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International lifestyle immigrants and their contributions to rural tourism innovation: experiences from Sweden's Far North

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Abstract

This paper discusses the contributions of international lifestyle immigrants to new tourism development and innovation in the sparsely populated north of Sweden. Based on a qualitative case study, the paper examines how lifestyle immigrants contributed as tourism entrepreneurs to the formation of local capital in tourism, and stimulated local learning and innovation spillover through networks of interaction and collaboration. The theoretical framework integrates concepts from rural lifestyle migration, local community development, and local tourism innovation systems. The results document how immigrants emerged as important drivers of new tourism products, processes and markets, and introduced a range of new ideas, skills and external networks to the region. Yet, an in-depth social network analysis reveals that immigrants made more limited contributions to networks, collaborations and knowledge exchange with local tourism stakeholders, thus limiting learning outcomes and innovation spillover at a broader local system level. Reasons for this lack of systemic interaction included socio-cultural distance between immigrants and locals, limited levels of trust and reciprocity, diverging development and lifestyle priorities, and issues around exclusive immigrant networking. Finally, the relevance of the theoretical framework is discussed in relation to its applicability to other immigrant mobilities in sparsely populated rural areas.

Keywords: international lifestyle migration; lifestyle tourism entrepreneurs; local tourism innovation system; rural tourism; social network analysis; sparsely populated north

1. Introduction

Many communities in the remote and sparsely populated peripheries of developed countries have been struggling with socio-economic decline over recent decades due to the vagaries of natural resource industries, a loss of traditional employment, and subsequent outmigration and population aging. Tourism is often presented as one of the few economic alternatives for these communities, despite its potential to stimulate economic rejuvenation and regional development being questioned in academic circles (Hall, 2007; Müller & Jansson, 2007). Peripheral tourism industries tend to be constrained by issues around limited entrepreneurship, a lack of critical mass and diversity of businesses and products, low levels of knowledge and skills, and weak institutional structures that stifle innovation and new development outcomes (Hjalager et al., 2017; Carson & Carson, 2011; Hall, 2007). In-migrant entrepreneurs are sometimes described as potential change agents who could stimulate new tourism development and innovation by bringing new resources, ideas, skills, and network connections to peripheral destinations (Bosworth & Farrell, 2011; Iversen & Jacobsen, 2016; Carson & Carson, 2011). Other studies, however, have challenged the positive contributions of migrant tourism entrepreneurs to innovation and economic change in peripheral areas, arguing that development outcomes may be limited as migrant entrepreneurs are often driven by lifestyle motivations rather than economic growth aspirations (Ioannides & Petersen, 2003; Ateljevic & Doorne, 2000; Lundmark et al., 2014).

While much of the research on migrant tourism entrepreneurs and their impacts on new tourism development in rural or peripheral areas has focused on domestic migrants, relatively little is known about the contributions of international migrant entrepreneurs, particularly in the context of very remote and sparsely populated northern peripheries (Carson et al., 2017). On the one hand, their international origins, different socio-cultural backgrounds, and their particular mobility patterns may predispose them to connect remote communities to global flows of knowledge and trade, and introduce new ideas, products, processes and markets to local economic systems. On the other hand, the same characteristics may prevent immigrants from becoming locally embedded and from sharing their knowledge and development efforts with local system stakeholders in collaborative ways.

The aim of this paper is to provide a better understanding of how international lifestyle-driven migrant entrepreneurs contribute to tourism development and the functioning of interactive tourism innovation systems in a sparsely populated region of northern Sweden. The theoretical framework for the study considers the motivational and mobility dimensions of international tourism entrepreneurship, their contributions to various forms of local capital available for new development, and their interactions with other local stakeholders to stimulate knowledge exchange, learning, collaborative action and innovation spillovers at a local system level. The framework was applied to a case study of lifestyle immigrants from Western Europe who became tourism entrepreneurs in a sparsely populated region of northern Sweden. The findings document the immigrants' contributions to tourism innovation, whilst also identifying the barriers to collaborative interaction, knowledge sharing and learning at the broader destination level. The final discussion reflects on the value of the framework for studying the contributions of international immigrants to innovation and new development in sparsely populated rural areas, and identifies areas for further research.

2. Background

International immigrants are increasingly seen as a potential resource for rural communities seeking demographic and economic rejuvenation (Hedberg & Haandrikman, 2014; Stenbacka, 2013; Hugo & Morén-Alegret, 2008). Particularly more remote and sparsely populated peripheries, where settlements are relatively small, dispersed and isolated from major population, service and political centres, may benefit from new flows of international immigrants, as they struggle to attract in-migrants from domestic sources (Munkejord, 2015; Golebiowska et al., 2016). International mobility and immigration can enhance the global connectivity of rural communities and link local economies to external sources of supply and demand, thus facilitating new avenues for economic development in the periphery (Hedberg et al., 2012; Woods, 2007). As local employment opportunities in the periphery tend to be limited, the incidence of entrepreneurship and business creation among immigrants is often high, suggesting that they may be able to stimulate new economic development in peripheral communities (Najib, 2016; Kalantaridis & Bika, 2011). Immigrant entrepreneurship in peripheral areas appears to be particularly common in the

tourism and hospitality sector, partly because tourism is often perceived as an 'easy' industry with low entry barriers (Lundmark et al., 2014), but also because tourism lends itself to what we term 'lifestyle entrepreneurship', allowing business owners to pursue particular lifestyle goals, such as being able to live in a certain place and having more time for family and leisure interests (Stone & Stubbs, 2007; Eimermann, 2016; Iversen & Jacobsen, 2016).

