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Original Article

Can Entrepreneurship Education Address Educational Asymmetry in Rural Communities Hosting Displaced People?

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Abstract

The arrival of highly educated displaced people in rural communities can expose a paradox. Newcomers may struggle to use their qualifications, while residents' local knowledge and networks remain disconnected from that expertise. This article conceptualises the problem as educational asymmetry and examines how community-embedded entrepreneurship education might address it. The argument draws on accounts from 33 displaced Ukrainians across several host countries and an exploratory study of a residents-only entrepreneurship course in Sardinia. Ukrainian participants described barriers to professional recognition and institutional access. In Sardinia, dialogue and transparency received more favourable ratings than influence. End-of-course respondents rated collaboration less favourably than baseline respondents. The article proposes entrepreneurship education as a potential conversion infrastructure linking complementary resources through shared territorial projects. Such a role requires meaningful participation, institutional brokerage, and

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opportunities to implement joint ideas. The framework extends beyond Ukraine, but neither study tested mixed-cohort education.

Keywords

Community-embedded entrepreneurship education, forced migration, rural entrepreneurship, co-creation, educational asymmetry, sense of community

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Russia's full-scale invasion in 2022 brought millions of displaced Ukrainians to European communities that soon faced challenges well beyond providing immediate shelter (Eurostat, 2025). Finding employment, rebuilding professional lives, and becoming part of local communities became continuing concerns. Major cities remain important destinations. But settlement also includes medium-sized towns and rural areas (González-Leonardo et al., 2024; Tammaru et al., 2024). The Ukrainian experience makes a wider problem especially visible. As displacement continues, the initial humanitarian emergency becomes a more complex issue of professional participation and local development (Castles, 2003, 2010; UNHCR, 2024).

This article addresses a wider paradox, described here as *educational asymmetry*. Many displaced Ukrainians possess years of professional experience and a high level of education (Eurostat, n.d.; OECD, 2023, 2025). Using their expertise in a new setting depends on gaining access to work where it is recognised. Finding such work can be difficult, especially in smaller towns and rural areas (Kiselyova & Ivashchenko, 2024; Kubiciel-Lodzińska & Solga, 2023; Rock & Sharp, 2025; Struk, 2023). Meanwhile, residents offer a different kind of resource. Despite generally lower levels of formal educational attainment in rural Europe (Eurostat, 2024), residents are familiar with the community's unwritten rules. They know how local institutions work, whom to approach, and what the community trusts (Falk & Kilpatrick, 2000; Jørgensen et al., 2021; Lang & Fink, 2019; Polanyi, 1966; Sørensen, 2018; Sørensen & Svendsen, 2023; Tregear & Cooper, 2016).

This situation is not simply an inequality of competence but a problem of converting different forms of capital into opportunities (Prushkivska & Pereverzieva, 2008). Educational asymmetry points to

the difficulty of recognising and using these complementary resources together. The concept draws on the idea that the value of capital depends on the conditions under which it is recognised (Bourdieu, 1986; Erel, 2010).

In small communities, a limited number of employers or intermediaries may control routes into employment and local initiatives. Where services are scarce, relationships built over time matter (Arora-Jonsson & Larsson, 2021; Granovetter, 1985; Kalantaryan et al., 2021; Lamont & Molnár, 2002; Mastilović & Zoppi, 2021). Such social ties can sustain residents but make it difficult for outsiders to enter (Putnam, 2000). New arrivals may face unrecognised qualifications, skills mismatch, deskilling, and what migration scholars call 'brain waste' (Cuban, 2016; Farivar et al., 2022; Nieto et al., 2015; Riaño, 2021; Shinozaki, 2016). Host communities may also suffer losses, although less visibly. When local needs remain disconnected from valuable expertise, communities may miss opportunities for experimentation and development. As a result, stagnation and further outmigration may follow (Galera et al., 2018; Stockdale, 2004).

Entrepreneurship education may help address this relational problem. Much depends on who participates and what they can accomplish beyond the course. Existing initiatives often focus separately on newcomers' readiness (Hynie, 2018; Reiher, 2025) or residents' local capacity (Guzman et al., 2020). Less attention goes to the relationships and institutions needed to bring together the capabilities developed or already held by each group (Ager & Strang, 2008; Bourdieu, 1986). Simply bringing people together does not solve the problem. Even programmes that encourage collaboration can produce 'voice without influence' when participants have little say in the decisions that follow (Arnstein, 1969; Brandsen & Honingh, 2016; Cooke & Kothari, 2001; Voorberg et al., 2015).

This article explores the possibility that community-embedded entrepreneurship education could serve as a form of conversion infrastructure. Its role would be to connect learning with local institutions and territorial projects through which participants could recognise and combine their capabilities (Nabi et al., 2017; Walter & Block, 2016; Welter, 2011). Co-creation theory places interaction and resource integration at the centre of value creation (Vargo & Lusch, 2004, 2008). DART offers a way to examine dialogue, access, risk assessment, and transparency in reciprocal participation (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004; Taghizadeh et al., 2016). Sense of community (SOC) provides a complementary perspective on membership, influence, needs fulfilment, and shared emotional connection (Buikstra et al., 2010; Dinnie & Fischer, 2020; McMillan & Chavis, 1986; Talò et al., 2014). Taken together, these

perspectives allow the article to ask how participation is organised and how participants experience it.

