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## **Retaining Tourism Lifestyle Entrepreneurs for Destination Competitiveness**

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### **Abstract**

Due to their representativeness in the universe of tourism businesses and the potential to generate innovation, tourism lifestyle entrepreneurs (TLEs) play an essential role in the competitiveness of tourism destinations. Despite this vital importance, the antecedents of innovation generated by these entrepreneurs and their willingness to stay at the destination are still under-explored. Findings from a survey of 178 TLEs, indicate that the context influences community attachment, and affects indirectly innovation and willingness to stay. Community attachment has a positive influence on entrepreneurial self-efficacy, innovation and willingness to stay. A transition of the context results to developing economies was also taken into consideration. Theoretical and practical implications are discussed.

**Keywords:** Lifestyle entrepreneurship; Local knowledge; Destination Competitiveness; Creative Tourism; Partial Least Squares.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Tourism lifestyle entrepreneurs (TLEs) represent a very expressive group in the universe of businesses operating in the tourism sector. They can be defined as ‘tourism business owners who are actively pursuing a different lifestyle’ (Bosworth & Farrel, 2011, p. 1475), meaning that they are regulated by financial and non-financial indicators (Thomas et al., 2011). There is also evidence that these entrepreneurs play an essential role in the destinations’ sustainability and innovation (Shrivastava & Kennelly, 2013; Yachin, 2019). Because they are embedded in the local community they have, on the one hand, a central concern with the preservation of the way of life, culture and environment of the places where they develop their activity (Bosworth & Farrell, 2011; Morrison, 2006). On the other hand, their community attachment allows them to access local knowledge that is unique and difficult to imitate (Hoarau, 2014). Additionally, this proximity facilitates the network with local stakeholders (Czernek, 2017). The facilitated access to the local community and networking enables them to offer more genuine and differentiated experiences bounded to the place (Richards, 2011), allowing to respond to the growing demand by tourists for products and services with characteristics associated with the place (Arias & Cruz, 2018). As such, these experiences constitute the basis of their competitiveness in relation to large companies and entrepreneurs from other locations (Mottiar, 2007). In this way, local knowledge and tourism resources become a source of global competitiveness (Dias et al., 2020b; Guercini & Ceccarelli, 2020). Previous research has recognized that TLEs are not only better than large companies in product and service innovation (Shaw & Williams, 2004), but also creating niche markets (Koh & Hatten, 2002), and promoting destination diversification (Bosworth & Farrell, 2011). As Ryan et al. (2012) state, they act as triggers of destination change and innovation. In this way, destinations benefit from the existence of these entrepreneurs both by attracting tourists seeking genuine and immersive experiences (Bredvold & Skålén, 2016) and by the spillover effect of innovation generated in these small-scale businesses (Zhang et al., 2015).

Despite this prominent role, TLEs still remains an underexplored topic in academic research (Sun & Xu, 2019; Thomas et al., 2011). By pursuing lifestyle objectives, TLEs cannot be analysed using the same lenses of other business (Bosworth & Farrell, 2011; Carlsen, Morrison, & Weber, 2008). In particular, there is a need to extend existing knowledge about the TLEs innovation antecedents, particularly in the mechanisms leading to the integration of local knowledge into innovation processes (Hjalager et al., 2018; Yachin, 2019). Furthermore, given that TLEs runs unstructured businesses, its activities are pointed out as entrepreneurial *bricolage* (Arias & Cruz, 2018). Nevertheless, TLEs do not disregard business performance in running their business (Wang et al., 2019). Instead, they use their own individual indicators, associated to their perception of entrepreneurial self-efficacy. However, the way entrepreneurial self-efficacy influences decisions to innovate and to stay in a certain destination remains scarcely explored. In essence, these gaps stem from the fact that entrepreneurship in tourism is much centred in the person (Steyaert, 2007), and not considered as a process, as Fu et al. (2019) suggest, with less attention being paid to the dependent variables like innovation (Hoarau, 2014) and TLEs willingness to remain in a specific destination (Guercini & Ceccarelli, 2020). In this sense, this research aims to know the background of the innovation generated by TLEs. Given the importance of this innovation in tourist destinations, a second objective is to evaluate the factors that simultaneously influence the willingness to stay in a specific one.

The contributions of this research are fourfold in the context of TLEs research. First, it presents empirical results concerning the role that the context presents as a background to innovation and willingness to stay. Second, the innovation antecedents of these entrepreneurs are still little explored (c.f. Dias et al., 2020b; Thomas et al. 2011; Yachin, 2019). Thus, an empirical relationship is established between community attachment and innovation and willingness to stay. Third, this study introduces research on willingness to stay, as well as the role that context, community attachment and entrepreneur self-efficacy have in this retention of entrepreneurs. This is a subject scarcely discussed previously. Finally, this research addresses previous performance as a background in innovation, thus contributing to a better understanding of the factors that contribute to the motivation of entrepreneurs to innovate and invest in a particular destination, which has important implications for the success of destinations.

This article is structured as follows. In the following section (2) the theoretical framework is developed and the conceptual model and its hypotheses are presented. The methodology is presented in section 3. Section 4 presents the results of the empirical study, which are discussed in section 5. Finally, the conclusions are presented in section 6, as well as the limitations and avenues for future investigations.