The contributions of lifestyle-oriented migrant entrepreneurs to rural economies remains debated. Critics have argued that they contribute little to economic development due to their small-scale nature, their limited capacity to generate local employment, and the prevalence of lifestyle-driven semi-retirees and 'non-entrepreneurs' who are more interested in their own lifestyle goals rather than economic growth and development (Ioannides & Petersen, 2003; Ateljevic & Doorne, 2000; Eimermann, 2016; Lundmark et al., 2014). Some studies even claim that lifestyle entrepreneurs oppose growth in tourism (or other industries) to conserve the rural lifestyle values that attracted them (Paniagua, 2002; Ateljevic & Doorne, 2000; Stone & Stubbs, 2007). In turn, other studies suggest that even small-scale and lifestyle-driven migrant businesses can have positive effects on rural tourism development, and local economic development more broadly, as they bring in new business ideas, skills and distribution networks, stimulate competition and raise quality standards, and contribute to local employment by fostering local trade and economic linkages (Bosworth & Farrell, 2011; Najib, 2016).

Despite generic references to the innovation potential of migrant entrepreneurs in rural areas, little work has examined the contributions of these newcomers to local innovation outcomes in a more systematic way (Kalantaridis & Bika, 2011). There is a particular gap in research examining migrant contributions to innovation systems in more remote and sparsely populated regions where numbers of both firms and in-migrants are small, and common quantitative approaches to innovation studies (e.g. measuring patents) are of little value (Carson et al., 2014; Virkkala, 2007). This is complicated by the fact that innovation is a fuzzy concept that is difficult to define and apply across different geographic contexts. Our understanding of innovation concerns the adoption of new knowledge, products, services, processes, markets, or institutions, generating new outcomes that have previously not existed in the same form in the same place. Hence, a new product idea or a

new improved distribution process that may be nothing new in an urban context can constitute an important innovation in a small peripheral community where such have not existed before.

Innovation in a peripheral tourism context continues to be a quite under-researched field, with many studies pointing towards the challenges and barriers for innovation rather than the facilitators (Hjalager, 2017; Carson & Carson, 2011). On the one hand, this reflects the general academic discourse about innovation capacity of peripheral areas, suggesting that these environments are fundamentally disadvantaged in their ability to develop a culture of innovation due to the small and sparse nature of settlements, a lack of critical mass of firms and organisations, and 'institutional thinness' limiting the formation of strong clusters and networks of interaction (Doloreux & Dionne, 2008; Virkkala, 2007). In addition, tourism itself is often ignored in peripheral innovation studies as it is perceived as not a very knowledge and investment intensive service industry, where change and innovation is predominantly small-scale, incremental and process-oriented and difficult to measure (Hall & Williams, 2008).

2.1. *Conceptual framework*

The research for this paper examines the contributions that lifestyle-driven immigrant entrepreneurs make to tourism industries in sparsely populated northern peripheries, and what influence they have on the functioning of rural tourism destinations as tourism innovation systems. This approach considers not only the resources (e.g. ideas, knowledge, investment, etc) and individual innovation contributions (e.g. new products, processes, markets, institutions) that newcomers import to the destination, but how such new inputs are shared within the system through local networks of interaction and collaboration between different tourism stakeholders (such as firms, industry associations, government and non-government agencies, and community groups). Such networks are seen as critical in stimulating interactive learning, spillover of ideas, and collaborative efforts to generate new development at a broader destination level (Booyens & Rogerson, 2017; Carson et al., 2014; Prats et al., 2008).

The framework for the study builds on recent work by Moscardo et al. (2013), which discussed how mobile populations, with their particular mobility characteristics, may interact with local communities and subsequently contribute to the stock of local capital available for new development. Important mobility characteristics include spatial dimensions (e.g. where do people go?), temporal dimensions (e.g. how long do they stay?), and motivational dimensions (e.g. why do they move or why do they select certain destinations?). These characteristics will shape the extent and nature of the migrants' interactions with local stakeholders and their contributions to local capital formation. For example, permanent and long-term migrants are likely to make more profound contributions to local capital and development than more volatile and temporary populations, such as seasonal migrants or short-term visitors (Moscardo et al., 2013). The types of local capital that rural communities can draw upon for local development are diverse, and have previously been summarised by Emery and Flora (2006) as including:

- Natural capital: the natural resources available from the ecosystem.
- Built/manufactured capital: infrastructure, goods and material.
- Financial capital: accumulated wealth and monetary resources.
- Human capital: the skills, abilities, knowledge and motivations of people.
- Cultural capital: features of cultural expression (such as traditions, heritage, language, and beliefs) which influence shared values, contribute to cultural identity, and define cultural norms and behaviours.
- Social capital: the social relationships and network connections that people can access to facilitate collective action; these include 'bonding' social capital, based on dense trust-based relations between like-minded actors, as well as 'bridging' social capital, based on loose and casual relations across spatial, socio-cultural or political divides.
- Political capital: access to power and people's ability to influence decision-making.

These capitals provide a useful starting point to get a more structured and nuanced understanding of the inputs required for new development and innovation. For example,

existing natural capital in rural areas may be re-evaluated by immigrant tourism entrepreneurs with new eyes and subsequently re-packaged and commercialised as new tourist products that local stakeholders may not have thought of (Iversen & Jacobsen, 2016; Bosworth & Farrell, 2011). Some studies have identified rural in-migrants, particularly those from developed countries and urban origins, as relatively wealthy individuals with substantial financial resources who are both able and willing to invest in new local infrastructure and product development, thus converting financial, built or manufactured capital into new tourism products (Eimermann, 2016). They may have higher levels of education than local residents (Hedberg & Haandrikman, 2014; Kalantaridis & Bika, 2011), and may bring in new skills and experiences in tourism and business management, thus improving local marketing and distribution efforts (Carson & Carson, 2011). Immigrants are furthermore likely to have foreign language skills that could be of value for international tourism development in rural areas, and they may import new cultural practices, traditions and values that could result in new products, processes or institutions. Such benefits have, for example, been noted in the context of international return migrants who emerged as important knowledge brokers and institutional change agents after having spent extended periods of time abroad (Klein-Hitpaß, 2016). Immigrants are also likely to possess a better understanding of the characteristics and demand preferences of their home markets (Stone & Stubbs, 2007), and are able to access those markets through their extra-local networks (Hedberg et al., 2012; Najib, 2016).