The argument draws on two separate studies. Study 1 examines accounts from displaced Ukrainians living in various host countries. Their experiences illustrate practical efforts to recover the value of earlier education and professional experience after displacement. Study 2 concerns a community entrepreneurship and territorial development course in Sardinia, Italy. Because that course involved only local residents, it provides evidence of interaction and community-related processes in rural education but offers no basis for establishing migrant integration outcomes or the effects of mixed-cohort education. These studies illuminate different parts of a broader conceptual problem.

The central research question is: *How might community-embedded entrepreneurship education facilitate reciprocal resource conversion between newcomers and residents in rural and peripheral areas with limited institutional pathways?* Three subquestions organise the inquiry: how displaced Ukrainians experience and negotiate barriers to recognition (SQ1); what forms of interaction and community engagement emerge in the Sardinian course (SQ2); and which conditions could support future mixed-cohort programmes developing collaborative territorial projects (SQ3). The last subquestion develops an implication of the two separate studies rather than reporting on an intervention they tested.

The article's contribution lies in asking when capabilities become usable through cooperation, extending entrepreneurship education research beyond individual capability development. Educational asymmetry identifies the difficulty of bringing complementary knowledge into joint use. Conversion infrastructure describes how educational arrangements and institutional relationships could link displaced people's expertise with host communities' resources. The Ukrainian displacement makes the problem visible, but the proposed framework is not limited to that experience.

Theoretical Background

Forced Displacement in Rural Europe

Depopulation can leave rural communities with fewer employment opportunities and reduced access to services (Collantes & Navarro, 2011; Stockdale, 2004; Viñas, 2019). Residents manage these constraints partly through detailed local knowledge and established relationships.

Personal connections can open opportunities that formal procedures cannot, although people outside familiar circles may be unable to benefit. Rural networks thus play a dual role. They can sustain cooperation among residents but restrict access for newcomers (Arora-Jonsson & Larsson, 2021; Galera et al., 2018). Institutions that connect otherwise separate groups can help widen access (Amin & Thrift, 1994).

The number of forcibly displaced people worldwide tripled from 37.5 million in 2005 to 117.3 million in 2023 (UNHCR, 2024). Prolonged displacement creates demands beyond immediate reception, including employment, professional development, and social participation (Castles, 2003, 2010). Smaller municipalities may have few organisations providing this support. In such settings, personal relationships often matter for finding the right institution and opportunities to participate. This situation makes it difficult to separate social connections from institutional access (Ager & Strang, 2008).

A recent example is the mass displacement since Russia's full-scale invasion in 2022. Ukrainians have spread throughout Europe, even in smaller towns and rural municipalities (González-Leonardo et al., 2024; Tammaru et al., 2024). National protection regimes determine the general conditions for reception (Eurostat, 2025), further shaped locally by municipalities, employers, educational institutions, and community organisations (Scholten, 2014; Scholten & Penninx, 2016). Limited institutional capacity and a lack of organisations serving newcomers can make coordination challenging.

Migration may help sustain local demand, services, and economic activity in rural communities (Collantes et al., 2014; Mastilović & Zoppi, 2021; Rye & Slettebak, 2020; Ubarevičienė et al., 2025). But demographic gains do not ensure lasting settlement. Newcomers may move again if professional opportunities remain limited or they struggle to establish social relationships (Egea & Kreichauf, 2025; Stachowski & Rasmussen, 2023). Weaker integration in rural settings emphasises the need to distinguish between residence and longer-term participation (Natale et al., 2019).

Rural economies often employ migrants in agriculture, tourism, food production, and care. Employment in these sectors may be seasonal or relatively low-paid (Kalantaryan et al., 2021; Nori & Farinella, 2020; Rye & Scott, 2018). Migrants' contributions also extend beyond labour to entrepreneurship, consumption, civic activities, and initiatives supporting local services (Bianchi et al., 2023; Glorius, 2017; Glorius et al., 2020; McAreavey & Argent, 2018; Papadopoulos & Fratsea, 2021; Shcherbak et al., 2020; Woods, 2018).

But having a job or participating in economic life does not necessarily open access to the networks where local initiatives take shape and decisions are made (Arora-Jonsson & Larsson, 2021; Egea & Kreichauf, 2025). Municipalities and intermediaries can help connect people, but their capacity is not always enough (Cabral & Swerts, 2021; Galera et al., 2018; Meijer et al., 2023). Simply bringing displaced people does not guarantee a contribution to rural development. What matters is whether they can participate in local initiatives and discover ways to use their professional expertise alongside residents' knowledge of the territory.

Educational Asymmetry as a Problem of Resource Convertibility

Migrants are not necessarily less educated than the host populations. Migration patterns vary across countries and migration channels, and new arrivals are often positively selected for education (González-Leonardo et al., 2022; Schmidt et al., 2022; Spörlein & Kristen, 2019). In some European countries, the share of migrants with tertiary qualifications is equal to or even higher than that of the native-born population (Frattini & Cugini, 2025; Frattini & Pulito, 2025). This contrast may be more visible in rural areas, where graduate labour markets are smaller and formal educational attainment tends to be lower (Eurostat, 2024).

