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Integration of “Ideal Migrants”: Dutch lifestyle expat-preneurs in Swedish campgrounds

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**ABSTRACT**

This article contributes to understanding migration and integration experiences of privileged intra-EU migrant entrepreneurs termed “lifestyle expat-preneurs” by discussing the role of rural entrepreneurship in the processes of integration into sparsely populated rural areas, as exemplified by the Dutch tourism entrepreneurs in northern Sweden. Specifically, this article focuses on campground entrepreneurship, a sub-segment of rural tourism lacking much academic research. Findings demonstrate the experiences of intra-EU lifestyle expat-preneurs are absent from currently dominating theoretical, as well as political, discourses on migration and integration. The article concludes arguing campground entrepreneurship is a powerful catalyst of lifestyle migration, but the very nature of this business is an inhibiting, rather than supporting factor, for rural community integration.

**KEYWORDS**

Tourism entrepreneurship; human geography; migration; lifestyle

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**Introduction**

In the context of the current global anxieties around international migration and integration, intra-European migration largely has disappeared from the European policy spotlight, and, arguably, from international research attention. The discourses on migration have become heavily dominated by cultural and religious angst around the flows of non-European and non-Western migrants, predominantly from the war- and poverty-stricken countries of the Middle East and North Africa (Geddes & Scholten, 2016). One consequence is the discursive invisibility of the perceived “unproblematic” migration among countries of comparably high living standards, such as those of Western and Northern Europe. With new patterns of intra-European Union (EU) migration flows, such as those directed to the northern, peripheral, rural and “amenity-poor” regions, there is a growing need to bring them back into the discursive migration research space (Jentsch & Simard, 2009; Jentsch, De Lima, & MacDonald, 2007), not only theoretically to address traditional biases towards disadvantaged and “problematic” migrants, but also in policy-making since attracting entrepreneurial intra-EU migrants is high on the development agenda of many peripheral rural regions.

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Intra-EU migrants fit the dominant narrative of revitalisation of rural areas, which have long been in decline across Europe, including in Sweden (Eimermann, 2015b; Jentsch & Simard, 2009; Lundmark, 2006). These migrants are expected to inject new investments, knowledge and energy into rural communities plagued with chronic depopulation, lack of employment opportunities and economic and demographic stagnation. Tourism entrepreneurship is encouraged by many regional authorities since tourism is traditionally perceived as a low entry barrier business requiring comparatively little investment and capable of utilising natural resources that are abundant in rural areas, but hard to commercialise through other industries (Åberg, 2017; Margaryan, 2017). The next section explores research literature and theory about intra-EU migrants’ adaptation to challenging lifestyles in the northern rural peripheries to question how they fit within current discourses on migration and integration, and the role tourism business plays in this context.

This article contributes new knowledge about the integration of intra-EU migrant entrepreneurs in rural areas by researching Dutch campground entrepreneurs in northern Sweden, as a case study, which fit the definition of “ideal” migrants for three reasons. First, Dutch migrants in the rural Swedish north correspond to all the discursive criteria of “ideal” migrants because they are most often young, or middle-aged, couples who are fit for the role of rural development catalysts; coming from a comparatively proximate cultural and linguistic background, they bring multiple resources and are willing to settle in sparsely populated areas. Second, Swedish regional authorities have actively sought to attract Dutch migrants, promoting their communities in the Netherlands, which directly indicates the “desirability” of such migrants in the rural areas of the north (Eimermann, 2015b). In light of growing right-wing political sentiments in EU countries on one hand, and a desire to attract “cosmopolitan entrepreneurial migrants” (Scuzzarello, 2015) on the other, there is a need for closer attention to, and a more nuanced theoretical framing of, such migrants. As pointed out by Vance, McNulty, Paik, and D’Mello (2016) and Girling and Bamwenda (2018), relatively affluent migrant entrepreneurs are insufficiently captured by the majority of entrepreneurship theories. Better understanding of their post-migratory integration and experiences would help to empirically substantiate political rhetoric and provide recommendations for regions attracting and, most importantly, retaining such migrants.

