. Adapted from PEW Research Center (2014).

National populism is a political ideology in countries around the world. Supporters typically oppose mass immigration and neo-liberal globalization—as it refers to the ideals of an unregulated capitalist system or a free-market economy and is perceived to promote individualism, which diminishes nationalism when coupled with high immigration (Kotz, 2000; Fuchs, 2015). The belief is immigrants come to America from all over the world and bring with them their old nations' cultures, politics, and values, which then lessen the collective pride in American culture if the immigrants are free to maintain the ideologies from their home countries (Fuchs, 2015). Indeed, the ideology supports national attachment by promising to “give voice to those who feel they’ve been neglected,” as “the result of a conspirative political plan of powerful elites,” (Goodwin, 2018, para. 3; Fuchs, 2015, para. 6).

While there is little debate that national populism is growing, there are many explanations as to why, which are connected to four “deep-rooted” societal shifts that have been in the works since the 1970s and are all now coming to a head: growing political distrust, destruction of national cultures, loss of jobs and income, and

dealignment between voters and political parties (Goodwin, 2018, para. 9). Two of these shifts directly correlate to the growing negative perceptions of immigration: the fear of destruction of national cultures and the loss of jobs and income.



Figure 7: A Day Without Immigrants Protest. Adapted from Abramitzky (2020).

The Perceived Destruction of National Identity

Commentators have claimed that the current nationalist sentiment in the U.S. reflects lasting sentiments of racism or a pull towards fascism (Goodwin, 2018). Ruth Green, a multimedia journalist for the International Bar Association, notes that populists tend to support “xenophobic [dislike of people from other countries] and intolerant ideas” which can lead to further extremes, as they “[embolden] racists and incites...violence against minority communities” (Green, 2019, para. 2 and 19). Mike Gonzalez, a senior fellow in The Heritage, has another view: “people intuit that their culture is at stake...[they] don’t want to see it change radically or drastically” (Cordero, 2019, para. 7). As the country accepts more and more immigrants, some Americans fear that the immigrant's homeland cultures will begin to influence American culture if

the immigrants do not assimilate, which fuels populist resentment and unfriendliness towards immigration. However, based on data from the Migration Policy Institute, the US Census Bureau, and the US Departments of Homeland Security and State, the United States has experienced a slower total population growth rate of immigrants every year since 2015, which contradicts the notion that America is still an open and accessible country to emigrate to (Batalova et al., 2020). Despite this slowing rate of growth, “concerns have been raised about the speed and degree to which these immigrants can assimilate,” which stokes their fear of the destruction of national cultures and values (National Research Council, 1996, p.28). Yet, there is no evidence of this lack of assimilation; in fact, “waves of immigrants have continuously

assimilated into the settled regional American cultures” (Nowrasteh, 2016, para. 13). In a 2020 study on the cultural assimilation of immigrants based on two major waves of migration (1850-1913 and 1965-present), Ran Abramitzky, an economist at Stanford University and the National Bureau of Economic Research, found that “immigrants’ identification with United States culture grows stronger with time spent in the country,” which “suggests that fears that immigrants cannot or will not fit into American society are misplaced” (Abramitzky et al., 2020, pg.11-12). The fear likely occurs because assimilation happens and becomes more apparent over time whereas the increased arrival of new immigrants can happen in a short period of time, it may be hard to discern that assimilation is in fact happening.

The “Threat” of Immigration to Jobs and Income

Another popular argument against immigrants is that immigrants take American jobs, suppress wages, and hurt the (United States-born) working class. These concerns create “personal vulnerability to economic...deprivation,” such as unemployment and lower income, which “provides a direct source for inter-ethnic hostility,” (Lewin-Epstein & Levanon, 2005, p.92). These fears fuel negative perceptions of immigrants.

Yet, the assumption that immigrants take American jobs and make wages more competitive is false; immigrants are typically attracted to developing regions in need of businesses, and they have been shown to “increase the supply and demand sides of the economy once they are there” (Nowrasteh, 2018, para. 2).



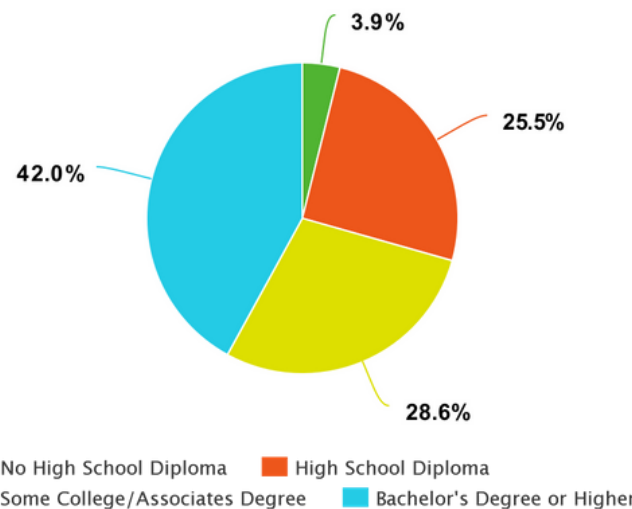
Figure 8: Supporters of illegal immigrants and members of the Latino community rally against a new Arizona law in Union Square on May Day. Photo by Spencer Platt (2010).

Motivations for Immigrant Entrepreneurship in the U.S.

Immigrant entrepreneurship is a widely researched phenomenon. Researchers have focused on the social dynamics and individual characteristics that encourage immigrants to engage in entrepreneurial behavior and their journey to reach success.

When immigrants move to the United States, they often first work jobs in the low-skill market. According to a 2019 U.S Bureau of Labor Statistics study, 65.7% of foreign-born workers were working jobs. Education level was a key contributor to entrance of low-skill market, with 24.9% of immigrant workers having a high school diploma as the highest level of schooling completed, and 20.4% of being without a high school diploma (Foreign-Born, 2020, pg. 2).

U.S Native-Born Workers Education Statistics 2019
U.S Bureau of Labor Statistics



U.S Foreign-Born Workers Education Statistics 2019
U.S Bureau of Labor Statistics

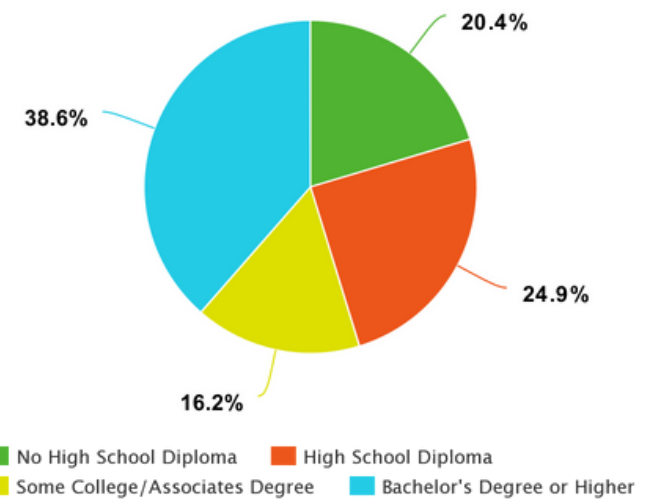


Figure 9: Immigrant Education Statistics, 2019.
Adapted from U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2019).

When immigrants come to the United States with Bachelor's degrees or higher, they are generally successful at finding jobs in high-skill fields, sometimes having a higher education level than US-born workers (Singer, 2012, pg. 6). However, some highly-skilled immigrants possess professional certifications that do not get recognized in host countries. Scholars suggest that the lack of recognition of skills and education acquired abroad may be due to prejudice against the legitimacy of the education quality in the mother country (King et. al, 2010, pg. 7). Within the labor force, foreign-born workers earn less than their native counterparts. The U.S Labor Bureau of Statistics found that in "2019, median usual weekly earnings of foreign-born, full-time wage and salary workers (\$800) were 85.0 percent of the earnings of their

native-born counterparts (\$941)" (Foreign-Born, 2020, pg. 4). The lack of opportunity, lack of recognition for previous experience, low pay, and language difficulties are in part, a driving force for immigrants to pursue entrepreneurship.

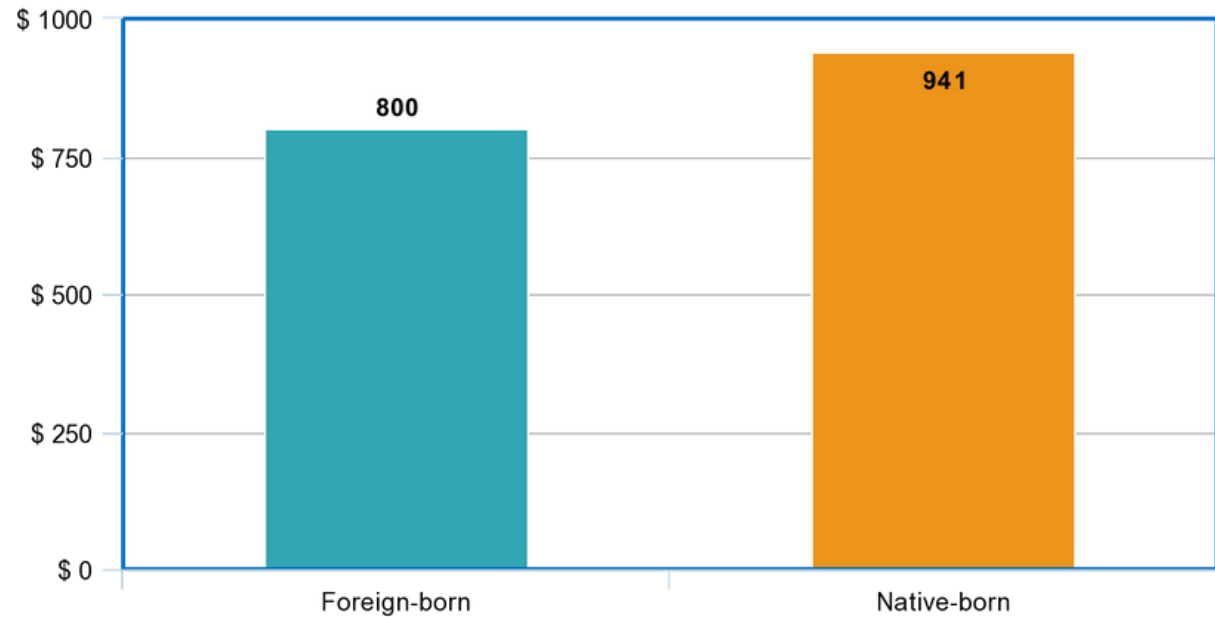


Figure 10: Median Weekly Earnings of Full Time/ Salary Workers. Adapted from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2019).

Necessity-Driven versus Opportunity-Driven Immigrant Entrepreneurship

Entrepreneurship can be divided into two distinct types: **necessity-driven** versus **opportunity-driven**. When an immigrant is left with no viable options in the job market, it is necessary for them to become self-employed to sustain themselves (Malerba & Ferreira, 2020). Alternatively, seeking self-employment out of desire and opportunity is opportunity-driven entrepreneurship. U.S Census Bureau data show that this is no longer the case. A 2019 study exploring Immigrant Entrepreneurship in the High-Tech industry found that when ranking motivations for starting one's own business, financial factors ranked lower for immigrants than US-born subjects, and having a viable idea for a business ranked highest (Brown et. al, 2019, pg. 25).

Table 1: Business Motivations Statistics. Adapted from U.S. Census Bureau 2019

VARIABLES	All	Immigrant	Native
Idea	1.49	1.51	1.48
Income	1.49	1.46	1.50
No Job	0.10	0.14	0.09
Own Boss	1.47	1.35	1.50
Work for Self	0.90	0.79	0.92
Always Wanted to Own Business	1.18	1.32	1.14
Role Model	0.62	0.63	0.62
Flexible Hours	1.26	1.21	1.27
Balance Work/Family	1.28	1.28	1.28
Observations	11,000	2,000	9,000

Note: These are means of motivation variables measured on a scale where 0 is not important, 1 is somewhat important, and 2 is very important.

Table 2: Immigrant Self-Employment Statistics. Adapted from , 2012

Immigrant subsample:	Self-employment (vs Salaried)	
	Linguistically close	Linguistically distant
	(1)	(2)
Second Generation	-0.079*** (0.000)	-0.079*** (0.000)
Immigrant Group	0.015 (0.014)	0.097*** (0.020)
Second Gen x Immigrant Group	-0.009 (0.016)	-0.080*** (0.020)
Years of education	0.002*** (0.000)	0.001*** (0.000)
Controls for race	✓	✓
Fixed effects	✓	✓
Number of Observations	333944	325266
Base rate of self-employment	13%	13%
Selection effect into self-employment		
1st-gen immig relative to U.S.-born	n/a	72%
2nd-gen immig relative to U.S.-born	n/a	13%

Source: March Supplements of the Current Population Survey, 1994 - 2012

The divide between necessity-driven and opportunity-driven entrepreneurship can be attributed to age and language proficiency (Kim, 2019, pg. 4). A 2018 study conducted by Georgetown University observed the gap between first-generation and second-generation immigrants, and the effects of language proficiency. Immigrants who did not know English were more likely to pursue self-employment,

and the children of those immigrants were more inclined to also follow the path of self-employment along with pursuing a higher education (Kim, 2019, pg. 5). Alternatively, immigrants who were comfortable with English had less trouble finding employment, so they were less likely to become entrepreneurs. Albanian immigrants to the United States have exhibited both necessity-based and opportunity-based entrepreneurship through the waves

that have emigrated over the past several decades. Examining Albania's economic and social history helps identify the push and pull factors towards immigrant entrepreneurship upon arrival to the US.



Journey from Albania to Worcester

Political Collapse in Albania



Figure 11: Map of Albania. Retrieved from *Brittanica.com*.

Albania in the early 1990's underwent a sharp shift in political, economic, and social dynamics. Following the death of Secretary Enver Hoxha in 1985, and in conjunction with other European events, communism in Albania collapsed in the early 1990's. After the fall of the communist regime in 1991, many factories and other primary places of employment in Albania shut down, leaving hundreds of thousands of people unemployed. With the economy in shambles, many Albanians looked outside of their home country for work opportunities to support their families. By 2006, approximately one-fifth, or 800,000 persons, of the entire Albanian population had migrated from Albania to other locations such as, Italy, Greece, and the United States in search of a labor market (Stampini, 2008).



Perceptions of Albanians in Greece

The first post-regime wave of mass Albanian migration to Greece occurred in the early 1990's, as a direct result of the collapse of communism. The second major wave took place in 1996 after a huge economic collapse in Albania due to the collapse of "pyramid schemes" (Kasimis & Kassimi, 2004). More than 444,000 Albanians migrated to neighboring Greece between 1990-early 2000's (Baldwin-Edwards, 2004). As of 1998, 65% of all foreign applicants of a Green Card in Greece were of Albanian origin—approximately 250,000 people (Lazaridis, 2007). This mass migration of Albanians generated increased levels of paranoia and distrust in Greece. The Greek government and local and regional municipalities were overwhelmed with the sheer number of foreigners entering Greece, spurring Greek parliamentarians to circulate

defamatory narratives about Albanians in Greece (Baldwin-Edwards, 2004). The Greek media began dishonestly associating Albanian immigrants with the "dangerous immigrant" stereotype, as well as and other forms of criminality (Baldwin-Edwards, 2004, pg. 3). This false narrative about Albanians strained their status in Greek society. However, research suggests that the average Albanian migrants were higher-skilled and better educated compared to the average Albanian civilian citizen who remained in Albania Danopoulos et al. (2004) also argue that many educated Albanians in Greece are deprived economic opportunities due to the pervasive narrative that "the majority of Albanian immigrants are categorized as self-selected migrants who are inclined to be more ambitious, entrepreneurial, and aggressive than

individuals choosing to remain in their home country" (Danopoulos, 2004, pg. 105).



Figure 12: The Vlora. Photo by Nicola Romani (1991).



*Figure 13: An Albanian refugee family arrives, on July 13, 1990 as the Italian ferry "Espresso Grecia" transporting them from Albania docks in Brindisi.
Photo by Joel Robine (1990).*



The U.S. Diversity Visa Program



Figure 14: Albanian winners of the visa lottery, Bora Laci (left) and her mother, Mirjan Laci. Retrieved from TribTalk.org.

