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Notting Hill Carnival Entrepreneurs: A Framework of Diverse Entrepreneurial Practices

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Abstract

This paper reconceptualises entrepreneurship through the lens of the Notting Hill Carnival, one of Europe's largest cultural festivals and a significant site of Afro-Caribbean cultural expression in the United Kingdom. Drawing on an interpretivist and constructivist perspective, the study combines desk-based analysis of policy documents, historical sources, and entrepreneurship literature with qualitative insights derived from doctoral research, including interviews, observations, and field notes. The paper argues that conventional entrepreneurship models, which primarily emphasise opportunity recognition, innovation, growth, and profit maximisation, inadequately explain entrepreneurial activity within culturally embedded and temporally bounded environments. Using mixed embeddedness theory as a foundation, the study demonstrates how entrepreneurial practices within the Notting Hill Carnival are shaped by the interaction of social, cultural, economic, and institutional forces. The findings reveal a diverse and overlapping range of entrepreneurial forms, including cultural, ethnic, diaspora, creative, social, grassroots, festival, informal, and street entrepreneurship. Rather than existing as discrete categories, these forms intersect within a dynamic entrepreneurial ecosystem rooted in Caribbean heritage, migration experiences, community networks, and cultural production. The paper introduces the concept of kaleidoscopic entrepreneurship, which conceptualises entrepreneurship as a multidimensional, fluid, and context-dependent phenomenon. It further develops a survival-surviving entrepreneurship continuum, illustrating how entrepreneurial activities initially driven by economic necessity can evolve into more resilient and sustainable forms of enterprise through the accumulation of social capital, networks, experience, and adaptive capabilities. The study contributes to entrepreneurship theory by extending mixed embeddedness into a festival context and offering a more inclusive framework for understanding minority entrepreneurship. Practically, it highlights the role of cultural festivals as entrepreneurial incubators that foster economic participation, cultural preservation, and community development, providing important insights for policymakers seeking to support diverse and culturally embedded entrepreneurial ecosystems.

Keywords: Notting Hill Carnival, Kaleidoscopic Entrepreneurship, Mixed Embeddedness, Cultural Entrepreneurship, Ethnic Entrepreneurship, Diaspora Entrepreneurship, Survival Entrepreneurship, Festival Entrepreneurship, Informal Economy, Minority Enterprise

Introduction

The Notting Hill Carnival is one of the most globally recognised street festivals, originating in the United Kingdom in the late 1950s as a response to racial tensions and a celebration of Afro-Caribbean culture. Over time, it has evolved into Europe's largest street festival and a powerful symbol of Caribbean resilience and identity.

Beyond its cultural significance, the Carnival plays an important economic role, creating opportunities for entrepreneurship within the Caribbean community and beyond. It supports a wide range of activities, including food vending, music production, costume design, and event management, contributing to both formal and informal economic activity.

This paper seeks to reconceptualise entrepreneurship through the lens of the Carnival experience, arguing that large-scale cultural events can function as entrepreneurial incubators that stimulate start-ups, generate economic activity, and provide platforms for minority enterprise. In doing so, it offers a counter-narrative to dominant Western models of entrepreneurship, which tend to emphasise formal markets and opportunity-driven ventures, by demonstrating how communities facing structural barriers transform cultural expression into economic opportunity. Despite extensive research on entrepreneurship, limited attention has been paid to culturally embedded and temporally bounded contexts, particularly those that emerge from ethnic minority communities and cultural events such as the Notting Hill Carnival.

Importantly, the paper introduces the concept of entrepreneurship as a kaleidoscopic phenomenon, recognising its dynamic and multifaceted nature within a temporal and structurally constrained setting. Building on this proposition, it develops a framework that positions the Carnival as a kaleidoscopic entrepreneurial ecosystem shaped by issues of race, diaspora, cultural resistance, and overlapping forms of entrepreneurship. This approach questions market-based conceptions and the Western-centric positioning of entrepreneurship, which may sometimes overlook the ways minority communities create opportunities.