The aim of this article, therefore, is to contribute to the better theoretical conceptualisation of intra-EU migrant entrepreneurs as well as to bring research attention of such migrants’ integration experiences in rural areas. Theoretically, this article is grounded at the intersection of migrant entrepreneurship, lifestyle migration and integration, with a special focus on tourism business. Specifically, linkages between tourism entrepreneurship and integration in rural areas, which is an under-researched topic (Jentsch et al., 2007; Jentsch & Simard, 2009), builds upon the empirical insights from extensive work by Eimermann (2013, 2014, 2015a, 2015b, 2016). The article contributes to this work by discussing the role of tourism, entrepreneurship in the processes of lifestyle migration, and integration in sparsely populated rural areas as exemplified by Dutch tourism entrepreneurs in the north of Sweden. As stated by Carson, Carson, and Eimermann (2017, p. 195), “There is still much to be learned
about the migration and business choices of international lifestyle migrants to northern Scandinavia.”

**Literature review & theory**

**Braiding expat-preneurship, lifestyle migration and integration**

**Expat-preneurship and lifestyle migration**

Intra-EU mobility is increasingly defined by complex factors spanning beyond the classic labour migration paradigm. Although citizens from developing countries show predominantly economic and political motivations to migrate, and the intra-EU migrants are not exempt from economic “pull factors,” decisions prompting a cross-border move are increasingly related to career choices, leisure and lifestyle possibilities, adventure and romance (Santacreu, Baldoni, & Albert, 2009). The “New Europe” is globalised, mobile and dynamic, with older approaches to migration becoming obsolete, a trend exhibited by this article’s case study that may be better understood with the help of two theoretical concepts: expat-preneurship and lifestyle migration.

The concept of expat-preneurs was introduced by Vance et al. (2016) to account for the growing trend of self-initiated migrant entrepreneurs within globalising modern societies. These entrepreneurs migrate abroad to pursue business goals and generally do not intend to permanently stay in the host country, although this option is not excluded. In their analysis of the most prominent theories on migrant entrepreneurship, Girling and Bamwenda (2018) argue the phenomenon of expat-preneurship remains largely ignored, primarily because entrepreneurship theories were developed focusing on migration from less-to-more developed countries, where the migrants started from a disadvantaged position. Historical research on “ethnic entrepreneurs” predominantly focused on migrants of black, Hispanic, or Asian heritage in the context of the United States (Aldrich & Waldinger, 1990), and more recently on Turkish, Surinamese, or Carribean heritage in the context of Netherlands (Rath & Kloosterman, 2000) who also often must “rise from the bottom.” This is, however, not the case with expat-preneurs – individuals who choose out of volition, not necessity, to temporarily live abroad and initiate a new international venture opportunity in a host country and are coming from a position of privilege (Vance et al., 2016). There is a clear lack of knowledge about such entrepreneurs, as recently found by Vance et al. (2016) and Girling and Bamwenda (2018).

Lifestyle migration, in turn, also emerged as an analytical tool to help understand privileged forms of migration that are invisible in the categories of conventional migration registers. The difference from the aforementioned concept is that there is no special focus on entrepreneurship as a migratory motive. Lifestyle migration has been defined as a migration of “relatively affluent individuals, moving either part-time or full-time, permanently or temporarily, to places which, for various reasons, signify for the migrants something loosely defined as quality of life” (Benson & O’Reilly, 2009, p. 621). Knowles and Harper (2009) add that in this form of migration, the overall quality of life is prioritised over economic factors, such as income or career advancement. In the context of lifestyle migration, migrants tend to be relatively affluent and privileged individuals on a quest for a better, often idealised, life and, inextricably, a hope for a redefined, better selfhood (Benson & O’Reilly, 2009; Benson & Osbaldiston, 2014).
In the context of nature-based tourism business, and specifically campsite owners, this article argues that these migrant entrepreneurs are driven both by entrepreneurial career opportunities as well as lifestyle preferences. Hence, none of the aforementioned concepts suffice alone. Combining the concepts of “expat-preneurs,” as described by Vance et al. (2016), and “lifestyle migrants” as by Benson and O’Reilly (2009), into one and labelling it “lifestyle expat-preneurs,” this article offers a term to describe relatively affluent individuals who choose to voluntarily move abroad to initiate a new venture opportunity and pursue a certain lifestyle.