The United States Diversity Immigrant Visa program was borne of the Immigration Act of 1990. The program seeks to diversify the American population by annually awarding 55,000 green cards to immigrants from underrepresented countries in the United States (Law, 2002). Available visas are distributed in proportional amounts among six geographical regions, dependent on rates of immigration (US Embassy). In the 1960s, the State Department determined Albania and 35 other adversely affected countries were eligible to receive the distributed visas. That list carried over to the Diversity Visa program that began in 1995. Thousands of Albanian citizens apply each year, mostly in effort to escape the economic and political hardships in their homeland. By 1997, Albania was one of the top diversity

visa-receiving nations, reaffirming the strong desire to escape (Law, 2002). This trend continued into the late 1990's and even the early 2000s until leveling out. As of 2016, 44,806 Albanians have been awarded a visa since the program's inception in 1995 (Congressional Research Department, 2018).

In order to apply to the diversity lottery, an applicant must be a native to any of the current determined diversity countries. The applicant must have adequate educational experiences (high school) and/or work experiences within five years of applying to the program (US Embassy). There is no application fee, and recipients are generally notified online.

Once an applicant is selected, the process that follows can take months or years. Applicants are rigorously interviewed by American embassy officials before they are approved to immigrate to the United States, and applicants generally require a sponsor in the U.S who can help the new arrivals acclimate and assimilate. Applicants can then take the next step to obtain full citizenship in the United States. Statistics from the 2021 Fiscal year indicate that more than 128,871 Albanians have applied to the Diversity Lottery program since 1995 (UN Embassy Data).



*Figure 15: Rights Denied: Albanians in Greece Face Long-Term Limbo.
Photo by Igor Vujcic (2020).*

American-Albanian Immigrants

America is perceived as a longstanding sanctuary to many people seeking asylum or new opportunities.

Albanians have emigrated to America for over a century, first seeking economic opportunities, then to escape the political constraints of communist dictatorship, and finally to leave behind the fallout of the fall of the communist regime in search of education and employment opportunities (Zeko-Underwood, 2019). After Greece and Italy, The third-most popular emigration destination for Albanians after the communist regime fell was the United States and the majority of the Albanian emigres to the U.S. settled in only a few states; 60% of the Albanian-American population is concentrated in New York, Michigan, and Massachusetts (Nedelkoska & Khaw, 2015).

Most Albanian immigrants came to America in recent years by two main methods: through the diversity lottery and family-sponsored visas (Nedelkoska & Khaw, 2015).

The recent waves of Albanians tended to settle in cities with already-established Albanian populations, as “an important pillar of [Albanian] society” has always been family, which has been influenced by centuries-old Albanian “norms, values, and beliefs” (Zeko-Underwood, 2019, p. 82). Elba Zeko-Underwood, a member of the Massachusetts Albanian community, conducted a cross-sectional study of Albanian immigrants to the United States (2019), and found that older generations of Albanian immigrants had a lower self-efficacy—or a belief in their abilities to control their own choices and outcomes—



Figure 16: This photograph was taken shortly after this young Albanian woman entered the United States. Retrieved from everyculture.com.



*Figure 17: A VATRA Band formed by Albanian Migrants in Worcester, MA.
Photo provided by Carmen Nassi Bartlett (1920).*

than newer generations, most likely in part due to having a limited network of friends and family to help them find connections to jobs at their skill level. Those who came after the fall of communism in Albania had an easier time, as they had more connections and “other characteristics desirable by the American market, such as language knowledge and technology skills” (Zeko-Underwood, 2019, p. 88).



Worcester's Immigrant Roots

As of 2018, Albanians made up 6.3% of Worcester's foreign-born population—which is 21.5% of its overall population of more than 186,000 (The Immigrant Entrepreneur in Worcester, 2018).

Worcester, Massachusetts has always been a hub for immigrants. In the early 1900s, the city was a thriving center of manufacturing, and as industry boomed, immigrants came in waves from different European countries (Worcester's Industrial Heritage, 2013).

This industrial boom generated the first substantial phase of Albanian immigration to America. In the Industrial Revolution (1860-1920s), a small wave of Albanians came to the US in search of economic opportunities and to escape political unrest (Zeko-Underwood, 2019). King and Vullnetari (2017) state that many of these Albanian migrants were young, Orthodox men who hoped to earn wages and eventually return

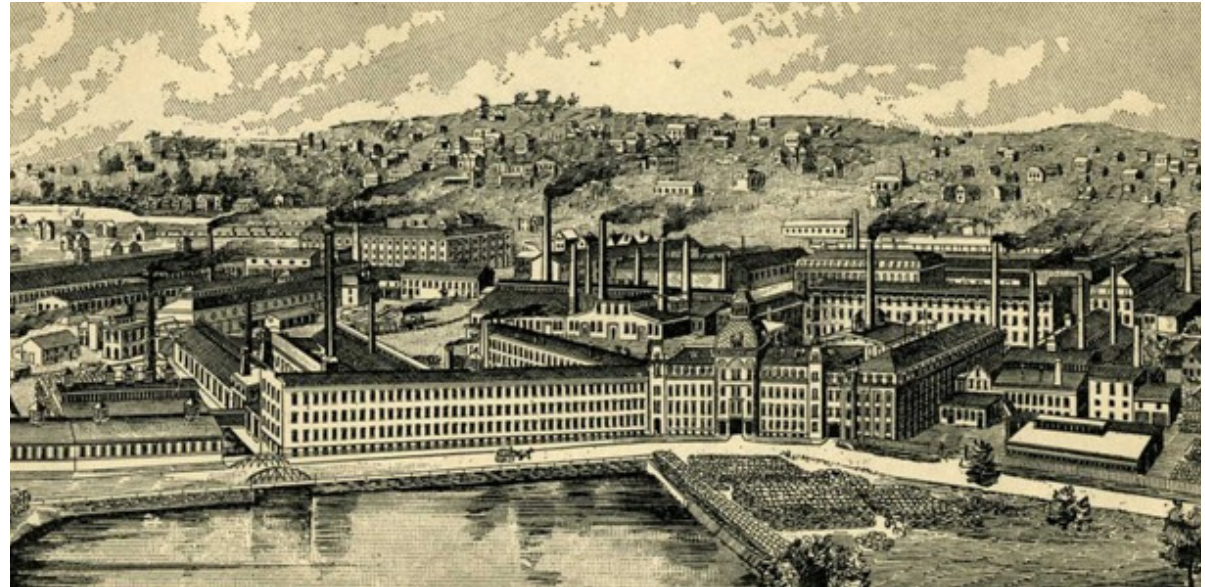


Figure 18: Historical photo from the Industrial Revolution. Adapted from "Industrialization" (n.d.).

back to Albania. Later in the 1920s, whole family emigration to the United States became increasingly popular. Most Albanian migrants pre-1990s were from Southern, more rural Albania. Approximately 70,000 Albanians were in the United States by 1981 (King & Vullnetari, 2017).



Demographic and Economic Trends of Worcester

In the 1990s, the Worcester Regional Research Bureau (WRRB) found that the Worcester population increased for the first time in more than 40 years, climbing 4.9%; also in part due to an influx of immigrants into the city. Today, Worcester is composed of a wide range of immigrants. According to US Census Bureau data from 2018, nearly 40,000 Worcester residents were foreign-born, or 21.5% Worcester's total population of 186,000. The WRRB noted in their 2020 Almanac that in 2018, nearly 34% of the Worcester population spoke a first language that wasn't English, and Worcester Public Schools reported that "more than 74 languages are spoken by children in the school system" (Worcester Almanac, 2020, pg. 31). In the 1990s, the Worcester Regional Research Bureau (WRRB) found that the Worcester population increased.

The study indicates that many current Worcester residents are second- or third-generation immigrants, as well (Worcester Almanac, 2020, pg. 32). In 1994, Worcester's unemployment rate was the lowest in the city since America's economic recession in the early 1990s, shown by Figure 19 below, and it kept decreasing until 2001.

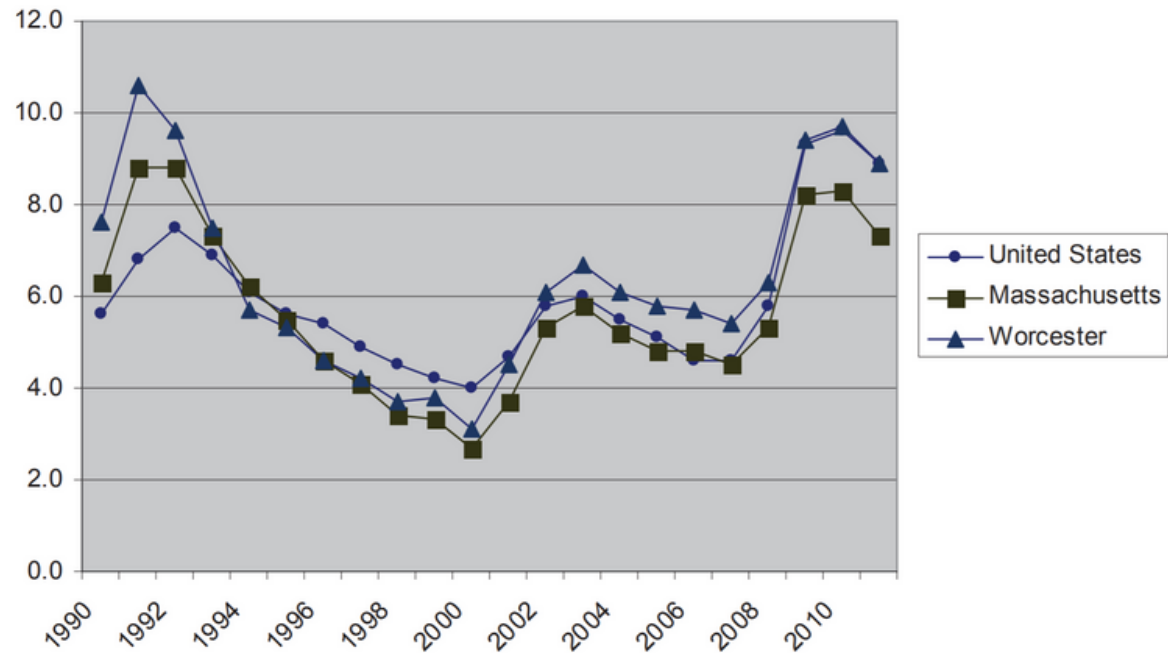


Figure 19: Worcester's Unemployment Rate from 1990-2011. Adapted from Worcester by the Numbers: Economy and Jobs (2013).

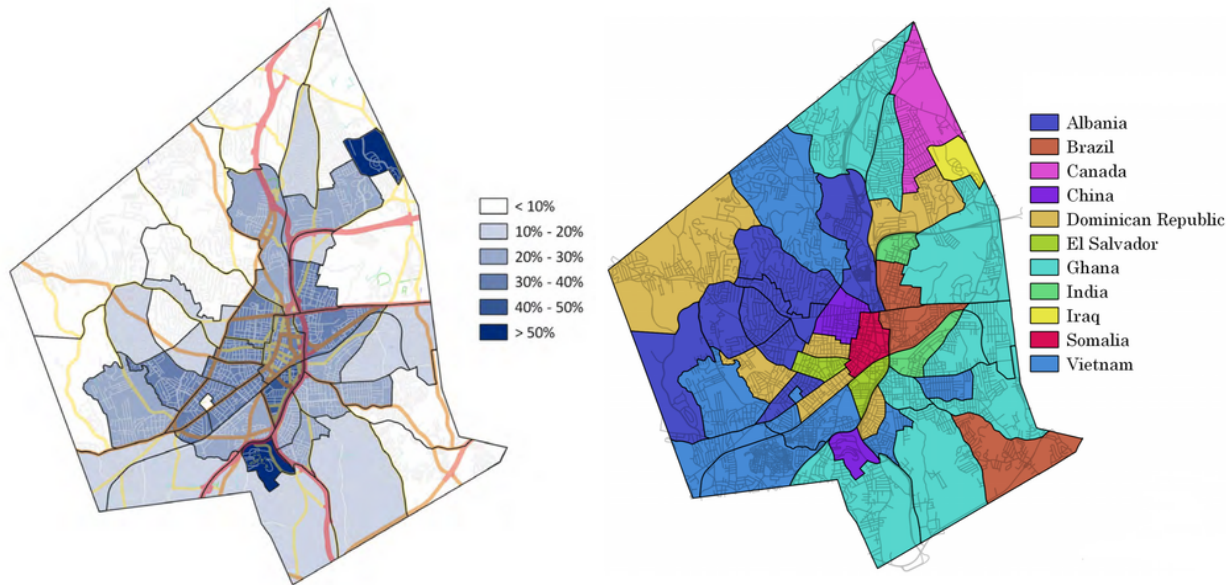


Figure 20: Map of Worcester poverty levels (left) and demographics (right). Adapted from the Worcester Almanac (2020) and The Immigrant Entrepreneur in Worcester (2018).

In the years between the major recessions, Worcester tended to have a relatively similar unemployment rate to the rest of Massachusetts, and a lower rate than the average across the United States overall (Worcester by the Numbers: Economy and Jobs, 2013). In 2018, Worcester evaluated the poverty level of its residents in various districts in the city (Worcester Almanac, 2020). In the most impoverished areas of Worcester (over 50% of the district's residents), the foreign-born residents are predominantly from China or Iraq. In 2016, the WRRB created a map detailing the predominant foreign-born population in each district, as well (The Immigrant Entrepreneur in Worcester, 2018). The districts in which the foreign-born population is primarily Albanian are generally between 10% to 30%, with one district in the 30%-40% category. The maps indicate that predominantly Albanian populated districts have a significant variety of income per resident.

In terms of current employment, the most popular industry in Worcester according to 2018 census data is educational services, health care, and social assistance—which is 20.7% higher than the second-most popular category: retail trade. Worcester also has a large variety of industries, including art, entertainment, food service, scientific, professional, management, and manufacturing. Multiple of the aforementioned industries have nearly unlimited entrepreneurial opportunities and applications. Immigrants often capitalize their entrepreneurship on such industries as well.

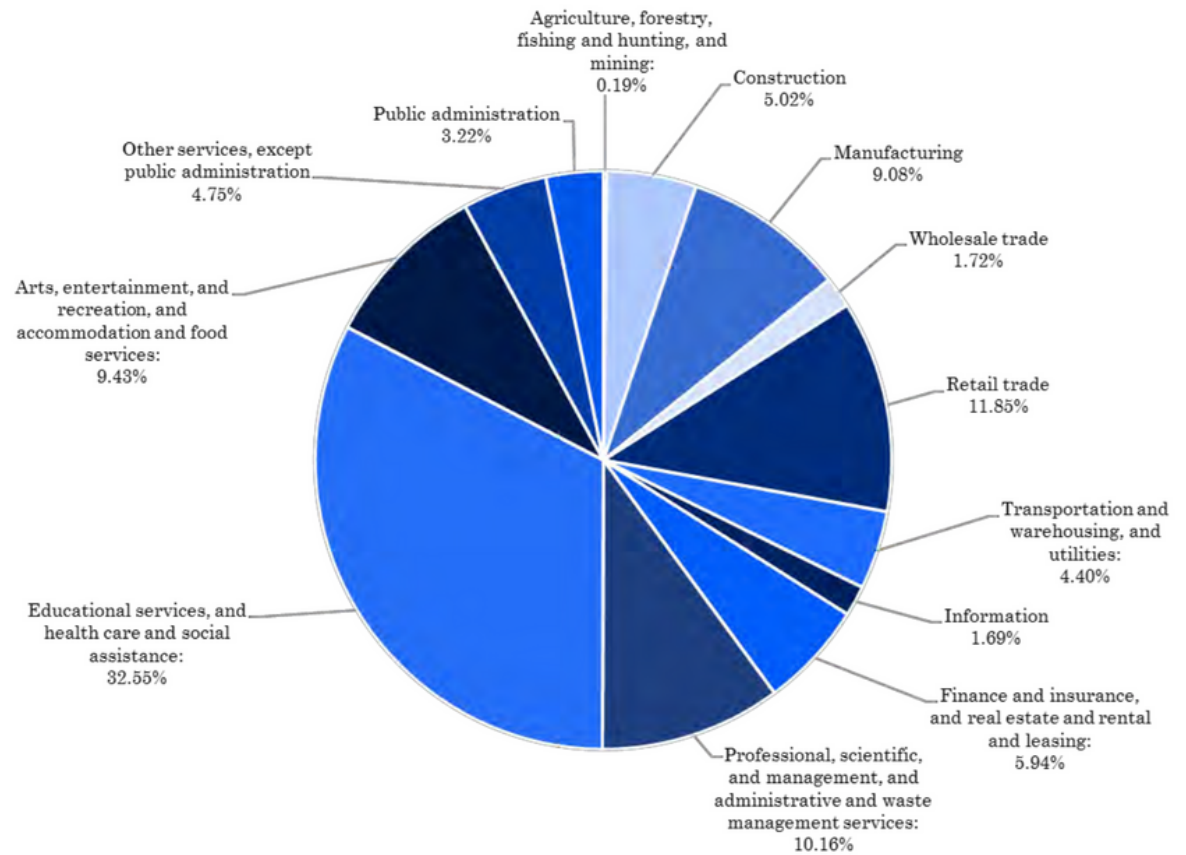


Figure 21: A pie chart of Worcester's overall employment by industry from a 2018 census survey. Adapted from the Worcester Almanac (2020).

