

**JOHN TIRMAN:** Good afternoon from MIT. And on behalf of the Inter-University Committee on International Migration, I'm John Tirman from the Center for International Studies at MIT, and I welcome you to this Myron Leaders seminar which will feature today Luisa Seiler speaking about immigration and entrepreneurship.

You can see her bio on the screen, but I will just say that she's a Fulbright Visiting Fellow at Harvard Business School. Also among many other positions. She is executive director of the Schwartzkopf Foundation, Young Europe. And without further ado, we will have Luisa Seiler please join us.

**LUISA SEILER:** Thank you very much, John, for the kind introduction. I'm very pleased to be here today and to talk a little bit about immigrant entrepreneurship in startup cities. There are many reasons why I believe this is of interest, but I would like to pick and share one of them with you.

We are here in one of the most important startup cities in the world, and where I come from, Berlin, is one of the most vibrant startup hubs in Europe. And this city's economic development departments usually invest a lot of money and time and efforts to attract companies and entrepreneurs from abroad.

And what they often don't see is that there are actually a lot of potential entrepreneurs with links to other countries and international background already there. Immigrant entrepreneurs who have come for multiple reasons, maybe not necessarily for starting a business, but many of them do have that potential.

And this is what we want to look at today. But first, I would like to share a little bit why this topic is so important to me and what is my connection. I have been working on immigrant entrepreneurship for 15 years.

And starting in Morocco in 2005 where I helped build a micro-credit system to support Sub-Saharan migrants to make a living, and continuing in 2015 in the midst of the Syria crisis where I work with UNHCR as a MacArthur Fellow in International Affairs to advocate with governments, particularly in Turkey at that time, to grant refugees and asylum-seekers access to the local labor market and particularly to have gained the right to start their own businesses.

After that, I joined a fledgling start up in Paris, Singa. And I was absolutely convinced from the beginning about their approach to focus on the potential and not only the need for help that is often the focus when we look at refugees and newly-arrived immigrants, and what-- yeah. I mean, their approach was to ask them what they can do, what they would like to do, what they would like to contribute. And that created a whole different dynamic.

And knowing that and getting to know Singa there, I then co-founded Singa in Berlin and helped scale it to several other European cities such as Zurich, Geneva, Milan, Brussels, or Stuttgart. And I absolutely believe in the necessity for research and practice to be interlinked-- John and I had a very good conversation about this some time ago-- also in the social sciences.

And while that might be self-evident here at MIT, it's not necessarily where I come from. They are often very much separated, and therefore, my drive to continue working on the issue of immigrant entrepreneurship as a part-time PhD researcher and Fulbright Fellow at Harvard University is to bridge that gap. Going to the next slide.

So let's have a look at startup cities and their ecosystems. Cities like Boston and Berlin, but also Paris and London-- and I could name many more, but these are the ones I am focusing on, they distinguish themselves by having a very supportive environment for startup. Their ecosystems usually comprise all of these actors that we can see here. And I'm going into detail a little bit about them in a minute. And sometimes even several more.

So why I like this model is because the entrepreneurs are in the middle. They are usually not there first, but they are the ones that all of this is centered around. And we have academia. I mean, we are today here at MIT, and MIT is one of the institutions that brings about not only incredibly great research about entrepreneurship, but also a lot of entrepreneurs themselves.

And it's actually one of the institutions that's probably really good at retaining international talent that would like to go into entrepreneurship after finishing their studies. And we obviously have investors that's very necessary. We have the government, and city governments play a very particular role in this. We have corporations with corporate venture capital as well.

We have nonprofits who play a usually more of a niche role, but are very important in celebrating entrepreneurs and also identifying them in the beginning, and that is particularly true when we talk about immigrant entrepreneurs. And foundations can also play a very interesting role, particularly in entrepreneurship education, but also in funding programs that support immigrant entrepreneurs.

And through all of these activities and the interactions between the actors, that we see here an entrepreneurial culture develops in addition to the city culture that we have in every larger city. And many times, startup cities are extremely proud to incorporate that entrepreneurial culture in their city culture. And that in itself, then, attracts entrepreneurial talent, and also opens pathways to entrepreneurship for citizens that are already in the city and that gets drawn into entrepreneurship.

You can see on the side that I have-- yeah, added some actors that don't become very visible here, but that are part of these institutions. So the first and foremost, very important, and we will look at them a little bit more in detail later, are incubators and accelerators.

They are usually a very good sign for a startup ecosystem to be quite developed. And they are the ones that-- not every successful entrepreneur goes through an incubator or accelerator, but a lot of them gain their networks, their knowledge, their funding also by going through such programs.

Usually affordable spaces is something that is very important for startup entrepreneurs. That's not necessarily the case when we look at Boston, London, Paris, or even Berlin nowadays, but it can help. Then visibility is something very important, particularly-- for any entrepreneur, but particularly for immigrant entrepreneurs, with the aim of raising awareness that they exist, what their potential is, and also with the aim of creating role models.

Because a lot of entrepreneurs in my experience have shared with me that it's so much more difficult to start something up if you don't have anybody to look not up to, but to-- if there's nobody around that is like you and has shown that the success exists. And yeah. So this is very important, and cities can do a lot with regards to visibility.

Mentors, networks, access to talent that they can hire, then the regulations should be favorable, and funding, obviously. So these are all things that help an ecosystem to be thriving in sort of cities and that are more or less necessary to create an environment for successful entrepreneurship.