**Lifestyle expat-preneurs and integration**

Migration does not end with the act of geographical relocation. Rather, migration overflows into the lived experiences of post-migration life. Negotiation of migrant subjectivities with a quest for a “better” life, which continues into the post-migration stage, is at the heart of lifestyle migration (Benson & Osbaldiston, 2014). This quest for a better life in a new country is not a guaranteed success story, and largely depends on the negotiation of what may be a messy reality of unmet expectations, disappointments, challenges and contradictions between imagination and experience. In order to understand the post-migration life of the migrants, this article next turns to the rhetoric of integration, as both a process and a goal of migration policies.

Integration has been a “hot topic” on the EU agenda within the last decade. Alleged failure of migrants to integrate has been conceptualised as a serious problem, threatening the very fabric of host societies, and giving rise to right-wing populism across Europe (Schinkel, 2017). The term “(im)migrants” in the public discourse currently refers primarily to non-Western, non-Christian migrants and refugees from less developed parts of the world. It is their integration, or the suspected lack of such, that receives critical scrutiny and requires resource inputs, while intra-EU migrants have been exempt from these discourses despite their ever increasing numbers (European Commission, 2018). This raises questions about, if the intra-EU migrants are not perceived as migrants, and are referred to as “movers” in EU terminology, and their integration is disregarded as a non-issue, how can we meaningfully talk about the integration of lifestyle expat-preneurs?

Despite its ubiquity in public discourses, integration is far from being a straightforward and unproblematic concept (Jentsch, 2007). As stated by Robinson (1998, p. 118), “integration’ is a chaotic concept: a word used by many but understood differently by most”. Although a thorough theoretical review of integration is beyond this article (see Schinkel, 2017), it is possible to discern the main defining criteria. We adopt the approach developed by Ager and Strang (2008), who define integration through four core domains: “foundation” (rights, citizenship); “facilitators” (language and cultural knowledge, safety and stability), “social connection” and “markers and means” (employment, housing, education and healthcare). Based on this framework, we bring forward the dimension of “social connection” as an important part of the integration process which is neglected for intra-EU migrants in the rural areas. Social connection is understood as an artery linking the formal principles of migrants’ rights to tangible public outcomes, such as employment or health. Social connection is the driving force of integration and is commonly pointed out as the defining feature of an integrated society (Ager & Strang, 2008). If the absence of conflict and tolerance among different groups is the most basic prerequisite, then full integration goes beyond this and is expressed in such terms as “belonging,” which involves
family links, committed friendships, feeling of respect and shared values (Ager & Strang, 2008). Social connection can be further subdivided into “social bonds” (connections within a community), “social bridges” (connections between communities) and “social links” (connections between individuals and structures of the state). Although this approach towards social dimension is not without flaw, its usefulness has been empirically tested (Zetter et al., 2006) and it is considered appropriate for the purposes of this article.

**Dutch migrants in rural Sweden**

Sweden has recently reached a total population of 10 million people, mainly due to immigration flows. The population distribution, however, remains highly uneven, and this trend is increasing. About 86% of Swedish inhabitants live in urban areas, primarily in the southern third of the country. The remainder of the country, known as Norrland, which literally means “northern land,” is sparsely populated and its rural areas are experiencing decline due to outmigration of young citizens, particularly women, an aging population, lack of employment opportunities and economic stagnation (Lundmark, 2006). With the lack of deliberate state actions to counteract uneven geographic developments, many local governments have taken pro-active steps to revitalise their communities. Many northern rural regions have initiated revitalisation projects under a new regional development paradigm of turning rural areas from spaces of production to spaces of consumption (Lundmark, 2006). One manifestation of this approach is the increasing efforts to attract lifestyle migrants and second homeowners, as exemplified by marketing campaigns of Swedish regional authorities, to attract relatively affluent European migrants (Eimermann, 2015b).