Stories of Immigrant Entrepreneurs

Transformative Stories

Immigrants have uniquely complex journeys and experiences. An effective way to raise awareness and appreciation of immigrants' journeys, and to illuminate related social and political issues, is through transformative stories. In transformative stories, personal stories encourage an audience to see issues from a new perspective (Wheeler, 2014). These stories are "character-centered narratives focused on the goals, motives, obstacles, and struggles a character faces over time" (Bublitz et al., 2016). Typically, stories have three essential elements: characters, chronology, and causality—yet stories must move beyond these basic elements to become compelling and memorable. Modern storytelling includes the integration of media elements with words to bolster the narrative. In this project, transmedia storytelling—or the technique of telling

a story across multiple platforms and technologies—can and will be used to highlight the importance of immigrants and immigrant entrepreneurship in the United States. Storyworlds are the pillar of transmedia storytelling. A storyworld can be defined as, "a rich universe of interconnected stories across multimedia" (TheWrap). These rich universes represents a distinct vein of the immigrant entrepreneurship journey. Collectively, storyworlds offers a reader an experience across cultures and into the lives of these entrepreneurs. These storyworlds spotlight the uniquely complex journeys of each entrepreneur, while also grounding the viewer in the overall phenomena that is immigrant entrepreneurship. By linking stories to broader ideas), the story becomes part of a network of stories, which is called a metanarrative (Bublitz et al., 2016). Metanarratives allow each story to

exist independently, while also telling a greater message and serving an additional purpose. Our project is an example of this; multiple stories from different perspectives recounted by entrepreneurs told separately but presented together under one "umbrella" that is the Worcester Albanian Business Network. The metanarrative in this project is Worcester Albanian immigrant entrepreneurship. Scholars explain that if stories are told with a focus on emotion, it becomes easier for the audience to build empathy for the metanarrative's mission, as the audience can understand the feelings of the depicted character, which is "associated with higher levels of story engagement and influence" (Bublitz et al., 2016). Nonetheless, constructing engaging transformative stories also requires more than a mission-motivated

message; it requires “a narrative hook, Immigrants have uniquely complex journeys and experiences. An effective way to raise awareness and appreciation of immigrants’ journeys, and to illuminate related social and political issues, is through transformative stories. In transformative stories, personal stories encourage an audience to see issues from a new perspective (Wheeler, 2014). These stories are “character-centered narratives focused on the goals, motives, obstacles, and struggles a character faces over time” (Bublitz et al., 2016). Typically, stories have three essential elements: characters, chronology, and causality—yet stories must move beyond these basic elements to become compelling and memorable. Modern storytelling includes the integration of media elements with words to bolster the narrative. In this project, transmedia storytelling—or the technique of telling



Figure 22: Storytelling word cloud.
Retrieved from livesinprogress.net.

character development, a climactic plot, and literary craft” (Bublitz et al., 2016). A hook grabs the audience’s attention and draws them into the story. There are many methods for writing a hook, such as starting at an important or urgent moment, presenting an unusual scenario, or introducing an interesting character (Haven, 2014). In addition, developing the characters over the course of their stories to make them more “realistic and concrete” makes them seem more alive and believable, adding to their stories’ credibility and engagement (Bublitz et al., 2016).

First-person narratives are considered one of the most compelling forms of storytelling, as audiences have access to the narrators’ thoughts and feelings, which makes characters easier to empathize with, and tends to make audiences have a greater willingness to interpret the story from their own points-of-view (Bublitz et al., 2016).

This characterization of personal stories and struggles closes the gap in connection between the message of the metanarrative and the audience, who might have had different life experiences and would have otherwise found it difficult to see life from another's perspective. In part due to the COVID-19 pandemic, some museums, such as the Tenement Museum in New York, and the Smithsonian, have created professional digital exhibitions to let visitors discover exhibits in a safe, socially distant way. The Tenement Museum recently curated an exhibit about immigrant entrepreneurship in New York City. The exhibit provides a snapshot into the tribulations of entrepreneurs as a result of the pandemic. Using large, high-resolution candid photos, and quotes from the entrepreneurs, the exhibit provides multiple compelling, first-person stories, while acknowledging the "inspiring ways [these entrepreneurs have been able] to adapt and thrive...in

the face of difficult odds" (Immigrants Mean Business, 2020, para. 3). This project was informed by the Tenement Museum's approach to telling immigrant entrepreneur stories highlighting triumph, resilience, and endurance as a counter narrative in divisive times and negative perceptions of immigration and immigrants.

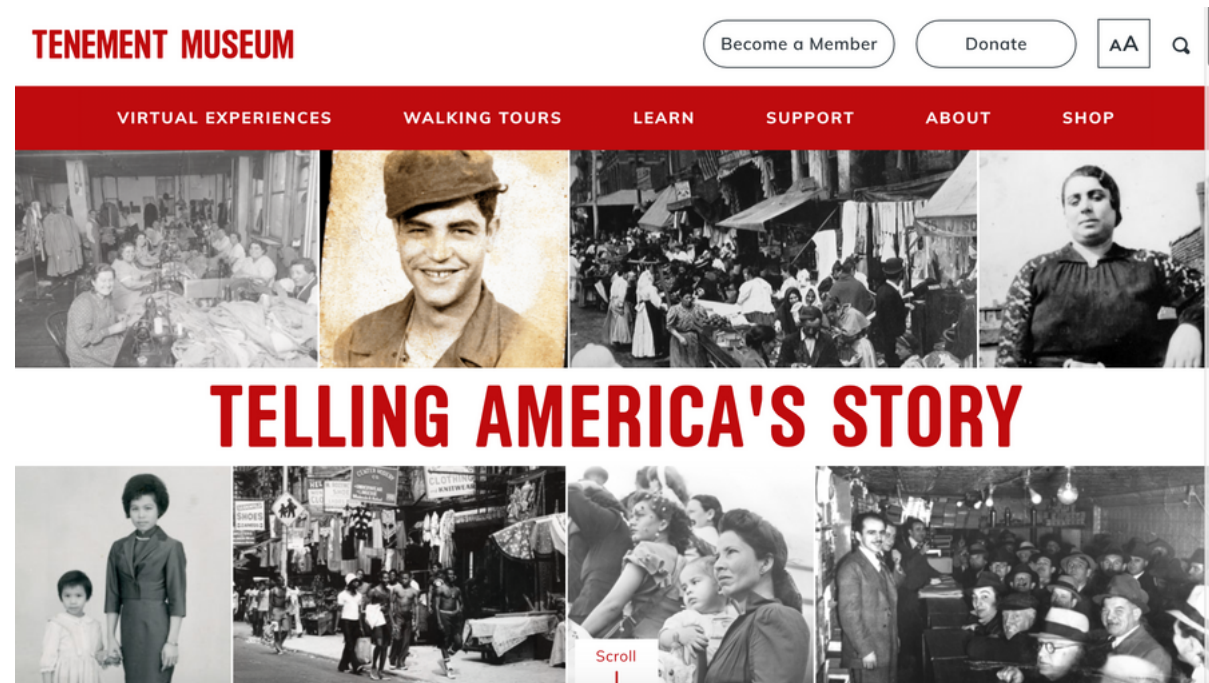


Figure 23: The landing page of the Tenement Museum's exhibition on immigrant entrepreneurship. Retrieved from Tenement Museum (2020).

Storytelling through Digital Exhibitions

Elements of Successful Digital Exhibitions

To reach a wide audience, a collection of transformative and curated narratives can be showcased online in a digital exhibition—the creation of which is becoming more common in today’s generation. Table 3 shows that people do not have as much interest in visiting museums, exhibitions, or art galleries, as indicated by decreasing levels of attendance at in-person museums and galleries from 2002-2012 (Jonathan Jones, 2020). A digital exhibition provides this younger generation with an immersive and interactive experience and will inspire them to follow in the footsteps of those prior by carving their own paths. To make an online exhibition successful, it needs to be interactive and immersive in order to best connect with the audience.

Table 3: Percentage of U.S. adults attending visual arts activities in 2002, 2008, and 2012. Adapted from Silber & Triplett (2015).

	2002	2008	2012
Art museums/ galleries	26.5%	22.7%	21.0%
Visual arts festivals or craft fairs	33.4	24.5%	22.4%

After having examined literature on digital exhibitions in effort to learn what the best methods and stylistic choices for delivering content, Barth et al. (2018) identifies four main aspects of an exhibition: Theme development, Material selection, Technical capabilities assessment, Metadata creation Kalfatovic et al. (2016, p. 3) profiles five design objectives that we considered in the design of our digital exhibition on Albanian entrepreneurs in Worcester. These include:

Four Main Aspects of an Exhibition:

- 1. Theme Development**
- 2. Material Selection**
- 3. Technical Creation**
- 4. Metadata Creation**

Aesthetic: organized around the beauty of objects. **Emotive:** designed to elicit an emotion in the viewer. **Evocative:** designed to create a specific atmosphere. **Didactic:** designed to teach the viewer about a specific topic. **Entertaining:** designed for the amusement or enjoyment of the viewer. Museum scholars and curators note that exhibition content must be relatable and easy to understand. The user interface of the digital exhibition should be friendly and fun to navigate (Drake, D, 2020). The exhibition should include media that attracts the audience such as: videos, interviews, photos, podcasts. A wide variety of media, instead of sticking to one kind, makes the experience more intriguing and impactful, by delivering the desired information in a multitude of ways. The inclusion of embedded videos alongside text emphasizes the point that the speaker makes, the inclusion of pictures to further explain the past and the present of the speaker, and



**AESTHETIC
EMOTIVE
EVOCATIVE
DIDACTIC
ENTERTAINING**

the inclusion of podcasts which provides another medium of interaction to the user of the exhibition are a few ways to use these media in the exhibition. If a digital exhibition has these few parameters, it would be easy to catch the eye of most people and engage them in the story being displayed, making it a successful digital exhibition. Museum scholars and curators note that exhibition content must be relatable and easy to understand.

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of ways. The inclusion of embedded videos alongside text emphasizes the point that the speaker makes, the inclusion of pictures to further explain the past and the present of the speaker, and the inclusion of podcasts which provides another medium of interaction to the user of the exhibition are a few ways to use these media in the exhibition. If a digital exhibition has these few parameters, it would be easy to catch the eye of most people and engage them in the story being displayed, making it a successful digital exhibition. Some examples of digital exhibitions include the Tenement Museum and various Smithsonian exhibitions. The Tenement Museum digital exhibition (Figure 24) uses historical pictures to allow the audience to imagine the setting to provide more realism to the story. These photos and other forms of media, like links to YouTube videos and podcasts, allow the story itself to become more concrete. By using a mix of media, text, and even a map of the

museum's exhibits, the Tenement Museum which makes it an engaging platform to use and learn from. The Tenement museum exhibit in Figure 2.6 uses Kalfatovic (2016) principle of a Didactic design objective where it aims to teach the viewer about a specific topic which is the honor of Women's history.

The Smithsonian Museum also has a vast array of online exhibits, including the Willi Smith exhibit which has many unique characteristics that informed our work. The Smithsonian Exhibit (Figure 25) utilizes media in a multitude of ways to capture the attention of a viewer, with the use of clickables, an abstract to entice the reader, and the option to view the online digital exhibit. When interacting with the exhibit, the user is presented with visual imagery in the form of provocative photos, slide shows, videos. The overall format of the exhibit is visually aesthetic and pleasing to the eye, and importantly, easy to navigate.

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Tenement Women: Agents of Change

Digital Exhibit in Honor of Women's History

From politics to pop culture, women on the Lower East Side have long led movements for social, cultural, and political change. Explore the digital exhibit to discover stories of workers and activists, creators and changemakers who brought new ideas to their homes, streets and factories, and consider how their legacies

Figure 24: Screenshot of the Tenement Women: Agents of Change exhibit. Retrieved from Tenement Museum (2020).

Figure 25: Screenshot of Willi Smith: Street Couture, an online exhibit. Retrieved from Smithsonian (2020).

Willi Smith: Street Couture

March 13, 2020 – October 25, 2020

Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum

2 East 91st Street
New York, NY

In the first museum exhibition dedicated to American designer Willi Smith (1948–1987), co-founder of the iconic brand WilliWear, over 200 works by Smith and collaborators will illuminate how the streetwear pioneer broke down social, cultural, and economic boundaries.

On the occasion of *Willi Smith: Street Couture*, Cooper Hewitt has created a digital community archive to honor the life and innovations of pioneering American designer Willi Smith. Powered by Cargo, the archive will collect and share anecdotes, personal photographs, ephemera, and garments to document Smith's contributions to fashion, art, design, and performance.

Learn More

View Online Exhibit



Design and Implementation Techniques for Digital Exhibitions

EXHIBITION CHARACTERISTICS

- Layout
- Navigation
- Media
- Clickable's

There are several important design and implementation techniques and traits which make for a successful digital exhibition (Barth et al., 2018). These include: **Layout** - Effective layout is essential for a successful exhibition. It is the backbone of the exhibition. Layout should be driven by the content rather than technology. **Navigation** - Navigation is determined by layout.

Making a platform easy to navigate enhances user experience. Navigational elements within the exhibition should provide clear directions as to how to enter, move within, and exit an exhibition. The exhibition should follow a systematic path while also allowing for independent exploration through different pages and links on a website. Clear navigation through an exhibition is critical. **Media**- The use of media enriches an exhibition. The systematic and strategic use of different forms of media (pictures, videos, podcasts, etc.) binds the exhibition together and makes it more engaging to the audience. Media used haphazardly can disrupt the experience, so it is essential to use media strategically. **Clickables** - To make an exhibition more interactive and to better connect users with the exhibition, clickables are a good choice. The use of clickables such as email links, phone numbers, addresses, links to other articles pertaining to the exhibition

make the experience more holistic and likable. The Tenement museum utilizes a very clean layout that is very pleasing to view. It also utilizes various forms of media including photos and video which adds to the experience. The museum exhibits are also easily accessible and provide fluid transitions to the next stages of the exhibition, which again enhances the viewing experience. The exhibition provides an organized map to explore the digital exhibition which makes the several sections much more accessible and easier to read through. Tenement uses these design techniques that Barth (2018) mentions and is a successful digital exhibition. A good mix of the characteristics mentioned above while portraying the narrative will make for a successful exhibition.





Figure 26: Immigrants Mean Business exhibit landing page. Retrieved from Tenement Museum (2020).

A large crowd of people is gathered on a beach next to a ship named 'VLORA'. The ship is a large vessel with multiple masts and cranes. The crowd is dense and extends across the foreground. The word 'APPROACH' is overlaid in large red letters, with a black brushstroke effect under the 'H'.

APPROACH

APPROACH

Examine

Create

Curate

The goal of this project was to profile Albanian entrepreneurs in Worcester to create a digital exhibition of their stories to inspire, mentor, and support other entrepreneurs, while bolstering a sense of appreciation for immigrant entrepreneurship in the United States as a whole. We accomplished this goal by pursuing the following objectives: Explored the diverse experiences of a select number of Albanian entrepreneurs in the Worcester region, created individual storyworlds for each entrepreneur, and curated a digital exhibition to convey individual stories and the collective entrepreneurial experience.