In-migrants may seek to interact with local stakeholders and access local networks to share extra-local resources and opportunities within the local system, yet without being too constrained or 'locked-in' by entrenched local institutions, hierarchies and network practices (Bosworth & Farrell, 2011; Carson et al., 2014). Such interactions may ultimately lead to processes of knowledge sharing and local learning, lifting the destination to a more competitive level, as local stakeholders get to use resources and implement ideas brought in by migrants (Carson & Carson, 2011). In contrast, there is a risk that immigrants fail to integrate and interact with local stakeholders, due to issues of language barriers, socio-cultural distance, low levels of trust, and conflicting interests with regard to development priorities (Stone & Stubbs, 2007; Najib, 2016). Immigrants may be left out of local decision-making and not get the chance to share their knowledge or assume leadership for new

collaborative development projects. As a result, the capital contributions of immigrants may not transfer from individual contributions across to the local system, or they may remain confined to a relatively narrow set of network connections, including co-ethnic or expatriate networks that share similar socio-cultural and institutional values, as for example observed by Casado-Díaz (2009) in the case of older British lifestyle migrants in Spain.

The following case study applies this conceptual framework to a remote region in northern Sweden that has recently experienced a strong increase in international lifestyle-driven immigrants becoming self-employed in tourism. The case study examines the following questions:

- 1) What were the motivational and mobility characteristics of these immigrant entrepreneurs?
- 2) How have they contributed to the accumulation of local capitals?
- 3) How have they interacted with local stakeholders to stimulate knowledge sharing, learning, collaboration and innovation spillovers at the local system level?

3. The case study region: a new immigrant (tourism) destination?

The study was conducted between April and November 2015 in the three northern inland municipalities of Sorsele (Västerbotten county), Arvidsjaur and Arjeplog (Norrbotten county). The region is located close to the Arctic Circle (Figure 1) and forms part of Swedish Lapland. According to data from Statistics Sweden (2016), it had a population of about 11,900 residents in 2015 (~2,500 in Sorsele, ~2,900 in Arjeplog, and ~6,500 in Arvidsjaur). About two thirds of them were living in one of the three municipal centres, suggesting that the remaining area is very sparsely populated. With forestry, mining and associated manufacturing declining in recent decades, all three municipalities have faced population decline, with Sorsele's population decreasing the most (-21% between 2000 and 2015, compared with -15% in Arjeplog, and -9% in Arvidsjaur).

Figure 1: The case study area in northern Sweden

While international migration to the region has traditionally been dominated by migrants from neighbouring Nordic countries, there have been substantial changes in the immigrant population in recent years (Hedlund et al., 2017). This warrants the consideration of the region as a ‘new immigrant destination’, as the arrival of new immigrant groups has meant new and unprecedented experiences for local populations (Winders, 2014). According to local register data (available through the ASTRID database at Umeå University), the percentage of immigrants born outside the Nordic countries increased strongly in all three municipalities between 1990 and 2010 (from 1% to 9% in Sorsele, 1-5% in Arvidsjaur, and 1-7% in Arjeplog). The share of Western Europeans (defined in the database as born in the EU15-countries, but excluding Switzerland) within the total immigrant cohort increased over the same period, from 8% to 47% in Sorsele, 9-24% in Arvidsjaur and 11-29% in Arjeplog. Western European immigrants had very high rates of self-employment (around 17% of all working-age migrants), compared to immigrants from other parts of the world (~6%), or Swedish-born residents (~11%). They also had relatively higher levels of education (with 39% of working-age Western Europeans having higher education, compared to 26% for other immigrants and 22% for Swedish-born residents).

Tourism has been a popular industry for self-employment among Western European immigrants in the case study region. An audit of local tourism businesses identified around 30 tourism entrepreneurs originating from countries such as Germany, Switzerland, the UK, the Netherlands and France. These have largely specialised in new outdoor activity niches (e.g. dogsledding, snowmobiling, fishing, canoeing, trekking etc) and small-scale accommodation offers. According to local tourism managers, these entrepreneurs started to emerge during the mid-2000s, and have since diversified the local tourism market away from the traditionally dominant visitor markets: business tourists and fly-in/fly-out contractors working in the winter car testing industry, and low-yield summer tourists, such as self-contained caravan and camping tourists and second home tourists.

To date, tourism in the area is still a small-scale industry, with annual visitor numbers remaining far below those in more established ski resorts further south. As a result, there have been hardly any tensions locally around excessive tourism development, gentrification, displacement of locals and negative social impacts arising from tourism, which have commonly been observed in more popular amenity-rich tourism destinations (Phillips, 2010; Moore et al., 2006). Most tourism businesses in the region are small and family-run, and many of them are still operating on a seasonal basis. There are few localised tourism clusters with more than just a couple of businesses, and these concentrate primarily in the municipal centres, where most of the larger hotels and restaurants are located. These clusters primarily service the visiting business tourist market and the car testing industry and do not specifically target leisure tourism.

4. Methods

The case study was qualitative in nature, aimed at developing a deeper understanding of the experiences of a relatively small number of immigrants and local tourism stakeholders. Data were primarily drawn from in-depth interviews with immigrant tourism entrepreneurs, and complemented with insights from discussions with local key stakeholders (such as local government representatives, destination managers, and local business owners) and public documents (such as strategic plans, industry newsletters, newspaper articles, and local tourism brochures).

The aim was to recruit international tourism entrepreneurs who moved to the region for lifestyle-related reasons. A convenience sampling approach was used to recruit the largest possible sample from a rather small target population. Potential participants were identified through public documents and local key informants, as well as subsequent 'snowball sampling' (with initial participants recommending additional participants during the fieldwork). Thirty potential participants were identified in the region, who were then contacted and informed about the study focus. In total, 20 could finally be recruited for an interview. Ten of them were living in Sorsele, seven in Arvidsjaur, and three in Arjeplog municipality. Thirteen participants were from Germany, four from Switzerland, and one each from the Netherlands, the UK and France. Twelve participants were middle to older age couples (40-65 years) living without children, four participants were families with young children, and another four respondents were younger couples or singles (under 40 years) without children. Most participants had lived in the area for more than five years, while six participants were more recent arrivals. Immigrants were primarily 'full-time' residential migrants (i.e. not seasonal) and had their Swedish homes registered as their primary residences.