In Sweden, there are currently 11,634 Dutch migrants, excluding the 8436 children born in Sweden, with one or both parents born in the Netherlands (SCB, 2017). The number of migrants per year has also been increasing (Eimermann, 2015a). Dutch migrants, when compared with other migrants of comparable socio-economic background, according to research with German, British, Spanish, Italian and French migrants, shows they are more likely to be found in metropolitan areas similar to the “stayers” in their respective home countries (Braun & Arsene, 2009). Dutch migrants in Sweden, in contrast, are over-represented in rural areas and small towns (Eimermann, 2015a). Dutch migrants in rural areas tend to exhibit the typical characteristics of lifestyle migrants: having high levels of self-employment and seeking rural idyll, vast natural areas, safety and tranquillity as well as fleeing overpopulation and hyper-urbanisation (Eimermann, 2013; 2015a). At the same time, ownership and operation of tourist campgrounds among the Dutch have grown in popularity. Specialised websites have emerged that are explicitly oriented towards Dutch-speaking tourists wishing to camp at Dutch campgrounds throughout Sweden and beyond (rondjezweden.se, rondjescandinavien.nl, logerenbijnederlanders.nl). This profile positions Dutch campground entrepreneurs as a distinct migrant group worthy of closer inspection to better understand integration in the rural north.

**Campground entrepreneurship**

Camping has received minimal attention in the research literature despite its significance as a form of outdoor recreation growing (Brooker & Joppe, 2014). As a leisure activity, it
has followed a development trajectory from a simplistic tent-based recreation in the 1960s, to a highly developed industry today, with “glamping” used to describe “high end” glamorous camping. The research on camping tourism has primarily been focused on the demand side (Mikulic, Prebezac, Seric, & Kresic, 2017; O’Neill, Riscinto-Kozub, & Hyfte, 2010; Triantafillidou & Siomkos, 2013) or is limited to brief analyses within a larger context of rural entrepreneurship or nature-based tourism (Brooker & Joppe, 2014; Fredman & Margaryan, 2014; McGehee & Kim, 2004), while not much is known about campground entrepreneurs.

Given the Swedish Camping Association (SCR) reported a record-breaking 16 million guest-nights spent in 2018 (SCR, 2019), this tourism area requires academic research. SCR has around 400 campground members, which, together, offer 75,000 camping sites and 9000 cabins (www.scr.se). The popularity of camping vacations has been growing in Sweden, where the majority of campers are domestic tourists with campervans (SCR, 2019), and, during the high summer season, camping accounts for 50% of all the guest nights spent in the country. We treat campground entrepreneurship as a subset of nature-based and rural tourism, extrapolating general insights from this sector. Conceptually, campground entrepreneurs would likely exhibit lifestyle motives as much lifestyle research describes (Ateljevic & Doome, 2000; Lundberg & Fredman, 2012; Lundberg, Fredman, & Wall-Reinius, 2014; Luck, Race, & Black, 2010). In addition, it can be expected, that campground entrepreneurs would be facing challenges typical for this sector, such as difficulty with accessing finances, lack of skills, a lack of suppliers in the region, seasonality and remoteness (Müller, 2013). In their national survey Fredman and Margaryan (2014) found only about 20% of nature-based tourism businesses in Sweden fully depend on tourism as their main source of income. Hence, migrant campground entrepreneurs likely face further challenges during their integration process.