## **6. CONCLUSIONS**

### **6.1. Overall findings**

This study focused on extending existing knowledge about TLEs. This is a very significant group of tourism business owners whose specificities make it a different group of entrepreneurs from other sectors. In pursuing objectives other than financial ones, traditional models of innovation cannot simply be transposed, as Marchant and Mottiar (2011) argue. But he specifically addressed the topic of the innovation and willingness to stay antecedents. The antecedents studied were entrepreneurial context, community attachment, and self-efficacy. To test the hypotheses, a quantitative study was conducted on a sample of 178 Portuguese Tourism Lifestyle Entrepreneurs. The results allowed the identification of a set of relationships. First, the direct and positive relationship between context and community attachment were identified, as well as an indirect relationship with innovation and willingness to stay through community attachment. Furthermore, it was also found that community attachment influences positively entrepreneurial self-efficacy, innovation and willingness to stay. Finally, our results show a direct and positive relation between entrepreneurial self-efficacy and innovation and willingness to stay.

### **6.2. Conceptual contributions**

This study contributes to the mainstream and tourism entrepreneurship knowledge. While early research on tourism entrepreneurship was focused on the personal traits of individual entrepreneurs, recent studies have been dedicated to study the factors influencing entrepreneurship activities. Specifically, this study develops an underexplored topic about one important topic about entrepreneurship in tourism. First, within entrepreneurship studies, the research on the factors influencing willingness to stay at the destination represents a key contribution, placing an important piece in the destination competitiveness framework. Second, this study integrates two dimensions usually separated in tourism innovation studies. By combining the effect of external and organizational dimensions this study frames a better understanding of the factors influencing the entrepreneurs' innovativeness. Third, this is the first

study to combine innovation and willingness to stay as outcomes variables, which represent an powerful insight to destination competitiveness theory, reinforcing the idea that both constructs are an interdependent part of the destinations' efforts to differentiate and build a sustainable value proposition.

This study also contributes to the mainstream entrepreneurship literature by uncovering the link between the context and place attachment and entrepreneurial outcomes. Specifically, while the previous research is focused on the place and its influence on the entrepreneurial activity in a perspective let us call it 'passive' associated with the characteristics of the place, this study assumes the place in an 'active' dimension, being a relevant part of the innovation process itself.

This study also builds on research on poor communities and developing countries. The context to which this study refers is part of the recognition that the basic conditions that precede it (education, funding, and access to channels) already exist, but that is not necessarily true in all realities. Thus, this study provides an interconnection between the two areas that suggests how the very conceptualization of the entrepreneurial context evolves.

Following these various contributions, in line with Fu et al. (2019) this study reinforces the idea that research on entrepreneurship in hospitality and tourism is a field with wide-ranging potential for development.

### **6.3. Practical contributions**

The results of this research provide important insights to improve tourism destination competitiveness. First, the importance of the context for retaining entrepreneurs and innovation. Investment in destination marketing is essential for the performance of these entrepreneurs. By attracting visitors and tourists, marketing strategies help to create and sustain a market for their businesses to prosper. However, this marketing should be appropriately targeted at specific segments of tourists who value creative and immersive experiences related to a particular lifestyle, not a mass market. Only in this way is it possible to develop a vibrant atmosphere that pleases both entrepreneurs and visitors. It will also be important to develop actions that contribute to strengthening the local identity and lifestyle, i.e. the community attachment. Ultimately, it is for these reasons that the entrepreneur has decided to invest in this place. For such initiatives as museums, events, fairs and other festivities can contribute to strengthen this identity and also to promote the destination and its entrepreneurs. In parallel, decision makers should also invest in creating a supportive environment for entrepreneurs, including better working and living conditions and market access, but especially a culture of entrepreneurship and stimulating atmosphere. Another important aspect to consider is related to the satisfaction of entrepreneurs with the performance of their business, or entrepreneurial self-efficacy. Thus, all initiatives that allow them to monitor their business performance and its social and environmental implications can help increase this level of satisfaction.

### **6.4. Limitations and future research**

This research also presents some limitations that may point to avenues for future research. The first is related with the sample. The generalization of the result is limited due to the purposive sampling method applied in a single country. Further research could explore data from other countries, and, if possible, apply a probabilistic sample. The various dimensions of innovation have not been explored in this study, in particular co-creation, which is very much associated with the type of experiences of TLEs. It would therefore be interesting to understand

how value can be created through cooperative processes of co-creation and how this contributes to entrepreneurial self-efficacy and innovation. It would also be interesting to understand the moderating role of the region of origin of entrepreneurs, not least because it is known that entrepreneurs from outside have more difficulty in establishing a local network of cooperation and being integrated into the community (c.f. Dawson et al., 2011). Finally, our study found that there is no direct relationship between context and innovation. It will be interesting to explore this topic and understand the reasons for this result.

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## Appendix

**Table A1.** Construct items

Constructs and items
<b>Community attachment</b> ( <i>1= Strongly disagree; 7= Strongly agree</i> )
I feel that I belong to this place
This place is very familiar.
This place is very important for my daily life
I live intensely this place
<b>Entrepreneurial Self-efficacy</b> ( <i>1= no confidence; 5= complete confidence</i> )
I successfully identify new opportunities
I create new products
I think creatively
I capable of selling an idea or a new solution
I obtain financing to create/develop the business
<b>Willingness to stay</b> ( <i>1= Strongly disagree; 7= Strongly agree</i> )
I would like to stay indefinitely in this place
I wish to follow the future development of this place
This site plays an important role in my future plans
My personal future is connected to this place
<b>Context</b> ( <i>1= not important; 7= very important</i> ). The place where I run my business has...
An stimulating atmosphere
A culture of entrepreneurship
Complimentary institutions (hospitals, schools...)
A future market potential
<b>Innovation</b> ( <i>1= Strongly disagree; 7= Strongly agree</i> )
I solve problems in an innovative way.
I am creative in the use and control of resources.
I develop creative solutions to difficult problems.
I often develop new products and/or services