Interviews were conducted face-to-face and typically lasted between 45 and 90 minutes. The interviews followed a broad interview guideline containing (amongst others) questions about people's migration and business motivations, their perceived contributions to local tourism development, and their experiences in relation to interactions and collaboration with other local tourism stakeholders. The interviews were conducted in either German or English (with non-German speakers), audio-taped and subsequently transcribed. All quotes presented in this paper were de-identified to protect data confidentiality, and German quotes were translated into English.

The written data were analysed using thematic content analysis and a qualitative social network analysis (Carson et al., 2014). The thematic content analysis relied on manual coding and screened the interview transcripts for common themes, using deductive codes from the conceptual framework and inductive codes emerging from the data. The subsequent social network analysis mapped out the immigrants' local and external business networks identified through interviews and secondary data sources (e.g. business websites, tourism brochures, and local tourism plans). Network connections typically included both

formal business collaborations (e.g. formalised product packages involving multiple operators), supply linkages (e.g. businesses buying products from local providers), as well as informal cooperation via business referrals. Network graphs were created to illustrate the type and extent of network connections, using the open-source software tool NodeXL.

The obtained network graphs, in connection with a summary of the interview findings, were presented to a number of local government and tourism stakeholders to both validate the findings and obtain additional or alternative explanations from local stakeholders. This part of the research was limited to more casual discussions with a narrow range of stakeholders (e.g. local government representatives, local/regional tourism managers, and a couple of local business owners). Time constraints meant that the study did not include formal in-depth interviews with local tourism businesses, which may have biased the outcomes of the research towards the perceptions of the immigrants. This may seem problematic when exploring the immigrants' perceived contributions to local development and innovation, since the respondents may consider themselves in a more positive light to justify their own choices and practices. Yet, we sought to reduce such bias through continuous 'probing' and follow-up questions, prompting the respondents to critically reflect on their own behaviours and potential negative impacts on the local tourism system. In addition, triangulation with data from public documents and the discussions with local key stakeholders were used to put the immigrant interviews into perspective.

5. Results

5.1. Common migrant, mobility and business characteristics

All participants identified lifestyle factors and the search for a better and more balanced quality of life as the major reasons for their relocations. They mostly originated from urban or densely populated areas, and cited common counter-urban migration motives as the main reasons for moving to northern Sweden. These motives centred around a desire to live in a relatively isolated and undeveloped environment and enjoy experiences of solitude, tranquillity, untouched nature, wide open spaces and personal freedom (Carson et al., 2017). The sparsely populated north was deliberately selected over rural areas further south, which were considered as too crowded or expensive, and as offering limited contrast

to their previous home environments. While more exotic destinations in Canada or Alaska would have been preferred by many (Carson et al., 2017), the proximity of Sweden to their home countries, as well as financial reasons and the relative ease of movement within Europe were major reasons for settling in northern Sweden. Apart from one respondent, all participants had chosen to live in or outside small villages (< 300 residents), and away from the larger municipal centres, to find the desired level of solitude and isolation.

Another important lifestyle factor motivating migration was the desire to live in an area where immigrants could pursue particular recreational hobbies (e.g. snowmobiling, dogsledding and running a husky kennel) that were not possible in their home countries. The northern climate (characterised by long winters and snow security) and the sparsely populated nature environment offered ideal conditions for such leisure pursuits, suggesting that natural place amenities were important factors influencing the immigrants' destination choices (Carson et al., 2017). In contrast to other studies on counter-urban lifestyle migration (Eimermann, 2017; Stockdale, 2014; Thulemark, 2011), social or cultural motivations, such as reconnecting with traditional rural communities and getting involved in local community development, were generally not important in their quest for a 'good life'. Some respondents had visited the region previously as tourists or volunteer workers (e.g. as doghandlers in husky kennels), but none of them cited family or friends as reasons for moving to the area.

The type of tourism businesses run by immigrants included a mix of accommodation (17), guided outdoor tours (13), F&B (3), and other retail (2). As documented in more detail in Carson et al. (2017), lifestyle considerations were important in shaping the nature and extent of the participants' businesses. Most respondents had no aspirations for economic growth and sought to limit the size of their businesses to have more time for their families or hobbies. Businesses were predominantly owner-operated micro-businesses, and only three businesses employed paid staff. In addition, seasonal business-lifestyle balancing was common, suggesting that time off from the business during parts of the year was appreciated and that year-round tourism growth was not a priority for most (see Dawson et al., 2011). As in previous studies on lifestyle migration and tourism entrepreneurship (Iversen & Jacobsen, 2016; Stone & Stubbs, 2007), few immigrants arrived with clear business plans and ambitions for self-employment. Instead, the majority decided to start a

business after migration, either because they could not find alternative employment or because they recognised tourism as an easy income opportunity that was compatible with their lifestyle ideals.

One group (8 respondents) converted their personal lifestyle passions (e.g. dogsledding) into a convenient income stream, while another group (7 respondents) consisted of semi-retirees who started a casual tourism business (e.g. guided tours or accommodation) to bridge the time until retirement. A third group (5 respondents) included younger entrepreneurs who were more growth-oriented and had clear ambitions to succeed with their business ideas, as well as grow tourism on a broader regional level. This reflects the diversity of different types of tourism lifestyle entrepreneurs that have previously been identified in the literature (Carlsen et al., 2008). Most participants had good levels of education (including post-secondary education), and some had also previous experiences as business owners or managers. While only a few had specific working or business experiences in tourism, most respondents cited extensive international travel experience as either tourists or volunteer workers in other remote peripheries.