**Methods**

**Research design and location**

This research utilises the qualitative research method of face-to-face semi-structured interviews. This method was chosen as the most appropriate because the research aimed to better understand participants’ life choices and experiences, which might be of a sensitive nature, requiring strong rapport and in-depth conversation (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Orb, Eisenhauer, & Wynaden, 2000; Patton, 2015). A purposeful sampling method was applied, where participants were selected based on predetermined criteria. Criteria included (i) having migrated from the Netherlands; (ii) running a campground business; and (iii) being located in the northern counties of Sweden (Norrland). Information about Dutch campground-owners was obtained through relevant websites. As a result, 11 campgrounds were contacted by email with a request to participate in the study. Out of these, four declined due to a lack of time, absence from the country, or lack of interest and seven responded positively. The interviews were conducted in April of 2018 by one of the authors, a native Dutch speaker. The month of April was chosen as the most convenient for interviews due to the low tourist season. The data were gathered in three counties of northern Sweden (Norrland) – Jämtland, Västerbotten and Västernorrland. According to Statistics Sweden (2018), the three counties combined had a total population
of 644,239 inhabitants. Jämtland is the county with the lowest number of inhabitants (129,806), followed by Västernorrland (245,968) and Västerbotten (268,465). Due to the richness of natural amenities and low population, these regions are important nature-based tourism destinations in the country.

**Interviews and data analysis**

The semi-structured interview questions were developed to capture the nature of entrepreneurship and understand the integration experience. Interview questions were developed based on the previous literature on the topic (Ateljevic & Doome, 2000; Eimermann, 2013; 2014; 2015a; Lundberg et al., 2014; Lundberg & Fredman, 2012). Examples of interview questions are: *Why did you decide to move to Sweden? What factors were important when choosing the location? Why did you decide to become a campground entrepreneur? What goals do you have for your business? What does integration mean to you? Could you describe your integration experience? What was the role of your business in your integration?* All the interviewees were couples who run a campground together as a family business (Table 1). Interviewing couples has advantages, yet they highly depend on the context and the topic of research (Bjørnholt & Farstad, 2014; Valentine, 1999). In this research, since all interviewees were migrants from the Netherlands and shared the experience of migrating, integrating and running a campground business together, using a joint couple interviewing method was accepted as advantageous (Valentine, 1999).

The interviews were held at the interviewees’ campground premises or homes, which allowed for a more familiar and relaxed environment for the interviewees (Kvale, 1996). All interviews were in-depth, lasted two hours on average, and were conducted in the Dutch language to enable development of a stronger rapport between the researcher and the participants. All interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim and selected quotes were translated into English by the authors. The interviews were conducted in accordance with the standard ethical procedures of informed consent, anonymity and confidentiality (Orb et al., 2000). The transcripts were analysed with a standard coding technique, as recommended by Saldaña (2015), where theory-based deductive and

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name*</th>
<th>Date of birth</th>
<th>Date of migration</th>
<th>Place of residence prior to migration</th>
<th>Occupation prior to migration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Piet ♂ Gonny ♀</td>
<td>1969 1969</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>Moderately urbanised</td>
<td>Warehouse and office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marco ♂ Ellen ♀</td>
<td>1982 1984</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>Moderately urbanised</td>
<td>Campsite</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toon ♂ Ria ♀</td>
<td>1968 1970</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>Moderately urbanised</td>
<td>Cleaning company</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Henk ♂ Jet ♀</td>
<td>1956 1957</td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>Extremely urbanised</td>
<td>Administration and management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wim ♂ Ans ♀</td>
<td>1967 1970</td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>Strongly urbanised</td>
<td>Police</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Willem ♂ Petra ♀</td>
<td>1967 1973</td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>Moderately urbanised</td>
<td>Finance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gijs ♂ Hilde ♀</td>
<td>1962 1966</td>
<td>2017</td>
<td>Extremely urbanised</td>
<td>Mental health care and office</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*All names are pseudonyms.*
emergent inductive codes were utilised to inform a phenomenological analysis. Although findings reported in this article are limited by the small number of interviewees, this is mitigated by the depth and length of the interviews. Future camping entrepreneurship research investigating integration would benefit from obtaining locals’ perspectives on the subject to create a more holistic picture.