As I said before, I am looking at Berlin and Paris and continental Europe and then London, which has a very quite particular-- is at a much more particular situation right now because when I started working on this, it was still part of the European Union, now it's not anymore. And then Boston.

And I want to make a little comparison of these four and show why I chose these four and what they have in common or not. So as I said before, Berlin Paris, London, these are the most vibrant startup hubs in Europe. They're actually number 1, 2, 3 in terms of number of startups, funding, total value of the startups, and also of unicorns that they bring about.

London is, let's say, world-class, while Berlin and Paris are still developing. And Boston and London are quite similar in terms of volume. And just to give you an idea, the overall value of the startup ecosystem in Boston and London are about \$140 billion, whereas Berlin and Paris are about \$40 billion.

And yeah. So France and Germany have a strong social security systems that might be a-- yeah-- might seem funny why I mentioned in this context, but it is actually very important, because these social security systems are usually-- not all of them, but most of the offers are accessible to immigrants as well. And that should be an indicator that there is less necessity entrepreneurship on the one hand.

But that also means that there might be less incentives to go into entrepreneurship, which is true. And whereas in the US and Britain, entrepreneurship among immigrants is very much encouraged through the necessity to sustain oneself. Then if we look at current visa regulations, there is definitely a shift for both Berlin and Paris-- so Germany and France, and also Great Britain and the US.

So while London and Boston have been-- I mean, traditionally cities, and the UK and US traditional immigration countries with, let's say, accessible visa policies, that has changed quite recently through Brexit, and also through the Trump administration quite drastically. There used to be a startup visa in the US it doesn't exist anymore. It's really, really difficult to get an H-1B visa.

And this is why such programs as global automated residence. I don't know if you've heard of that. It's a program in the US where-- which was started at UMass Boston where international entrepreneurs who have studied at a university here in the US actually are helped to get a visa through the university in order to be able to stay to start their business. Something like this, which is a turnaround, is necessary-- a workaround, sorry, is necessary.

Whereas in Germany and France, it's been quite difficult in the past to get a visa, and this has become more and more liberalized over the past 15 years. And particularly for entrepreneurs, it's become much more easy to stay. And what comes with that is this news about how favorable visa regulations are travel very fast around the world. And yeah. It's just also a question of how people perceive a country and a city to be welcoming.

So it's not only since 2015 that particularly Germany is perceived to be quite welcoming to immigrants worldwide, but I've also talked to several people here who say that there are students at MIT or at Harvard who come from very different countries all over the world, 10 to 15 years ago, 80% of them were aiming to stay here and there to start a business or to find a job here.

And nowadays, depending on which country they're from, but particularly in Asia, it's about the other way around. About 80% actually want to go back because they see that they have more opportunities there and they feel less welcomed here. And I think that in the long-run, that will definitely change something the dynamic of the local startup ecosystem.

And then last but not least, the funding that is available is also a very interesting difference that we see. London and Boston have much stronger capital available and much higher tickets are invested, whereas in Berlin and Paris, investments are traditionally much lower than in the US.

Let's look at-- so we looked at the cities now, and now let's look at the protagonist thing within entrepreneurs. Now a little introductory text I almost provocatively wrote about immigrants as natural entrepreneurs, which was meant to be that way, because obviously it's such a generalization, it's a little bit difficult to make.

What I meant by that is that-- and that has been shown in many, many, many studies. Immigrants usually have a more risk-taking personality. It's not shown-- it's not been shown yet if that is really due to their experience of having migrated or if that is, let's say, a personality trait that is already there, that's why they migrate.

There is a slight-- studies are leaning toward saying there's a self-selection people. With the risk-taking personality are more likely to migrate, which totally makes sense. But obviously, even though migration is inherently entrepreneurial in the sense of migration being a venture, per se, but obviously not every immigrant is an entrepreneur in the narrow sense of the word and of being a company founder. And that's obviously the group of people that we are interested in here.

Entrepreneurship definitions are always a bit tricky, because some believe that entrepreneurs need to be disrupting entire industries in the [INAUDIBLE] sense to earn that label, while others call every self-employed person an entrepreneur. Just to show you the range that exists in terms of definitions.

I really like this definition of foreign-born business founders and/or owners who seek to generate value through the creation or expansion of economic activity by identifying new products, processes, or markets. It's quite comprehensive, but it does include some degree of innovation. So it's not only about pure imitation in finding a business, but it can be an innovative idea that allows for self-employment, it doesn't need to be an incredibly innovative, high-tech, high-growth startup.

And just to give you an idea about why this is actually relevant, I mean, I personally think it's relevant, per se. It's just a really interesting topic and a really interesting group of people. But it's also economically and politically relevant. Economically, [INAUDIBLE], just to give you an idea, in the US, 25% of new businesses founded every year are founded by immigrants.

If we look at Germany, we have a percentage of-- it's 18% of the overall population are first-generation immigrants, and 21% of entrepreneurs are immigrants-- so it's also a little bit higher. And if we look at the UK, it's even more. If we look at the percentage of people who engage in entrepreneurial activity, it's 9% among locals and 16% among immigrants.

So if we look at any developed country, we can see that immigrants are more entrepreneurial than locals, and that's very interesting, particularly because we know that migration and immigration into the Global North will increase further, particularly looking at climate change that will definitely drive people, unfortunately, to leave their homes.

Demographic change is a pull factor. And increasing mobility and development all over the world-- development increases migration. So we can anticipate that there will be more migration, and therefore, looking at how migration drives innovation entrepreneurship is advised, in my opinion.