The paper draws on the mixed embeddedness framework developed by Robert Kloosterman and Jan Rath, arguing that the Carnival represents a temporally concentrated configuration of social, economic, and institutional dynamics. Socially, it is rooted in Caribbean heritage and diasporic networks that mobilise cultural capital. Economically, it creates

opportunities for self-employment and participation in the wider UK economy. Institutionally, however, these activities operate within regulatory frameworks and historically embedded racial inequalities.

This paper is significant from a theoretical perspective because it contributes to entrepreneurship scholarship by extending mixed embeddedness theory into a temporally concentrated cultural setting and proposing the concept of kaleidoscopic entrepreneurship. From a practical perspective, it underscores the role of cultural festivals as a locus of enterprise development and economic participation for minority communities. This offers insights for policymakers concerned with inclusion, cultural economies, and entrepreneurial assistance.

To guide the discussion, the paper begins by outlining the methodology, followed by a brief account of the historical and cultural context of the Notting Hill Carnival. It then examines the entrepreneurial environment of the Notting Hill Carnival and explains the emergent conceptual framework. The paper then discusses the framework's theoretical and practical significance, as well as its policy contribution.

Methodology

This study adopts an interpretivist and constructivist perspective, viewing entrepreneurship as a socially constructed and context-dependent phenomenon. Using the Notting Hill Carnival as an analytically rich case, the research draws primarily on desk-based analysis of policy documents, historical accounts, and existing literature to develop a conceptually grounded understanding of entrepreneurship that challenges dominant UK entrepreneurial frameworks. In addition, the paper incorporates qualitative data originally collected for the author's doctoral research, including semi-structured interviews, non-participant observation, and field notes. The data were analysed iteratively using interpretative thematic analysis, identifying interconnected themes such as survival, informality, cultural production, ethnicity, and diaspora networks. The integration of empirical insights with existing theory informed the development of a kaleidoscopic entrepreneurial framework and a continuum from survival to surviving entrepreneurship, highlighting the dynamic, multidimensional, and culturally embedded nature of entrepreneurial practice within the Notting Hill Carnival context.

Historical and Cultural Context

This section provides a brief account of the historical and social context of the Notting Hill Carnival. The arrival of Caribbean immigrants in Britain in 1948 marked a significant period in Caribbean experiences in the United Kingdom. Caribbean migrants faced numerous settlement problems and challenges, including discrimination, racism, marginalisation, and violence from the non-migrant community. It was out of these difficult circumstanc-

es, together with efforts to unify Caribbean communities, that the Notting Hill Carnival emerged. The Carnival created opportunities for Caribbean people to engage in entrepreneurial activities, such as providing ethnic goods for the community, producing costumes, and offering event-management services. These business activities showcased Caribbean culture and provided a sense of belonging for the diaspora. The Notting Hill Carnival also facilitated self-employment and provided a means of both survival and surviving. It therefore offered a template for future Caribbean entrepreneurs to sustain themselves, linking survival, surviving, and Carnival entrepreneurship with migrant, cultural, and traditional backgrounds.

The Notting Hill Carnival originated 66 years ago in the United Kingdom. Originally, it was an indoor Caribbean party developed in response to the racial tensions that existed at the time. In 1966, it became a street festival with the aim of bringing together citizens within a particular community (Mensah, 2020). The Notting Hill Carnival is a multicultural event involving steelpan, reggae, and other forms of Caribbean cultural expression. It provided a sense of comfort and release for Caribbean people in the face of racial tension, marginalisation, and discrimination. Thousands of people arrived on the SS Windrush (reference). For many, Britain was imagined as a "paradise" and, in some ways, a home away from home where culture and traditions could be maintained. Research on ethnicity, culture, and entrepreneurship has been undertaken for many decades (Light, 1972; Hofstede, 1980; Kloosterman & Rath, 2001). Importantly, cultural festivals such as the Notting Hill Carnival may act as catalysts for entrepreneurship and, by extension, upward economic and social mobility (Ferreira & Dinis, 2025).

The Entrepreneurial Environment of the Notting Hill Carnival

Traditional entrepreneurial frameworks emphasise profit and opportunity as central entrepreneurial pillars (Kirzner, 1973; Shane & Venkataraman, 2000). While these are present in the Notting Hill Carnival, they provide only a partial conceptualisation of entrepreneurship in this environment. Entrepreneurship in this context is embedded in, and intertwined with, socio-economic, institutional, cultural, and geographical conditions. This reflects the concept of mixed embeddedness, as Kloosterman and Rath (2001) describe entrepreneurship as the interplay between agents and a broader range of structural conditions.