Qualifications obtained in one country may not carry the same professional value in another. Research on skills mismatch, recognition of foreign credentials, and human capital underutilisation has examined different aspects of this problem (Bahl & Sharma, 2023; Bauder, 2003; Chiswick & Miller, 2009; Farivar et al., 2022; Nieto et al., 2015; Reitz, 2001; Riaño, 2021). The resulting loss of professional opportunities is sometimes described as 'brain waste'. Displaced Ukrainians provide a recent example of difficulties in regaining professional status (OECD, 2023, 2025). But formal recognition does not resolve every issue. Language requirements, employer trust, and access to local networks also determine the usability of existing skills (Cabral & Swerts, 2021; Rock & Sharp, 2025).

Educational asymmetry puts residents' and newcomers' resources into the same discussion. Displaced people may possess formal qualifications, professional experience, and transnational networks (Jaroszewicz et al., 2025; Kushnir & Richards, 2025; Levitt & Glick Schiller, 2004; Storti, 2014). Residents bring familiarity with institutions, local knowledge, relationships, and legitimacy (Falk & Kilpatrick, 2000; Jørgensen et al., 2021; Lang & Fink, 2019; Polanyi, 1966; Sørensen, 2018; Sørensen & Svendsen, 2023; Tregear & Cooper, 2016). The difficulty is that

potentially complementary resources do not automatically become useful to one another. Recognition rules, restricted access, or weak connections between groups can prevent their joint use. Educational asymmetry concerns the limited convertibility of these complementary capabilities. It is not defined by which group has more years of formal education.

Bourdieu (1986) shows how social recognition shapes the value of capital. Erel (2010) examines how the value of migrant cultural capital changes across institutional contexts. The capability approach makes a related distinction between possessing resources and having an opportunity to use them (Robeyns, 2005; Sen, 1999). A displaced professional may have expertise relevant to a local initiative but lack the contacts or legitimacy needed to participate. Residents may possess local relationships, but they often lack the expertise required for the initiative. Social boundaries and established networks influence the ability to combine such resources (Granovetter, 1985; Lamont & Molnár, 2002; Szkudlarek & Wu, 2018; Wimmer, 2008).

Skills mismatch refers to whether candidates' capabilities align with available job opportunities. Credential recognition concerns the formal acceptance of qualifications. Human capital underutilisation asks why expertise remains unutilised. Educational asymmetry adds the reciprocal question of how newcomers' expertise and residents' place-based resources can become useful to one another (Ensign & Robinson, 2011; Kloosterman, 2010). Its focus on joint use complements the above concepts. Reciprocal conversion requires access and meaningful roles, together with institutional relationships through which joint initiatives can develop (Strang & Quinn, 2021).

Entrepreneurship Education as a Potential Conversion Infrastructure

Entrepreneurship education has traditionally focused on entrepreneurial knowledge, skills, intentions, and venture creation. Education about, for, and through entrepreneurship represents different approaches to learning and practice (Bell & Bell, 2020; Pittaway & Cope, 2007; Rasmussen & Sørheim, 2006). Research has also examined how pedagogy and context shape these outcomes (Ayala-Gaytán et al., 2024; Bae et al., 2014; Kuratko, 2005; Mwasalwiba, 2010; Nabi et al., 2017). Practice-based approaches focus on experimentation, dealing with uncertainty, negotiating resources, and working with others (Neck & Greene, 2011; Sarasvathy, 2001; Sarasvathy & Venkataraman, 2011).

Community-embedded entrepreneurship education may bring these learning opportunities to the places where participants live. Local challenges become material for developing projects with municipalities, businesses, and associations. Working together on a common territorial problem can unite people with different capacities and provide access to resources that they could not mobilise on their own (Audretsch & Belitski, 2018; Belitski & Heron, 2017; Jack & Anderson, 2002; Korsgaard et al., 2015; Müller & Korsgaard, 2018; Wigren-Kristofersen et al., 2019). Research on rural entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial ecosystems has shown why place, social relationships, and institutional support are so relevant for entrepreneurial action (Korsgaard et al., 2025; Trettin & Welter, 2011; Walter & Block, 2016; Welter, 2011). Bringing different kinds of knowledge together may also help participants identify existing opportunities (Zare & Di Minin, 2026).

Conversion infrastructure refers to the educational and institutional arrangements that could make complementary resources useful to one another. In a territorial project, a newcomer might contribute professional expertise, while residents bring knowledge of local needs, organisations, and people able to help. A course could provide space to recognise these contributions and develop an idea together. It would become conversion infrastructure only if participants could also reach the institutions and resources needed to pursue that idea. This approach is different from improving individual entrepreneurial skills alone. The point is not just what participants learn, but whether they can put their knowledge to use together.

Holding a course in a community is not enough. Established actors may dominate decisions. Local partners may not have the resources or authority to sustain projects after teaching concludes (Ganoo & Eloranta, 2022; Haneberg et al., 2022; Hunter & Lean, 2018). Displaced participants may encounter additional restrictions related to language, legal status, financial insecurity, and caregiving responsibilities (Baluku, 2025; Elo et al., 2026). Educational design is important, but so is the opportunity to act beyond the classroom. Without both, entrepreneurship education may foster collaboration but not facilitate reciprocal resource conversion (Nabi et al., 2017).

Conditions for Meaningful Co-creation

In service-dominant logic, value emerges through interaction and resource integration (Grönroos, 2011; Payne et al., 2008; Vargo & Lusch, 2004, 2008). Public co-production research similarly asks how citizens contribute

to services and collective outcomes (Bovaird, 2007; Nabatchi et al., 2017; Ostrom, 1996; Osborne et al., 2016; Torfing et al., 2019). Applied here, both perspectives provide a basis for examining what newcomers, residents, and local organisations could accomplish through collaboration.