EXAMINE DIVERSE EXPERIENCES OF A SELECT NUMBER OF ALBANIAN ENTREPRENEURS IN THE WORCESTER REGION.

Why are some Albanian immigrants drawn to entrepreneurship? To address this question, the team conducted in-depth, semi-structured Zoom interviews with 11 Albanian entrepreneurs. The team worked closely with our sponsor to identify the first round of Albanian entrepreneurs in the Worcester region to interview. We also used a snowball sampling strategy to enlarge our sample by asking interviewees to provide names of other local Albanian entrepreneurs or self-starters.

Professor Peter Christopher, who founded the Albanian Project Center at WPI and Greg Steffon, who organizes the Albanian Festival in Worcester that takes place every other year, also connected us with various entrepreneurs. Thus, we found many of our entrepreneurs through a

convenience sampling strategy—those who were available and willing to participate—as either our sponsor or Greg Steffon approached the entrepreneurs first and provided us their contact information.

Ideally, we wanted to interview entrepreneurs across a range of characteristics including gender, degree of support network, level of education, previous training or work experience, and length of time in the United States, but time limitations and a lack of responses limited us from pursuing this purposive sampling strategy. However, we still noted these categories for each entrepreneur in Table 4.



Table 4: Characteristics of entrepreneurs interviewed and their businesses, alphabetically

	About the Entrepreneur				About their Entrepreneurship		
	Age	Gender	Year of Migration	Time in United States	Degree of Support Network	Full or Part Time	Previous Work Experience
Adela Tego	~36	F	~2000	~20 Years	Came for schooling	Part time	Senior Director at Reliant Healthcare
Bersan Shqina	~55	M	1998	~22 Years	Family in CT	Full Time	Worked in Greece and started an Arcade with his father in Tirana
Edi Postol	~38	M	2003	17 Years	Came with significant other	Full Time	Worked at Italian restaurant, worked at Boomers for 8 years
Erion Kodra	~44	M	1997	~23 Years	Came with family	Full Time	Dunkin' Donuts
Erjon Metohu	~35	M	~1999	~ 21 Years	Relatives in Worcester	Full Time	Dunkin Donuts' and went to school for graphic design
Eva Postol	~37	F	2003	17 Years	Came with significant other	Full Time	Helped part-time at Boomers and worked at Dunkin Donuts
Eva Shqina	~55	F	1998	~ 22 Years	Family in CT	Full Time	Worked at a gas station, worked as HR at MEM initially
Greta Bajrami	~31	F	~1999	~21 Years	Came with parents	Full Time	Worked waitressing jobs, for other construction companies
Irida Tollkuci	~45	F	~1993	~27 years	Came with significant other	Full Time	Previous employee at another insurance company
Kreuzza Disho	~35	F	2002	~18 Years	Parents moved to Worcester 6 months prior to her.	Full Time	Library assistant at Quinsigamond library, manager at Dunkin donuts
Orieta Kristo	~39	F	1995	~25 Years	Came with parents	Full Time	Worked at other insurance agencies, odd jobs as a team
Oriola Koci	~43	F	1996	~24 Years	Came over with parents	Full Time	Said she worked for Corporate America
Valon Dalipi	~26	M	2014	~6 Years	Brother came in 2017	Full Time	Worked in family business in Albania, then worked construction, real estate agent in the US

Interview Topics

- **Life in Albania before migrating to the United States**
- **Work and educational experiences in Albania**
- **Reasons for immigrating to the United States**
- **Initial impressions of Worcester**
- **Struggles faced upon arrival**
- **Opportunities they envisioned**
- **Support of family and friends**
- **Events that influenced their decision to become entrepreneurs**
- **Amount of community involvement they have as a business**
- **Any advice they would give their younger selves**
- **How they would want to be involved in the digital exhibition.**

Interviews are an essential and effective way of simultaneously building rapport and getting crucial information (Seidman, 2013). We tried to pay particularly close attention to how we could effectively guide a conversation and keep the conversation moving, how we could build rapport to discuss personal experiences, and how we could ensure we approached our interviewee's stories with respect. A complete list of our baseline questions can be found in Appendix C. To prepare for interviews, each team member conducted practice interviews to ensure we were comfortable easing into a conversation through icebreakers, rather than jumping right into the consent script (Appendix B) or questions. Engaging in conversation with the interviewees allowed us to establish a connection early on and helped ease any tension or discomfort that might arise from our questions about people's histories or life experiences. This rapport with our

entrepreneurs lead to unexpected information and anecdotes and enabled us to conduct numerous follow-up interviews to gather additional information from entrepreneurs.

Two team members were present at each interview, as we did not want to intimidate or outnumber our interviewee. The same two team members also conducted any follow-up interviews. The team felt that changing the interviewers over multiple interviews with the same person would undo the rapport previously built. All interviews were conducted over Zoom. Each was recorded in order to accurately document the interview and allow us to have audio/visual content for the exhibition. The team only recorded these interviews after obtaining consent from the entrepreneur (see Appendix A) and after ensuring the entrepreneur understood how we would use the information provided.

We asked each interviewee to supply photos (digitally through email or an online drop box) that we could use in the exhibition and catalog that pertained to their life in Albanian early years in the United States, their profession, or anything else they felt was pertinent to their story. We had hoped to be able to ask each interviewee to discuss the photos they provided with the idea that further conversation or information would surface, however, this was not possible due to the online nature of our interviews (Rose, 2016). Our participants emailed photos back to us or uploaded them to a link to a Google Drive folder.

We set out to have a broad range of entrepreneurs in the full-time (e.g., entrepreneurial endeavor is their main occupation) and part-time (e.g., entrepreneurial endeavor is not their main occupation) sense. In total, we interviewed one part-time, and ten full-time entrepreneurs. We

transcribed the interviews and used thematic analysis to identify codes and themes among the stories (Flick et al., 2004).

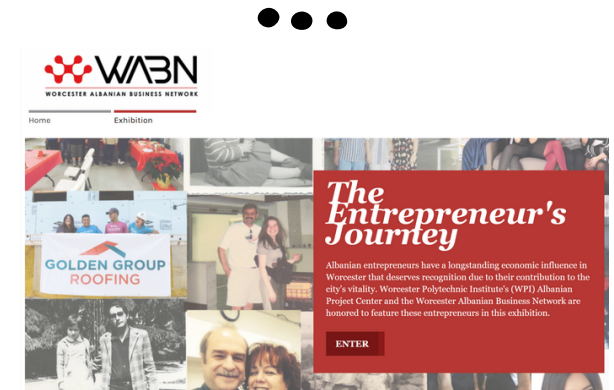


Figure 27: Screenshot from the Entrepreneur's Journey exhibition on the WABN website.



Figure 28: Screenshot of our team's interview with Kreuza Disho.

CREATE INDIVIDUAL STORYWORLDS OF EACH ENTREPRENEUR.

We created storyworlds of each entrepreneur for an exhibition catalog and the online exhibition. A story world, as discussed in the background chapter, is “a rich universe of interconnected stories across multimedia” (The Wrap). Each entrepreneur represents a distinct vein of the immigrant entrepreneurship journey. Collectively, storyworlds offers a reader an experience across cultures and into the lives of these entrepreneurs.

These story worlds spotlight the uniquely complex journeys of each entrepreneur, while also grounding the viewer in the overall phenomena that is immigrant entrepreneurship. We established three research questions to guide our interviews and the development of the exhibition.

Research Questions

- 1. How can we attract and retain visitors to our exhibition?**
- 2. How do we represent each story distinctly, but emphasize a larger theme?**
- 3. How do we determine which types of media to use for each story of our showcased entrepreneurs?**

To address the first research question, the team developed narratives by thoroughly analyzing and coding interview transcripts for each entrepreneur. We started by creating an outline of the narrative to identify general ideas, themes, and important information. The team coded sections of the interview transcripts that would later be used to develop a chronological timeline.

The team then composed a cohesive profile for each entrepreneur primarily using the entrepreneur’s own words and direct quotes. We also paraphrased some statements to tie the experience together. Developing a biographical profile of the entrepreneurs served to ground our exhibition to our objective: creating a comprehensive story world of Albanian immigrant entrepreneurs.

Finally, the team formatted the biographical profile with visuals and media in an engaging manner and intertwined it with surrounding text. The team referred to Kalfatovic's five aspects of design (examined in Chapter Context: aesthetic, emotive, evocative, didactic, and entertaining). Each of these design aspects encourage exhibition viewers to more deeply engage with the content. Given the time limits of the project, the team mainly focused on the aesthetic aspect to facilitate a user-friendly and appealing website. This is not to say that we ignored other aspects such as, emotive and entertaining to enhance the quality of the profile. The team tried to integrate the media in an engaging and intuitive way for easy user navigation.



CURATE THE DIGITAL EXHIBITION TO CONVEY INDIVIDUAL STORIES AND THE COLLECTIVE ENTREPRENEURIAL EXPERIENCE.

The goal of the Digital Exhibition was to shed light on Albanian entrepreneurs in the Worcester region, and to highlight their accomplishments and the struggles they have overcome. The digital exhibition showcases both the journeys to entrepreneurship and the journeys of entrepreneurship for each entrepreneur through interactive and captivating methods. The immersive exhibition experience includes: interaction through clickables, media interlinked to stories, narrative text, and quotations. The goal is also to bolster appreciation of the Albanian community by others outside of it, hoping it can be a learning device for not only Albanian Entrepreneurial community but also inspire fellow entrepreneurs to connect with their community and learn from other businesses. During the development

stage of the exhibition, the team considered: how does the information derived from interviews with entrepreneurs inform the decision-making process? How do we respectfully display personal stories of those we interview? How do we ensure the longevity of this exhibition? The first step of the technical application of the project was to finalize a platform in which to build the exhibition. The Weebly.com web platform fits this criterion, which our sponsor had already purchased a domain for: Weebly: wabn.org. We ensured it met our criteria of being accessible, updateable, and maintainable, and able to support different media types.

The team used the website-builder on the Weebly platform to create and accommodate both a portfolio of Albanian-Worcester entrepreneurs and informational content, such as a directory and mission statements of the Worcester Albanian Business Network (WABN). Additionally, the team included a directory of known Albanian-Worcester entrepreneurs and enterprises to contribute to the networking intent of the WABN. We recommend that the directory be updated on a continual basis to expand the network.

To ensure preservation and even expansion of our exhibition in the future, the team created a style guide (a standalone deliverable) that divulges how we transformed our interviews into transmedia narratives and into profiles in the exhibition. The style guide also directs users towards how we formatted the pages, what fonts we used, and what colors we used.

The digital nature of the exhibition implies the incorporation of a variety of media within the exhibition. Media such as audio clips, short videos, and photographs have been integrated within the exhibition in an effort to merge educational material with an engaging experience for a reader or viewer. Each entrepreneur profiles is unique in terms of transmedia, design, and text.

The team received copies of personal photos from several entrepreneurs showing their childhood, adolescence, or adult years. These photos were used to supplement their entrepreneur profile in the exhibition and the catalog. The team also used audio or video clips from the Zoom interviews.

The team used Microsoft Video Editor, a free video development platform with Windows 10 to edit the video from the Zoom interview into separate, short video clips. Adobe Premiere Pro, a paid software that

the team had access to, was used to edit the audio of the Zoom interviews into shorter audio clips.

Worcester Albanian Entrepreneurs Directory

The team incorporated a directory into the exhibition for Albanian entrepreneurs identified in the Worcester region. The directory includes contact information and the website link for each business. This directory remains separate from the exhibition, but both features will be published on the WABN website, wabn.org. The final step of developing the digital exhibition was to publish the website and publicize the exhibition through social media. The team created an Instagram page for the WABN in effort to share the stories of the entrepreneurs to a broader audience, and attract potential viewers to the exhibition.



FINDINGS

ENTREPRENEUR PROFILES



ORIETA KRISTO

Horizon Insurance

Orieta Kristo was born in Tirana, Albania in 1981 under the Communist regime. She lived with her mother, father, and a younger sister, in the capital. There, her mother worked as a Physician's Assistant and her father as an engineer. Given their positions in society, Orieta's parents were able to ensure Orieta and her sister's childhoods were comfortable and pleasant. Orieta attended a professional dancing school and would often travel to different parts of Albania to compete professionally. Orieta's parents, along with thousands of other Albanians, applied for the newly formed Diversity Visa Lottery Program. In 1995, when Orieta was 16, her family was selected to receive visas for the United States, and late that year, she

settled quickly with the help of their extended family already in Worcester. Her assimilation with her school peers was not as easy; *"going from dancing and performing and [having] lots of friends and then moving to a new country, it was hard."*

Xenophobia spilled into Orieta's schoolyard. Orieta has firsthand experience with xenophobic sentiments and recalls several hardship attending American school, she says,

"I just kind of felt talked about, I could tell they were bullying me and saying nasty things, but I didn't care. I always had the mindset, this too shall pass."

Orieta Kristo



Figure 30: Orieta Kristo at a professional dance school in Albania. Provided by Orieta Kristo.

A 2015 study, "Bullying Victimization in School Age Immigrant Youth in the United States" (Maynard et al.), concludes that, "Immigrant youth are more likely to experience bullying victimization than native-born youth.

Xenophobia, a dislike of or prejudice against people from other countries, has severely affected perceptions of immigrants in America. The Trump administration further increased the false narrative that Immigrants take away from the potential jobs of natural-born American workers, that they suppress wages, and even evade taxes. However, the Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that as of 2019, the weekly earnings of foreign-born salaried workers made more than \$100 less/week than native-born employees (\$800/week vs \$941/week) (U.S Department of Labor).

Orieta did not let the xenophobic rhetoric of her peers detract from her journey. Since Orieta's arrival in Worcester, she has had approximately 18 jobs; *"I don't think I ever stopped working. I was 14 working for 3\$ an hour in a pizza place, 27 hours a week."* Her work experience

stands in contrast to accusations that immigrant workers are a detriment to the United States economy. Research conducted by Bernstein et.al in 2018 reports “low wages and high housing costs drive many immigrants to work multiple jobs” (Bernstein, 2018). Orieta’s work ethic is the result of her family’s financial struggles financially during their early years in Worcester and the effect of the transition from her parent’s higher status in Albanian society as a physician’s assistant and an engineer, to struggling to find well-paying employment in Worcester.

Orieta Kristo attended Worcester State University and graduated with a degree in Business Administration and Marketing. Her first post-college job was a lower-level position at State Street Insurance. Orieta wasn’t particularly fond of this job because she didn’t have much contact with clients. She knew she had strong people skills and wanted a job where she could put those skills to use. Global small business nonprofit Accion details that “Persuasive Communication Ability” is key to a successful entrepreneur (Accion). In addition, the nonprofit stresses that,



Figure 31: Childhood photo. Provided by Orieta Kristo.

“communication is critical to your success” (Accion). Orieta honed her communication and interpersonal skills in her various jobs, but began to feel that the corporate world was not her path in life. *“I graduated in marketing and I always wanted to be in sales. I’m very good with people. I started my career at State Street Accounting, and it was horrible. All I was doing was crunching numbers all day, and I didn’t see anybody. It was horrible.”*

In 2008, Orieta landed a job at Liberty Mutual where she could make her own hours and have her own schedule. Still, she didn’t like the cutthroat corporate

life and wanted to have a more personal and open environment. *“I wanted to create my own space, my own culture, my own little company where people can express and be themselves, and at the same time, have personal or financial gain.”* That sentiment was the impetus to start Horizon Insurance in 2015.

McGrath and MacMillan (2000) write that a key element of entrepreneurial leadership is “creating a climate supporting continuous search for opportunity.” Orieta tries to foster a culture of productivity and self-expression at Horizon. She also wanted her space to be one where a new mother could feel comfortable. Kristo recalls her own experiences as a new mother attempting to breastfeed and not feeling accommodated by the corporate world. This experience helped inspire her to create her own work climate.

Orieta classifies her brand of entrepreneurship as “Work smarter, not harder,” so she can have a balanced home/work life and spend time with her family and friends.