While I said earlier, classifying immigrant entrepreneurs, is quite difficult and should be done with care, because we're talking about a group that is already prone to a lot of stereotypes, it is also necessary and helpful to assess the following questions. If we want to successfully support immigrant entrepreneurship, we still need to better understand why immigrants are more entrepreneurial despite them facing certain challenges.

We also would need to know better how they engage in the process of starting entrepreneurial ventures. And also under which circumstances they can be successful. This is what we are looking here today. So from my experience as a practitioner in the field, this categorization makes sense. There are a lot of people who would like to go into self-employment because they want to be their own boss. It's a strong motivation, and also because they want to make a living for themselves and their families.

Then there are also a lot of people who have a good business idea to start a small or medium-sized enterprise. Sometimes very innovative, sometimes slightly innovative, very often related to the migration experience or to the experience that people bring from their home countries. And then there's a small group of people, like among locals, who are striving to start a high-growth venture, which are usually tech ventures, but not necessarily.

And we'll go into detail in this model a little bit later, but I would like to share before with you what other credit categorizations are out there, particularly in research that have been used a lot to look at immigrant entrepreneurship. It started out with country of origin. So there were a lot of comparisons between, for example, entrepreneurs that come from a certain country, and then we looked at how entrepreneurial are they compared to entrepreneurs they come from a different country.

Then we looked at the motivation to migrate. So did somebody flee their country and become a refugee? Did somebody migrate because of economic reasons, because of family reunification, and so on? And what does that do to their entrepreneurial activities? We also looked at necessity versus opportunity entrepreneurship. So does somebody found because they have to for economic reasons or because they follow an economic and entrepreneurial opportunity?

In my opinion, for the purpose of best supporting immigrant entrepreneurs in their founding process, it's actually not really important to know where they are from or what brought them here, but where they want to go with their business. And this is why I chose categorization that is related to the business and not so much to the person and their background.

Also, one thing that I find striking is-- and I have seen that many, many times when working with immigrant entrepreneurs, is that makes migration becomes a much more common phenomenon. So people might come from Syria, but don't apply for refuge because that will restrain them in their endeavor to start a business. Or people might come from-- it's just not as clear-cut.

I mean, if somebody applies to be a refugee and they become refugees-- get refugee status, they still-- they're not a refugee only there are so many different reasons why people would migrate that it's very difficult to stay in these categories. And the same is true for necessity versus opportunity. I've seen so many people where both was kind of true, and I would like to share a little bit longer quote with you from one of the entrepreneurs that I've been working with for quite a long time. He's Syrian, and you can see all of that in that quote.

So he shared it with me, Luisa, to be honest, I was forced to be an entrepreneur now. I thought that I would do this after 50. But now I was forced to do it before 40. To stay here legally, I had only three options. Either to ask for refuge, which I didn't want to do, or to find a job, or start a business, and I had six months.

I did my master's degree in teaching English to speakers of other languages, and my thesis was on the different learning styles in the classroom and how the teacher should cater to the different learning styles. So I had a dream of creating a system that would allow each one to learn in their way, whatever that way is. But I always thought, what if I to develop such a thing?

I applied and applied and applied for jobs and I was not even getting an answer. I only applied with university. Maybe this was one of the mistakes, but this was my scope. That was what I know and these are the people that I know. So the last option was to start a business. And at that time, I said, OK, maybe it's time to do the dream, so let's do it.

And I did it-- I did not know that I'm an entrepreneur. To come up with an idea or to develop the idea made me-- or maybe I'm still in the process of building my entrepreneurial personality and I started to love this. So the other day, I was having a discussion with someone and they said, what if they offer you this job now? Which is a secure job, very well-paid in a university. After a long, long thought, I said, if they offered to me now, I would say no. I cannot now give up this dream.

So that shows very well. He was forced to do it, but now he loves it, it's his dream. It's not as clear-cut, and I think we have to cater to that in programs that support immigrant entrepreneurs. And this is what I would like to look at now.

Here are some patterns that I observed over the past years. From all of these actors in the ecosystem, we're now looking at incubators and accelerators a little bit more in detail, not because I think they are the most interesting, having co-founded some-- they are obviously interesting to me, but because they are, as I said before, indicative how much of an ecosystem is.

The goal should be that everyone can get into traditional support programs, such as incubators and accelerators. And by traditional, I mean support programs that are there, that are not created for a particular group of entrepreneurs. And for those among you who are familiar in the entrepreneurship field, they know Brad Feld, Startup Communities, and he writes, "Anyone, regardless of experience, background, education, ethnicity, or perspective, should be welcomed into the startup community if they want to engage with it."

And he doesn't even write that with regards to immigrant entrepreneurs. That's not the topic at all he writes it because he says every startup community that wants to be successful needs to be inclusive necessarily. I agree, but unfortunately, that's not what we observe today. We're not necessarily talking about active discrimination, although that might occur as well. It's much more the subtle barriers that keep immigrant entrepreneurs out of these traditional support programs.

And that is why bespoke programs are needed, in my opinion, and ideally, they're always temporary, and they also have to be accompanied by efforts from all these players that we looked at to further develop the traditional programs to become more inclusive. So that's really one of the means to get to the overall goal, is to support the traditional programs to become more inclusive, but also raise awareness among policymakers and regulators, and then by offering bespoke programs.

And that concretely can lead to-- yeah, to combine these three approaches. If we look at the model again of the three categories, they're still the same, we can see that there are certain things that work best for the people who are in these categories and also certain things that a bespoke program can do for them.