Scholars have proposed many typologies to characterise entrepreneurial activity, suggesting that entrepreneurship is not monolithic but diverse in nature (Gartner, 1985; Welter et al., 2017). The Notting Hill Carnival exemplifies this diversity. Its entrepreneurial environment is multifaceted, shaped by the interplay of geography, culture, migration, ethnicity, community development, and informality. Awareness of these dynamics is

a useful starting point. A closer examination reveals a kaleidoscopic entrepreneurial environment in which diverse expressions of entrepreneurship become visible. Consequently, no single entrepreneurial label adequately captures entrepreneurial practice within the festival.

The entrepreneurial practices within the Carnival intersect with several established entrepreneurship typologies. However, none of these individually captures the complexity of the entrepreneurial environment. Rather, these forms coexist and overlap, creating what this paper conceptualises as a kaleidoscopic entrepreneurial environment.

While the Carnival exhibits characteristics associated with micro, informal, and cultural entrepreneurship, classifying entrepreneurial activity exclusively through any one of these lenses risks oversimplifying the entrepreneurial reality. Entrepreneurial practices frequently cut across multiple categories simultaneously, suggesting the need for a more integrative conceptual framework (Thornton, 1995; Williams & Nadin, 2012; Getz, 2016). Entrepreneurship is often associated with formal processes in the formal economy. However, the Notting Hill Carnival is also associated with the informal economy, where activity may occur with fewer formal obstacles and hindrances (Williams & Nadin, 2012). Hence, some businesses may not be formally registered or regulated by the state (De Soto, 1989). Vendors may operate informally because of barriers related to licensing, costs, or bureaucracy. Another defining characteristic of the Carnival, which highlights the overlapping nature of this environment, is the sale of cultural goods and values, particularly through costumes, music, food stalls, and art, giving it a distinctive character (Lounsbury & Glynn, 2001; Scott, 2012).

The Notting Hill Carnival is closely connected to the experiences of Caribbean immigrants and their descendants, many of whom have historically encountered racism, discrimination, barriers to the job market, and limited economic opportunities in the host country (Chrysostome & Arcand, 2009). These conditions align with necessity entrepreneurship, although the concept remains contested, as it is often used to describe entrepreneurial activity undertaken in response to socio-economic challenges (Storey, 2001; Welter et al., 2017).

Existing research suggests that necessity entrepreneurs often operate with limited resources, rely heavily on social and family networks, and develop opportunities within highly constrained environments (Baker & Nelson, 2005; George, 2005). While these characteristics are evident within the Carnival, the entrepreneurial practices observed extend beyond simple subsistence or self-employment. Many entrepreneurs have transformed initially survival-oriented activities into more sustainable ventures through the development of networks, cultural capital, experience, and market opportunities. This suggests a progression from survival entrepreneurship, focused on meeting immediate economic needs, towards surviving entrepreneurship, characterised by continuity, resilience, adaptation, and long-term sustainability. The Notting Hill Carnival therefore provides a context in which

entrepreneurship evolves beyond necessity, illustrating how historically marginalised communities create trajectories for both economic participation and entrepreneurial development.

The Notting Hill Carnival can be viewed as a platform for survival entrepreneurship, a form of entrepreneurial activity that emerges from necessity and is principally concerned with meeting immediate economic needs rather than pursuing wealth creation or opportunity-driven growth (Bruton, Ketchen, & Ireland, 2013; Williams & Nadin, 2010). However, evidence from the Carnival suggests that entrepreneurial activity often evolves beyond subsistence. This paper therefore introduces the concept of surviving entrepreneurship to capture the transition from short-term survival towards longer-term continuity, resilience, and sustainability. Unlike survival entrepreneurship, surviving entrepreneurship reflects the capacity of entrepreneurs to build networks, accumulate resources and experience, adapt to changing social and institutional conditions, and establish more enduring ventures. In this sense, the Notting Hill Carnival serves not only as a mechanism for economic survival but also as a platform through which entrepreneurs develop pathways towards persistence, growth, and long-term business sustainability (Aldrich, 2008).