People invited to collaborate do not necessarily have equal influence. Participants can discuss ideas while established organisations keep control of decisions (Arnstein, 1969; Cooke & Kothari, 2001). Co-creation outcomes thus depend on how responsibilities are distributed, and decisions are made (Brandsen & Honingh, 2016; Voorberg et al., 2015). Participation itself may mask power imbalances or shift costs onto vulnerable actors (Cooke & Kothari, 2001). Legal uncertainty, language barriers, and limited time make such arrangements particularly impactful for displaced people whose involvement is already limited (Cin et al., 2025; Leurs et al., 2023).

Co-creation can help participants use their capabilities only when they have some influence over what happens to a shared project. Exchanging ideas is an initial step. Participants also need access to resources, clear responsibilities, and a role in implementation decisions. Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004) identify four DART dimensions, subsequently examined empirically (Melis et al., 2023; Taghizadeh et al., 2016). Dialogue supports exchange and shared understanding. Access concerns the information, resources, and opportunities available to participants. Risk assessment brings potential costs and responsibilities into consideration. Transparency concerns how clearly rules, decisions, and expectations are communicated.

These dimensions help reveal what apparently successful collaboration may leave unresolved. Participants might develop a promising idea without access to an organisation able to support it. They may accept responsibilities without understanding the risks. Shared activities can also make communication across social boundaries easier (Star & Griesemer, 1989). That does not mean they remove unequal influence. Research involving refugees has documented opportunities for mutual learning and network development through collaboration (Harima & Freudenberg, 2020; Subramanian et al., 2025). The question is whether such exchanges provide participants a meaningful role beyond the conversation.

SOC as the Social Experience of Co-creation

McMillan and Chavis (1986) identify four dimensions of SOC: membership, influence, needs fulfilment, and shared emotional connection.

Together, these dimensions describe how participants experience the community. SOC helps distinguish participation in community activities from a sense that one's contributions are valued. When collective action is built on trust and ongoing participation, SOC is connected to civic engagement and sustained cooperation (Buikstra et al., 2010; Talò et al., 2014).

Existing rural relationships can increase a sense of belonging and facilitate cooperation (Lyons et al., 2016; Markantoni et al., 2019). They can also strengthen boundaries between residents and newcomers (Ashmore et al., 2017; Dinnie & Fischer, 2020; Putnam, 2000). A newcomer may be formally welcomed without having much influence over local decisions. Residents may similarly feel attached to their community but have few opportunities to influence new initiatives.

DART asks how interaction is organised. SOC asks how participants experience their relationship with the community. Although the questions are related, they are distinct (McMillan & Chavis, 1986; Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004; Tyler, 1990). Open dialogue can improve relationships while leaving perceived influence weak. Strong attachment can coexist with restricted opportunities. Within the proposed mechanism, DART describes arrangements that could enable reciprocal participation. SOC captures the belonging, influence, and relationships that could sustain it. This complementarity is conceptual and does not imply that one set of dimensions causes the other.

A Conceptual Model of Reciprocal Resource Conversion

Figure 1 locates DART and SOC within the proposed conversion mechanism. Community-embedded entrepreneurship education could bring complementary capabilities to territorial projects. DART concerns the conditions of interaction, while SOC addresses participants' experience of membership, influence, needs fulfilment, and shared emotional connection. The mechanism depends on the institutions, intermediaries, and decision-makers to which participants have access. Collaborative learning could facilitate reciprocal resource conversion and joint territorial initiatives where people have meaningful roles and institutional support. Unequal responsibilities, limited influence, or weak implementation routes may interfere with the process. The feedback loop in Figure 1 proposes that visible joint outputs might strengthen trust and encourage further cooperation.

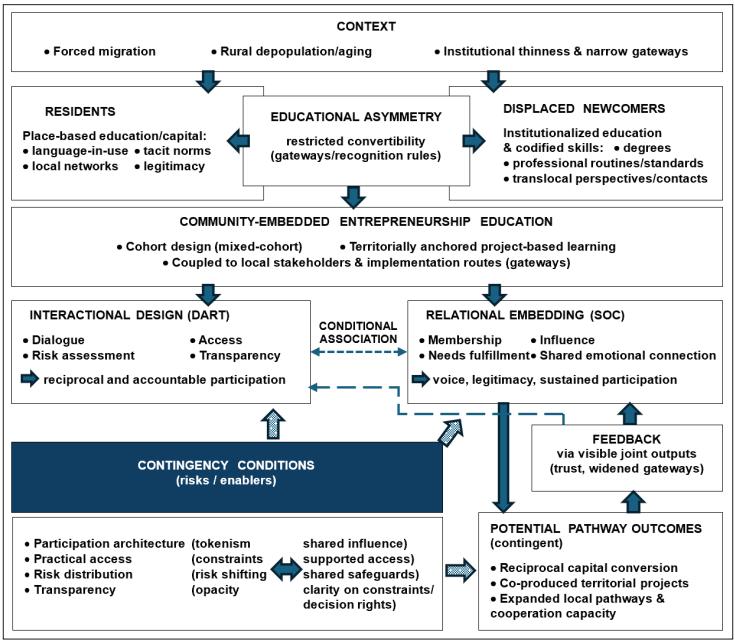


Figure 1. Interactive Conceptual Model.