So the majority of people is in the self-employment category. They are usually primarily looking for information how to set up a business and might not even want all that entrepreneurship training, all that networking, all these things. But when they enter such a bespoke incubation program, our experience has been that this might actually develop into a wish to start a proper company with a few employees-- so to move up into that-- and I'm not saying it's better, it's just bigger-- a small and medium enterprise category.

But what happens also very often is that through the networking, they actually discover that self-employment seemed to be the only option for them, but they have gained access, through being in as part of such a program, gain access to employment that matches their skills, which we now-- didn't in the beginning, but now also consider one of the success metrics of such programs.

Then if we look at those who want to start small and medium-sized enterprise, they have usually, as I said before, were low-tech ideas that might lend themselves organic growth. So they might end up in the high-growth sector eventually, but in a more organic, let's say, speed. And what they mostly need is access to small-scale funding, which is often not provided because they might not have access to loans by banks and they might not be interesting for VCs and so on because the money is-- the funding of some sort is small.

And they also often, because of their status as immigrants, don't have access to family, friends, and [INAUDIBLE] money. And I've actually been very happy to hear-- just this morning I read it, that in Berlin we will soon have a new government and they decided to create new startup grants for women and immigrants in particular that bridge exactly this gap.

And then if we look at the smallest group of people that aims at high-growth businesses from the beginning, mostly tech businesses, they could technically enter directly into the tech accelerators, into the traditional programs, but the usual barriers often keep them from doing so. And the task of bespoke programs is to prepare them for entry in the traditional support system.

And this preparation looks [INAUDIBLE] as the following. It's actually not-- yeah. It's mostly introducing them to startup culture, to the local jargon, to networks giving them visibility, and also providing partnerships to these traditional programs so that they are even aware of the situation.

Otherwise, bespoke programs usually offer the same support offer as traditional incubators, such as entrepreneurship training, network mentoring, visibility, price money, and so on. And it's really about getting in. So it's really about making this one step into the traditional programs, about being a little bit more flexible with regards to the needs of the entrepreneurs.

In our experience, bespoke programs have to continuously develop themselves according to human-centered design principles and the needs of the participants. The expectations have to be a little bit less standardized and the success metrics more differentiated. So what's concretely different?

Very concretely, it starts with outreach. Outreach into the immigrant communities is key so that they even know that these programs exist. And that they feel welcome in the programs. I already spoke about access to finance and particular funding instruments. That is one other thing that is a little bit different. And role models are also a very important part. I spoke about them earlier.

And one of the things that everybody agrees is that instead of looking at CVs and existing networks or maybe Ivy League credentials, it's very, very important when taking startup teams into these programs to look at their entrepreneurial hunger and the strength of their entrepreneurial drive and to rely on that rather than credentials.

Ideally, such bespoke programs lead to a virtuous cycle that eventually creates a mass of successful immigrant entrepreneurs in a given ecosystem, which then, again, successful mentors then-- successful entrepreneurs then mentor new entrepreneurs, it creates a network, role models, and so on.

The danger of this is obviously that people get stuck in ethnic networks and markets, which is why it's so important that these programs are bridging the gap between the traditional startup community and the immigrant startup community. And in many cases, the migration experience provides a fresh view in society as I said before, and really leads to very innovative products or services that locals might actually just not see.

Here, the flip side can be that products or services are only interesting for people with a migration experience, which is not a problem, per se, but it just creates a limited market. And then there's a lot of biases connected to having such bespoke programs, which is why they should always be temporary.

And what I find interesting-- and I said earlier that the city of Berlin has introduced this new-- or will introduce this new policy instrument of supporting immigrant and female entrepreneurs, is that if we look at such bespoke programs, they are-- it's very similar with all underserved entrepreneurial groups.

So if we look at immigrant entrepreneurs or female entrepreneurs or BIPOC and minority entrepreneurs, maybe non-academic entrepreneurs-- so let's say all of the entrepreneurs that are not the usual suspects, unfortunately nowadays, the ecosystems are built in a way that for them, bespoke programs are still very helpful until we reach a point that the traditional programs become more inclusive.

And we've seen now that more and more organizations are creating targeted offerings for these groups. What is interesting, though, is that it's still quite unclear which of the interventions actually work for which target group and in which context, and that is why I'm driving this forward or I'm trying to drive this forward.

And on an individual level, I already said there need to be some shifts in what we focus on when these teams are onboarded into the program or when-- also when they move out of the program. Commercial or-- traditional incubators have very, very clear success metrics. Where do you stand when you come in? Where do you stand when you go out? What is your success? What do you have to have achieved? That is usually not possible here, or at least not advised, let's put it like this.



So the individual level is usually-- it really much depends on where a person stood when they come in, and you could see that in the pyramid that I had. We're not-- I mean, we're not working with teams that are at a very particular stage in their startup development that have a very, very-- that come from one particular industry. It's much more diverse.

And the commonality of people that the startup entrepreneurs have is their migration experience. So it depends very much on where a person stood when they enter and what their goals were to see if they were successful throughout the program in reaching them. So it's much more relative the progress than absolute indicators.

On an ecosystem level, we-- yeah. If you remember how we started today, there is a focus on attracting entrepreneurs from abroad rather than looking who's already here. So first of all, in order to figure out if looking at who's already here and supporting them is more successful or is successful at all, we need to collect more data on immigrant entrepreneurs.