**Findings**

**In search of a better life on the northern campgrounds**

There are several typical properties of lifestyle expat-preneurs observable among our respondents. We found unanimous willingness to escape the perceived unfavourable conditions in the Netherlands related to quality of life. These included overcrowded spaces, absence of access to vast natural areas, long commutes, as well as certain cultural properties, such as competitiveness, stress, work pressure and perpetual discontent with life. Piet, for example, states:

> I could no longer not take the crowdedness, the feeling of never being good enough, never being fast enough, all the stress. I always thought why people there couldn’t just act normally, give each other some space and stop expecting impossible things.

Subsequently, freedom, peace, nature, clean air and vast spaces are typically mentioned as attractive features pursued in Sweden. The warmer climate of the Netherlands was deemed as less favourable, due to lack of snow, high humidity, and lack of pronounced seasons. Access to a guaranteed snow cover and scenic landscapes, especially mountainous, were important for the migration decision and location selection. Lifestyle preferences were also expressed as a conscious choice of settling in sparsely populated locations and avoiding compatriots and other foreign migrants. Ellen, for example, said, *We did not want to go to the south because of the huge number of the Dutch and Germans. I’ve heard stories about entire towns crowded with foreigners. I don’t like that at all.*

Second, an important characteristic of expat-preneurs is the international venture ambition and temporality of stay. For our interviewees, starting a new life by becoming tourism entrepreneurs was one of the main motivations to migrate. Gonny stated, *We are making a fresh start. It also means that we needed to start doing something completely different.* Further, as Petra explained, *It could have been a campground, a hotel, a B&B or a hostel – it just had to be a business in tourism. It is something, I believe, any foreigner could establish when moving abroad.*

Coming from a relatively privileged background, the expat-preneurs used their own savings and resources to purchase a campground business, put it into operation and invest in further development. Access to finances in Sweden was described as challenging since banks were reluctant to offer loans to the newly minted migrant businesses. Although access to finance became easier after a business proved successful over time, these entrepreneurs kept their business small. True to the classic description of lifestyle entrepreneurship, economic growth was not an important business goal. As Piet said

> I’d like my business to grow in such a way so that I would not be worried about my finances. I do not want to become rich and I won’t anyway. If I wanted to get rich I would have picked a different profession.
However, growth was inhibited by external factors, such as the lack of a potential workforce, remoteness from the main tourist hubs, or poor accessibility.

Finally, pragmatism and the temporality of the entrepreneurial venture also were evident. Some interviewees never went to Sweden before they started to look for a campground to purchase. Moreover, all admitted Sweden was not even their first preference as a migration destination, as it came second after Norway. The most common decision-making scenario was: interviewees had an idealised image of Norway, given its majestic nature and quality of life reputation. After discovering the high property prices and complex legal procedures, they would opt for Sweden as the “second best”. Toon, for example, stated, I neither had been nor am really in love with Sweden... It was a purely practical choice. Piet explained, We decided to switch from Norway to Sweden because of financial reasons. Everything is much cheaper in Sweden. The temporality of this venture also was emphasised, as interviewees did not rule out the option that they would return back to the Netherlands or move to another country. Ria stated, I cannot say that I will die here, that I will stay here forever. It depends on how the life goes. Lifestyle expat-preneurship provides a way to conceptualise a subset of intra-EU migrants who are driven by both entrepreneurial as well as lifestyle motives to migrate.