"So, I think in business, and even being an entrepreneur, its one of those things, it didn't work, I failed maybe, but let me try it again because we keep doing it over and over again until you get it right so I think that's what has helped me personally to be where I am today." Orieta Kristo

Forbes writer and entrepreneur Neil Patel writes "Successful entrepreneurs understand that they must work on their business, not in their business" (Patel, 2015). Kristo advocates for learning to separate oneself from being involved in minute tasks of the business: *"Don't work in your business, work above your business, because if you work in it then you can never direct it the direction you want to go."*

Horizon Insurance's role in the Worcester-Albanian Community has grown in recent years. The company sponsors many Albanian community events and activities, which, in turn, has contributed to growth of the business. Kristo and her employees are Albanian, so they are beneficial to the Albanian community.

Response to Covid-19

As with every business, Horizon Insurance has not escaped the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic. Fortunately for Kristo, Horizon was able to keep their doors open during the quarantine period. However, recent technology has made remote working more accessible for businesses, including Horizon, and has made the transition process to remote working easier.

Figure 32: Kristo (left-most) with Horizon Insurance employees. Provided by Orieta Kristo.



ORIOLA KOCI

Livia's Dish and Altea's Eatery

A majority of our interviewees came to the United States through the US Diversity Visa Program. In most cases, their parents won the lottery, and the family was able to come to America. Yet the program has a history of separating families, as well, which Oriola Koci can attest to.

Oriola was 17 years old when her mother won the lottery in 1995. They were living in Tirana, and were allotted nine months to prepare for the move to America, while also finding a sponsoring family, completing interviews, and doing all the required paperwork. However, Oriola's older sister was excluded from the lottery

visa, because the rules of the lottery precluded children over the age of 21 from being awarded immigration status if their parents are selected. So, while Oriola, her mother, and her father arranged to move, her sister had to stay behind in Albania. While this was

difficult for her parents, Oriola Koci knows that they made that sacrifice for her. America would allow her to pursue her dreams—whatever they may be—while Albania would not provide the same opportunities.

Her family arrived in Worcester in 1996, when the economy was doing well, and the city's unemployment rate was at its lowest level since 1990 (Worcester by the Numbers, 2013). Oriola's mother found a job at a toy factory right away, and her father worked for UPS. Back in Albania, her mother had been a nurse practitioner, and her dad was a manager of a factory until the fall of Communist rule. Her parents gave up their higher stature jobs in Albania and accepted lower-level jobs in the US for the sake of their daughter. Recognizing this, Oriola worked hard to learn English and go to college: *"all of it was just for my parents. I wanted them to know that I did the one thing that they wanted me to do."*



Figure 33: Oriola Koci and her parents on July 11, 1996; their first day in America. Provided by Oriola Koci.

Oriola Koci attended Assumption College in Worcester where she majored in business administration, with a concentration in human resources. She then went on to get a master's degree from Clark University in professional communications. Enton Mehillaj, her husband, graduated from Johnson and Wales University in Providence, Rhode Island, with a degree in culinary arts.

Oriola and Enton had always dreamed of owning their own business together but it never seemed like the right time. The two had spent almost 15 years learning how to run a business. Oriola worked at MassBiologics, an entity of the University of Massachusetts Medical School in Jamaica Plain, MA as a human resources consultant. She learned business on the administrative level: how to hire staff and serve as a link between the employees and the management. Enton Mehillaj held several successful culinary positions as the Sous Chef at the Regatta Bar and Grill in Westborough, MA, and a Restaurant Manager at the Crown Plaza Hotel in Worcester. The two also bought multiple duplex apartments—one at a time—and

began renting them out. Through this, the pair were able to *"grow that responsibility of an owner, which is a little different than just working for somebody."*

"When I had my first daughter [Altea], my mom retired and she said, 'you're not sending her to daycare, I will take care of her.' And that gave me the opportunity to really focus on my job because I knew that my daughter was being taken care of."

There was an issue with this situation, however: *"I needed to move closer to my mom, to make sure that [Altea] was being taken care of. I had to commute [to Jamaica Plain from Worcester] and that really killed me. I felt like I [was] wasting my life on the Mass Pike. At the beginning it was fine, and then it got worse and worse."*

Oriola quit her job at MassBiologics six months after her second daughter, Livia, was born in 2012, and promised herself that her next job would be less than five miles from her house. It was always part of the duo's routine to experiment with new recipes together, so in recognizing the opportunity before them, with Oriola out of work and wanting to stay local, she and her husband decided to take a calculated risk—or a decision in which the risks versus the benefits are carefully considered before it's made—and opened their first restaurant together in Worcester, Livia's Dish, in 2013.

Taking this risky step from having an idea to making it a reality is the pinnacle of the entrepreneurial spirit. As Accion's fifth characteristic of the entrepreneurial mindset reminds us, entrepreneurs must be tenacious. In the case of Oriola Koci

Challenges as Opportunities:

"Those kinds of challenges trigger more excitement. And I think that the way you address things makes a big difference in how they end up becoming a problem, an issue, or just a bump in the road."

Oriola Koci

and Enton Mehillaj, early successes in entrepreneurship increased their willingness to explore new opportunities (Dewald, 2016). In 2016, the pair opened another restaurant named Altea's Eatery, emboldened from their success with Livia's Dish.

The restaurants could be classified as opportunity-based ventures. The pair chose to "*entertain the idea of opening something together,*" but did not need to do so due to a lack of other options or for the financial security of their family. Oriola had made the choice to leave her

corporate job, while Enton still had his own as a Corporate Executive Chef for Sodexo, a food service operations company for institutional, commercial, and governmental locations.

Using the resources available to them—their education, work experiences, and talents—Oriola Koci and Enton Mehillaj were able to efficiently and effectively create a business plan and launch their restaurant. She and her husband "*cover both ends.*" Oriola takes on the front administrative end and Enton is the chef in the back.

The pair faced several struggles when they opened their first restaurant: having to build a name for themselves, not having the capital to advertise their business, deciding on a direction for the restaurant to take, and finding its niche in the community. Using her connections and her networks from college or graduate school, Oriola Koci went "*knocking on doors*" to spread the news of her and her husband's business through word-of-mouth.

Figure 34: (from left to right) Livia, Enton, and Altea cooking. Provided by Oriola Koci.



This is also an example of using the resources you have access to as an entrepreneur; other interviewees have also noted building a network to be key to success as an entrepreneur.

The duo also used the entrepreneurial strategy of “failing fast,” wherein one makes a small decision or change to their venture early in the business model, and “if it works, it sticks, but if it fails, data is collected and something else is tried,” (Zimmerman, 2020, para. 3). Oriola Koci and Enton Mehillaj, like many other immigrant entrepreneurs, agreed that finding their business’s niche, or place, in the community is crucial to its success, but this isn’t usually accomplished right away. Oriola remembers that when they first opened Livia’s Dish, *“there was breakfast, lunch, and dinner first, and that was overwhelming.”* Realizing right away that, to have a good work-life balance, the structure of the restaurant needed to change, she and her husband revised the business model. When Livia’s Dish opened, their daughters were 4.5 and 1.5 years old, so Oriola and Enton had to manage them along with the restaurant

On reflecting a year later:

“A year after we opened up, someone asked me, ‘do you feel like you did the right thing?’ and I said, and I say this every day, if someone had told me how difficult it was prior, I would have probably said I don't want to do this, but [if you] fast forward to a year after, [it was] the best decision of my life.” Oriola Koci

and their customers. *“The beginning was hard,”* Oriola remembers, *“someone said to me, ‘it’s got to be hard, are you going to be able to survive?’ And my response then and my response now would always be ‘my daughter’s name is on the wall. This is going to succeed.’ But that’s how much a part of us these restaurants are.”* Oriola’s positive mental attitude, Accion’s first trait of the entrepreneurial mindset, in the face of challenge allowed her to maintain optimism that her restaurant would succeed, and in July, Livia’s Dish celebrated its eighth anniversary.



Response to Covid-19

In mid-March 2020, Massachusetts Governor Charlie Baker announced that due to the COVID-19 pandemic, all restaurants would be prohibited from serving dine-in business. Overnight, their plans for the future were disrupted: *“I can’t live day-by-day. I have to think of my business as a year from now. So, when you put together a map like that for a year, five years, and 10 years, and then something like [COVID-19] happens, it really shakes you up.”*

Not wanting to close their businesses and furlough their employees, Livia’s Dish and Altea’s Eatery remained open for take-out and Oriola Koci and Enton Mehillaj adapted to the ever-changing restrictions—such as with tent and patio seating.

Oriola Koci noted that she didn't want to hire a new group of people whenever they were able to reopen, as they had already put so much effort into finding the perfect team that had *"the same passion, the same values as [we] do."*

Oriola and Enton also own the buildings their restaurants are in, which Mrs. Koci realizes is not something entrepreneurs typically do. A restaurant is *"a risky business, chances of it failing are [high] and then you're stuck with a building."* The duo successfully pivoted and now doesn't worry about their next rent check or being evicted from the buildings. *"I said 'go big or go home.' So that's what we did."*



Figure 35: Oriola and Enton in Livia's Dish during the summer of 2020. Provided by Oriola Koci.

KREUZA DISHO

Dippin' Donuts

Kreuza Disho co-owns Dippin Donuts Cafe with her husband Gjergji in Worcester, MA. She moved to the United States with her husband and their first-born son in 2002, after winning a spot in the U.S Diversity Visa Program.



*Figure 36: Young Kreuza in Albania.
Provided by Kreuza Disho.*

Kreuza Disho grew up in Korçë during the height of the communist regime. Despite the tough conditions posed by the regime, her parents worked good jobs for the time, her mother as a pharmacist, and her father as an electrical engineer for the Albanian Army. They both instilled strong values in Kreuza. Her father:

“gave us a lot of strength. He told us, no matter how many difficulties we would see in our way, we had to find a positive. No matter how much we would struggle, we had to find the force to fight back. I remember in school, my mother was very demanding for me to have good grades. She wanted us to succeed. Teaching us since we were little that we had to work hard, that we had to reach for success because nobody was going to hand anything to us.” Kreuza Disho

Kreuza earned her master’s in Education from the University of Korçë, graduating right before they left for the United States in 2002. They ended up in Worcester through her parents, who had moved to the area 6-months prior, thanks to the Diversity Visa Program. This was not Kreuza’s first time in the United States, however: she had lived in Fresno, California for a month as an exchange student when she was 15 years old. “When I came to Worcester, I was expecting a little bit more different, a little bit more fancy, I would say. I was a little bit disappointed compared to Fresno, like where I lived, and from what we had seen on TV too, you know, because in Europe, it’s different.” The image of the United States portrayed by media versus the reality caused culture shock and confusion for Kreuza and many other entrepreneurs when arriving.

Kreuza had trouble finding a full-time teaching position in Worcester. Instead she worked as an assistant at the Quinsigamond Library and a substitute teacher. She was struggling to pay her bills, until her cousin offered her a position at Dunkin Donuts. “I couldn’t afford life working two days a week,

or three days a week, or none. My cousin, who was a manager at Dunkin at the time, she offered me a job. I took it without hesitation. I wanted to work because I had bills to pay.” At the same time, she attended Salter College part-time in West Boylston, MA to earn her Associate's degree in Paralegal Studies, as a backup career plan. Instead of using her paralegal background, she became the General Manager of the Dunkin Donuts. A coworker shared that a local location of Dippin' Donuts, a central Massachusetts-based chain, and Kreuza seized the opportunity to buy the business:

“God gave me that push into that direction, that I can do it. I'm working for somebody else, I have so much knowledge, because I used to go to the Dunkin corporate meetings. It's not only just to know how to work, you have to know how to deal with the business side.”

Kreuza Disho



Figure 37: Kreuza and Gjergji.
Provided by Kreuza Disho.

Dippin' Donuts' beginnings under new ownership were not without their struggles. Kreuza and Gjergji faced discrimination and suspicion from local residents: *“Spencer is a small town, when they hear that this business got sold, they had suspicions. We had difficulties when people would come into the store and they would say, ‘you're the new owners, you have an accent, I don't know if you'll make my coffee right.’ I had a background, from working at a coffee company and to have these kinds of comments, it was a big slap in my face.”* They also faced challenges in finding dependable employees, *“It is a struggle with the employees, you have to find good*

employees in order to represent your store. In order to serve the people not only good quality, but you have to have a smile on your face. A lot of businesses, they lost sales because don't have good help, they destroy the business with their attitudes, and I went through some of those.” However, Kreuza persisted and found competent employees and success. She possesses the entrepreneurial characteristic of a positive mental attitude, where when faced with challenges, rather than giving up, you look for solutions to keep your employees happy and your business running. When asked about advice for budding entrepreneurs, Kreuza addressed the importance of facing challenges head on, and persisting through hardship:

“Take the big step and do it. It's not gonna be easy. We have a challenge every day. Sometimes I fall, but I get back up. No matter how much stress you're going through, don't give up. It's easy to give up, it's easy to lose something, but it's hard to start over, so don't destroy what you have. If you have a dream and the ability and the courage in yourself, do it.”

Kreuza Disho

Kreuza and her business have a strong connection to the Albanian community in Worcester, and their support is what keeps her business going. Dippin' Donuts is a prominent sponsor of the Albanian Festival; Kreuza and her family run the coffee stand during the Festival. Kreuza also works with St. Mary's Church in Worcester to run outreach programs to Albanian youth in Worcester, like starting the Albanian School, and run events to promote Albanian history in the city, like the Albanian historical event, which took place last March. *"I'm connected and I take pride in it. Like I really put my heart and soul into different activities."*



Figure 38: Kreuza serving coffee at the Albanian festival. Provided by Kreuza Disho.



Figure 39: A Dippin' Donuts coffee outside of the store. Provided by Kreuza Disho.

Response to Covid-19

Without the Albanian community support, Kreuza's business would not have survived the effect of the pandemic. Dippin' Donuts lost one of their main sources of customers, college students, when they were all sent home in March 2020. Additionally, employees were given the option to stay home, because Kreuza's priority was the health of her employees, rather than her profit. Dippin' Donuts adapted by offering takeout, and slowly they started bouncing back. *"I'm not what we normally are with a normal sale, but I'm happy that I have my employees at work. I'm happy that bills are paying themselves. I'm happy for that. I have my whole team that is working and the business is running. I don't want to complain because I try to see the light at the end of the tunnel."*

EVA & BERSAN SHQINA

MEM-Connections Electrical

Bersan and Eva Shqina (Figure 40) brought their prior drive and knowledge of entrepreneurship to Worcester, MA where they now own MEM-Connections Electrical. Eva and Bersan Shqina migrated to Athens, Greece in 1991 from Tirana, Albania after the fall of communism. Eva was studying linguistics at university in Albania and worked at a publishing company, while Bersan had been working at an electrical engineering company. The couple fled Albania and headed Greece. In Greece, the couple

faced barriers with the culture and language. Eva says, *"It was hard going into another country, especially with a different language, different culture, and being isolated for many, many years, or all our life. A different country that we had no idea what's going on, it wasn't that easy."* Bersan Shqina had ambitions to start his own business, but immigration laws in Greece prevented him from doing so. Eva Shqina, *"In Greece, being an immigrant, you don't have the abilities to grow, and being an entrepreneur or doing a business -- you have very limited sources and abilities, from the rules of government that they have there."*

Their experiences echo the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (Baldwin-Edwards, 2004) report, *Immigration into Greece: 1990s- 2003: A Southern European Paradigm*, that states, "The sudden influx of Albanians in 1991 resulted in a hysterical reaction by Greek parliamentarians, the media, and society generally," (Baldwin-Edwards, 2004, pg. 3). This hysteria directly impacted the drafting of new immigration laws that had

not been changed since 1929. Furthermore, the Greek national media promoted a narrative of Albanian immigrants as criminals. The new immigration law of 1991 includes the preamble, "suddenly, Greece started to be flooded with aliens, who, entering, staying, and working illegally, create enormous social problems for the state, while they inevitably try to solve their own problems by engaging in criminality (drugs, robberies, thefts etc.)" (Baldwin-Edwards, 2004, pg. 3).



Figure 40: Eva and Bersan Shqina.
Provided by Eva and Bersan Shqina.

The harsh language about immigrants indicated a larger xenophobic problem in Greece, and the new law directly associated Albanian immigrants with illegal activity. The Shqina's realized Bersan's entrepreneurial visions were unlikely to be fulfilled in Greece, due to the negative narrative that followed Albanian migrants in Greece.

