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# **International Winter Tourism Entrepreneurs in Northern Sweden: Understanding Migration, Lifestyle and Business Motivations**

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# **International Winter Tourism Entrepreneurs in Northern Sweden: Understanding Migration, Lifestyle and Business Motivations**

This paper examines the migration, lifestyle and business motivations of international winter tourism entrepreneurs who have moved to a “low-amenity” rural area in northern Sweden. Low-amenity areas are characterised by economic decline, outmigration and limited tourism development. Based on qualitative interviews, the research applied a multi-dimensional framework to the study of migrant tourism entrepreneurship, considering personal migration drivers, the value of location-specific amenities, desired consumptive experiences, previous familiarity with the destination, business-related goals, as well as temporal and technological dimensions of mobility and self-employment. The findings suggest that the northern winter and the undeveloped low-amenity character of the place were key factors in migration choices. Consumptive lifestyle interests around counter-urban living and winter outdoor hobbies were prominent, yet there was diversity in terms of business aspirations and considerable seasonal lifestyle-business balancing. Despite noticeable contributions to winter tourism development in the low-amenity north, the study also identified a sense of temporariness and expected onward migration among migrants, raising questions about the longevity of this development.

Keywords: international lifestyle migration; lifestyle tourism entrepreneur; winter tourism; low-amenity rural area; northern Sweden

## **Introduction**

The northern winter has been recognised as offering opportunities for new tourism development in rural areas that have not had traditional forms of winter tourism (i.e. skiing) (Hall, Müller, & Saarinen, 2009). Yet, developing successful new winter tourism niches relies on dedicated entrepreneurs who may be scarce in the sparsely populated north (Lundberg & Fredman, 2012; Lundmark & Müller, 2010). Attracting international migrant entrepreneurs is sometimes seen as a potential strategy to stimulate new economic development in such areas (Eimermann, 2016; Iversen & Jacobsen, 2016). However, their contributions to tourism and economic rejuvenation have also been questioned, as migrants

are often driven by lifestyle rather than business related goals (Ateljevic & Doorne, 2000; Ioannides & Petersen, 2003; Lundmark, Ednarsson, & Karlsson, 2014; Peters, Frehse, & Buhalis, 2009; Stone & Stubs, 2007). What has yet to be established is how migrant entrepreneurs balance lifestyle and business ambitions in different rural and northern contexts, and what this might mean for long-term development prospects.

The aim of this paper is to examine the migration, lifestyle and business motivations of foreigners who moved to a peripheral rural area in northern Sweden and started a business providing winter tourism experiences. The study identifies the reasons for migration to the north, the reasons for entering tourism self-employment, and the role of the northern winter for migration and the lifestyle-business balance. The specific context for this research is that of “low-amenity” rural areas in the far north, which are characterised by socio-economic decline, sparse populations, and an increasing lack of services and infrastructure (Vuin, Carson, Carson, & Garrett, 2016). These areas are little developed in terms of tourism, and thus appear to offer little for the stereotypical consumption-driven amenity migrant and travel-stimulated tourism entrepreneur that has commonly been observed in popular tourism destinations (Lardiés, 1999; Snepenger, Johnson, & Rasker, 1995; Stone & Stubs, 2007; Williams, Shaw, & Greenwood, 1989). There has been little research into the relationship between lifestyle migration and tourism entrepreneurship in such low-amenity areas (Eimermann, 2016; Vuin et al., 2016), particularly in northern environments dominated by cold winter weather. It is therefore not clear whether the lifestyle-business balance criticised in other contexts applies here, or whether there are different implications of that balance for tourism development prospects.

### **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework for this study builds on previous literature around lifestyle

migration and tourism entrepreneurship, suggesting that the business aspirations of migrant tourism entrepreneurs cannot be fully understood without considering the factors influencing their migration decisions. Self-employment may motivate the decision to move, it may accompany the migration decision to facilitate a particular lifestyle change, or it may follow the relocation after migrants realise new business opportunities or the need for new income streams (Eimermann, 2016; Iversen & Jacobsen, 2016; Komppula, 2004). Migrant tourism entrepreneurship can thus be a diverse phenomenon resulting from a variety of migration, lifestyle and business motivations. Carlsen, Morrison and Weber (2008) proposed a useful framework for studying these motivations, considering the role of personal migration drivers, location-specific amenities, familiarity with the destination, desired consumptive experiences, business-related motivations, as well as temporal and technological dimensions of migration and self-employment.

*Personal* factors influencing rural migration decisions often centre around counter-urban lifestyle aspirations as people seek a less stressful life in the countryside (Buller & Hoggart, 1994; Carlsen et al., 2008; Stockdale, 2014). Other common “push” factors to move to rural areas include a lifestyle change following unemployment or dissatisfying working conditions, personal reorientation after changes in relationships or family status, the search for a better work-life balance in connection with semi-retirement and part-time work, cheaper housing and lower cost of living, or the search for a more family-friendly environment (Benson, 2010; Eimermann, 2017; Iversen & Jacobsen, 2016; Williams et al., 1989).