**Marooned on an “isolated island”**

Campground entrepreneurs faced integration challenges which are unique and invisible within the dominant discourses on integration and tourism development in rural areas. Remoteness, sparse population, as well as the very nature of their business, posed multiple integration handicaps. As was illustrated by Marco, I believe the campground hindered our integration. If my wife had a job at the municipality and I had a job at ICA [supermarket], we would meet colleagues from our town right away. During the first 3–4 years, the campground was our own isolated island. The relative social isolation of this business also means there is less reliance on local social networks. This may have some advantages for migrants, as Jet explained motivations of her family to become campground entrepreneurs with no previous experience, Camping business is the easiest way to make a living in Sweden. As a foreigner you cannot get into the Swedish environment easily. If you are looking for a job, they want you to be a friend or family. It is very difficult to get in, you have to know someone in order to get a job. The integration process became somewhat easier if a campground had a shop, a café, or a gas station, which attracted locals. Ans states, Our shop helped us tremendously to get in touch with people. In the beginning it felt like the locals were coming to a “zoo”. They would buy an ice-cream and stare at the new people in the shop. The shop made it easier to get in touch. The tourism business itself was not helpful in the integration process.

Second, integration into the local community was not smooth nor easy for any interviewees, despite the assumed cultural proximity. The entrepreneurs found it hard to adapt to local work ethics and cooperate with other businesses. From the migrants’ point of view, the locals lacked interest in cooperation, initiatives and business ambitions, as well as willingness to help others in this pursuit – reminiscent of a stereotypical collection of attitudes often ironically referred to in the Nordic countries as “the Law of Jante” after a satirical Danish novel. Marco, for example, said:
It is envy. Imagine, you are my colleague and you have a campsite further north. I would treat you nicely, but I would not want you to make more money than me. And you would not want me to earn more than you. It is certainly ok for you to make a living, but not to earn more than I do. It is not accepted.

Similarly, Petra described:

The biggest problem for me is the Swedish envy. Specifically, the way in which Swedish companies try their best to make you fail. For example, one hotel here in town. The owner reported to the local fire department that our caravan spots were too close to each other, even though it was not a problem before us. As a result we had to change everything. He really tried everything to make us fail. I think it’s a pity. They won’t see partnership opportunities. Together we could improve the area but no, you can’t do it here. Nor anywhere else in Sweden.

Almost all of the migrants have been in Sweden for nearly a decade (Table 1) and stressed it took a long time, at least five years, before the locals started to accept them. Overall, the majority still saw them as foreigners. Those Dutchies from the campground, as Petra stated. When asked directly, our interviewees did consider themselves integrated, but struggled with the meaning of this term in the context of a sparsely populated rural north. Interviewees stated their social interaction is mainly limited to an exchange of greeting on the streets, but this is the way, they perceive, the locals interact with each other. The Swedes keep very much to themselves, noted Jet. Likewise, Willem stated, For me integration is adjusting to the country you are living in. I believe we have succeeded ... I mean, everybody in this town is pretty much on their own. And so are we. If we see each other on the streets, we have some small talk. I know enough people to do so. The migrants also felt quite foreign, showing a struggle with cultural integration. They missed, for example, more spontaneous and direct interactions, and experienced a certain distance and self-censorship. Piet said, In Sweden you cannot just visit your neighbor spontaneously and have a coffee together. Gonnie noted, In Sweden I would never be able to tell someone what I really think about them.

Finally, despite the explicit efforts of the regional authorities to attract Dutch migrants to rural regions, our interviewees were very clear they did not receive any support from the local authorities. The campgrounds are located in the periphery, quite far away from the core communities, which prevented the entrepreneurs to directly benefit from investments and development projects. Jet stated, There is no support from the local government. Not at all. In fact, we are a bit disappointed. Overall, operating a campground played an inhibiting, rather than catalysing role, in the integration process of the migrants, while integration in the sparsely populated rural areas remains insufficiently reflected in current integration discourses and is not discussed in regional development documents.