5.2. *Immigrant entrepreneurs and their contributions to local capital and innovation*

Most businesses offered tourism products based around the very experiences that had attracted them as lifestyle migrants in the first place: small and secluded accommodation in a natural and peaceful environment and guided outdoor activities designed to enjoy the scenic landscape and remoteness of the place. There were comments explaining that immigrants were re-interpreting and commercialising the natural assets of the north in ways that locals had either not thought of or were not interested in. In particular, guided outdoor activities were often mentioned as a relatively new addition to the regional tourism portfolio, and a market niche that was primarily serviced by immigrant entrepreneurs. According to one of the regional tourism managers, there had been few commercial dogsledding or snowmobiling tour operators in the region up until the mid-2000s when immigrants started to fill these product gaps. Immigrant entrepreneurs were also instrumental in promoting the region's exotic appeal as a winter adventure destination, whereas many local providers traditionally considered the summer as their main season. As explained by one local government representative:

"I think we as locals are sometimes a bit 'snow-blind', we don't see what is so special about the area or the winter. For us, it is nothing out of the ordinary, we prefer to go south for our holidays to get away from the snow and the cold, the darkness and the isolation. They [immigrants] see this differently. For them, it's a new experience and an adventure. (...) And they know that this is something that international tourists find attractive, whereas we think 'why would anyone want to go out in minus 20 degrees and tour around in the forest?'"

Converting 'free' natural resources into successful commercial tourist products was repeatedly described by both immigrants and local stakeholders as something that locals were not so familiar with and sometimes struggled to understand. A common remark was that local operators had limited understandings of how to make money from nature-based experiences given that Swedes consider access to nature as a non-tradable good that everybody should be allowed to access for free, as explained by Participant 3:

"One problem for nature-based tourism here is that nature is so abundant, it's everywhere and it's easy to access. In fact, everybody should have access to it, this is part of the Swedish 'allmansrätten' [Right of Public Access]. You can't charge tourists to access the forest or the river, so you have to be a bit more creative in terms of extra services you can sell. (...) But I think making money from nature experiences is not part of the Swedish spirit. It has taken me years to convince the local fishing association to raise the prices for fishing cards. They didn't understand that tourists from Germany are quite happy to pay for an experience they can't get in Germany."

Participant 5 and Participant 16 explained that locals were often content with renting out basic accommodation or equipment to self-contained tourists, yet without offering a service component that could increase the commercial value of those products. For example, while there were several local companies renting out snowmobiles for independent use, few of them offered guided tour options or introduction courses for international guests who had limited driving skills and knowledge of the region. Similarly, even though fishing was known as a popular pastime among locals, commercial fishing tourism products (such as guided fishing tours or flyfishing instructions for tourists arriving without their own equipment) were described as a relatively recent product stream that was to a large extent driven by foreigners.

Another product gap addressed by immigrant entrepreneurs concerned the range and quality of accommodation options. According to one local tourism manager, the region's previous accommodation offer had been limited to either standard hotel rooms in the larger towns or very basic self-contained accommodation in the wilderness offering low-standard amenities. Many of the immigrant entrepreneurs were catering to international niche markets who demanded high-quality yet small and personalised accommodation options, away from the main centres. As a result, they often made substantial investments on their rural properties to either renovate existing facilities or build new facilities (e.g. guest houses and cabins) that provided the sort of accommodation standard expected by Western Europeans. Though such new infrastructure additions were primarily small-scale, they nevertheless demonstrate a willingness among immigrants to invest financial capital in the region aimed at improving the range and quality of tourism infrastructure.

In terms of human or cultural capital, a major contribution by immigrants was knowledge about external markets from their home countries, as well as foreign language skills. For example, Participant 12 and Participant 17 offered their language services to regional tourism organisations and attended international trade shows on behalf of the destination marketing organisation. Another comment was that immigrants had brought a new entrepreneurial spirit to the region, particularly as the local business mentality in northern Sweden was repeatedly described as 'not very competitive', 'slack', or 'lacking ambition and competitive thinking'. In contrast, many participants considered themselves as being more opportunity-driven and market-oriented by constantly trying to fill identified product and service gaps. This was often linked to a stark contrast in mentality and cultural stereotypes, describing Western Europeans (in particular Germans) as highly ambitious and competitive people who are never satisfied and always strive for more and better things. In contrast, the local Swedes were described as humble and modest people who do not want to do more than absolutely necessary, let alone outperform their competitors. As explained by Participant 14:

„We've noticed up here, the mentality is very different to what we are used to in Germany. If you suggest to locals to expand their businesses with this and that because you know there would be demand for it, they are often just not interested. Why invest any more time or energy than absolutely needed? They call it 'lagom' – it's Swedish for 'it's just right, we don't need any more or less'. They are

content with what's there, and that's very different from us Germans...we always want a little bit more, and we want to have it better than our neighbours. The Swedes here don't think like that."

While many respondents appreciated the more relaxed northern mentality from a lifestyle perspective, they thought that it compromised efforts to develop international tourism in the region. A common point of criticism was that, even though the local tourism industry was keen on attracting international tourists, they often lacked an understanding of external market demands. Local industry stakeholders were described as having limited ambitions to improve their products and services, despite receiving suggestions and advice from immigrants who were more familiar with international market expectations. Several respondents explained how they had tried to share their knowledge with local stakeholders, but were often frustrated that local stakeholders were not prepared to absorb and apply such knowledge. This is illustrated by Participant 5 who argued:

"Our guests simply have higher quality demands, they expect something different to what the locals here are trying to offer. It's often about simple things, such as providing ensuite toilets rather than shared facilities. They [local business owners] know this, we've had countless meetings and industry forums where we discussed these things, but they just don't react, they don't see a need to change. Or another example: how often have I tried to tell them that they need a more professional online presence? Not those self-made websites where you can't find any information. Tourists nowadays want to know from your website what it costs, when it is available, and how they can book it online...as simple as that. But nothing happens. It's sometimes like talking to a brick wall."