The Notting Hill Carnival is deeply intertwined with ethnicity, culture, and migration, making it a significant site of cultural, diaspora, and ethnic entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurial activity within the Carnival is centred on the production and commercialisation of Caribbean cultural products and experiences, including music, costumes, food, and artistic expression, reflecting key characteristics of cultural entrepreneurship. Through the deployment of cultural capital, ethnic minority entrepreneurs use their cultural heritage as a resource for both social and economic advancement (Bourdieu, 1986). The Carnival also exhibits features of diaspora entrepreneurship, as Caribbean migrants and their descendants maintain cultural traditions, mobilise transnational and local networks, and adapt cultural practices to the socio-economic context of the host country (Brinkerhoff, 2009; Riddle et al., 2010). Furthermore, the strong presence of entrepreneurs from migrant and minority backgrounds aligns with the literature on ethnic entrepreneurship, which emphasises the role of shared identity, community networks, and niche markets in facilitating entrepreneurial activity (Light & Gold, 2000; Ram & Jones, 2008). Collectively, these dimensions illustrate how entrepreneurial practices within the Notting Hill Carnival are embedded within broader processes of cultural preservation, identity formation, and community development.

The Notting Hill Carnival also exhibits characteristics of creative entrepreneurship, as entrepreneurial activity is rooted in the creation, production, and commercialisation of creative and cultural outputs. Costume design, steelpan music, calypso, reggae, dance, performance, and Caribbean cuisine represent forms of creative expression that continuously evolve while generating economic value. Creativity therefore serves as both a cul-

tural and entrepreneurial resource, supporting innovation, differentiation, and the development of unique market offerings (Amabile, 1988; Howkins, 2001). Through these activities, the Carnival demonstrates how creative entrepreneurship contributes to both cultural preservation and economic participation.

This paper puts forward the view that entrepreneurial practices within the Notting Hill Carnival also exhibit characteristics of social, creative, grassroots, and street entrepreneurship. Beyond economic value creation, entrepreneurial activity contributes to community integration, cultural preservation, intergenerational knowledge transfer, and broader processes of social change, reflecting key aspects of social entrepreneurship (Mair & Martí, 2006; Bornstein & Davis, 2010). At the same time, creativity functions as a central entrepreneurial resource, underpinning the production and commercialisation of costumes, steelpan music, calypso, reggae, dance, performance, and cultural events (Howkins, 2001; Oakley, 2006). Entrepreneurial activity within the Carnival also emerges largely from community-led initiatives characterised by limited access to capital and resources, aligning with notions of grassroots entrepreneurship (Alvord, Brown, & Letts, 2004; Peredo & Chrisman, 2006). Furthermore, as much of this activity takes place within public urban spaces and often spans both formal and informal spheres, it shares characteristics with street entrepreneurship (Bromley, 2000; Cross & Morales, 2007). Collectively, these dimensions further demonstrate the multidimensional nature of entrepreneurship within the Notting Hill Carnival, reinforcing the argument that no single entrepreneurial typology adequately captures the complexity of this entrepreneurial environment.

The entrepreneurial environment of the Notting Hill Carnival challenges traditional entrepreneurship models that emphasise opportunity recognition, growth, innovation, and profit maximisation as primary entrepreneurial outcomes. Rather than representing a static or linear process, entrepreneurship within the Carnival is dynamic, fluid, and highly context-dependent. Entrepreneurial activity is shaped by shifting regulatory, institutional, economic, social, and cultural conditions, reflecting the mixed embeddedness of entrepreneurs within this environment. Businesses emerge and evolve in diverse ways: some operate formally while others remain informal; some are temporary and event-based, whereas others become recurring or permanent ventures. This diversity highlights the limitations of conventional entrepreneurial frameworks in accounting for culturally embedded and temporally situated forms of entrepreneurial practice.

Furthermore, entrepreneurial activity within the Carnival extends beyond purely economic motivations. Cultural expression, identity formation, community participation, and social value creation are often as important as financial outcomes. The cyclical and event-based nature of the Carnival further distinguishes it from traditional models that assume continuous business development and linear growth trajectories. Consequently,

entrepreneurship within this context is better understood as a multidimensional process characterised by overlapping entrepreneurial forms and outcomes.