*Locational* factors motivating rural in-migration have often been discussed in relation to “amenity migration” (Moss & Glorioso, 2014), with migrants being driven by the prospects of consuming particular rural place amenities, such as natural, aesthetic, cultural, or recreational assets (Morrison, 2006). Favourable climatic conditions, scenic landscapes, and access to beaches, mountains and waterways are commonly identified as key amenities, along

with infrastructure and services designed to experience these assets (Casado-Díaz, 2006; Lardiés, 1999; Madden, 1999; Stone & Stubbs, 2007). There is often a strong link between amenity migration and tourism, sometimes referred to as a tourism-migration nexus (Hall & Williams, 2002). Previous holiday visits may attract tourists back as migrants or “residential tourists” who seek to consume tourism attractions, activities and services on a more regular or permanent basis (Benson & O’Reilly, 2009; Snepenger et al., 1995; Williams et al., 1989). Migrants may then become self-employed in tourism to produce the experiences they initially sought to consume, thus blurring the boundaries between consumption and production (Shaw & Williams, 2004). Hence, *familiarity* with the region as tourists may be important in the subsequent migration-entrepreneurship process (Carlsen et al., 2008).

Consumptive motivations and the *experiential* dimension of desired lifestyle experiences often revolve around certain hobbies that were not possible in the previous living environment (Carlsen et al., 2008). Common examples in the literature refer to popular tourism destinations, such as coastal areas or mountain resorts, where migrants seek to engage in place-based activities such as surfing, boating or skiing (Shaw & Williams, 2004; Tuulentie & Heimtun, 2014). Consumptive motivations can also relate to particular experiences associated with counter-urban living (peace, tranquillity, escapism), more quality time with the family, or the exotic “otherness” of a place (e.g. different climate, landscapes, cultures) (Carlsen et al., 2008; Cederholm, 2015; Komppula, 2004; Lundberg & Fredman, 2012).

*Business* dimensions consider the reasons for self-employment and the extent to which consumptive and productive interests are balanced (Morrison, 2006; Peters et al., 2009). An important distinction has been made between migrants who arrive with clear plans for their business start-ups, and those who become self-employed after migration (Iversen & Jacobsen, 2016). The former are sometimes described as more entrepreneurial and proactive,

while the latter may enter self-employment by accident or financial necessity (Carlsen et al., 2008; Cederholm & Hultman, 2010; Morrison, 2006). Other distinctions have been made between entrepreneurs for whom the business is the primary source of income, and those who consider it as a side activity requiring little financial and time commitment (Ioannides & Petersen, 2003; Peters et al., 2009). Some entrepreneurs pursue a tourism business because of previous industry experiences and a passion for tourism, while others may consider tourism as a “lesser evil” or simply more compatible with family and lifestyle priorities (Cederholm, 2015; Iversen & Jacobsen, 2016; Komppula, 2004; Morrison, 2006). Some reject traditional economic growth ideologies and are more driven by a desire to share their lifestyle passions with like-minded guests rather than economic concerns (Ateljevic & Doorne, 2000; Cederholm & Hultman, 2010; Helgadóttir & Sigurðardóttir, 2008; Lundberg & Fredman, 2012). Again others may see tourism as a convenient way to combine leisure interests with work and pursue their hobbies as “serious leisure” ventures to make a living out of their preferred lifestyle activities (Shaw & Williams, 2004; Stebbins, 2001).

Tourism lifestyle entrepreneurship may therefore comprise a continuum of entrepreneurial types driven by a variety of lifestyle and business goals (Bredvold & Skálén, 2016). This continuum includes: pure lifestyle seekers opposing economic growth to preserve their lifestyle ideals (Ateljevic & Doorne, 2000); “non-entrepreneurs” entering self-employment by necessity to make a living in their desired destination (Ioannides & Petersen, 2003; Williams et al., 1989); “constrained” entrepreneurs limiting their business activity due to skill, resource or lifestyle constraints (Shaw & Williams, 2004); business owners who consider the pleasures of tourism self-employment or the sharing of lifestyle values at the heart of their desired lifestyle change (Cederholm & Hultman, 2010; Helgadóttir & Sigurðardóttir, 2008; Marchant & Mottiar, 2011); and more business-driven entrepreneurs

who consider economic success along with personal and financial independence as part of their perceived “good life” (Bredvold & Skålén, 2016).

