



Lifestyle entrepreneurs and their identity construction: A study of the tourism industry



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HIGHLIGHTS

- A narrative understanding of identity construction is used to problematize the conceptualizations of lifestyle entrepreneurs.
- Flexible-versus-stable is one dimension of lifestyle entrepreneurs' identity construction.
- Embedded-versus-independent is a second dimension of lifestyle entrepreneurs' identity construction.
- These dimensions explain the identity-construction process for individual lifestyle entrepreneurs.
- The modern, The loyal, The freedom-seeking, and The post-modern are types of lifestyle entrepreneurs.

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ABSTRACT

The present study takes issue with the uniform conceptualization of lifestyle entrepreneurs in previous research by drawing on identity theory and life-story interviews with lifestyle entrepreneurs in Norway. This article aims to show how lifestyle entrepreneurs create their entrepreneurial identity and how this identity informs both their entrepreneurial actions in different ways and how they manage the enterprise. On the basis of a narrative understanding of identity this article differentiates between two dimensions of identity construction: (1) socially and culturally embedded versus independent, and (2) flexible versus stable. The main contribution of this study is that embedded or independent and also flexible or stable identity constructions dominate the identity-construction process for individual lifestyle entrepreneurs. On the basis of the latter this article reports four narrative types of lifestyle-entrepreneur identity construction: (1) the modern, (2) the loyal, (3) the freedom-seeking, (4) and the post-modern lifestyle entrepreneur.

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1. Introduction

Research on entrepreneurship and innovation is relatively scarce within tourism studies (Li, 2008; Thomas, Shaw, & Page, 2011). Existing research commonly refers to entrepreneurs in tourism as 'lifestyle entrepreneurs' (Ateljevic & Doorne, 2000; Morrison, 2006; Shaw & Williams, 2004; Thomas et al., 2011; Williams, Shaw, & Greenwood, 1989). Lifestyle entrepreneurs are described as those who are focused on finding a sufficient and comfortable way of living and less focused on profit and growth (Andrews, Baum, & Andrew, 2001; Kuratko & Hodgetts, 1998; Morrison, 2006). Lifestyle entrepreneurs often initiate businesses on the basis of the goal of realizing a particular lifestyle balancing

economic, family, and social needs (Ateljevic & Doorne, 2000; Carlsen, Morrison, & Weber, 2008; Jaafar, Abdul-Aziz, Maideen, & Mohd, 2011) and make decisions regarding their business on the basis of subjective criteria rather than objective economic facts (Dewhurst & Horobin, 1998). However, some researchers suggest that lifestyle entrepreneurs are a more heterogeneous group, with some of them operating according to pure economic motives and basing their decisions on rational economic calculus (Ateljevic & Doorne, 2000; Dewhurst & Horobin, 1998; Thomas & Thomas, 2006). Therefore, Thomas et al. (2011) have called for research to understand lifestyle entrepreneurs better, in particular their main impetus for establishing the enterprise and the dynamics relating to the way they direct their enterprises.

In order to answer this call for research we approach lifestyle entrepreneurs from an identity perspective. General entrepreneurship studies on identity have contributed to the understanding

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of the multiple inducements that characterize entrepreneurship (Bredvold, 2011; Down, 2006; Essers & Benschop, 2007; Fenwick, 2002; Foss, 2004; Johansson, 2004; Nadin, 2007; Watson, 2009). These studies look at entrepreneurs from various sectors, such as health, theatre, building and construction, but also tourism. In particular, studies on identity have been able to show how entrepreneurs enact cultural and social values and use these values as resources for their own constructions of identity. Many of these studies are part of a new movement in the field of entrepreneurship research, labelled the 'European school' (Hjorth, Jones, & Gartner, 2008), and this article applies this approach to tourism studies. Our aim is to show how lifestyle entrepreneurs create their entrepreneurial identity and how this identity in different ways informs their entrepreneurial actions and the way they manage the enterprise.

In order to illuminate on this aim we draw on a study of life-story interviews with lifestyle entrepreneurs in Norway. We highlight the role of networks for lifestyle entrepreneurs in the construction of their entrepreneurial identity and in conducting their entrepreneurial actions, thus contributing to new insights on the relation between identity construction, entrepreneurship, and networks in a tourist context. The article is organized as follows. It opens with a review of relevant research into entrepreneurship, lifestyle entrepreneurs in tourism studies, and identity. We then explain our methods, focusing on how we worked with life-story interviews. Next, the findings of the life story interviews are reported. We conclude this article with an analysis and discussion articulating its contributions in relation to previous research.