Method

The research combines two exploratory studies, each serving a different empirical purpose. Study 1 examines displaced Ukrainians' efforts to use their existing capabilities amid unfamiliar relationships, institutions, and opportunities. Study 2 examines collaboration and community relationships during a residents-only entrepreneurship course in rural Sardinia. Both use DART and SOC as analytical perspectives, though they do so through different methods. Their connection is interpretive; neither directly tests the conversion of resources between displaced people and rural residents.

Study 1: Displaced Ukrainians in Host Communities

Study 1 draws on 33 participant accounts, collected through interviews or written responses as part of a broader project on displaced Ukrainians

(Kochkina et al., 2026). Recruitment began through professional and diaspora networks and continued by snowball sampling. Most held tertiary qualifications and had substantial professional experience before displacement. They resided mainly in European host countries, with a smaller number in Canada and the United States. Appendix A provides the aggregate sample characteristics.

The semi-structured interviews took place online between April and August 2024 and averaged 46 minutes. Participants could also provide written asynchronous responses. The interviews were mainly in Ukrainian, with some in Russian. Questions covered professional trajectories, settlement, employment, education, institutional experiences, and relationships with employers and local and diaspora communities. Participants gave informed consent, took part voluntarily, and could withdraw. With permission, interviews were recorded and transcribed using TurboScribe; the transcripts were checked for accuracy and anonymised. Data were securely stored with restricted access.

Accounts were analysed deductively, using a theory-led thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2019). DART and SOC guided interpretation while allowing insights that could refine or challenge the framework. Analysis was conducted in the original languages, and selected excerpts were translated into English for reporting. Network-based recruitment produced a non-representative sample. These cross-sectional, self-reported accounts help explore experiences and possible mechanisms, but not estimates of their prevalence. The study was not designed to compare countries or rural and urban populations.

Study 2: The Sardinian Entrepreneurship Course

Study 2 examines a community-based entrepreneurship and territorial development course held in a small Sardinian municipality from March to May 2025 (Corona et al., 2025). University and municipal stakeholders designed the 36-hour programme together. Teaching took place over six weeks, on Friday evenings and Saturday mornings, for existing and prospective micro-entrepreneurs in hospitality, agri-food, crafts, and territorial promotion. Recruitment used a municipal public call and local networks. Only residents participated, so the course did not assess migrant integration. Aggregate participant characteristics appear in Appendix B.

Course content included entrepreneurship, territorial marketing, digital tools, communication, and sustainable resource use. Participants worked in groups and ended with a public presentation of a short place narrative. Teaching was in Italian, with occasional use of Sardinian.

Anonymous questionnaires at baseline and the end of the course were supplemented by open-ended feedback and observations of group activities. Seventeen residents completed the baseline questionnaire; 11 completed the final questionnaire. Demographic information was available for 16 participants. Participation was voluntary and based on informed consent. Responses were anonymised and securely stored, with particular attention to confidentiality in the small-community setting.

The questionnaires used single-item indicators adapted to the rural and territorial context to assess four DART dimensions (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004): dialogue (opportunities for information exchange with stakeholders), access (information about the course and its objectives), risk assessment (awareness of the limitations of those managing the project), and transparency (clarity of project information). Four additional items assessed the SOC dimensions (McMillan & Chavis, 1986): membership (feeling part of the community), influence (having a say in local initiatives), needs fulfilment (access to what residents need), and shared emotional connection (relationships with other residents). Two items assessed perceived collaboration: the ease of collaborating with others and the suitability of the local environment for collaboration. The second item was reverse-coded. All responses used five-point Likert scales (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree), with higher scores indicating more favourable perceptions. The DART and SOC dimensions each had a single item, not a multi-item scale.

Quantitative results were interpreted descriptively. Exploratory comparisons of the anonymous, non-matched baseline and final samples used the Mann–Whitney U test, rank-biserial correlation (r), and p values. Open-ended responses and observations of group activities were examined thematically for interaction, access, perceived influence, and barriers to collaboration. Analysis was conducted in Italian, and selected excerpts were translated into English for reporting. The small single-site cohort, possible ceiling effects, and non-matched questionnaires preclude within-person or causal interpretations and conclusions about longer-term outcomes.

Findings

Study 1: Recognition of Capabilities in Host Communities

Participants' opportunities to use their capabilities differed markedly. Some retained professional positions or found new opportunities. Others faced occupational downgrading or uncertainty about future employment.

Accounts repeatedly described unfamiliar institutions, restricted professional networks, and difficulties securing local recognition of previous experience. DART and SOC organise the analysis of these institutional and relational conditions.

Dialogue

Respondents' communication difficulties were not confined to language proficiency. They needed to learn who to approach, how institutions operated, and what administrative requirements meant in practice. P16 in Germany described translating official letters repeatedly and sometimes finding that the resulting message differed substantially from what she intended. Other accounts concerned unfamiliar procedures and expectations. Respondents stressed the importance of questioning rather than waiting for information to be offered spontaneously. P04 in Austria identified 'an active attitude, basic trust, and the ability to ask for and accept assistance' as resources for adaptation. When local actors were willing to respond, dialogue could help a newcomer take the initiative.