*Temporal* considerations around migrant tourism entrepreneurship include the life stage of the migrant (Iversen & Jacobsen, 2016) and the expected duration of the migration and/or business venture (Benson, 2010; Eimermann, 2017). Semi- or pre-retirement migrants typically enter self-employment to bridge the final years until retirement and often make minimal business investment (Ioannides & Petersen, 2003). On the other end of the spectrum are young and mobile lifestyle seekers driven by the search for adventure, independence and opportunities to practise their preferred outdoor activities (Ateljevic & Doorne, 2000; Marchant & Mottiar, 2011; Shaw & Williams, 2004). For them, productive motivations may be important, yet limited to a certain period of time after which they move on to the next stage of their lives and careers.

Another temporal perspective concerns seasonality and entrepreneurial aspirations to limit business activities to certain times of the year (Dawson, Fountain, & Cohen, 2011; Goulding, Baum, & Morrison, 2005). Seasonal breaks may provide a necessary lifestyle balance, and may also be used for travel or to maintain social connections with family and friends at their previous homes (Eimermann, 2017). This ties in with the final *technology* aspect of the framework, which describes transport and information technologies as an increasingly important facilitator of lifestyle migration and entrepreneurship, allowing for more flexible and mobile living and working arrangements (Carlsen et al., 2008).

The following case study uses this framework to identify the migration, lifestyle and business motivations of international tourism entrepreneurs in a low-amenity area in northern Sweden. The study specifically examines:

- 1) The reasons for migration, and the various personal, locational, familial and experiential factors facilitating the move to a low-amenity area in the north;

- 2) The reasons for tourism self-employment, considering the ways in which lifestyle and business interests are balanced; and
- 3) The role of the northern winter in determining both migration and the lifestyle-business balance.

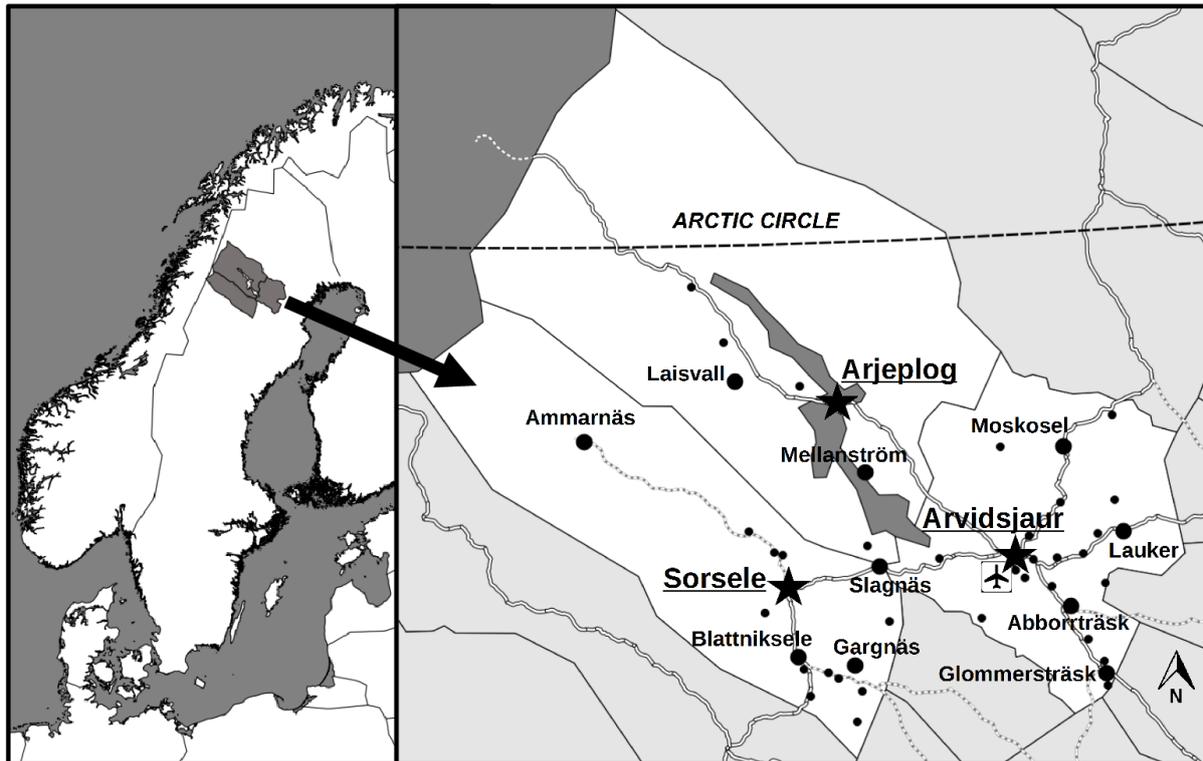
The study addresses two gaps in the literature: First, with most research on amenity migration focusing on amenity-rich areas and popular tourism destinations, there has been little focus on the sorts of locational assets and experiential factors motivating decisions to seek out a less developed or declining low-amenity destination for migration and tourism entrepreneurship (Eimermann, 2016; Vuin et al., 2016). Second, this research makes a contribution to understanding lifestyle migration and tourism entrepreneurship in a northern environment characterised by cold and long winters. International lifestyle migration to such northern locations, and in particular the role of winter in migration and business decisions, is still a very under-researched topic, with most studies focusing on tourism-related international migration from northern countries to southern, warm-weather destinations (Buller & Hoggart, 1994; Casado-Díaz, 2006; Lardiés, 1999; Madden, 1999; Stone & Stubbs, 2007). While some studies have identified winter sports activities, such as alpine skiing, as important drivers of migration (at least on a seasonal basis), they have predominantly focused on popular winter resorts where tourism is well established and (seasonal) work or business opportunities are plentiful (Lundmark, 2006; Tuulentie & Heimtun, 2014). In contrast, consumptive and productive interests around winter experiences in low-amenity areas will likely centre around different values and activities that are currently not well understood.