Some immigrant entrepreneurs thought that their efforts to contribute to local learning and capacity building were flawed because of cultural misunderstandings and certain immigrant practices that were not compatible with local customs and norms. For example, Participant 14 admitted that his well-meaning advice to the local tourism managers had fallen on deaf ears because he came across as overly pushy and arrogant. Similar observations were confirmed by Participant 1 and Participant 13 who described the local reputation of Western Europeans as one of arrogant 'know-it-all's – something that was not well respected within the 'Nordic-noble' Swedish culture. Participant 12 and Participant 18 explained that simply telling locals what to do was the wrong approach towards knowledge sharing and learning. Instead, working with locals on projects with

mutual benefits, and demonstrating to them through hands-on collaboration how and why things should be done differently, was seen as the key. However, as lamented by Participant 18, few immigrants seemed to have the time and patience to invest in such gradual relationship building:

"I noticed pretty quickly that telling them 'this is what a typical Swiss customer expects' doesn't get you very far. I work a lot with a local Sami couple, they are very simple people. They know a lot about Sami culture, but they have never been outside Sweden before, so how can they possibly understand the Swiss mindset? And so I invited them on a trip to Switzerland to actually experience what life in Switzerland is like, what people do and expect, but also what they don't have and what we can provide for them up here. I think this has been a real eye-opener for them. But it takes some time and effort to build that trust and understanding, a lot of newcomers here don't seem to realise that."

In terms of social capital contributions, immigrants were successful at importing new external networks and market connections into the region (as illustrated in Figure 2), something that was also identified as a key contribution by local government and tourism stakeholders. Most immigrant entrepreneurs attracted a substantial proportion of their customers from international markets, either through their own personal networks or through links to external companies and tour operators (almost half of all respondents had formal business collaborations with companies abroad). In contrast, building collaborative networks with local tourism stakeholders was often described as more challenging and taking much longer than expected. Many immigrants started their businesses thinking that local tourism operators would be happy and excited about new opportunities for collaboration, given the small and fragmented nature of the local tourism industry. Instead, a common experience was that local business owners were quite reserved towards immigrants, reflecting the somewhat shy and unobtrusive Swedish mentality. One particular concern was that the immigrants' attempts at building local collaboration networks were not reciprocated by locals, meaning that collaboration efforts were seen as a one-way street, as explained by Participant 14:

"At the beginning, we were probably a bit naïve and thought we could just get in touch with some of the local businesses here and work out some package deals, or at least send each other customers and pool our resources that way. But it didn't really work out (...). For example, we tried it with [one local

business] and they just said ‘sure, send us your guests’, but they never sent us any of theirs, not even once.”

Participant 9 and Participant 18 both thought that earning the trust of locals was such a long and difficult process because many immigrants from Western Europe had previously disappointed local hopes, either by not staying very long or by displaying bad and disrespectful behaviour. While this was not directly confirmed by the few local stakeholders interviewed during the study, some local government representatives admitted that it was difficult for them to embed immigrants in local networking efforts. From their perspective, it was more an issue that immigrants were not patient enough and expected tangible outcomes too quickly, while the ‘Swedish way’ was more laid-back and often involved multiple meetings of discussions and informal social networking before more concrete projects or development strategies were implemented. This observation was shared by many immigrants, as explained by Participant 20:

“Their favourite pastime here is ‘möte’ [Swedish for ‘meeting’]. For example, they have business breakfast meetings all the time, and apparently it’s for networking... but for me it’s more like ‘net-without the -working’ bit. The same ideas are discussed over and over again, but at the end of the day nothing happens, and nobody takes action. When we were new here we went to all these meetings because we thought we could get some useful contacts, but there is hardly ever any outcome. Just too frustrating, so we gave up after a while. Why waste your time on all these talkfests? Plus it’s not just the time for the meeting itself, it’s also a 140km roundtrip to attend those meetings.”

The quote above also illustrates that physical distance and isolation between stakeholders was an additional barrier for networking and collaboration. Immigrants who were predominantly settling in the smaller and more isolated villages were not interacting with tourism stakeholders in or around the municipal centres on a regular basis. While networking and collaboration arrangements could be managed online or by phone, this was described by some as not being ‘the Swedish way’ (*“They don’t respond to emails, particularly not in English, unless they know you really well. You usually have to meet them in person.”*, Participant 13). As explained by Participant 4, there was also some criticism that public tourism stakeholders hardly ever made an effort to meet immigrant businesses in their remote locations, whilst at the same time expecting those business owners to turn up

at meetings held in the main towns. Again, this reflects perceived concerns around limited reciprocity in network and collaboration efforts.

Despite these difficulties, there was a general sense that immigrant businesses were interested in accessing local business networks and working with local stakeholders for shared benefits. Many participants emphasised that they sought out local suppliers (e.g. builders, traders or food suppliers) where possible, to make sure economic benefits would stay in the region. Using local producers was also seen as adding a more authentic or exotic touch to their tourism products. For example, great efforts were made to establish links with a few Sami-operated businesses in the region (e.g. reindeer herders, meat producers, cultural guides), because Sami culture was seen as an attractive aspect that could enhance tourism packages for international markets. In contrast, collaborative links with other local tourism businesses were more limited, as outlined in Figure 2. In particular, collaboration with the bigger hotels was often described as difficult, as these operators were seen as pursuing different market priorities (e.g. car testers, business tourists, construction workers) and as not very supportive of package deals for the leisure tourism market.

Figure 2: Business networks held by immigrant tourism entrepreneurs

Difficulties in networking and collaborating with local tourism stakeholders were often compensated by networks with other immigrant entrepreneurs. When asked about their most common business networks in the region, the majority of participants listed other immigrants as their main contacts, either for formalised package deals or informal customer referrals. Networking with other immigrants was described as ‘easier’ and more straight-forward, because they were usually speaking the same language, were targeting the same markets and had similar cultural values and work ethics. Ten German-speaking entrepreneurs even started a formal German-speaking business association to create a platform for joint marketing and product development, and to act as a more powerful lobbying group within the regional tourism marketing organisation. As explained by Participant 5:

“We felt that we were not getting anywhere by going to those official network meetings. So we started our own little network, it’s mainly for German-speaking businesses. It doesn’t have to be

Germans, but they should speak German as we are primarily dealing with the German-speaking market. We think this is a useful platform for us because it's like-minded people getting together and discussing similar interests. We have a different background and attitude compared with some of the Swedish businesses here, probably because of our culture and upbringing. It's not that we want to exclude ourselves from the locals, but some things are just easier to discuss with other [immigrants]."