Importantly, the Carnival reveals a survival-surviving dynamic. For some entrepreneurs, participation represents a survival strategy aimed at generating immediate income and addressing economic necessity. For others, the Carnival serves as a platform for surviving entrepreneurship, providing opportunities to build networks, test products, develop brand recognition, and establish pathways towards longer-term business sustainability. This distinction highlights the uneven distribution of resources, networks, and opportunities, while illustrating how entrepreneurship may evolve from subsistence-oriented activity to more resilient and enduring forms of enterprise.

Emergent Conceptual Framework

This paper reconceptualises entrepreneurship within the Notting Hill Carnival as a non-linear process shaped by the interaction of cultural, social, institutional, and economic forces. Extending mixed embeddedness theory, the framework demonstrates how survival-oriented and growth-oriented entrepreneurial strategies coexist within a complex entrepreneurial ecosystem. In doing so, it challenges traditional entrepreneurship models that prioritise opportunity recognition, innovation, and profit maximisation as the primary indicators of entrepreneurial success.

The framework positions cultural entrepreneurship at its centre, reflecting the importance of Caribbean heritage, identity, traditions, and cultural production as key drivers of entrepreneurial activity. Closely connected to this are other interrelated entrepreneurial forms, including creative, necessity, ethnic, diaspora, and social entrepreneurship. While analytically distinct, these entrepreneurial forms interact and reinforce one another, collectively shaping economic participation and entrepreneurial outcomes.

The framework also incorporates grassroots, street, and festival entrepreneurship, highlighting the community-based, informal, and temporary characteristics of entrepreneurial activity within the Carnival. Underpinning these dimensions is diaspora entrepreneurship, which connects entrepreneurial activity to migration experiences, transnational networks, cultural continuity, and broader socio-economic conditions. These conditions give rise to entrepreneurial practices associated with income generation, survival, and longer-term sustainability.

Importantly, the framework illustrates that these entrepreneurial forms should not be understood as discrete categories but as interconnected and evolving dimensions of a broader entrepreneurial ecosystem. Entrepreneurship is therefore conceptualised as operating along a continuum from survival entrepreneurship, concerned with immediate economic needs, to

surviving entrepreneurship, characterised by resilience, adaptation, continuity, and longer-term sustainability within structurally constrained environments.

Figure 1 below [page 114] presents the kaleidoscopic entrepreneurial framework, which captures the multidimensional nature of entrepreneurship within the Notting Hill Carnival environment. The framework illustrates how multiple forms of entrepreneurship coexist, overlap, and interact within a temporally bounded and culturally embedded festival setting. At its core is a kaleidoscopic view of entrepreneurship that recognises entrepreneurial activity as dynamic, fluid, and context-dependent rather than a singular or fixed phenomenon.

The emergent framework contributes to entrepreneurship theory by proposing that entrepreneurship is best understood as a kaleidoscopic phenomenon comprising multiple, overlapping perspectives rather than a single universal model. From a policy perspective, this reconceptualisation highlights the need for more flexible, inclusive, and context-sensitive approaches that recognise the heterogeneity of entrepreneurial activity and support both short-term livelihood strategies and long-term entrepreneurial development.