### **The Case Study Area**

The study was conducted in the three inland municipalities of Sorsele, Arvidsjaur and Arjeplog in northern Sweden (Figure 1). According to Statistics Sweden (2016), the region

had a combined population of about 11,900 residents in 2015. About two thirds of the population were living in one of the municipal centres, with the remaining areas being very sparsely populated. All three municipalities have faced continuous population decline over the past decades.

Figure 1. The case study area in northern Sweden



The region's tourism and hospitality industry has been largely reliant on the winter car testing industry, with several bigger hotels in the area catering almost exclusively to car testers during winter. Winter has thus become the main tourist season in the region, yet the majority of visitors are business travellers and non-resident workers. Leisure-oriented winter tourism has slowly evolved alongside car testing, particularly since an increasing number of migrants – mostly from Western European countries – moved to the area in the mid-2000s and started offering winter experiences to international markets. These operators have specialised in experiences such as dogsledding or snowmobile tours, and other winter-based

activities (e.g. ice-climbing, ice-fishing, snowshoe hiking, snow-kiting, ice go-karting). Many of them also offer small-scale accommodation alternatives to the larger hotels.

Despite these emerging winter tourism products, the region is by no means a major tourism destination comparable to more prominent ski resorts further south, or the winter tourism hub around Kiruna further north. Apart from the few larger car tester hotels, the industry is dominated by small (owner-operator) businesses. There are few purpose-built second homes and holiday houses, which are typical of the more popular tourist resorts, and housing prices outside the municipal centres are generally very low, thus emphasising the low-amenity context of the region.

## **Methods**

The research was based on semi-structured interviews with international migrants who were self-employed and promoted winter tourism products. Potential participants were identified with the help of local key informants and subsequent “snowball sampling” (with initial participants recommending additional participants during the fieldwork). In total, 20 international winter tourism entrepreneurs were identified from these sources, and 15 were ultimately recruited for a face-to-face interview.

Ten participants were from Germany, three from Switzerland, and one each from the Netherlands and France. All but one had arrived in the region after 2005. Seven participants were middle to older age couples (40-65 years) living without children. Four participants were families with young children, while another four were younger couples or singles (under 40 years) without children. Their tourism businesses included a mix of products, including dogsledding tours (9), snowmobile tours (5), other guided outdoor activities (4), and accommodation (12).

The interview guideline included broad questions around the factors influencing people's migration decisions and destination choices, as well as their entrepreneurial business motivations. The interviews were conducted in either German or English (with non-German speakers), and typically lasted between 45 and 90 minutes. The interviews were audio-taped following participants' consent and subsequently transcribed. The written data were analysed using thematic content analysis and a manual coding approach, with deductive codes drawn from the conceptual framework and inductive codes emerging from the data. All quotes in this paper were de-identified to protect data confidentiality, and German quotes were translated into English by the researchers.

## **Findings**

### ***Migration and Lifestyle Motivations***

The most common personal migration factors in this case study closely resembled those observed in previous studies on rural lifestyle migration (Benson, 2010; Buller & Hoggart, 1994; Eimermann, 2017; Stockdale, 2014). In particular, counter-urban lifestyle motives, the wish to semi-retire and enjoy a better work-life balance, and a desire to live in an area where migrants could pursue their preferred outdoor hobbies, were identified as key drivers. General living conditions in their home countries were often described as "too crowded", thus generating a desire to look for a place with more space, fewer people and a quiet environment to enjoy experiences of solitude, peace, and personal freedom. The strong contrast of living in the sparsely populated north appeared to be an important experiential dimension of the desired lifestyle change, and participants repeatedly emphasised that this change would not have been possible in other rural (non-northern or less remote) contexts. This is illustrated by Participant 10:

Probably the two main things that brought us here, and which have somehow disappeared from Central Europe – it's the feeling of personal freedom and the vast open space. You only get that here in the north. Infinite forests, solitude, living in nature with bears and elks, looking over the wide open [frozen winter landscape] – that's the freedom we were looking for.