Access

Other Ukrainians were often the first people participants consulted about documentation, employment, housing, and institutional procedures. These informal networks reduced uncertainty about unfamiliar systems, though they did not necessarily open wider professional or community networks. P15 in Sweden encountered a different restriction: the identification arrangements available to displaced Ukrainians limited her access to certain digital services. Understanding the procedures and possessing the necessary competencies were insufficient to overcome that institutional barrier.

Professional trajectories also differed. Some respondents had difficulty finding work similar to their previous positions or had to re-demonstrate their qualifications. Others could tap into professional networks and institutional support. P29 continued his career in Canada:

> It is not simple for those who are forced to work outside their profession. I managed to find a job […], so I was able to continue my professional career. (Canada, P29)

For P29, institutions that recognised existing qualifications helped ensure professional continuity. He also described language learning and networking and explained that his family had deliberately chosen a place that offered better professional prospects. His account connects the use of expertise to both personal efforts and access to relevant institutional opportunities.

Risk Assessment

Displacement required respondents to make professional and personal decisions under considerable uncertainty. Some pursued further training or language learning, while others considered working outside their previous jobs. Information obtained through official sources was often supplemented by advice from people who had already navigated similar situations. Nevertheless, individuals could not always anticipate whether their investments in adaptation would lead to suitable employment. P12 in Finland described the possibility of accepting work substantially different from her previous professional activities:

> I am already preparing myself mentally for the possibility that it could be any kind of work. It probably won't be strawberry picking because I speak English, and I could obtain some kind of managerial job. (Finland, P12)

P12's uncertainty concerned whether accumulated experience would retain its professional value in the new setting. Looking at other work did not necessarily mean a lack of relevant skills but rather a lack of confidence that those skills would be recognised or supported. Other respondents likewise weighed immediate employment against the opportunity to maintain or rebuild a career.

Transparency

Respondents described difficulties in interpreting or applying the administrative rules that were formally available to them. The reports described complex documentation and unfamiliar procedures. Even when newcomers understood the procedures, identification arrangements beyond their control limited their access. Lack of clarity about requirements or eligibility may delay decisions on employment and professional development. Repeated inquiries, translation tools, and informal advice helped participants navigate these systems but did not remove their constraints.

Sense of Community

Respondents differed in their ability to enter established social circles. Some formed friendships with residents relatively easily. Others found that being welcomed did not lead to close relationships or opportunities to participate. P12 described her experience in Finland:

> They are very reluctant to let you into their circle of communication. Nobody will invite you home or to the sauna just to spend time together. You have to be a very close friend for that. (Finland, P12)

Courteous everyday contact could prevent the development of relationships that facilitate the circulation of local knowledge and opportunities. Ukrainian diaspora networks offered membership, emotional support, and practical assistance. Some respondents used organisational skills developed before displacement in volunteering and community activities, although this involvement did not necessarily connect them to the wider host community or its decisions.

The accounts provided stronger evidence of membership, shared emotional connection, and efforts to meet practical needs than of influence over local decisions. Social activity or professional employment did not necessarily confer a voice in the institutions shaping opportunities. For educational asymmetry, this matters because acceptance and individual adaptation could leave barriers to recognition and joint use of capabilities unresolved.

Study 2: Collaboration in a Rural Entrepreneurship Course

The Sardinian course brought residents with different professional interests together around shared learning and a territorial project. Questionnaire responses and qualitative feedback distinguish interaction within the course from perceived influence over initiatives in the wider community.

DART

Of the four dimensions, dialogue received the most favourable responses. Its mean was 3.90 at baseline and 4.55 at the end of the course ($U = 52.5$, $p = .054$, $r = 0.439$), though this exploratory comparison did not meet the conventional significance threshold. Qualitative accounts described exchanges of ideas, collaboration, and contact with expertise previously unavailable to participants. Group activities facilitated communication across business interests. The instructors also offered perspectives on entrepreneurship, marketing, and territorial development.

Participants generally understood the educational goals and reported positive learning experiences. Transparency was rated positively in both questionnaire waves (means of 4.06 and 4.58; $p = .305$). Risk assessment was moderately positive in both ($3.65 \rightarrow 3.82$; $p = .461$). That difference offers limited grounds for inferring a change in participants' capacity to evaluate or share risks.

Access responses were less favourable at the end of the course ($4.08 \rightarrow 3.76$; $p = .330$). The item concerned information about the

course and its objectives, not financial resources, institutions, or opportunities to implement projects. Qualitative feedback raised concerns about that broader form of access. Participants valued course contacts but identified other actors whose involvement could have helped connect learning to local activity. One participant proposed including municipal administrators, the local Pro Loco association, and businesses such as restaurants, bars, and shops, which also stood to benefit:

> In small villages like these, lessons should include municipal administrators, the Pro Loco, and local operators (restaurants, bars, shops), as they stand to benefit; no one is born with all knowledge ... there is always something to learn. It would have been a wonderful opportunity. (Study 2, open-ended response)

The participant wanted classroom exchanges to connect more closely with local institutions and economic actors. Developing ideas within the course could still leave uncertainty about who would help carry them forward.

SOC and Collaboration

Respondents reported high levels of membership and shared emotional connection at baseline. These evaluations were relatively consistent across waves, suggesting community attachment among respondents. Needs fulfilment was evaluated more moderately. Influence received the weakest SOC responses (2.74 → 2.45; $p = .613$), indicating that belonging did not necessarily coincide with feeling able to shape local initiatives.