There is still very little data. There are some great researchers who are working on the topic and who have been collecting a lot of data about this, but sometimes data is also not accessible, so that is one thing to do. The other one is to assess this dynamic between which investments are made into the economic development in bringing companies and entrepreneurs to the cities other than supporting locals and wouldn't it pay off and wouldn't people-- wouldn't it-- yeah, wouldn't it pay off to invest more in the local international talent?

Once the percentage of immigrant entrepreneurs in traditional incubators is representative of immigrant businesses overall. That would probably be one of the clearest success indicator. So we should look at which percentage of traditional support program participants are actually immigrant entrepreneurs.

Then the visibility again, among the most important entrepreneurs in the city, usually there are immigrant entrepreneurs. So how can we look-- how can we see how visible they are? Are they role models? And another suggestion would be to look at how inclusive our policies and regulations and what are the advancements made over the past years in making them more inclusive.

These are some suggestions, and for those of you who will later be interested in diving a little bit deeper, I don't know if we will share the presentation. For anybody who's interested, there is some literature that connects my personal experiences as a practitioner to the research around this topic, and that underlies what I have shared today. And now I'd be very happy to hear some questions and to answer them.

**JOHN TIRMAN:** Thank you, Luisa, for that very rich presentation. Now we're going to have-- our discussant today is Anna Hardman who teaches economics at Tufts University and has been a long-time member of the Inter-University Committee on International Migration, co-chair.

And she will have some questions for Luisa and then she will field your questions which you can put up using the-- what is it? The-- yeah, Q&A button on your screen. So let's go on Anna. Thank you.

**ANNA HARDMAN:** All right. And I really enjoyed your presentation. I see the first comment here is it would be great if we can get the slides to review the content. Awesome presentation, thank you. And I echo that. That was [INAUDIBLE]. And that's not really a question.

I found myself, with a background in economics, thinking about how economists look at immigrant entrepreneurs. And of course, one thing that economists always ask for is numbers. And the thought that your work will actually lead to having some more empirical evidence about what kinds of interventions can actually work for immigrant entrepreneurs is enormously exciting.

My first thought as Luisa was talking was to ask a question that you, in fact, addressed in part, but I'd like to push it a bit, which is the question, when people talk about immigrant entrepreneurship, they usually think about the entrepreneurs who start biotech companies, the people who you call [INAUDIBLE].

And yet-- and of course, there have always been people like that. MIT produced an engineer called George Hatsopoulos who started the firm which has become bigger and bigger Thermo Electron. That's clearly the top of your pyramid. The bottom end is people like the place I brought my vegetables and fruit for many years, which was a grocery shop in a suburb of Boston Arlington, Christos [INAUDIBLE], who came from Greece in the '50s and ran a business for many years serving what had been a large population of Greek immigrants.

So I really liked that you did go on from talking initially about the places where the high-tech entrepreneurs can prosper to talking about small-scale entrepreneurs, the people you call that self-employment, or sometimes there's a business is evolving into not just self-employment, but small and medium-sized enterprises.

That, however, one question you didn't address as much, but again, I as an economist thinking about these issues talk about is, what sorts of cities? You talked about the big immigrant-attracting cities. We talked about-- you talked about Berlin, you talked about Boston, Paris, London. And I have further questions about things like the ways in which host countries are addressing the issue of visas for entrepreneurs.

But I also think that in addition to those big cities, much less attention has been paid to entrepreneurs and much smaller places who may never grow to become what you're calling high-growth.

But as we think about the problems that both Europe and I hope the United States face in hosting the large numbers of migrants, often either mixed migrants or refugees, but also the challenge of attracting entrepreneurial immigrants, the question of where they go, what are the forces that make it attractive for immigrants to go to different places, and should we, in fact, be encouraging entrepreneurs to locate in those big entrepreneurial cities?

So my question is, what do you see as the issue in comparing-- focus on the biggest, most visible cities? It was interesting to me that you didn't talk about the Silicon Valley, for example. Obviously many of the most successful top-of-the-pyramid entrepreneurs have been in Silicon Valley, and many of them have been immigrants to the United States, foreign-born entrepreneurs.

It's also true, though, that a lot of-- there are lots of other places. And as an economist, I think about what kinds of factors make cities in general and individual cities in particular attractive for immigrant entrepreneurs and fertile for those immigrant entrepreneurs? And for example, we think of things like diversity, which Jane Jacobs, an urban planner-- urban policy person talked about very effectively starting in the '60s.

But also, the economist jargon about learning-- we learn in cities. Cities produce growth in an economy because people can learn. And immigrants-- can immigrants in big cities more effectively start businesses than immigrants in smaller places? Sharing the fact that people need to be part of a community. And that's where there are tensions between small places-- smaller places and also between immigrant networks and networks of immigrants from all countries.

And so I guess what I'm really asking you to do is to talk about, first of all, big cities versus small cities. Is it desirable for the kind of assistance that immigrants that you're talking about-- and I think this is a very exciting innovation and something we don't have enough of here. But is it something that we should be starting in the very biggest cities and perhaps move on later to smaller urban places? Or is it something that can be done in places that needs to be done in big cities only?

I really enjoyed your talk, Luisa. I thought you raised a lot of interesting questions. But when you talked about startup cities, are you thinking only of cities where there are already a lot of startups?

**LUISA SEILER:** Very, very interesting question and a very important one. And so I think the question is great and the answer is quite-- would be quite complex. So I will try to point to certain issues in what you asked and what you raised. First of all, so there are a lot of advantages to being in a startup city when wanting to start a business, let it be a high-growth business or more of a smaller business.