Escaping from civilisation, stress and the pressure to succeed in an increasingly competitive urban society were also mentioned as personal “push factors”, along with looming unemployment, suffering a burnout from work, or general dissatisfaction with previous working conditions. Consistent with Stockdale's (2014) observations, these latter incidents often provided the final trigger for the decision to migrate. As one couple from Germany explained:

My husband had just lost his job. And then we thought, instead of looking for another job in another city, why not move somewhere we would actually enjoy? At that time, one of our musher friends had just moved to northern Sweden with his dogs, and so we thought this could be something for us as well. (...) We always wanted to have a big husky kennel in the country, but we couldn't really do that back home. (Participant 2)

Most participants agreed that they wanted to work less, enjoy a less hectic life, and have more time for travel, personal hobbies, and their families. Yet, there were also a few younger to middle-aged migrants for whom travelling and living abroad, gaining new experiences and becoming more independent were important push factors for migration (see Eimermann, 2017; Iversen & Jacobsen, 2016). For them, self-employment was an important part of the new challenges they sought, and a common strategy was to convert outdoor leisure interests into profitable business opportunities (see Cederholm, 2015; Marchant & Mottiar, 2011; Shaw & Williams, 2004). Again, such motivations were closely intertwined with northern locational values.

There were two sides to the story: first, we wanted to find a place where we could live with our dogs, somewhere with more space and freedom for our passion. (...) The

second consideration was to start a business together. We had long been toying with the idea to quit our office jobs and run a tourism company. But the combination – business and dogs – had never been possible in Switzerland. So we started looking for options further north... (Participant 11)

The northern winter emerged as a recurring key theme when considering potential migration destinations, confirming the crucial role of climate and weather conditions as locational amenities (Carlsen et al., 2008; Madden, 1999), even in a northern context. Migrants active in dogsledding were particularly motivated by the prospects of long winters, allowing them to “consume” their hobby for six to seven months a year. Some had huskies in their home countries, but the lack of snow and cold winters, in combination with a lack of space, prompted them to look for a new home in the north. Snow security and low winter temperatures were seen as destination prerequisites, and areas further south or closer to the coast were often avoided due to more unstable snow conditions. Non-husky owners also considered the northern winter climate as an important locational asset, allowing them to finally enjoy a “real winter” again which they thought had disappeared in their home countries due to climate change. Winter and snow thus represented important consumptive experiences, yet opportunities to engage in such experiences in their previous home environments were considered restricted in both time and space:

Winter here is generally the type of winter that you can't experience in Germany anymore. Those days are gone unfortunately. There might be snow, but it's wet and doesn't last very long (...). You could go to the mountain resorts, but it's not the same. It's so busy and concentrated, and you are quite restricted in where you can go. (Participant 14)

More space and a relatively uninhabited environment where winter outdoor hobbies would face limited restrictions emerged as locational key advantages of the region. The low amenity north was often deliberately chosen over more developed tourism destinations

further south, which were described as too crowded (with tourists or other lifestyle migrants) and too expensive and commercialised. The participants thus appeared to be different from the stereotypical “residential tourists” in amenity-rich destinations (e.g. Benson & O’Reilly, 2009; Casado-Díaz, 2006; Lardiés, 1999; Snepenger et al., 1995; Stone & Stubbs, 2007), as migrants were not attracted by existing tourism amenities, but rather by their absence.

We spent a lot of time looking around Dalarna [central Sweden], but we couldn’t find anything suitable. The houses were all on small lots, nothing with a bit more land or forest, and the prices are a different ball game. It’s a ski resort, and it’s developing quite fast. Lots of people from the city are moving there, lots of holiday houses are built. This wasn’t really what we were looking for. (Participant 5)

Almost all participants settled in or near a small village, away from the larger municipal centres, emphasising their desire for space and solitude (Komppula, 2004). As in previous studies (Carlsen et al., 2008; Iversen & Jacobsen, 2016; Morrison, 2006), property purchases were primarily motivated by lifestyle considerations (e.g. the peaceful location, aesthetic appeal, access to nature) rather than business considerations, suggesting that locational and consumptive values were more important than economic interests at the time. Though some participants acknowledged that living closer to a major tourism destination would make their businesses more profitable, they sought to stay away from such “touristy” locations. Instead, they preferred to enjoy their outdoor hobbies along with the feeling of having the natural environment to themselves.

I’m glad we didn’t move to Kiruna. It’s just too busy and the density of sled-dog operators is very high (...). Here, you don’t meet anybody when you are out with the dogs. And you don’t have to explain to your guests how to behave in case you meet another dogsledding group...we don’t have that problem here. It’s just you, the dogs and the forest. (Participant 12)

Familiarity and personal connections with the area had some impact on locational choices. Yet only few participants had previously visited the destination as tourists, suggesting that a direct tourist-migrant transition was less common in this study context than in popular tourism destinations (Casado-Díaz, 2006; Lardiés, 1999; Stone & Stubbs, 2007). Where such transitions did occur, the migration decisions were described as spontaneous and coincidental, for example triggered by particular real estate opportunities (see Vuin et al., 2016).