This realization caused Bersan Shqina to shift his focus to building a business back in Tirana. In late 1991, Bersan found a job in Greece in an electronics store where he was introduced to the world of arcade games and a potential business opportunity. *"I had permanent work in the store where we used to produce those arcade games and then repair them. This was for the first five years [in Greece]. After the first year there working with these guys, I was able to open up my business in Tirana, Albania. I bought the first four arcade games at the time, and I sent my father to open up a store there, because he was retired. And this is how we built a business in Albania with the arcade games."*

With the help of Bersan's father, in 1992, the couple was able to start and maintain one of the first post-communist businesses in Tirana. Bersan wanted to bring the concept of nightlife and gathering places that the couple experienced in Greece, back to his homeland Albania. Opening an arcade game store in Tirana created a spot to meet with friends, play games, and grab a bite to eat, even though the owner lived in Greece.

Eva and Bersan Shqina were able to maintain a business from another country by acquiring a work/travel permit. Bersan Shqina made the journey from Greece back to Albania every two months from 1992 - 1998. When in Albania, Bersan would maintain the arcade games at the shop by replacing the PC boards or the machines. The difficulties being an Albanian immigrant in Greece eventually pushed the couple to migrate to the United States, where they could pursue their dreams of starting their own company. Eva says her husband,



Figure 41: Bersan Shqina at MEM-Connections Electrical. Provided by Eva and Bersan Shqina.

"he had such a vision on what he's going to do in the future. Greece wouldn't let him do what he wanted to do. That was one of the reasons that we decided to come to the United States." Eva Shqina

The couple arrived in Stafford Springs, Connecticut on October 3rd, 1998. Bersan remembers *"we came from Athens, the city full of lights and nightlife and people."* The Shqina's were

sponsored by Bersan's cousins in Connecticut, as per the regulation of the Diversity Visa Lottery. Connecticut was a less popular destination for Albanian immigrants than nearby states New York and Massachusetts (Nedelkoska, 2015). The Shqina's used a network of friends and other Albanians to reach Worcester the next month. Eva Shqina and her education in Business Administration in Greece had been on track for her to work at the National Bank of Athens, but in Worcester the best job she could find was an overnight gas station attendant. Bersan Shqina found work as a doll-maker, working 12-hour shifts. Eva says, "*Bersan was going in the morning, working many hours, he will come home, and we would switch at the door and I would leave to go to work,*" The couple lived like this for close to a year. The hardships and stress slowly fueled their plans for the future.

The scholars who analyze immigrant education and employment note that highly skilled immigrants often find themselves in lower-skilled jobs. A 2016 study in Canada found that 80% of immigrants studied felt their occupation

did not match their education level (Subedi & Rosenberg, 2016). When he arrived in the US in 1998, Bersan Shqina was initially unable to find work as an electrical engineer because he was unaware that he could have a diploma evaluation. After learning he could have his credentials examined, Shqina found work at a small tech company in Worcester. He learned of a program at Columbia Tech that supported aspiring small business owners. He presented his resume to program board members, and after six months got the financial support to open MEM-Connections Electrical. Shqina had navigated through the high-tech industry of electromechanical assemblies and electrical harnesses in Albania, Greece, and Worcester to a position where he could open an electromechanical small business of his own. Bersan and Eva saw this opportunity in the market for them to build this business, and fully invested their energy into the success of the business.

The company started with six employees, all Albanians, with professional expertise in the field. The company swiftly grew



Figure 42: MEM-Connections Electrical Employees. Provided by Eva and Bersan Shqina.

and prospered, but financial crisis hit a year later, in February 2001. The 2001 Recession, stemming from lingering fears of the "Y2K Scare" that computers would stop working at the turn of the century, lasted eight months. That caused computer and software sales to sharply decrease (Amadeo, 2020). During this difficult time when they had to lay off employees, Eva Shqina began taking a more "hands-on role" at MEM. She continued to work her primary job as an administrative assistant despite her new role at MEM. Bersan Shqina reflects that the rest of the events of 2001 also

contributed to the economic gravity of MEM. Bersan says, *"I spent much more of the time just to try putting some connection between the people who have the connection in the industry."* Near the end of 2001, the Shiqna's began to see an increase in orders and a mending economy. MEM-Connections Electrical had weathered the economic downturn and has prospered in the electromechanical industry.

Response to Covid-19

The start of the 2020 Covid-19 pandemic marked an anxiety-inducing time for many small business owners, including the Shqina's. Eva Shqina recalls the uncertainty and paranoia the couple experienced, and she takes pride in the new sanitation procedures and safety precautions put in place to protect their employees. Paranoia is understandable, as CNBC reports that of the businesses closed due to Covid-19, 60% will remain permanently closed (Sundaram, 2020). Fortunately, MEM-Connections Electrical fell under the "essential business" category and was allowed to keep the doors open.



Figure 43: MEM-Connections Electrical Employees. Provided by Eva and Bersan Shqina.

GRETA BAJRAMI

Golden Group

Roofing

Greta Bajrami is the CEO of Golden Group Roofing, started in 2012. In 1999 she moved from Tirana to Worcester with her parents after her mother won the US Diversity Visa Program.

Greta Bajrami's life in Albania was difficult. Her family suffered from poverty and the effects of the civil unrest caused by the collapse of the Ponzi schemes in 1997. Greta recalls hiding under her bed at night to shield herself from flying bullets, and seeing her community cleaning up dead bodies under the town clock tower. Her mother was a doctor, but they were often left without running water or enough food to eat, as it was an underpaid profession in Albania.

Her mother made sure she had a fulfilling childhood despite their circumstances by keeping her mind active.

"I grew up this little girl who was intellectually rich, but financially poor. My mom, she kept my mind very rich. She exposed me to books and arts, and theater. Some of the best memories of my whole life remain in those first 10 years of life where I was the poorest."

Greta Bajrami



**Figure 44: 8 year old Greta in Albania.
Provided by Greta Bajrami.**

When they moved to Worcester in 1999, Greta's family struggled financially still, living in a small studio apartment in a bad part of Worcester. Greta worked hard through school with dreams to attend law school in Boston, so she could support her family. However, she became pregnant with her daughter at 19, and decided to pursue a different education track closer to home, to ensure she could stay local and afford the life her daughter needs.

Greta and her then-boyfriend (now husband), Freddy Campoverde, both attended college at Worcester State studying Business Administration, struggling to juggle student and parent life. They attended classes all day while their daughter was at daycare, and then made it home to feed their daughter dinner, and give her to Greta's mother. From then, they would work waiting tables at Legal Seafoods in Framingham until around midnight, and they would do the same thing the next day. When reminiscing about college, Greta said *"We worked every day, I mean, there wasn't a shift that I didn't pick up because we were trying to survive, we were trying to pay for college, we were trying to pay our*

rent, pay our food, pay our daughter's food, and just survive. And we thought that was going to be our life." Starting her own business did not cross her mind until her senior year in college, when she took an entrepreneurship class and designed a café as her semester project.

After graduating from college, Greta and Freddy both got jobs at a construction company, CertainTeed, working at the subcontracting level. They found the job through a Craigslist advertisement, and were immediately hired because of their college education. Greta began to notice shortcomings in the company, like a lack of customer service, little use of technology, and a disregard for some basic business principles.



Figure 45: Greta outside of her construction job, CertainTeed. Provided by Greta Bajrami.

She thought she could put her college degree to use and run her own construction business, after still struggling to pay her bills and recognizing the company's shortcomings. *"In order to change myself from financial hell, I needed to take a skill and apply it so I can rise out of it. I realized that I was a good strategic planner. And I said, why don't I take this and implement it in construction and make something out of it?"*

Greta's journey into entrepreneurship came out of necessity, like many other immigrant entrepreneurs. She was unable to support her family working at CertainTeed, and there was no ability for upward mobility in the company, due to poor management and prejudice in the industry. She remembers the disparity in job positions in the construction industry caused by race: *"I was the labor girl or guy; the Albanians, the Russians, the Brazilians, the Spanish people. We were the labor force, we were never meant to be the leaders, the brand, you know, the brand visionaries."* In order to improve her financial situation, she became self-employed.

Greta Bajrami and Freddy Campoverde saved up \$10,000 in tips and wages from their restaurant jobs in college and their time at the construction firm and received a \$5,000 gift from her mother. In 2012, at the age of 21, Greta Bajrami opened Golden Group Roofing, and was immediately met with skepticism from peers and potential customers. *"Everybody that heard it thought I was crazy. They're like, What? You are 21 years old, you are [an] Albanian girl. What do you know about roofing?"* Greta prevailed, despite the criticism, because she possessed an important entrepreneurial characteristic: creative mentality. Rather than re-inventing the roofing process, Greta integrated personal touches into the consulting process, such as purchasing small thank you gifts for customers, and running it all electronically to allow the process to go smoother. She also tied in values she learned from Albanian culture:

***"Something that I had learned as a little girl, right, when somebody comes into your house, you take out your best everything to give that person your all. And those fundamentals are sprinkled into Golden Group's identity, my company's identity today."* Greta Bajrami**



Figure 46: Greta, Freddy, and coworkers at a construction site. Provided by Greta Bajrami.

Response to Covid-19

Greta Bajrami's adaptation to the Covid-19 pandemic, or lack of need to, is thanks to her ability to look toward the future. As early as 2018, Golden Group was already implementing Zoom for virtual consultations, minimizing the in-person contact between contractors and customers. After a mandatory eight-week shutdown early this year, Golden Group was able to function almost as if normal, and Greta projects that Golden Group's end-of-year numbers will be the same as last year. She emphasizes the importance of reinvesting in one's brand, including technology.

"I'm very thankful that again, I was always reinvesting in my brand. One area that I've always reinvested in heavily has always been technology. So overall, it's affected our business, but I'm very fortunate that we were already implementing a lot of the new ways of doing business prior to COVID starting." Greta Bajrami

Greta Bajrami's journey to and from entrepreneurship was rife with hardship and lack of support, but she ultimately became a successful CEO. She risked failure and humiliation by opening a business in a male-dominated field, that was unaccepting to women and immigrants. She took her knowledge from college and prior work experience in construction and poured it into building a brand that could launch herself and her family out of poverty.



Figure 47: Greta and coworkers at a construction site. Provided by Greta Bajrami.

ERION KODRA

Strategic Behavioral Solutions

In 1997, when Erion Kodra was in his early twenties, his mother won the US Diversity Visa Program, and he, his mother, and his younger brother came to the United States. In Tirana, both of Erion's parents were doctors. His mother was an obstetrician, and his father practiced internal medicine. The family had no connections in Worcester besides their required sponsors for the diversity program, who were not very active in the family's move and transition. Erion describes why they chose them as sponsors: *"my dad knew somehow somebody who was [in Worcester]."*

When his mother won the Lottery, she made a decision for her family; she and her two sons would move to Worcester, while her husband remained behind in Albania. His career was in Albania, and he was in his late 40s, so it would be difficult for him to continue his practice in the United States.

Erion's mother gave up her career for her family, and had a difficult time pivoting to life in America; *"My mom suffered extensively. Basically, from a doctor, she was now working at McDonald's."* This is not an uncommon situation for immigrants; some professional certifications are sometimes not recognized in the United States, in part due to prejudice against the legitimacies of the quality of education in the country of which the immigrant got their certification (King et. al, 2010, pg. 7).

America's failure to recognize some certifications directly resulted in Erion's father staying behind in Albania and separating his family.

At the time that his mother won the visa, Erion Kodra had been in Greece attending the American College of Thessaloniki, where he learned English. That set him up to transfer into Clark University just three months after he got to Worcester, majoring in finance, economics, and business. In his eyes, the transition wasn't a large shock because he moved from one college experience to another.

Erion met his wife Olta near the end of 1997 through a group of Albanian-American friends in Worcester.

Learning English is Crucial

"Language is a key thing; I keep telling newer immigrants who come here to forget about any college or school, learn the language first. It's the most basic thing you need to do to get around, get the bearings of the system, and then things get better." Erion Kodra

She was also from Tirana, and had moved to Worcester with a student visa to study the piano. When their son was diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), the couple found that the services and therapists they took him to were not helping him. *"At one point we said maybe we can do this thing ourselves better than anybody else."* Given the struggles they faced as parents of a child with ASD, Erion and Olta saw an opportunity to create a better ASD service to fit their son's and other children's needs.

One problem, however, was that neither Erion nor Olta were qualified to provide those kinds of services themselves, such as teaching people with ASD how to communicate with others or tie shoes. With good management, Kodra's were able to create Strategic Behavioral Solutions (SBS) in 2017.

SBS is a small-to-medium enterprise with almost 50 employees that provides "behavioral analytic interventions to all people seeking behavioral change, and their insurance-based services serve clients diagnosed with ASD" (Strategic Behavioral Solutions, 2020, para. 3).



Figure 48: Erion Kodra, Olta Kodra, and their son. Retrieved from the SBS Facebook page.

Erion explains the company: *"the services that [SBS does are] in-house services. They have a therapist, who goes to the home and based on the plan, which has been designed by a psychologist or a licensed behavioral analyst, they do this applied behavioral therapy. [ASD] is a spectrum, so there are a variety of issues. Some kids can look normal, but then they just take their clothes off out of the blue, or they put their hands onto a stove. It can be very dangerous sometimes."*

Olta Kodra runs the day-to-day operations of the company, while Erion manages the finances. Despite difficult days and challenges, Erion says *"it's worth it because at least I'll leave something to support [his son]. He will very likely need help for the rest of his life. So [we] thought that if we have something well established and well built, it will be a support for him too."*

Erion Kodra also acknowledges the larger role the company has on their clients; *"Families have experienced a lot of psychological shock and trauma from their children's diagnoses, so we are in the middle of it, trying to at least give some hope. And it does make a difference; a lot of the kids do actually improve significantly over the years. Difficulties come with time, but it's worth it. It's worth every moment."*

Erion remembers that when he and Olta started Strategic Behavioral Solutions, they made some expensive mistakes. *"Nothing works as it's planned usually. No plan survives contact with the enemy."* The enemy in Erion and Olta's case turned out to be financial and hiring issues. The company initially over-projected their revenue, or assumed they'd make more in profits than they actually did, so the money they were putting into the company wasn't

enough to cover expenses, salaries, or to save. This is a common issue for new businesses; about 18% of small-businesses owners said they didn't secure enough financing when they were starting out, according to a 2011 survey by Hiscox, a business insurance company (Gunn, 2011).

Yet, the pair also didn't know how to deal with insurances and the insurance companies, which turned out to be an issue because without the proper insurance, they couldn't get paid, and without that, it was hard to pay their employees. *"It was a haphazard struggle. I really had to borrow everywhere, mortgage everything I could."* It was due to his background in finance that Erion was able to get the company out of immediate financial trouble.

There were also few employees that were both qualified practitioners or staff for autism services and willing to work for a start-up that couldn't offer a large salary.

Figure 49: Clients of SBS playing with marbles. Retrieved from the SBS Facebook page.



The Biggest Challenges

"A finance problem, which is always first in a business, and also a lack of experience in how to operate and hire people at the same time; those were kind of the biggest challenges." Erion Kodra

"[We] were brand-new, so we would hire anybody without doing a background check or a professional check, which turned out to be a bad idea, because it costed us in terms of the quality of work and job environment in general." The only reason they company was able to stay in business after their reputation had taken a hit from the poor services their employees were providing was because the demand for Autism services is so high that they would keep getting customers.

The Kodras learned that they had to spend more money on advertising and overpaying good professional staff to reverse their reputation as a *"shady place running in the background."* This didn't help their financial troubles initially, but once they started getting more clients due to their improved reputation,

they were on track to continue moving out of their financial deficits, then COVID-19 came and upended the company again.

Response to Covid-19

Erion believed that *"this year was supposed to be the breakthrough year"* for SBS. However, the company provides in-house services, and because of the pandemic, many families did not want the employees coming into their homes. Instead, the therapists had to try and teach their clients through Zoom. Erion explains, *"you can't really teach a kid how to tie their shoes on Zoom; it's impossible. So psychologically, [COVID] was a huge disrupter."* The business itself also struggled because it was completely closed for a few months following the initial outbreak.