But there might also be some advantages of starting a business in a place where less people start businesses and where there's less diversity, and therefore, maybe a little bit more visibility for immigrant entrepreneurs. Just to give you a little bit of background, I say this from my experience of having worked with people who have tried to set up support programs in smaller cities in Europe or even smaller towns or regions, and have had some very similar experiences and some very different experiences than we did in the larger end, the startup cities.

So you raised Jane Jacobs' approach or research, which is also something I am very much-- am familiar with and I use a lot, particularly when I was speaking about city cultures and the learning in cities and spillover effects and so on. And I think these are all things that necessarily happen much more in larger cities and that are dynamics that can only happen in such ecosystems that we have seen.

If you look at smaller cities, usually these ecosystems don't exist. There's very, very little support. Almost none of the actors exist that we saw in the ecosystem model. And people are much more on their own in starting a business, which can be a challenge for anybody regardless of them being immigrant or not. But might even be more challenging if you don't have the existing networks, knowledge, background, and so on.

The other hand-- and that is something that I would-- particularly in the context of Germany in recent years where some people have didn't really have a choice where they ended up, because there is a system of distribution throughout the country. If somebody comes as an asylum seeker and only once they have received refugee status and after some time they can start choosing where they want to move, we have seen some quite several people trying to start businesses in smaller places.

And the success factors are probably quite different than in larger cities. But I would say, it depends a lot as well, and we were focusing here on the openness and the readiness of traditional programs to welcome immigrant-led startups in the smaller places. We would have to say it probably depends a lot on the openness and readiness and welcoming of the local community to be customers to an immigrant-led business.

And that is something that has to be assessed very individually. I mean, there are regions that are more welcoming than others culture-wise, but then again, it can also be-- that's very individual. So the work that these support programs that I know that worked in regions in smaller cities did was much more with the local communities than with the entrepreneurs themselves, and that is something that is--

Yeah. I found very interesting is-- and what they always said is the immigrants themselves, they know-- they deal with questions of inclusion of how to interact, how to set-- how to set up a life every day. But the local people, they usually don't deal with questions of inclusion because they don't have to deal with it. So we have to approach them and have to work with them to shift their mindset towards a more inclusive mindset. So that is maybe something that can-- yeah, that hopefully answers part of your question, Anna.

**ANNA HARDMAN:** There's a question in the Q&A which I think is really interesting commenting that this was an excellent talk. But also, asking about-- saying how much the writer appreciates the focus on ecosystem-building and building acting connections between different actors in the space. And this questioner asks, are there best practices you've observed in the ecosystem-building space?

And I would add to that, have you seen the internet-- Zoom, for example, and all the equivalent technologies making it possible to provide technical assistance to a broader network of either immigrant entrepreneurs or people who, once they get their paperwork in order, would like to become immigrant entrepreneurs?

**LUISA SEILER:** There are definitely best practices in ecosystem-building. For example, I said earlier that one of the key tasks of a peaceful program is also to create pathways or funnels or however you want to call it into the more traditional programs. And that is something that works very well and that should necessarily be done to create partnerships between incubation acceleration programs where entrepreneurs are graduated into the traditional programs. We've seen that many, many times. And it's been very successful.

Another part is the visibility question. I hinted at that earlier. So on the one hand, creating visibility means creating awareness, because a big piece of the fact that traditional programs or also other actors in the ecosystem are not inclusive is because they're not aware of the needs and issues at hand.

And that can be, for example, we've been doing that in Paris and Berlin quite successfully. That can be by creating events such as an award-- just last week, we had the newcomer startup award in Berlin, which is run by Singa, by my organization, together with the city of Berlin, and it's really a celebration of immigrant entrepreneurship where people can gain prize money, where they really gain a lot of visibility.

And this event happened online. So it's due to the pandemic. Last year we weren't able to do it at all. Before that it was always offline, it was a great event, a lot of positivity, people being very surprised about the potential that exists in the city. I mean, what I shared earlier, just not knowing about it.

And this year it happened online, and we were able to reach a much larger audience than usually. And now bridging towards the question about the technological tools, I mean, there was a necessity as in every other educational program in the past years to go online, and the programs that I know and that we work with have all decided to use that opportunity to provide support for people for a larger group of people, but it also--

I mean, for those of you who are familiar with incubation programs, it actually means having two programs. Because one of them is an actual incubation program with a cohort of people that work together and then go through the program together, graduate together. And there, there's not an unlimited number of people who can go through it without losing the cohort aspect. And then some of the other more educational aspects of the program can be offered to a larger group of people.

What we were able to do is that we were no longer restricted to supporting entrepreneurs in Berlin, but we could actually also-- and that comes back to your earlier question, we can also support entrepreneurs that are in smaller cities and that could go through our program without having to relocate, and that was actually really, really interesting.

Eventually some of them decided to relocate anyways because they realized they weren't able to realize their idea in where they were, and that they would get much more resources and it would be much easier to realize their idea within an existing startup ecosystem. But yeah, so that definitely is possible, and that also leads us to considering to keep part of the offers online.

And in addition to that, I would also say that what we at Singa do offer a lot nowadays is this piece of supporting other organizations to become more inclusive, and through going online, we've been able to do that internationally much more than we did that before.

**ANNA HARDMAN:** Thank you, Luisa. Another question which I'm not sure whether this is really fair to ask you, but it's very much indicative of the interest in this topic. Somebody has asked, what would you say is the best way for international students to start their own business in the US upon graduation and after finishing their respective permitted practical training in view of the difficulty of getting a visa?