That I ended up here instead was an accident. I first came here in 2006 as part of a snowmobile safari (...). And it was so beautiful out here in winter... So I asked the owner, more as a joke, if he would like to sell this place, and a few years later he was really ready to sell. And that was exactly when I was looking for a break from work. It was pure coincidence. I wasn't looking for a property up here, the property came to me. (Participant 7)

Many other participants had never visited the area prior to migration. Some had spent time as doghandlers or tour guides in other northern environments (e.g. in Norway, Finland, Canada or Alaska) where they developed a taste for the northern outdoor lifestyle. Travel-stimulated migration (Snepenger et al., 1995) was thus present to some extent, but this was not dependent on familiarity with the region itself. Participants mostly valued generic northern place amenities, and eventually chose northern Sweden as the more accessible or affordable compromise. Again, final destination choices depended primarily on real estate opportunities which were either found online or through recommendations from other expatriates living in the area.

I think, once the northern wilderness, vastness and wide open space has truly captured you, you can't go back to normal. My dream has always been to move to the Yukon where I spent some time as a guide. But it was too far away from home, my wife didn't like that idea (...). So then we started looking in northern Europe, and we found a

German-speaking real estate agent who happened to advertise properties around here.  
(Participant 9)

### ***Business Motivations and Lifestyle Balancing***

Similar to previous research (Carlsen et al., 2008; Eimermann, 2016; Iversen & Jacobsen, 2016), most participants became self-employed after migration, meaning that entrepreneurial aspirations had not been part of the initial lifestyle migration decision. Some had hoped for paid employment but could not find any suitable jobs, thus starting their business as a “Plan B”. A common perception was that tourism self-employment was a more enjoyable income option than jobs that would compromise their lifestyle interests. Converting their hobbies into business models was therefore common, demonstrating the blurring of lifestyle consumption and production (Cederholm, 2015; Shaw & Williams, 2004).

We started off working for [the car tester hotel], but we had different shifts, so we never got to see each other. And those jobs were during winter, so then we had no time left for our dogs, which had been the main reason for coming here in the first place. This was not how I had planned my “lifestyle move”. (...) Dogsledding tours are a much better compromise in comparison. We can just keep doing what we like doing anyway and charge for it. (Participant 6)

Previous experiences as business entrepreneurs were rare among the participants, and those who did have some experience were primarily older semi-retirees who wanted to downsize their workloads. Similarly, previous work experiences in tourism were limited. Some participants ended up in tourism by accident, for example when they bought a property with existing accommodation facilities and simply continued renting out those facilities. Others got gradually drawn into tourism by helping out existing tour companies as casual guides. Hence, replicating business models from existing tour companies – many of them run by other expatriates – was a common path into tourism (see Stone & Stubbs, 2007). The

perception of tourism as an “easy” industry requiring relatively little prior knowledge and investment was often apparent in the migrants’ stories.

I was looking for something to do during winter, and then I met this German guy who was also running snowmobile tours. I started taking some of his guests out here as a tour guide, and my wife prepared lunch for them, and that’s basically how we ended up in tourism. (...) After a while we thought we could easily do this on our own, it didn’t seem all that difficult. (Participant 5)

In particular winter activities were repeatedly described as easy business opportunities for migrants. Demand for alternative winter activities among international tourists was seen to be on the rise, yet respondents thought that international markets were grossly underserved by local providers. For example, there had been few commercial dogsledding or snowmobiling tour options in the region before migrant entrepreneurs started filling those product gaps. In addition, participants thought local providers did not always understand the type of services demanded by international tourists. While there were several local companies renting out snowmobiles for independent use, few of them offered guided tour experiences for international guests with limited driving skills and knowledge of the region. Another comment was that locals struggled to comprehend (and market) the region’s exotic appeal as a winter destination for international tourists, considering that most Swedish (or Nordic) tourists visit the area during summer.

Despite acknowledging growth potential in winter tourism, many migrants did not want to expand their businesses. As observed in previous studies (Ateljevic & Doorne, 2000; Cederholm & Hultman, 2010; Helgadóttir & Sigurðardóttir, 2008; Lundberg & Fredman, 2012), a common strategy was to keep businesses small and restrict the number and size of tourist groups. Some respondents demonstrated a clear opposition to conventional growth-oriented tourism development approaches, and they were keen to emphasize that they did not want their businesses to turn into mass tourism operations, which they had seen during

previous trips to other popular destinations. They referred to large sled-dog farms in Finland, Alaska or Kiruna, which in their opinions had become “soulless dog factories” that did not match their ethical values. Instead, they preferred to specialise in small and personalised tours. A few operators even stopped running short day tours to avoid the constant tourist turnover, and focused on extended tours and musher training workshops, which they thought attracted tourists more likely to share their own lifestyle values. Some also refused to work with international tour operators who were seen as pushing larger groups, high-intensity tourism, and the wrong type of tourists (described as “needy”, “high-maintenance”, and not sharing the same passion for the dogs).