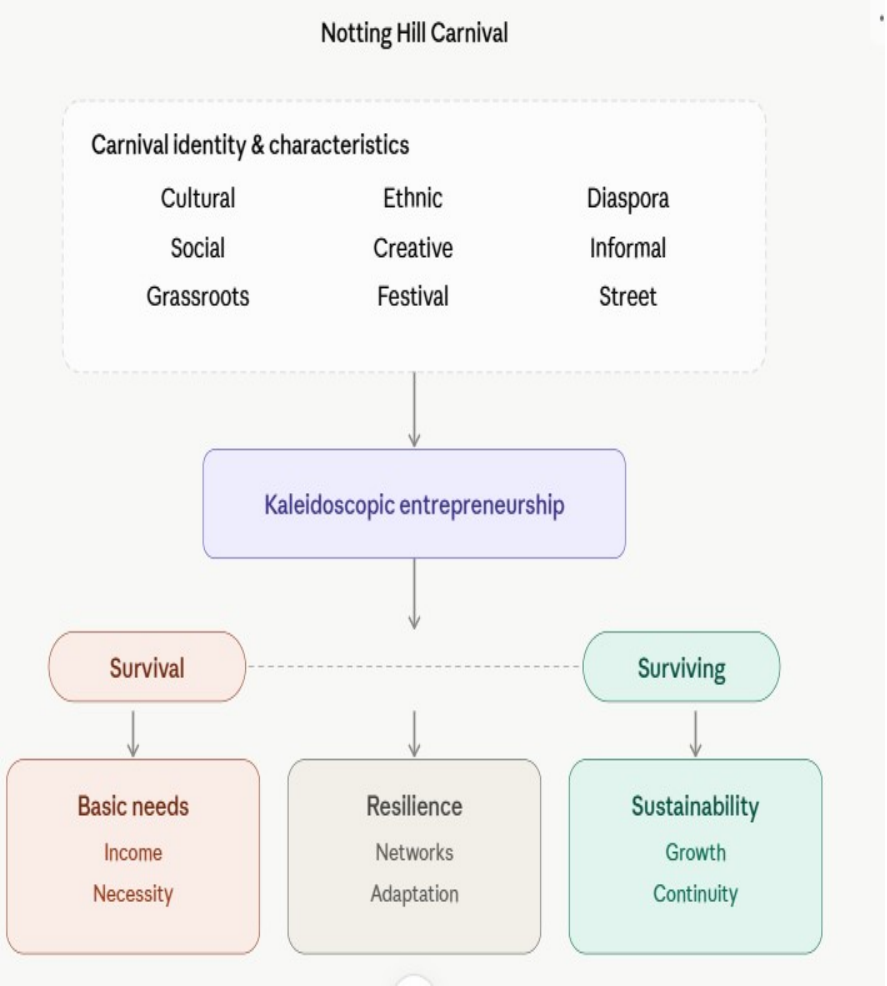


Figure 1.1 *Emergent Conceptual Framework of Entrepreneurship*

The framework illustrates how multiple entrepreneurial forms—including cultural, ethnic, diaspora, social, creative, grassroots, festival, informal, and street entrepreneurship—interact within a culturally embedded and temporally bounded setting. Rather than operating as discrete categories, these entrepreneurial forms overlap and collectively shape a kaleidoscopic entrepreneurial environment. The framework further proposes that entrepreneurship exists along a continuum from survival to surviving. At one end, entrepreneurial activity is primarily driven by necessity, income generation, and the fulfilment of basic needs. Through the development of networks, resilience, and adaptive capabilities, entrepreneurs may progress towards surviving entrepreneurship, characterised by continuity, growth,

and sustainability. The framework therefore reconceptualises entrepreneurship as a dynamic, multidimensional, and context-dependent phenomenon shaped by the interaction of cultural, social, and economic forces.

This study is subject to several limitations. First, the findings are derived from a single case study of the Notting Hill Carnival and are therefore context-specific. Consequently, they should not be interpreted as statistically generalisable to all entrepreneurial settings, although they may offer analytical insights that are transferable to similar culturally embedded entrepreneurial environments. Second, the study adopts an interpretivist qualitative approach, which is inherently dependent upon researcher interpretation. As with all qualitative research, the possibility of subjectivity and interpretive bias cannot be eliminated, despite efforts to ensure rigorous analysis. Third, while the study draws upon rich qualitative data and extensive desk-based research, it does not incorporate newly collected primary data that reflects the contemporary entrepreneurial environment of the Notting Hill Carnival. Given the evolving nature of the Carnival and its entrepreneurial ecosystem, future research could build upon these findings through updated empirical investigation. Finally, further research is required to refine, validate, and potentially challenge the proposed kaleidoscopic entrepreneurship framework and the survival-surviving continuum in both the Notting Hill Carnival and comparable entrepreneurial contexts.

Conclusion

This paper has outlined the methodology used, provided a brief account of the historical and cultural context of the Notting Hill Carnival, and examined its entrepreneurial environment. It has also explained the emergent conceptual framework and discussed its theoretical, practical, and policy significance. The paper concludes by highlighting the limitations of the study and the need for further research on culturally embedded and temporally bounded forms of entrepreneurship.

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