2. Entrepreneurship and lifestyle entrepreneurs

Most entrepreneurs state motives such as 'being my own boss', 'being independent', 'being creative', and 'having an interesting job' as being most important for becoming an entrepreneur regardless of the industry (Beaver, 2002; Bredvold, 2003; Elmlund, 1998; Johannisson & Landström, 1999). Studies inspired by neoclassic economics view entrepreneurs as economic agents, working towards the maximization of economic profit. This type of research is focused on finding 'general laws' of entrepreneurship that transcend context (Hjorth et al., 2008). In line with our focus on identity, our approach to entrepreneurship is that it is more of a cultural phenomenon than an economic one (Hjorth & Johannisson, 1998). Inspired by the European School in entrepreneurship research (Hjorth et al., 2008), our cultural approach suggests that entrepreneurs continuously search for meaning embedded in the cultural context (Bruner, 2001; Steyaert, 2007). With an interpretive approach to entrepreneurship (Gartner, 2004, 2007, 2010, 2012; Hjorth, Johannisson, & Steyaert, 2003; Steyaert and Bouwen, 1997; 2007) our attention is focused on how entrepreneurs understand themselves and their entrepreneurship.

Our understanding of innovation and entrepreneurship in this study are based on Schumpeter (2000). According to Schumpeter, innovation is about integrating resources into products and services that are offered on the market. It may concern integrating resources into completely new products and services or developing existing products and services by re-integrating their existing resources. Schumpeter further argues that entrepreneurship concerns implementation on the basis of an innovation that may imply creation of new ventures, which is the case in the study reported here. However, what is commonly referred to as entrepreneurship in the tourism industry, are seldom based on innovation but only concerns creation of new ventures (Hjalager, 2010; Li, 2008; Thomas et al., 2011). The traditional Schumpeterian approach to entrepreneurship stresses the role of the visionary and innovative entrepreneur (Schumpeter, 2000). According to Hjalager (2010), it

is a challenge to adopt this approach in tourism. However, the entrepreneurs who participated in this study have all initiated their business on the basis of innovation – from a Schumpeterian stance they are true entrepreneurs. More precisely, this means that they all had a unique idea, which they developed into an innovation that laid the foundation for their respective enterprise. In tourism a distinction is made between entrepreneurs motivated by economic and non-economic factors, and the lifestyle entrepreneur belongs to the latter category.

It was Williams et al. (1989) who initially observed the phenomenon of lifestyle aspirations in small-scale tourism businesses. Dewhurst and Horobin (1998) classical study elaborated the lifestyle concept and developed the well-known continuum between lifestyle-orientated and commercially orientated goals among tourism business owners. For those business owners who are lifestyle-oriented, 'their business success might be measured in terms of a continuing ability to perpetuate their chosen lifestyle' (1998, p. 30). According to Ateljevic and Doorne (2000, p.381), this continuum also has led studies of entrepreneurship in tourism towards a focus on the importance of social and cultural values rather than economic factors only. Later, several tourism researchers have drawn on and elaborated on this continuum both in studies of small business owners and entrepreneurs (Getz & Carlsen, 2000; Szivas, 2001; Hollick & Braun, 2005; Getz & Petersen, 2005; Cederholm & Hultman, 2010). In spite of these studies, lifestyle entrepreneurs in tourism and their non-economic motives still seem to be 'a thorn in the side' for some researchers (Hollick & Braun, 2005; Lashley & Rowson, 2010; Peters, Frehse, & Buhalis, 2009).

Ateljevic and Li (2009) note that no commonly agreed upon definitions of tourism entrepreneurship and lifestyle entrepreneurs exist. However, lifestyle entrepreneurs are commonly defined as entrepreneurs who launch touristic enterprises to support their desired lifestyles and hobbies with little intention of economic growth (Getz & Petersen, 2005; Hall & Rusher, 2004; Koh & Hatten, 2002; Morrison, 2006; Peters et al., 2009). Others emphasize that lifestyle entrepreneurs create a business that enables them to realize their chosen lifestyle and provides the possibility to balance family, economic, and social needs (Ateljevic & Doorne, 2000; Carlsen et al., 2008). Lifestyle-oriented tourism entrepreneurs are more common in rural areas (Getz & Carlsen, 2000), since the desire to live in a particular place is important for pursuing lifestyle entrepreneurship (Peters et al., 2009; Szivas, 2001; Williams et al., 1989). The presence of small scale, close contact and communication with customers as well as extensive and intimate knowledge of the immediate surrounding areas are also characteristics used to describe lifestyle entrepreneurs (Cederholm & Hultman, 2010).

Lifestyle entrepreneurship is seen as a particular feature of many small tourism firms (Ateljevic & Doorne, 2000; Getz & Petersen, 2005; Williams et al., 1989). It is argued that low market barriers in combination with the fact that the organization of many tourism activities not implying formal and technical training makes it possible to start a business venture based on a lifestyle (Ateljevic & Page, 2009). In the context of the tourism industry in the United Kingdom, knowledge of the industry was deemed unimportant for the owners who started hotels; both general and industry-specific skills could be learned on the job (Szivas, 2001). According to McKercher and Robbins (1998), tourism entrepreneurs develop their businesses with minimal strategic planning and their 'mediocre' performance is arguably an outcome of their choice of lifestyle. Some research suggests that non-economic motives create difficulties within the tourism industry (Dewhurst & Horobin, 1998; Lashley & Rowson, 2010). Others maintain that despite the fact that lifestyle entrepreneurs do not follow economic motives, their contribution to economic welfare and customer

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