If you want to grow, you have to do it “big business” style, with 200-300 dogs, several tour guides, and contracts with big tour operators, like some of these places in Kiruna or in Finland. But I don’t want that. I want to run this operation here with *my* dogs, I want to know them all by name. (...) And I don’t want this mass turnover of tourists who don’t know anything about dogs. (Participant 12)

In this sense, limitations to business growth, the conservation of lifestyle values, and motivations around sharing such values with like-minded niche markets were clearly evident in this case study, confirming observations from previous studies (Ateljevic & Doorne, 2000; Cederholm & Hultman, 2010; Helgadóttir & Sigurðardóttir, 2008). A few operators also demonstrated “non-entrepreneurial” traits (Ioannides & Petersen, 2003; Peters et al., 2009), admitting that they were not interested in deeper engagement with tourists. For them, the tourism business was merely a small side income to pay for the expenses associated with their hobby.

Tourism is only really paying for the dog food here. I don’t want more tourists, they are just incredibly exhausting. That’s also why we cut back from multi-day to short day tours, and I’m glad when the guests go home at the end of the day so I don’t have to entertain them any further. (Participant 14)

There were also comments opposing general tourism growth in the region. Again, citing examples from other busy tourism destinations, some participants feared that increasing tourism would destroy their hidden lifestyle paradise (*"We don't want this area to turn into another Kiruna. Then the peace and quiet would be gone."* Participant 8). In contrast, a few businesses were more growth-oriented and sought to expand both their businesses and regional tourism in general. They were keen to emphasise that they did not consider themselves as stereotypical "society dropouts" seeking a less stressful life, but as serious entrepreneurs with ambitions to succeed in the industry. They were developing strategies to grow tourism on a year-round basis, and also repeatedly voiced their frustrations over the lack of business drive among the more consumption-driven lifestyle entrepreneurs, and the local industry more broadly.

Still, a clear differentiation between growth and lifestyle interests was at times difficult, as many entrepreneurs had different strategies for different seasons. Some invested all their energy into growing the winter tourism business to have the summer and shoulder seasons (i.e. late spring and early autumn) available for lifestyle consumption. Another strategy was to expand the winter business to keep busy and "cope" with the long and dark winter (*"I need to have lots of tourists around during winter, otherwise it gets really lonely and depressing up here."* Participant 13), while taking it slower during summer. As argued previously (Dawson et al., 2011; Goulding et al., 2005), seasonality was mostly seen as an opportunity to balance economic and lifestyle priorities. Many participants appreciated seasonal time off from the business to travel back to their home countries, visit family and friends, or simply recharge their batteries from the busy winter season.

We get a lot of demand for our snowmobile tours here in winter, almost more than we can handle. I hired a seasonal guide these last couple of years so we can run more tours. (...) We don't really want to get involved in the summer business. In summer we usually

go back to Germany in our campervan, and just enjoy that mobile lifestyle a bit more.  
(Participant 5)

In addition, some respondents sought to diversify their winter tourism businesses into summer tourism to get some of the winter back for lifestyle consumption, as explained by Participant 6:

We've probably reached our personal limit as far as tours are concerned. (...) We haven't had a single day off since January, and we are hardly getting any time for ourselves during winter. We have to set some boundaries, maybe expand summer tourism a bit more with fly-fishing, just to take some pressure off during winter.

Another strategy was to pursue other part-time employment, including commute work or Internet-based work, during the summer and shoulder seasons to avoid having to dedicate the entire winter to tourism, as explained by Participant 2 below. Such income strategies point towards the importance of good transport and communication technologies, as suggested in the framework by Carlsen et al. (2008).

I drive up to Arjeplog in summer to work in aged care (...) and my husband does fly-in/fly-out work at a Norwegian oil platform. It's good money, so then we don't have to run daily tours during winter and we can focus a bit more on ourselves and the dogs.  
(Participant 2)

In terms of temporal perspectives, very few respondents seemed to have long-term business plans for the future. Older semi-retirees mentioned that they were planning to operate their businesses for just a few more years, and some of them were considering selling the business and leaving the region upon retirement. Some younger couples and families also thought that they might move on in the near future, or once their family situations start to change. This was also illustrated through multiple anecdotal stories about past migrant entrepreneurs who had left the region due to changing family circumstances or lifestyle priorities. Definite plans to stay for good were relatively rare, suggesting that the move to the

north, and thus the business venture, represented a temporary “lifecourse stopover” (Eimermann, 2017).