Perceived collaboration showed the clearest contrast with dialogue. Its mean was lower at the end of the course (3.90 → 3.43; $U = 51.0$, $p = .046$, $r = -0.455$). Anonymous, unmatched questionnaires cannot establish a decline in individual willingness or ability to collaborate. They show less favourable assessments among final respondents. Practical group work may have made the organisational requirements of collaboration more visible, including the institutions and partners needed to continue projects. Qualitative feedback is consistent with this interpretation but does not establish it conclusively. The exploratory comparison should not be treated as evidence of a course effect.

Interaction, belonging, and influence, therefore, require separate interpretation. The course supported knowledge exchange and exploration of common interests, while responses regarding broader collaboration and influence were less favourable. Its residents-only design

precludes conclusions about newcomer integration. Educational interaction alone cannot establish access to the institutional relationships and decisions needed to pursue collective initiatives.

Discussion

Across the separate studies, capabilities and opportunities to interact did not necessarily translate into opportunities to act. Displaced Ukrainians described how institutions and relationships shaped the use of existing expertise. Sardinian respondents evaluated educational interaction favourably while reporting weaker perceptions of collaboration and influence. These observations inform the proposed mechanism but do not demonstrate reciprocal conversion between newcomers and residents.

Theoretical Contributions

Educational asymmetry offers the first theoretical contribution by identifying a relational problem of resource convertibility. Research on skills mismatch, deskilling, and brain waste explains why migrants' qualifications and experience may be devalued across national and institutional contexts (Chiswick & Miller, 2009; Riaño, 2021; Shinozaki, 2016). Study 1 is consistent with that account. It also shows the importance of knowing institutions and gaining entry to relationships and networks through which opportunities become accessible.

The participants' different professional paths illustrate the relevance of these conditions. Informal networks helped individuals navigate unfamiliar settings. However, support from the diaspora did not necessarily lead to engagement with host-country institutions. This distinction aligns with Bourdieu's (1986) delineation of socially recognised capital and Erel's (2010) discussion of its changing value across different migration contexts.

The conceptual extension concerns resources on both sides of a potential collaboration. Residents' institutional familiarity and trusted connections may complement newcomers' professional expertise. Educational asymmetry asks when that complementarity can be used for local initiatives. Because the studies did not observe a shared newcomer-resident project, this reciprocal dimension remains a theoretical extension rather than an empirical finding.

The second contribution concerns the institutional work that entrepreneurship education could support. Research on entrepreneurship education already recognises experiential learning, engagement with external stakeholders, and entrepreneurial ecosystems (Nabi et al., 2017; Pittaway & Cope, 2007; Walter & Block, 2016). Conversion infrastructure extends the question to how relationships enable participants to apply learning and capabilities beyond a course.

Sardinian participants valued dialogue and also identified local actors whose involvement could have strengthened the course's territorial connections. Their feedback helps specify the institutional role at issue. A course can generate ideas, but pursuing them requires institutions that recognise participants' contributions, mobilise resources, and support projects. Study 2 provides a reason to examine that role. It does not show that the course fulfilled it.

The third contribution concerns the joint use of DART and SOC to distinguish interaction from its relational experience. DART examines opportunities to exchange information, understand responsibilities, and access resources. SOC examines membership, influence, needs fulfilment, and shared emotional connection (McMillan & Chavis, 1986; Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004). Their complementary functions allow apparently positive participation to be examined more closely.

The Sardinian responses make this distinction visible. Dialogue and transparency were evaluated favourably, while perceived influence was weak and final collaboration responses were less favourable. Neither individual change nor relationships between dimensions can be established from these patterns. They do, however, caution against treating positive interaction as evidence of influence. The Ukrainian accounts reveal a related difficulty. Acceptance and support within networks did not always broaden opportunities. Read together, DART and SOC help identify participation that has social value while leaving little scope for collective action, extending longstanding distinctions between participation and influence (Arnstein, 1969; Cooke & Kothari, 2001; Dinnie & Fischer, 2020).

Conditions for Reciprocal Resource Conversion

The proposed mechanism links the educational setting, where participants can recognise complementary knowledge and develop relationships, to institutions that can support their ideas. Study 2 makes the distinction between course information and implementation access

especially important. Its access item measured the former; qualitative feedback concerned the involvement of municipalities, associations, and businesses beyond the classroom. Being informed about a course does not necessarily open access to project resources. The evidence does not establish that Sardinia lacked implementation opportunities. Rather, some participants considered broader stakeholder involvement important.

For conversion to occur through the proposed mechanism, participants would need to recognise each other's capabilities, have meaningful roles in developing an initiative, and connect with organisations able to provide resources, legitimacy, or practical support. These are conditions for the mechanism's operation, rather than observed stages in the studies. Ideas generated during teaching would remain incomplete if participants had no credible route to pursue them.

Participation also imposes unequal costs. In Study 1, unfamiliar procedures, language barriers, and restricted networks made routine activities demanding. A future mixed cohort could reproduce those difficulties if its communication and allocation of responsibilities favoured people already familiar with local institutions. Accessible information and appropriate communication arrangements would therefore matter alongside transparent roles. Without them, established actors could dominate discussion and decisions, reproducing the asymmetry that the programme seeks to address (Brandsen & Honingh, 2016; Cooke & Kothari, 2001). Evidence of conversion would require more than interaction or belonging. Participants would need to combine capabilities in initiatives over which they exercise meaningful influence. Neither study directly establishes this outcome.