After the work Erion and Olta had put in to recruit a dependable team and develop a positive company reputation, there suddenly was no money coming into the business. Erion says *"we were still paying our people, so we either struggled to get some money to pay them, or we laid them off. A lot of the employees are part-time so they can actually lose their income when they get laid off temporarily."*

Despite the challenges Strategic Behavioral Solutions is facing right now, Erion Kodra is still trying to hold fast to a positive mental attitude. He believes the business "will be in a better place if we can survive this whole period" because they have made mistakes with it in the past, but they were able to learn from them and improve the company. This is indicative of the entrepreneurial idea that "what has been done in the past can be done again" (Dewald, 2016, pg. 107).

ADELA TEGO

The Coffee Mug

Adela Tego of Korce, Albania immigrated to the United States in 2000. Tego's grandfather had been imprisoned by the Communist regime for 25 years and was only released in 1991 after the fall of communism in Albania. He had been imprisoned for his democratic views and opposition to communism:

"We were one of the families that was really touched and hurt from the Communism. My grandfather wanted the democracy against the leader of the Communism, and he suffered for that." Adela Tego

Tego's grandfather and other prisoners were monetarily compensated by the new government for their imprisonment. Using his compensation money, Adela's grandfather purchased several ownership stocks in a local beer factory. Adela's father and grandfather began taking on a larger managerial role. Eventually the Tego family acquired full ownership of the factory. Adela's father became a primary manager of the factory, and she helped her father with small tasks at the factory along with her older sister. Even though the business acquisition was financially beneficial for her family, given the recent fall of communism, Adela and her family faced public backlash for being some of the first business owners in post-communist Albania.



Figure 50: photo of Adela Tego and sister. Provided by Adela Tego.

"Going through and buying the businesses, that's what made us even stronger, because we were strong leaders. We reached all of this because of hard work and dedication, and not having anything handed to us."

Adela says her motivation and drive comes from her parents, and their determination in Albania to provide for Adela and her older sister. The backlash her parents faced in Albania served to motivate them to work harder, but also profoundly impacted the psyche of her parents. They strained under the stress of maintaining a new business, navigating through a period of political unrest in Albania, and raising two daughters. Adela's family decided to leave Albania: *"We felt America was the place where we wanted to be. And we fought, we fought very hard. And they kept telling us, you got to have good grades, you got to make sure you study hard. Because we didn't win the lottery. That was the only ticket, for us to get out of there."* The family was not a recipient of the Diversity Visa Lottery program, as many other Albanians were. The course of action taken by Adela's family was to

send Adela and her sister to the US for high school, which could only be achieved if Adela and her sister maintained excellent grades. Her sister had first left Albania for a school in Texas and had stayed for six months as part of a foreign exchange. After the program's completion, family relatives already in Worcester helped Adela's sister stay in the country and move to Worcester. Adela's father eventually managed to join the sister abroad and also come to Worcester with the help of friends. Adela and her mother had been left in Albania until 2000. When it was Adela's turn in the exchange program in 2000, Adela left her mother behind to join her father and sister in the United States.

Adela was one of the nearly 6,000 Albanian students traveling to the United States for school that year (UN Data). She was 16 years old. *"The family was divided in half for almost two years."* Her family was eventually able to bring her mother over to America, where they were all reunited in Worcester for the first time. The family had distant relatives who had already settled in Worcester which



**Figure 51: Adela Tego and her mother.
Provided by Adela Tego.**

guided their decision to settle there. Once in Worcester, Adela began working full time at a health clinic at 19, which put her higher education ambitions on hold. Another contributing factor is that Adela and her family were still in the process of receiving citizenship, and could only manage to find low paying jobs, like many other immigrants.

The road to Tego's education was not what she had envisioned for herself. She married when she was 22 and had her first daughter at 23.

She was unable to finish her college education at that time because she had to work to support her new family, and her parents. Adela says that having hard working rolemodels as parents has been the driving force in her entrepreneurship in America. Adela decided to continue her education after the birth of her second child. She briefly attended Quinsigamond Community College before graduating from Worcester State with a bachelor's degree in Business Administration and Management, received a master's degree in Business from Assumption College. Today, Adela's full time job is as a Senior Director at Reliant Healthcare.

Adela, like 19% of the 28.8 million other small business owners in America, went into business with her parents (Dougert, 2018). Together, they opened the Coffee Mug in Auburn, Massachusetts in 2005.

Adela works as part-time entrepreneur at the Coffee Mug because of her full time-job but still manages the business and financial aspects of being a restaurant owner, while her mother directs the kitchen.

Her husband Jani Tego owns Ted's Pizza in Worcester, into which Tego also channels a lot of her drive and time. *"20 years have been very challenging [and] continues to be challenging. Being a business owner is not easy. There's a lot of obstacles that come with it, financial side of things, but also labor, the work, the amount of hours, giving your heart and soul to the business. You also want to make sure that you are engaged with the community. That's so important, for us as Albanians in general, we support each other."*

Tego attributes the success of the Coffee Mug to the café and the family's extensive involvement in St. Mary's Albanian Orthodox Church. Tego has been a member of the Church for 23 years and is on the church board of directors. Tego says, *"We're very supportive of the Albanian Community Church, the community, they've been supportive, through the Albanian festivals, which is a big event that we do for our community."* Her family has established strong connections with other parishioners and they have accumulated a

lot of support through the Tego's family volunteering and other involvement. The Coffee Mug also plays a large part in the biannual Worcester Albanian Festival hosted by St. Mary's Albanian Orthodox Church. Tego herself helps with the marketing and organization of the festival, and the Coffee Mug is a primary food provider of the festival.

Response to Covid-19

The 2020 Covid-19 pandemic forced the Coffee Mug, like 100,000+ other restaurants, to close its doors for several months. Tego and her mother were able to re-open the restaurant at half capacity in August 2020, but both women fear what's to come in the coming months. The restaurant is not earning what it used to, and she and her mother are exhausting every possible financial and physical resource to keep the doors open.



Figure 52: Photo of the Coffee Mug. Provided by Adela Tego.



Figure 53: Photo of Adela and Jani Tego. Provided by Adela Tego.

EDI & EVA POSTOL

Boomer's Pizza

Edi and Eva Postol met at the age of 18 and 17 at the University of Korçë. Edi is from Korçë, Eva from Pogradec. Partway through college, with no idea of what direction they wanted to go in for life, Edi and Eva applied for, and won, the U.S Diversity Visa Program, and moved to the United States in 2003 when they were 21 and 20 years old.

Eva recalls her father's immense impact on her as a child. "The influence I got from my dad [is] working hard and be nice and kind to people. My dad is the person that never says no to person, he always says yes, even if it's something that he doesn't want to do, he doesn't say no, that's the kind of person he is. I am like that. That's something that I learned from him, to be nice to people. It's good to be nice. The other part is working hard, because he never stopped working, even now."



Figure 54: Eva, customer, and Edi (left to right) at the front desk of Boomers. Retrieved from the Boomer's Pizza Instagram.

When Edi and Eva came to the United States, they had little money, sparse luggage, and hopes to open their own business. They ended up in Worcester through friends from Korçë, who let them stay with them until they found an apartment and steady jobs. Edi worked at an Italian restaurant on Shrewsbury Street for a few months, and ended up at Boomer's Pizza, where he worked for 8 years. He started as a delivery driver and worked his way up to manager. Eva helped part-time at Boomer's and found work at Dunkin Donuts as well. Edi and Eva struggled during this time, because of their lack of English proficiency and transportation around Worcester.

“We didn't really speak any English, she was a little bit understanding, but I couldn't understand anyone. And the no driving, no car, just walking. We used to live in the Clark [University] area. She used to work in Boomers, I used to work in Shrewsbury St. We were just walking around for almost six months, until after we bought the first car. We wanted to go to school to learn English, so we took some classes at Clark, ESL classes. I was working in a restaurant in that time, but in the morning, I would go to school at nine o'clock, [it] was hard. And I was tired. To get English was very hard.” Edi Postol

The previous owners of Boomer's decided to sell their restaurant in 2011, and Edi was their first choice to sell to, because he was the most experienced worker in their restaurant. “After I moved to Boomers, working inside, outside, running the place, everything, when the time came, and the

owner decided to sell it, he asked me first and I said why not? I'm taking a risk. We made it and we've been running that place for almost nine years, now.” They piled together all their savings to put towards their restaurant. Once they opened, Edi and Eva together worked hundreds of hours a week at the start, to get Boomer's going. The restaurant was in poor shape when it was left to Edi and Eva, and over the course of 9 years they quadrupled the amount of business. Though they were well-versed in food service, the financial side of running a restaurant was unknown territory to Edi and Eva. They exhibited tenacity, the fifth entrepreneurial mindset characteristic, by jumping into the restaurant business at such young ages, with little experience. They bounced back from failure when they fell and worked hard to build their business and skills in the 9 years since purchasing Boomer's.

“We took a risk when we came from nothing, and we just said 'let's take this too, we're young, why not?' Boomer's wasn't that busy like it is right now, it was very quiet. It was the lowest business, and the economy in that time wasn't very good too, and when we took over [business] was not even half, quarter of what we're doing right now. We started by working hard, making everything from scratch. We came here with nothing and it was something that we've been dreaming, to have our own business. We made it, and we're proud of ourselves.” Edi Postol



Figure 55: Edi drinking a latte with Boomer's foam art. Retrieved from the Boomer's Pizza Instagram.

Edi and Eva owe their success to the help they received from the Albanian community and pay it back as often as they can. "We support each other and help as much as we can. People that come over, we take care of them. When they come from Albania the way that we came, that's what we do when new Albanian people come in America, we help them to start a new life here. We have helped around 11 families, and we take care of them. They come here; we help them for about a couple months. We help them find house, find a job, and find themselves a life here in America." They are appreciative and give their all to the community that did the same for them.



*Figure 56: Outside of Boomer's restaurant, summer 2019.
Retrieved from the Boomer's Pizza Facebook page.*

When the pandemic hit, Boomer's was thankfully able to re-open sooner than most of our entrepreneurs, because they already offered takeout. However, the prices of their food supplier rose, and that affected their profits. Edi and Eva, despite these price increases, kept the prices the same for their customers, to ensure they would still be able to eat at their restaurant. "The prices were pretty high. It affected us because we didn't change anything. We just wanted to run the business and do what's best for it, to keep the business alive. So far, it's working, thank God. We didn't think about how much we were losing, we just wanted it to go smoothly, as much as possible. The prices that we buy the product from the companies, went higher, that affects the profit. We wanted to keep the business the same, so we don't close the place. We have been okay. I cannot say good, but okay. We still had customers coming and trying to be careful. We follow any requirement that we are told to do and do our best. And so far, we have been lucky."

Edi and Eva are pillars of the community, and are thankfully bouncing back due to the support of the Albanian Community and college students all throughout Worcester.

IRIDA TOLLKUCI

Catalyst Insurance

As a child growing up in Tirana, Albania, Irida Tollkuci remembers that parents would not supervise their children very much, so it was up to the children to figure out how to play and get along with each other. Looking back, Irida attributes this childhood structure to having an impact on traits that eventually allowed her to become an entrepreneur. *"It was really very beneficial to us, because even as a child, you'd learn to negotiate conflict resolutions and make teams [with] no direction from an adult."*

In 1993, 18-year-old Irida left Albania and came to the United States with her boyfriend at the time, who had a student visa and was

studying economics and math in Washington, DC. Her parents had to make the decision whether to keep her close to home when the country was in a time of turmoil or to allow her to leave. Irida notes that *"parents are parachutes when you're dropped in a place that is unfamiliar to you, that you don't know the language and you have to start adapting to the rules."* Yet, she and was alone in America besides her boyfriend, who was occupied with school.

Irida spoke French, Italian, and Albanian, but not English. She knew she wanted to continue her education in America, so she made it a priority to learn the language as soon as she was able, which she notes was more difficult than it would be today. *"There was no Rosetta Stone or other devices that we have now for language learning,"* she recalls. *"I went to the library, I put those big headphones on, and I put the tapes in the cassettes and I just kept playing different [English] expressions. And I remember feeling frustrated because the rules of language learning went completely out of the window."* This tenacity led her to eventually attend college in America.



Figure 57: Irida Tollkuci. Retrieved from the Catalyst Insurance Agency website.

In September 1993, Irida's boyfriend finished school, and the pair moved to Charlton, Massachusetts. They settled with relatives for about a month before they moved and rented an apartment in Worcester. In 2000, Irida was finally accepted to Clark University in Worcester after years of learning English to earn enough points on her Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) as part of her application. She remembers what it was like to be enrolled in an American University: *"it was great because my accent wasn't the only accent in the class."*

In 2004, Irida Tollkuci graduated Clark University with a degree in business and international economics. *"I did not graduate and say, I want to go into insurance. But I had a friend that worked there, and so I said I'm going to try it. I didn't know anything about insurance. I just went into it wanting to learn something new, understanding that, even if the job did not work out, I would walk away with knowledge that would serve me for years to come."* Irida recognized an opportunity to explore a new path for her future that she had never before considered, operating under the mindset that *"there is nothing that you learn that does not serve you at one time or another."*

As a newer-generation Albanian-American, Irida exhibited high self-efficacy. This corroborates the findings in Elda Zeko-Underwood's thesis, *They Came Searching for the American Dream: A Cross-Sectional Study of Education, Acculturation, and Self-Efficacy Among Recent Albanian Immigrants*, wherein she found that older generations of Albanian immigrants had a lower belief in their



Figure 58: A Catalyst Insurance holiday party. Retrieved from the Catalyst Insurance Agency Facebook page.

abilities to control their own choices and outcomes than newer generations (Zeko-Underwood, 2019).

However, Irida's situation in America somewhat contradicted the reasons why Zeko-Underwood argued newer generations had a higher self-efficacy. In her thesis, Zeko-Underwood claims that those who came after the fall of communism in Albania had an easier time, as they had more connections, knowledge of the language, and technology skills (Zeko-Underwood, 2019). While it was her connection with her friend that

allowed Irida to get a job at Mapfre Insurance right out of college, she possessed great self-motivation to learn English and earn a degree after coming to the US without a large support network. Exhibiting Accion's fourth characteristic of the entrepreneurial mindset, Irida was driven to create Catalyst Insurance because she wanted freedom to choose her own schedule and make a work-life balance after she had her first daughter. *"I realized that I wasn't really there; I was putting in a lot of hours at work, and I was missing some really great milestones that I should have been there for."* Irida

still had to put in many hours to start her business, but she was able to work around schedule that also allowed her to be there for her daughter.

Irida's parents came to the United States to support her with her children after she had her first daughter in 2002. Through the Family Reunification Program, legal US residents who are at least 21 years old may file a petition for immediate family members to obtain visas to come to the United States, too. If the petition is approved, the legal resident then must take full judicial and financial responsibility for the applicants (Family Reunification, 2019). Irida notes that *"the adjustment was a whole different ballgame for them. They came at an age where they had already settled friendships and careers [in Albania]. They had to start everything from scratch."*

For Irida, success has had many different meanings throughout her life. At 18, success was learning English and going to college. After college, success meant finding a job, then learning the business of insurance, then starting a family. Almost

28 years after coming to the United States, Irida now sees success as leaving a mark by helping others reach their own success.

Irida works with Habitat for Humanity, Abby's House--which provides women and their children with shelter and the support they need to get back on their feet--and with the Albanian church and Albanian community of Worcester itself.

"We provide funds, along with other businesses, to be able to get that families off to a good start. We try to remember that we do have responsibility to communities to help and lift them up and give them a chance to succeed." Irida Tollkuci



Figure 59: Employees of Catalyst Insurance raising money with Abby's House. Retrieved from the Catalyst Insurance Agency Facebook page.

VALON DALIPI

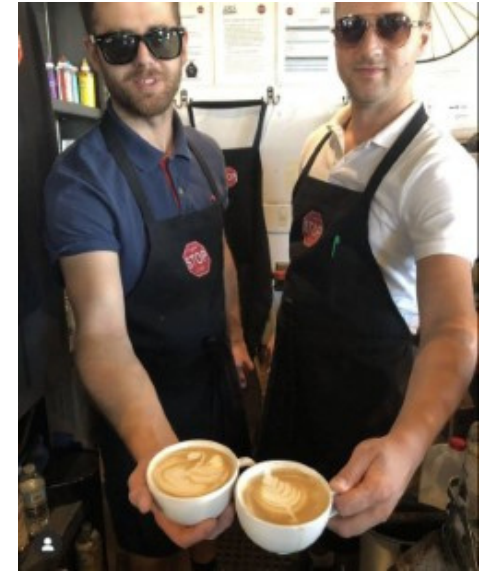
STOP Café Pizza & Grille

Valon and his brother, Hasan Dalipi, co-own the Stop Café Pizza & Grille on Park Avenue in Worcester. In Albania, Hasan had started an ice company that would provide bags of ice to cafés, restaurants, and hotels. Eventually, it became a family business, and his parents continue to run it to this day. Hassan also owned a bar/café in Albania.