I think-- I'm not sure that you're expected to have expertise on US visa programs, but you may still have hints for students who want to start a business and what they can do before they have the kind of paperwork that allows them to get established.

**LUISA SEILER:** Yeah, no, unfortunately I'm not an expert in US visa regulations. And I'm-- yeah. I also haven't gotten myself through the process of starting a business here, so it's difficult to say. But I would say, usually-- I mean, here in Boston, but I'm also sure that in many other US cities-- universities have really, really, really great programs in supporting their students, but also sometimes students from other universities in the same city to start businesses, and they're usually very much looking for talent.

It might sometimes seem difficult to get into these programs, but looking at the flip side, I know that these programs are also always looking for good people. So I would definitely approach them as early as possible, reaching out to them and asking for their support in not only learning about the entrepreneurial aspect, but also learning about what can be done in terms of visa processes and so on.

I did mention earlier one program, which is the Global EIR, Global Entrepreneur-in-Residence program. Yeah, maybe have a look at that. And there might be other similar programs like that. I do know of several entrepreneurs who tried starting up something and eventually had to look for a job because otherwise they wouldn't have been able to stay and try to combine having a job and starting a business, which is often very, very challenging. But yeah, this is my limited view and experience on that.

**ANNA HARDMAN:** As I said, I don't think you're expected to have expertise on American-- the problems of getting the right kind of visa in the US. There is one more strategy that people sometimes use, which is somebody I started an IT business in Greece because they didn't have--

Initially because they wanted to be back, but discovered that because it was a relatively low-cost, high-skill population of people in this particular branch of IT, they actually ended up becoming an entrepreneur in their home country, and that's an interesting twist on what you're talking about. That does not work for people who are refugees, obviously.

But certainly, I think, learning about entrepreneurship and how to do it, and then sometimes bringing that to a country which-- with a product that can be sold elsewhere, but using the fact that often labor costs are lower than in the United States, certainly than in New York or Boston or Silicon Valley or Berlin or London, is another strategy.

And when we talk about immigrant entrepreneurship, I would very much like to see us talking about teaching-- sharing some of the aspects of entrepreneurship that are not dealing with bureaucracy, whether it's visas or-- clearly one of the kinds of things that your startup support programs must be offering is help with dealing with all the kinds of bureaucracy involved, and that's very much country or place-specific.

But there are other aspects that can be shared. And being part of a network is enormously important. I want to ask myself one question about-- you were asked about another question in the Q&A was, when it comes to support programs, what's your experience with standardizing and digitizing the delivery? Does this enable you to reach more entrepreneurs potentially beyond large cities and European countries?

And I would extend that to whether-- you obviously have an enormous job ahead of you, but you've also thought a lot about entrepreneurship and all its dimensions. Have you thought about making this something that can be shared across international frontiers? Digitizing, in other words, not just the smaller cities, but also to people who can learn from it through the web beyond individual countries?

**LUISA SEILER:** Yeah, thank you very much for that question. Obviously we have thought about it. We have also done several projects in other countries. So first of all, our network that we have built across Europe and also in Canada, actually, is-- yeah, is already international, but in very similar contexts, let's say. The contexts are very similar.

We have very recently done a very-- a really exciting program in Morocco, which was the first one that was a little bit outside of the European and North American context, where we collaborated with local actors to co-create a program that works there. And our experience, even within Europe, is that programs have always-- there can be a certain aspect of standardization which we use, but there always needs to be a local adaptation.

Context matters too much, and that's not only true for the bureaucratic question, but also for-- yeah, just for the recipients of the program. As I said earlier, such bespoke programs constantly have to evolve with their clientele, with their participants, and constantly have to view themselves through a human-centered design lens.

We even see that within one location, let's take the example of Berlin, we've been active for six years now, and the program has immensely evolved over time with the different participants. And that is also true for other locations. So I would say yes and no. I mean, we've thought about it and we're definitely driving this further, not only within Singa, but also within a larger network of organizations who we partner with very strongly.

We've also partnered with them to develop a curriculum for people who want to themselves support others in becoming entrepreneurs. And so we are-- yeah. I would say there is some kind of standardization across Europe for these programs, and we are currently, particularly with having gone online, looking into the possibilities to making it even more efficient in terms of accessible to many more people.

But there always needs to be some degree of local adaptation and local presence also of people who know the context and who can interact with the entrepreneurs and who can make sure there is some kind of cohort-building, some kind of network networking, mentoring. There are just too many parts that really relate to the respective context.

**ANNA HARDMAN:** That makes perfect sense. But I'm wondering-- I have one more question about your experience-- now you say-- as you say, the Berlin program has been going for five or six years. To what extent do you see a possibility of mentoring from people who were in the program from early and who have been able to establish their firms?

In other words, is this a trainers and participants setup? Or to what extent is it possible to have a network of mentoring of the older generation of entrepreneurs of immigrant entrepreneurs for newer generations? And to what extent are those social interactions themselves perhaps one of the most desirable outcomes of the program?

**LUISA SEILER:** Oh yes, that is definitely happening, something that we encourage, but that's also quite organically happening. And as I said before, the aim would be to create a critical mass of immigrant entrepreneurs and in a certain ecosystem to gain a certain visibility, to gain a certain-- also-- how can I say? Gravity in terms of the power to advocate for certain things.