Designing Entrepreneurship Education for Rural Host Communities

Educators could organise learning around a concrete territorial challenge requiring different forms of expertise. In a future mixed cohort, displaced people, residents, and stakeholders would identify problems together and take part in developing proposals, negotiating contributions, and deciding how projects proceed. The framework thus suggests attention to both participants' roles and course content. These recommendations are design implications for programmes yet to be evaluated; the studies did not demonstrate the benefits of mixed-cohort teaching. Evaluation would need to examine the quality of cooperation, participants' influence, knowledge, and satisfaction.

For local governments, an early task would be to connect the course with development priorities and explain relevant administrative requirements. Introducing participants to decision-makers and potential sources of support could render implementation requirements more transparent. Community organisations and businesses may offer perspectives on local needs and relationships that can be useful for identifying potential partners during programme design. Feedback from participants in the Sardinian course suggests that these actors should be involved early, without assuming that every proposal requires the same partners.

Rural development agencies can help participants connect with organisations and resources beyond the course, particularly in municipalities with limited capacity. Universities, professional associations, and diaspora organisations could also connect groups that otherwise remain separate. The value of this brokerage would lie in making institutions and opportunities accessible to people with different starting positions. Introductions alone would leave that work unfinished.

Evaluation should follow projects after teaching ends. Relevant questions concern whether participants establish relationships beyond existing networks, whether project development recognises different expertise, who influences decisions, and whether initiatives secure continuing support. These indicators would distinguish successful classroom exchange from the wider contribution proposed for conversion infrastructure.

Limitations and Future Research

The evidence develops a framework that requires testing for effectiveness. In Study 1, a non-representative sample spanning different contexts allows interpretation of institutional and relational barriers. It cannot establish their prevalence or support systematic country and rural-urban comparisons. DART and SOC were used interpretively, not measured quantitatively. Study 2 concerns a small cohort at one resident-only course. Its single-item indicators, possible ceiling effects, and anonymous, non-matched questionnaires limit comparisons between the baseline and final samples. Differences between those samples do not establish individual change, causal effects, or longer-term outcomes.

The reciprocal dimension remains unobserved. Neither study followed newcomers and residents as they used complementary capabilities in a shared project. Educational asymmetry is therefore a conceptual framework, with conversion infrastructure as a proposed response. Future research involving mixed cohorts should extend beyond teaching

to examine resource identification, role negotiation, institutional access, and influence over implementation. Comparing rural communities would also help examine how institutional capacity, networks, and intermediaries shape those processes.

Generalisability is analytical rather than statistical. Sardinia represents a particular rural and peripheral setting. The proposed mechanisms may inform research elsewhere where access depends on local networks and limited institutional pathways. Their operation cannot be assumed across different employment structures, institutions, or community relationships. Transfer requires examining these contextual conditions.

Conclusions

Rural communities hosting displaced people may have complementary capabilities without arrangements that allow their joint use. Educational asymmetry names this relational problem. The Ukrainian accounts show barriers to using existing expertise. The Sardinian course illustrates the gap between favourable educational interaction and perceived influence or wider collaboration. The separate evidence supports developing the framework, not claiming that mixed-cohort education resolves the problem. Community-embedded entrepreneurship education could serve as conversion infrastructure when learning connects participants' capabilities to institutional relationships and credible implementation routes. Its contribution would depend on meaningful roles and opportunities to pursue shared territorial projects. Research involving both newcomers and residents is needed to determine whether these arrangements facilitate reciprocal resource conversion and under what conditions.

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Appendices

Appendix A. Sample Characteristics: Study 1 (N = 33).

Characteristic	Category	*n*
Gender	Female	28
Gender	Male	5
Age (years)	18–24	3
Age (years)	25–34	7
Age (years)	35–44	10
Age (years)	45–54	10
Age (years)	55–64	2
Age (years)	65+	1
Education	Secondary/vocational	2
Education	Bachelor's degree	1
Education	Master's degree or equivalent	19
Education	Doctoral degree or higher	11
Host country	Germany	5
Host country	Czech Republic	5
Host country	Poland	4
Host country	Italy	3
Host country	Sweden	3
Host country	Canada	3
Host country	United States	3
Host country	Switzerland	2
Host country	Austria	1
Host country	Denmark	1
Host country	Finland	1
Host country	Slovakia	1
Host country	United Kingdom	1
Data collection	Interviews, including interviews supplemented by written responses	27
Data collection	Written responses only	6

Note: Age and education are characteristics recorded in the study. The sample includes participants whose displacement-related circumstances prevented their return to Ukraine.

Appendix B. Participants' characteristics: Study 2 (*N* = 17).

Characteristic	Category	*n*
Gender	Female	13
Gender	Male	3
Age (years)	Range	27–65
Age (years)	Mean	42.9
Business interest	Hospitality	9
Business interest	Farming	2
Business interest	Handicrafts	2
Business interest	Restaurants	2
Business interest	Territorial development	1
Course participation	Completed	11
Course participation	Did not complete	6
Questionnaire responses	Baseline	17
Questionnaire responses	End of course	11

Note: Demographic and business-interest information was available for 16 of the 17 enrolled residents. One participant did not provide these characteristics. Course completion was 11 of 17 (64.7%).