Interestingly, the local government representatives and tourism managers did not see such immigrant networks as an issue. Instead, it was described as another useful layer of networks in the region that went across different municipal and county borders and helped promote the larger region as a tourism destination on a more international scale.

Networking and collaboration between the different municipalities, and even between different villages within municipalities, had often been difficult in the past due to historic rivalries and embedded parochial thinking. The new immigrants were less aware of such internal rivalries and boundaries, and were seen as useful bridging agents connecting some of these fragmented communities, as described by one local government representative:

"Arjeplog and Arvidsjaur could never really work together. Too much competition and jealousy. They tried a regional collaboration and had a joint DMO [destination marketing organisation] for a while, but it didn't work out. And when you look now, you can see that there are quite a few networks and collaborations happening between these newcomers, so from a regional perspective it can only be good for us. And it is definitely something that Swedish Lapland [the supra-regional DMO] is interested in because they want to promote the whole county internationally."

Nevertheless, there were also negative remarks about such exclusive immigrant networks, not least from some immigrants themselves who regarded them as 'international enclaves' and as examples of bad migrant behaviour and poor integration efforts. Some respondents sought to avoid collaborations with other immigrant entrepreneurs, describing them as disregarding local practices and as being overly concerned with their own business interests rather than the interests of local people and communities. As explained by Participant 12:

"That's exactly what we DON'T want! We don't want a Dutch or German enclave. We want to integrate in Swedish society, or else we could have just stayed at home. We make a deliberate effort to become locally involved. I volunteer in the local community association and a local sporting group."

It's about giving something back to the community, not like some of these migrants who just come here to consume the lifestyle, make some money and then disappear again. They are known as the 'gold diggers' around here..."

Community engagement efforts, such as those described above, were however rare, with only three respondents emphasising that they made efforts to contribute to community volunteering or non-commercial development projects. Getting involved in local community groups and building up a dense social network of Swedish friends was not a priority for most, either because they wanted to get away from society and enjoy a quiet lifestyle, or because they thought they were too busy with their businesses. Also only three respondents mentioned that they sought to become involved in local leadership groups or other organisations involved in tourism-related planning and decision-making. Connections to public sector stakeholders, and direct influence on local planning and decision-making, were therefore limited among the participants. Again, time constraints and conflicting lifestyle priorities were mentioned as reasons, but also language barriers, a lack of knowledge about local hierarchies, and a feeling that foreigners should not impose themselves on local decision-making. This means that, despite their potential knowledge and innovation contributions, their impact on political capital and their ability to influence local development plans were rather limited.

6. Discussion and Conclusion

This paper has sought to provide a better understanding of how international lifestyle-driven migrant entrepreneurs contribute to tourism development and the functioning of interactive tourism innovation systems in a sparsely populated region. The paper has presented a multi-dimensional framework for analysis, drawing on concepts from Moscardo et al.'s (2013) work on mobilities and community development, Emery and Flora's (2006) work on community capitals, and the idea of local tourism innovation systems emerging from interactive networks of knowledge exchange and collaboration (Booyens & Rogerson, 2017; Carson et al., 2014; Prats et al., 2008). In applying this framework to a case study in northern Sweden, the research identified the nuanced contributions of lifestyle-oriented immigrant tourism entrepreneurs to local capital accumulation, and their interactions with

the local tourism system to stimulate knowledge sharing, learning, collaborative action, and innovation spillover.

The findings confirm that immigrant tourism entrepreneurs from Western European countries were primarily driven by lifestyle motivations, including counter-urban living and particular outdoor hobbies reliant on natural amenities available in the sparsely populated north. With a few notable exceptions, entrepreneurial aspirations in tourism were not the main motivation driving immigrants to the north, though many identified and implemented new business and development opportunities after arrival. Business models were predominantly small and micro-scale, generating limited local employment, whilst allowing for semi-retirement and lifestyle pursuits. As such, these immigrant businesses were similar to common descriptions of tourism lifestyle entrepreneurs in the literature (Carlsen et al., 2008; Iversen & Jacobsen, 2016; Stone & Stubs, 2007; Ioannides & Petersen, 2003), suggesting that they may not have the entrepreneurial textbook traits required to stimulate new tourism development and innovation. Yet, the findings also confirm other studies (e.g. Bosworth & Farrell, 2011; Eimermann, 2016) suggesting that these lifestyle-oriented business owners nevertheless make important contributions to the local tourism system. They were successful at commercialising local resources in novel ways, by introducing new product ideas and market knowledge, improving service and quality standards, and connecting the destination to new external (international) markets.

Mapping the contributions of immigrant entrepreneurs against the multiple types of community capital (Emery & Flora, 2006; Moscardo et al., 2013) has provided a useful tool to identify and evaluate those contributions in a more structured and nuanced way. New development emerging from existing **natural capital** was evident in how immigrants were able to re-interpret and commercialise existing 'free' natural resources as new tourism products that local stakeholders had not used in the same ways before. In addition, the small-scale nature of new tourism development, as well as the relatively low number and density of new tourism entrepreneurs, means that local concerns about potential negative impacts from tourism on natural environments have been very limited thus far. While investment of **financial capital** has remained small-scale and constrained by the migrants' lifestyle priorities, it has nevertheless resulted in new and improved tourism infrastructure,

particularly in the alternative accommodation sector, thus extending ***built capital*** for new tourism development.