On the other hand, as I mentioned as well, there comes a certain danger of intergroup-- staying too much within this group, and that's why it is so important to always keep this connection to the more traditional startups seen.

And one of the things that we do is that there are some mentors, some experts, some entrepreneurs we've been working with for a very long time, but we're also trying to not only have cohorts of participants of immigrant entrepreneurs, but also cohorts of mentors, cohorts of entrepreneurs, and cohorts of people from the local startup system that change in order to expose as many people as possible to the issue and to create an even larger network that is truly not only spans--

Not only spans across industries, but also across different experiences and generations of entrepreneurs within an ecosystem. Let them be local entrepreneurs or newcomer entrepreneurs, immigrant entrepreneurs. Yeah.

**ANNA HARDMAN:** Luisa, thank you very much. Just a couple of messages to say thank you. Those have come in on the Q&A. Congratulations on the great presentation, I really liked it, especially the link between risk aversion migration and entrepreneurship. And I agree with you, that numerically we clearly see that immigrants have a disproportionate likelihood of becoming entrepreneurs.

We still don't have exactly the information that-- as an economist, I would like to know, for example, about the extent to which the greater entrepreneurship of immigrants is because of what we call-- economists call self-selection. Who are the people who choose to take risks and is choosing to take risks in a context of migration, something that's highly correlated with willingness to take risks and starting a business of some kind.

Or is it also that we see higher entrepreneurship among immigrants because it's difficult for them to get more conventional kinds of jobs? You had a wonderful quote from a person you had worked with earlier talking about how he didn't-- it wasn't his first choice to start a building-- I think it was a man. But it wasn't the first choice to start a business.

But once having done it, it was something that the person wanted to very definitely continue with and would not abandon in order to take a job of the kind he initially looked for. So I think we really don't know, we don't have the kind of data, and one thing I would love for the EU to be persuaded to do, for example, or the US government just to collect more information about entrepreneurial activity.

Who does it? Micro-studies of businesses, and particularly tracking businesses over time, what I would call panel data where you can see which businesses grow, which survive, and which do not. We don't really know enough about those patterns of life in businesses started by either immigrants or native-born people in each country.

Luisa, thank you very much. I don't-- maybe perhaps John wants to say something, I'm not sure, but this has been a great presentation. I really liked it. I don't see-- the comments that I'm seeing now are congratulations, are people saying how much they enjoyed hearing what you had to say. And I think we all wish you the very best, both in your research and in your entrepreneurial-- nonprofit entrepreneurial activity.

**LUISA SEILER:** Thank you so much, Anna.

**JOHN TIRMAN:** I actually have one substantive question before we wrap up, and that is, is there, as I would expect, a strong correlation between successful entrepreneur immigrants and the size of the compatriot community that they're coming to? And have you measured that and what could you tell us about it?

**LUISA SEILER:** So I have not measured it, but there is a substantive literature about what we call ethnic entrepreneurship. And there is definitely some evidence that it is much easier for entrepreneurs to start businesses in a place where they have a strong ethnic community that they arrive into, because again, it's almost like a sub ecosystem that exists in terms of support mechanisms.

There's also evidence, though, that while it is quicker and easier to start a business within these ethnic communities, usually it has-- there's some limitations to it, because the market that they serve is also limited necessarily. And it's very, very difficult for somebody to-- who has started a business with an ethnic lens or within an ethnic community to then move out of that-- with that business.

So it's kind of a trade-off that people, if they can make that informed choice, have to do. Do they enter this ethnic community in terms of their startup endeavor and make use of the networks, the services, the pathways that exist within this community? Or do they quite purposefully not take this advantage, maybe go the harder way, but then have a stronger opportunity to serve different markets and to access different markets?

**JOHN TIRMAN:** That brings to mind yet another question. I remember in London a large Cypriot community, both from north and south. And one would think that entrepreneurial activity from recent immigrants-- or just the immigrant tradition generally would bridge the gap, potentially, the political gap between the Cypriot communities that have been in conflict so much on the island for so many years. Have you looked at all? Entrepreneurship as a social mechanism for reconciliation at places like London where it's actually going on?



**LUISA SEILER:** So there's somebody else who has looked at that. We both know him, his name is Steven Koltai. He's written a book about entrepreneurship and-- *Peace Through Entrepreneurship*. And I haven't-- there's very little-- I mean, I've looked into the topic a little bit, but there's very little literature about this, very little research being done about this.

Experience-wise, I think both is true. It is-- there are some-- I know about some anecdotal evidence that shows that yes, there are some-- that entrepreneurship can bridge the gap. But then there's also evidence that-- particularly if we look, for example, at different generations of immigrants who have come at different times, that sometimes older generations are not ready to support younger generations of immigrants.

And I'm not talking about first, second, third generation, I'm talking about recently arrived and have been there for much longer because they have struggled themselves so much and don't see why newly-arrived immigrants should-- for them, it should be so much easier. So I think it really, really depends on the communities and the cities. And very often, the conflicts are actually carried into the diaspora.

And yeah. So I know this is not a quite-- might be a quite satisfying answer to your question, but I think that would be a very excellent research question to look into for future research.

**JOHN TIRMAN:** Great. Well, thank you so much again, Luisa, I think we'll wrap it up there. For those who could not watch today, it will be on our YouTube channel. So you can spread the word, as we will. That's the MIT Center for International Studies, and it'll be up in a day or two, I guess, probably early next week. And thank you again so much and best of luck with your many endeavors.

**LUISA SEILER:** Thank you, John.