Valon moved to the US in 2014 when he was 20 in search of more opportunities that he wouldn't have in Albania. He first went to Atlantic city after his arrival to the US.

Valon moved to Atlantic City, New Jersey when he was 20 years old, in 2014. he recalls *"pretty much everything was different from back home. I was here by myself, so [I kind of enjoyed] the freedom, and at the same time [I was] missing home."* Valon moved to Worcester soon from Atlantic city as he had friends in Worcester and considered Atlantic City as a seasonal place for the summer.

Valon faced the struggle of the language barrier. He spent a lot of his time reading books and newspapers. Valon also worked as a delivery driver, *"helped me a lot to communicate with people."* He then also worked with a construction company working with heating and AC's. *"These different experiences helped me a lot to decide what I actually want to do, and without experiencing things you are not going to know what you want to do."* Valon then decided to start own restaurant, STOP Café with his brother Hasan, since he (Hasan) had experience of running a restaurant in Albania. Hasan moved to the US in 2017.



**Figure 60: Hasan (left) and Valon (right).
Provided by Valon Dalipi.**



**Figure 61: Valon at STOP Café.
Provided by Valon Dalipi.**

About his journey into entrepreneurship and the reason he chose to be an entrepreneur, Valon says *"It's exciting the whole time, it's up to you working for yourself. If you work hard for yourself, it pays off hard and vice versa."*

"Always have your customer as a priority, making the customers happy, listening to their critique" is the most fundamental strategy Valon follows to make his business successful. Valon also credits the large Albanian community in Worcester as a key reason for the success of the restaurant. To make the restaurant more attractive and enticing to the large Albanian customer base, Valon and his brother incorporate traditional Albanian cuisine and special dishes such as the Byrek. *"The key is to offer people what they need to be successful, and we did that by offering them our recipes of traditional Albanian dishes."*

"Try new things, gain experience, set a focus, never stop working towards it." Valon Dalipi

Response to Covid-19

The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted many businesses. Valon's business did suffer a loss of customers due to the pandemic and had to close the in-restaurant dining while still providing take-out food. The business benefited with the opening of a new storefront while the older storefront was still being used for take-outs. Valon and his brother had a plan to shift to another space for their restaurant and the COVID-19 situation helped them. They could work on developing the new space while still having a functional space that would be operational, this way they did not lose a lot of sales and could also set up a new space. They have now moved completely to the new location.

Valon considers making connections a very important part of growing as an individual and as a business. *"Social media, meeting people and befriending them, hanging out with people. If you become friends with someone, they will open up more with you and share more with you. This will help you grow."* He considers himself and his brother as jigsaw puzzle pieces who fit together and work in harmony with each other while covering and improving each other's weaknesses. For instance, Valon is better with technology while brother is better with management of kitchen.



Figure 62: Valon (second from far right) with employees of the STOP Café making the Albanian eagle. Provided by Valon Dalipi.

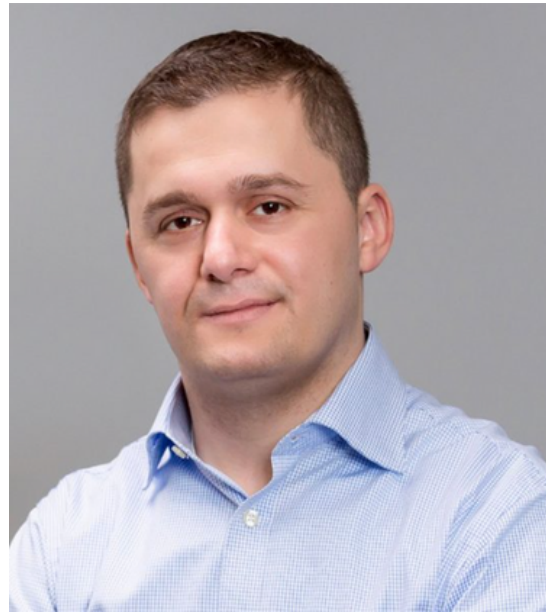
ERJON METHOHU

Eri Design

Erjon Metohu is the founder of Eri Design, a company which works with clients to develop their websites, apps, build a brand, and work in digital marketing. Erjon spent his formative years until the age 14 in Tirana, Albania after which his family moved to Worcester, MA in 1999 after his family won the Diversity Visa Lottery. His family decided to move to the United States because Albania was no longer a place, they wanted to raise their children due to the civil unrest. *"In about '97, which was the civil war, everybody got equipped with guns, and people should not be carrying guns, they were carrying guns and shooting in the air for fun. So those bullets were flying everywhere, that changed our lives dramatically. And we*

were scared to death as kids. And we would lay in the ground at night when there's flying bullets, and you can hear them, either hitting buildings or any of that. So that was a scary time."

He considers himself American despite being born in Albania because this country gave him opportunities and chances that he would not have had in Albania. *"It's just getting the opportunities to get here; you could have all straight A's and you could be the best student and just no one*



**Figure 63: A portrait of Erjon.
Provided by Erjon Metohu.**

gives you that shot in Albania. Whereas here you can achieve whatever you want to achieve whatever you put your effort into." Erjon talks about his father as a main reason for him to pick up on entrepreneurship, creativity, and engineering since his father started and found many businesses and setup a kiosk business in Albania.

Erjon speaks about moving to the States halfway through eighth grade in 1999, and on some convincing from his relatives and family, redid 8th grade in the US which made it easier for him to get used to the system and learn English rather than going straight to high school with broken English. Erjon's experience in the US highschool was not straightforward. He went to Burncoat High School in Worcester which had few, if any, Albanians. Erjon worked throughout high school. He started working at Dunkin' Donuts while in high school and worked after school there for approximately seven years. Erjon had a passion for art and used to draw and paint as a child and wanted to be an artist and make a living out of it, but his father

encouraged him to pursue a career that would earn money while also following his talents. This led him to graphic design that combined his passion for art with technology, and which could also make him money. He went to Becker college to study graphic design as his major.

Erjon's journey into entrepreneurship starts very early, when he was in college. He started studying design software on his own while at Becker and took classes on design, which allowed him to start working on side projects.



Figure 64: Erjon working in his parents' attic.
Provided by Erjon Metohu.

He created his own logo and website through which he started to operate; this was the birth of Eri Design.

He started developing logos, brochures, business cards for friends and people in the Albanian community, including the website for the Albanian Church in Worcester and helping market the Albanian Festival.

These connections in the Albanian community, and his work for the Albanian festival, helped kick start his business: *"My business started getting really busy afterwards. I graduated college in 2008. When I graduated college, instead of working for another company, I decided to do this full time."*

He started working on his company from his father's auto body shop and moved up from there to his own small office to where it is today in Shrewsbury with seven employees.

"I was very focused in helping my family, it was also a way that I could actually support myself and pay for my own college."

Erjon Metohu

Erjon describes the struggles that come with entrepreneurship and owning a business:

"you're managing people, you're managing expectations. You're making sure the clients are satisfied. So, it's a combination of everything, managing the property, managing people, so that's certainly a challenge of its own. So is making sure that all those pieces are aligned for a fluid experience for the customer. that is the most challenging thing." Erjon says *"One of the reasons why we've been able to gain is the fact that we are very much focused on doing top quality work, and some of the work that we've done has won awards."*

Eri Design worked with several higher education institutions such as Clark University, Becker College, UMass Medical, Tufts and considers it to be their niche. They also provide services such as creating digital marketing, logo designs, website strategy, design, and development support.

Response to Covid-19

The COVID-19 pandemic was a silver lining for the business. Since most of the businesses and firms have gone online, and it is the work of his company to build websites, this time helped him a lot. *"If you're going to start a business., figure out a niche and try to understand that audience as much as possible."*

RECOMMENDATIONS



Recommendations

Continue Gathering Entrepreneurs' Stories

In addition to the online profiles, the team developed a catalog that offers an analysis of each entrepreneur profile. The team also created a style guide as outlining how the profiles were built (i.e., font, color, general layout, most effective interview questions) and recommendations for the future expansion of the exhibition.

The team recommends that the WABN continue to produce profiles of Albanian entrepreneurs in Worcester. We provide our list of sample questions to use in these interviews, which span questions about the entrepreneurs' family history, experiences that influenced their entrepreneurial mindset, as well as their present endeavors and how they created their businesses. We found that it is vital to have a comprehensive understanding

of both the journey to entrepreneurship and the journey in entrepreneurship. One's motivations for becoming an entrepreneur can come from anywhere, and those motivations and attitudes brought to the start of entrepreneurship further influence one's journey within it. Involving integral members of the Albanian-Worcester community is vital to the proliferation of this project.

Expand the Exhibition

We noticed several areas for future research that would benefit the exhibition:

- 1. Explore transformational stories**
- 2. Investigate second- and third-generation Albanian entrepreneurs**
- 3. Focus a sample on part-time Albanian entrepreneurs**

Transformational stories of immigrant entrepreneurs would recognize immigrants who had professional, scientific, or specialized careers in Albania but lost their credentials to continue pursuing that career when they arrived in the United States—which happened to many of our entrepreneurs' parents.

While transformational stories are more likely to be found in the older generation of Albanian entrepreneurs, *investigating the newer generations—the American-born Albanian entrepreneurs in Worcester*—would provide yet another perspective to our exhibition. Their attitudes, motivations, and approaches to entrepreneurship might differ from first-generation Albanian-Americans.

We recommend using a purposive sampling strategy to find *part-time entrepreneurs*, or those who have at least one other job and do not rely on their entrepreneurial venture as their sole source of income. This sample would add another facet of entrepreneurship to the exhibition while also giving recognition to those who are less likely to receive it than large corporations or small-to-medium enterprises.

Use Multiple Communication Channels

Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, we could only communicate with entrepreneurs through email and Zoom, which resulted in cases of bad internet connections, insufficient knowledge of Zoom, and email miscommunications. In the future, the team *advises attempting to speak over the phone* with the entrepreneur for scheduling and contact purposes, as we found this to be easier than email in some cases. We recommend *using as many communication channels as possible*, including visiting entrepreneurs' shops, restaurants, businesses when it is safe to do so, to develop personal connections and build trust with the interviewees.

Conclusion

The creation of our exhibition was dependent on conducting 11 in-depth, semi-structured, meaningful interviews with Worcester-Albanian entrepreneurs. After engaging in conversation with our entrepreneurs, we then qualitatively analyzed their answers, and connect them to the characteristics of the entrepreneurial mindset, as defined by Accion, a non-profit community lender. Every entrepreneur displayed each of these characteristics, though some traits were more apparent in some. Connecting their stories to these traits allowed us to develop strong profiles detailing their journey into and through entrepreneurship, with an emphasis on their individual entrepreneurial mindset. These stories, motivations, and mindsets should be both recognized and appreciated.

To view the exhibition and the full entrepreneur profiles, go to: <https://www.wabn.org/exhibition.html>

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Introductory Email Script

Hello _____.

We are students from Worcester Polytechnic Institute doing a project to create a digital exhibition highlighting the experiences of Albanian entrepreneurs in Worcester in order to help inspire, mentor, and support other entrepreneurs.

We are working with Mr. Ardian Preci of the Worcester Albanian Business Network and Co-founder & CEO at Sanfrix Limited. As a Worcester Albanian entrepreneur, we would like to interview you to learn about your personal journey of becoming an entrepreneur.

This interview can be conducted through Zoom or whichever mode of communication you would prefer—such as Google Meet, Skype, Facetime, etc. If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to email us! We very much look forward to speaking with you!

Sincerely,

Vignesh Kadarabad, Alyssa Moore, Emily Musser, and Bella Piccione

Appendix B: Interview Consent Script

Thank you for taking the time to meet with us. As we said in our email, we're students at Worcester Polytechnic Institute working with Ardian Preci and the Worcester Albanian Business Network (WABN). Our team is creating a digital exhibition of the experiences of entrepreneurs in the WABN for inspiring, mentoring, and supporting other entrepreneurs. Through a series of semi-structured interviews, we hope to learn about your journey of becoming an entrepreneur.

With your permission, we would like to record this interview to allow us to go back and review your responses. If you would rather not, it's perfectly fine, as we can just take notes instead. We would also like, with your permission, to quote you in the exhibition, as we will be showcasing your story, and your words should certainly be a part of that. If we ask a question that you do not want to answer, just let us know and we will move to the next one. If you don't understand our question, let us know and we can try to rephrase it. You can also stop the interview at any time. Do you have any questions before we begin?

Appendix C: Sample Interview Questions

The following questions are our semi-structured interview schedule. The unnumbered questions are guiding prompts for our interviewees. We will review what information is collected, and subsequent interviews will be conducted from a list of baseline questions specific to the information provided in the initial interview.

- What was your life like in Albania before coming to the United States?
 - What were your parents' occupations?
 - To what extent would you say your parents influenced who you are today?
 - To what extent did your parents help you become an entrepreneur?
- How would you categorize your own path to becoming an entrepreneur?
 - What kind of work and educational experiences did you have?
- What brought you to the United States?
 - What was your first impression of the US? Worcester?
 - What were some of the struggles you faced upon arrival to the US?
 - Did you have the support of your family through this time?
- What made you want to become an entrepreneur? Necessity? Desire?
- Tell us about your work experiences in Worcester?
- What things have helped you become an entrepreneur?
- What has been difficult for you as an entrepreneur?
- Why become an entrepreneur?
- Would you want your children to become entrepreneurs?
- What role would you say your business plays in the Worcester Albanian community?
- Are a lot of your customers of Albanian heritage? Mix? How about employees?
- What advice would you give to a younger self when you had just become an entrepreneur?
- Do you have any photos that you would like to contribute to the exhibition? (Adolescence, adult years, business).
- What would you want represented about you most in a digital exhibition?
- How have you handled COVID-19 as an entrepreneur?

Appendix D: Online Exhibition Platforms

There are several platforms to build, develop, and curate digital exhibitions. The most important aspects in selecting the right platform are its ease of use, ability to expand, aesthetics, cost, and support. The main platforms we investigated were:

Weebly.com - Weebly is a free website-creation software. It is very easy to use and develop, and allows for multiple people to work on the page at the same time—which was paramount for our project. It does not require programming skills to develop it, which makes it easier to create a website through a domain. This software fits most of the criteria we looked for and is also free though it has some limitations in functionality. An example of a Weebly website can be seen below:



Figure 65: Example website: Aims Moon Paperie. Retrieved from Weebly.com.

Wordpress.com - WordPress is a free content system, specifically designed to help create and maintain websites. The platform provides blogging features and efficiency. The web-based user interface is designed to accommodate website design, publishing, and updating of websites. WordPress comes pre-equipped with templates and themes that can be utilized by anyone for free. WordPress also contains features such as a custom navigation bar, which is very useful in any website design. Furthermore, WordPress can accommodate multiple forms of media such as text, images, links, and videos.

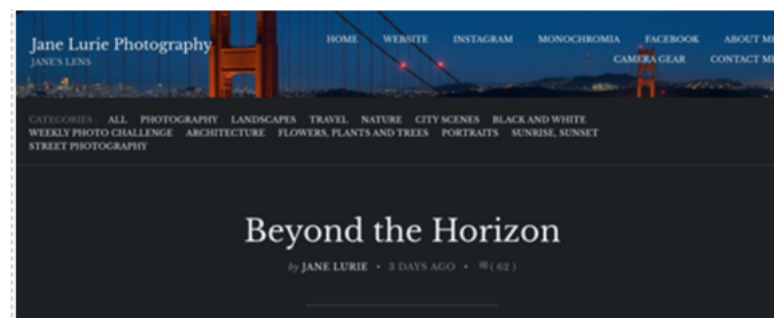


Figure 66: Example website: Beyond the Horizon, Jane Lurie. Retrieved from Wordpress.com.