Despite higher education levels, immigrants did not necessarily bring any professional tourism knowledge or skills into the region. Still, their international backgrounds and travel experiences meant that they had extensive applied knowledge about their home markets that could be used to identify and develop new products, improve expected quality standards, and enhance marketing and distribution processes (e.g. web-marketing; working with international tour operators). In addition, their foreign language skills were of considerable value to local or regional tourism organisations interested in marketing the destination to new international markets. As a result, ***human capital*** contributions did not so much manifest through formal education and professional knowledge transfer, but through the application of informal skills, experiences and cultural understandings. Creativity and a new entrepreneurial spirit, characterised by more competitive and outcome-oriented thinking, were additional contributions to the human and ***cultural capital*** available for tourism development in the region. However, such new cultural norms and traditions were not always helpful in accessing and mobilising local resources. This was interesting to observe insofar as one would usually expect relatively limited socio-cultural distance between northern Swedes and other Western Europeans. Yet, there were a number of subtle cultural and institutional differences that acted as barriers to interaction, and to sharing different ideas and approaches to tourism development. Language barriers were only one small part of the puzzle, while issues around cultural misunderstandings, different attitudes and networking behaviours, and different manners and demeanour seemed to have a more critical impact. In contrast to previous observations around international return migration (e.g. Klein-Hitpaß, 2016), our findings suggest that the abilities of immigrants to become new knowledge brokers and institutional change agents within the local system may be more limited – or they may take more time to evolve as immigrants first have to learn how to navigate local institutional settings.

In terms of ***social capital*** contributions, there was evidence of substantial new bridging capital emerging from extra-local networks and business connections to their international home countries. In addition, the rather extensive networks within the immigrant community suggest a new form of bridging capital that has started to link

historically disconnected villages and municipalities together as a regional destination. Nevertheless, the challenge remains as to how to share such bridging ties across the rest of the local system to generate more interaction, collaboration and learning between immigrants and local stakeholders. In this case study, cultural differences, limited trust that takes a long time to build, and different development priorities (e.g. leisure tourism versus car testing) were among the key challenges for embedding immigrant entrepreneurs in local network dynamics. In addition, the immigrants' dominant lifestyle ideals (i.e. seeking solitude and enjoying nature and outdoor hobbies, rather than engaging in local community activities) appeared to limit local bonding efforts, particularly as bonding with other immigrants was seen as easier due to shared language, interests and cultural understandings. This reflects observations from Casado-Díaz' (2009) study on older British lifestyle migrants in Spain, suggesting that lifestyle-driven immigrants may form their own lifestyle communities instead of seeking to become a part of existing local communities. Also limited immigrant contributions to *political capital* in the form of assuming leadership roles and getting involved in higher-level planning and decision-making seem to have compromised the exchange and sharing of resources and knowledge between immigrant and local stakeholders. In this respect, the findings differ substantially from similar studies on domestic lifestyle entrepreneurs (Bosworth & Farrell, 2011), presumably due to the added socio-cultural complexity of international migration. These issues raise important questions about the ability of immigrant entrepreneurs to stimulate local learning, capital spillover and innovation outcomes within the remaining industry, as individual innovation contributions may not translate to a broader system level, at least not within a short timeframe.

It would be useful to monitor the development of such network constellations over a longer term to identify if and how connections change as a result of immigrants having spent more time in the destination, and locals having been more exposed to new immigrant behaviours. Some case study evidence suggests that immigrant entrepreneurs with more patient and persistent approaches to local collaboration have been more successful at building closer relationships with local businesses. Other findings, however, suggest that locals may become wary of 'bad' immigrant behaviour, and may limit their social bonding and networking efforts due to disappointed hopes and experiences of lifestyle migrants

'coming and going' on a regular basis. The temporal mobility dimension of international lifestyle migration may therefore have important impacts on local perceptions and levels of trust. While the immigrant entrepreneurs in this case study had largely demonstrated both full-time and long-term residence intentions and business commitments, other immigrants may have more volatile, seasonal and short-term mobility patterns (Eimermann, 2016 and 2017; Stone & Stubbs, 2007), thus compromising the reputation and reception of these migrants among locals.

The spatial mobility dimension of lifestyle immigrants also deserves some attention. Their preference for small and isolated villages over larger municipal centres suggests that immigrants have generated new tourism flows to places that have traditionally not seen many international tourists. Small numbers of businesses and visitors mean that this may not (yet) have generated much spillover in terms of local linkages and new business creation in those villages. Still, the presence of immigrant tourism entrepreneurs in the more sparsely populated areas has at least started to diversify the dominant form of tourism in the region away from the main municipal centres and the strong dependence on the car testing industry. The preference for small villages among lifestyle immigrants could also mean a renewed sense of pride and confidence among local community members as they realise that international migrants and tourists are drawn to places by the very amenities that have often been blamed for the local demise of rural villages (e.g. lack of industrial development and jobs, sparse populations, and attributes around isolation). The present case study has not been able to explore such local experiences in more detail, and further work is required to identify the nuanced perceptions of local industry and community stakeholders.

Finally, more research work is required to compare the impacts of different types of migrants and mobilities on local development in more detail. This case study has been limited to exploring the contributions of a particular type of immigrant (i.e. lifestyle-driven and from Western European countries) to a particular form of economic development (i.e. tourism). Immigrants from other parts of the world are likely to be driven by other motivational factors, and will thus exhibit very different spatial and temporal mobility patterns, as well as different interactions with local communities. For example, emerging research on refugees or non-European immigrants in rural areas suggests a higher

concentration of migrants in the larger municipal centres, rather than the smaller villages (Hedberg & Haandrikman, 2014; Najib, 2016; Stenbacka, 2013). They may also show higher rates of migrant turnover, lower rates of self-employment, and economic engagement in industries other than tourism (Hedlund et al., 2017), suggesting that there may be vastly different opportunities and constraints for local development. Similarly, more pronounced issues around socio-cultural distance and different networking behaviours may influence the extent to which these immigrant groups can engage in local networks and development efforts (Munkejord, 2015). Further research comparing different immigrant mobilities and their impacts on local socio-economic development in sparsely populated areas will be useful to better understand the extent to which rural communities can benefit from such mobilities. The use of more systematic research frameworks, such as the one applied in this paper, may enhance comparisons across different mobilities and different case study contexts.

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