I have a plan for the next 10 years or so. I tend to get bored after a while, so every 10-15 years I'd like to try out something new. So I'll probably be here for the next little while, but I wouldn't say forever. Let's see... (Participant 7)

## **Concluding Discussion**

The aim of this study was to examine the migration, lifestyle and business motivations of international winter tourism entrepreneurs who moved to a “low-amenity” rural area in northern Sweden, using the multi-dimensional framework proposed by Carlsen et al. (2008). The first part of the study identified the main personal, locational, experiential and familial factors driving migrants to the north. While personal migration drivers were similar to those identified in the literature, the study found that the locational drivers were quite specific to the northern and low-amenity case study context. The sparsely populated and undeveloped character of the region emerged as a key asset in the migration process, providing the basis for a particular consumptive and experiential lifestyle dimension that would not have been possible in more developed areas. The tourism-migration nexus therefore seems to take a different shape in low-amenity areas when compared to amenity-rich tourism destinations (Eimermann, 2016; Vuin et al., 2016), as migrants are not attracted by existing tourism, but rather by its absence, allowing them to consume the assets of the north whilst capitalising on under-utilised resources for their businesses.

The second part of the study identified the migrants' business motivations and their strategies to balance lifestyle and business interests. Consumptive interests (around outdoor recreation and counter-urban living) were clearly dominant among participants, who included non-entrepreneurs with limited tourist engagement, semi-retirees seeking to reduce their workloads, pure lifestyle seekers opposing further tourism growth, as well as entrepreneurs

converting personal lifestyle passions into “serious leisure” businesses (Stebbins, 2001) yet constraining business growth to preserve their lifestyle ideals (Ateljevic & Doorne, 2000; Carlsen et al., 2008; Ioannides & Petersen, 2003; Shaw & Williams, 2004). As in other studies (Eimermann, 2016; Iversen & Jacobsen, 2016), previous experiences in tourism and entrepreneurship were limited as migrants often entered self-employment by necessity or by accident, and replicated existing products and business models. At first sight, these findings seem to corroborate the assumption that lifestyle migrants may not be ideal drivers for new tourism development in declining rural areas (Ioannides & Petersen, 2003; Lundmark et al., 2014). On the other hand, one cannot ignore that these entrepreneurs can nevertheless make important contributions to the regional tourism portfolio through their niche-oriented business models (Ateljevic & Doorne, 2000; Lundberg & Fredman, 2012), as their lifestyle interests predispose them to both recognise and fill particular market gaps that have not been taken up by local entrepreneurs.

The third objective was to understand the specific role of the northern winter in facilitating both migration and the lifestyle-business balance. Winter was clearly a key drawcard for migrants relying on extended snow security and low temperatures for their preferred outdoor activities. The northern winter may therefore provide an important consumptive and experiential dimension for international migrants from the south, especially as perceptions around climate change and the disappearance of “real winter” increasingly compromise such experiences in their home countries. Yet, the winter was also key for the migrants’ business ideas, thus requiring a variety of strategies for seasonal lifestyle-business balancing, ranging from seasonal business concentration to year-round diversification and non-tourism work during off-season. Seasonal balancing, in conjunction with various mobility practices during off-season, appear to be crucial for the survival of lifestyle

entrepreneurs in the north, particularly as these strategies provide the necessary respite from both the northern environment and the seasonally intense tourism context.

Nevertheless, the temporal dimension of business survival requires further consideration. The particular life stages of migrants, their remote location from family and friends, and their ongoing mobility aspirations, could mean that a certain degree of temporariness and transience in such a remote context may be unavoidable. As such, lifestyle migration may not be a one-off permanent relocation, but merely a temporary stay over an extended period of time (Benson, 2010; Eimermann, 2017). This will have serious implications for regional tourism planners, since there is no guarantee that new product niches developed by migrants will persist after these migrants leave. That migrants are in part attracted through interactions with previous migrants and replicate existing business ideas suggests that there may well be a certain migration and entrepreneurial path-dependence (Stone & Stubbs, 2007) that could help replace leaving entrepreneurs with new arrivals. Yet, the extent to which local stakeholders are able to maintain the tourism momentum once migrant entrepreneurs move on is not clear. While this study has been limited to the migrants' perspectives, more research is needed on how local tourism stakeholders interact with migrant entrepreneurs and benefit from their contributions to tourism.

There is still much to be learned about the migration and business choices of international lifestyle migrants to northern Scandinavia. This case study has been limited to a particular geographic area in northern Sweden and a particular demographic group (Western Europeans). Thus, the findings are not representative of all international migrants and tourism entrepreneurs in northern Scandinavia, and further research is required to compare the experiences and motivations of different migrant nationalities, in different Nordic countries, and in different types of (high- or low-amenity) destinations. In particular, the volume and spatial concentration of international tourism entrepreneurs in different northern peripheries

is currently not well understood, nor is the extent of migrant turnover and the longevity of their business ventures. Future research in this field would benefit from a combination of quantitative and qualitative research approaches that can capture the size as well as the temporal and motivational dimensions of the migrant entrepreneurship phenomenon in the north.

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