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Title:

The influence of tourism and amenities on place attachment and entrepreneurship in remote communities: A case study of Tofino, BC

Introduction

Many rural and remote communities have struggled to maintain a viable economy due to globalization, shifts in the resource sectors, and inadequate human capital due to outmigration among others. While some communities have diversified through tourism, their economic resilience is often challenged due to limited or unsuccessful entrepreneurial ventures. This study was undertaken to provide a better understanding of new migrant entrepreneurs and what attracts them to remote communities. The case study location that was chosen for the study was Tofino, BC which has emerged as a prominent rural tourism destination and which relies heavily on a diverse mix of entrepreneurs to support the visitor economy and the year round residents in the region.

Literature:

A well-established ingredient in business development is that place or context matters. Deciding where to start one's business is vital in shaping a business as it influences access to the supply and markets for goods and services. The influence of place on business decisions is potentially much more complex if we sought to understand it from the motivation of the entrepreneur. Small business owners in rural areas have a number of different reasons to start businesses. One of these is that they provide 'a job and an income' in a location with limited employment opportunities (Du Plessis et al., 2002; Raley & Moxey, 2000; Robinson, 2001). Some business migrants move to rural places because of a business opportunity however in other cases it is due to the desire to live a specific lifestyle or to be surrounded by cultural and environmental characteristics of a place (Getz & Nilsson, 2004; Getz & Carlsen, 2005; Lee et al., 2008). Post migration, these people need to find a way to remain in place or maintain their new lifestyle. As Stone and Stubbs (2007) explain, many of these migrants become 'self-employed expatriates' by running their own small businesses. While profitable businesses do exist, lifestyle oriented enterprises are more or less seen as a means to an end for the migrant (Janoschka & Haas, 2013).

Lifestyle entrepreneurs are a differentiated subset of entrepreneurs who value quality of life over profitability and high growth in their business venture (Marcketti et al., 2006). Lifestyle entrepreneurs may well be a part of the solution to rural restructuring, as they have been shown to develop service quality and add vibrancy (Ateljevic & Doorne, 2000), add niche offerings to an area (Dawson, Fountain, & Cohen, 2011), and impart innovation and externalize rural markets (Argent et al., 2013; Marcketti et al., 2006). What would be valuable to know is to what extent the natural and cultural amenities in rural and remote contexts influences relocation and entrepreneurship decisions for migrant business owners.

Methodology:

The case study method was chosen as an illustrative example to examine the role of amenities in the entrepreneur's decision to establish a business in a rural remote community. The case was developed using a mixed method design which included secondary data and in depth interviews with entrepreneurs. Secondary data included web based marketing materials and community plans. Using content analysis, these materials were used to identify what place promotion methods were being used to attract business to the community as well as to identify the natural and cultural amenities being profiled (Vaugeois & Whitney Squire, 2010). In-depth interviews were conducted with staff from marketing and business development agencies that were responsible for fostering economic development in the community. A sample of entrepreneurs who had migrated to the community in the past 15 years was also asked to participate in in depth interviews to understand their motivations and experience.

Key findings

The study found that although there were no specific place promotion efforts directed at attracting entrepreneurs, businesses were often established as an indirect outcome of promotional efforts aimed at attracting tourists. The entrepreneurs interviewed had initially learned about the amenities in Tofino through tourism promotional materials, brand image or prior positive visitor experiences.

Most of the respondents relocated with the desire to have a particular lifestyle. A variety of natural, cultural and system amenities facilitated leisure experiences and place attachment bonds. These bonds align with place attachment theory (Low & Altman, 1992; Lewicka, 2011). The entrepreneurs interviewed had not planned to establish a business from the outset; rather, the decision to start their business resulted from the attachment to place and the desire to remain in the community where they could continue to experience its natural and cultural amenities. Analysis was conducted to understand the relationship between place attachment and entrepreneurship. Amenities influenced the decision to relocate to Tofino but what was unanticipated was that the amenities then facilitated a bond to the community which then influenced respondents to negotiate how they could remain in place and entrepreneurship was the chosen outcome.

Discussion and conclusion

This case study was supported by a background of research which implied that small business development is vital to the economic health of the remote and rural towns of Canada. Communities are profiting from the entrepreneurial businesses based on the development of local geography and culture (Siemens, 2014). The results align with literature which indicates that people who are first attracted to rural areas as visitors or tourists and then as permanent residents often go on to set up small businesses (Rasker & Hansen, 2000; Vaugeois, 2010). This research closely supports the arguments from other studies on lifestyle migration in tourism. The lifestyle business owner's consumption and production overlaps, meaning that they are usually motivated to relocate after having been tourists themselves (Dawson, Fountain & Cohen, 2011). These findings provide valuable contributions to the literature as they expand and clarify the role of tourism promotion in economic development (Rangwala, 2010).

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