Discussion & Conclusion

The case of lifestyle expat-preneurs reveals a blind spot in the current rhetoric on integration, in Sweden and EU policies in general. Within this dominant logic, Dutch tourism entrepreneurs are the epitome of successful and desirable “cosmopolitan entrepreneurial migrants” (Scuzzarello, 2015) who are, we argue, considered to be above and
beyond migration and integration discourses. Since integration is considered to be complete once employment is reached, the expat-preneurs are treated as \textit{a priori} integrated. Indeed, Dutch migrants settle in unattractive areas, establish and develop their businesses with their own means and skills, without reliance on the state support, are independent, entrepreneurial and quick to learn. All this, however, does not mean that integration is a “non-issue”; these migrants still face many integration challenges that can be made visible if conceptualised using “social connections,” which focuses on the strength of social bonds, bridges and links within communities (Ager & Strang, 2008; Zetter et al., 2006). From our interviews, it becomes evident that social connections are rather weak on all levels, especially links within their communities, as well as with local authorities. This is congruent with prior research, as lifestyle migrants have often been noted to lack integration within the host communities, not uncommonly at their own volition.

Benson (2011), for example, studying the British lifestyle migrants in rural France, argues lifestyle migrants are more inclined to integrate into the community of their compatriots rather than the locals. In the present research, however, reasons behind weak social integration are not the same. These migrants have a strong inclination to integrate into the host society and even intentionally avoid settling in the communities where the number of their compatriots is high. Despite cultural and linguistic proximity, the migrants still face many obstacles and need to perform major renegotiation of their identities. They become part of communities where there are very few other migrants and scarce immigration history, very little population “flow” and high average age. Thus, overcoming the image of an “eternal newcomer” (Urban, 2013) becomes nearly impossible for years on end (Benson & O’Reilly, 2009; Benson & Osbaldiston, 2014). Certain traits of Swedish culture (e.g. high level of individualism, self-reliance and reticence) may become quite challenging to integrate into, especially in the context of the rural north, where the population is largely dispersed. This calls for sensitising the concept of integration to the specifics of rurality and peripherality (Jentsch et al., 2007; Jentsch & Simard, 2009).

Certain challenges of expat-preneurial post-migratory life are embedded in the very nature of the campground business in the rural north. Campground business, therefore, emerges in an ambivalent role: on the one hand, it enables the immigration and settlement itself. Migrants have limited employment options in rural areas, which is true even for the “privileged” migration within the EU. Tourism business indeed emerges as a relatively inclusive and easy-to-enter sector. What is especially noteworthy is that the migrants make a decision to migrate and become tourism entrepreneurs simultaneously, and these life-changing decisions are inherently intertwined. Previous research (Carson et al., 2017; Müller, 2006), indicates that becoming a tourism entrepreneur is not part of the initial migration motivations, but rather is something that happens out of necessity, due to inability of migrants to obtain other jobs, akin to disadvantage theory. In contrast, our interviewees moved to the north of Sweden with a clear pre-existing decision to become tourism entrepreneurs. Changing profession was a desirable part of the migration experience, as discussed by King, Breen, and Whitelaw (2014). The importance of the tourism sector, as a later-life career option, requires stressing and is often ignored; tourism is usually perceived as a sector with a high share of youngsters who treat it as a temporary, seasonal job. A clear theme in our interviews is that campground business enabled interviewees to
drastically change their lives at a time when igniting a new career is not easy, after 40
years of age. As extensively discussed by Åberg (2017), competence in tourism
business is viewed as simply “common sense,” something that anyone, at any age,
can do.

On the other hand, however, the very nature of campground business inhibits migrant
integration. Campground business becomes a double-edged sword, which enables inde-
pendence on one hand, and isolation on the other. This may result in disconnection
from community processes, as well as challenges in accessing certain services caused by
geographical remoteness and the necessity to continuously be present at the campground,
where the interaction is almost exclusively with tourists. Having to spend significant
portions of their time at the campgrounds, these entrepreneurs have to invest in socialisation
with transient tourists, rather than with locals. Thus, even if the entrepreneurs are not
creating expat enclaves (Benson, 2011; Benson, & O’Reilly, 2009), one can talk about
campground-sized tourist enclaves where the migrant campground-owners become
“trapped.”

This article contributes to better understanding migration and integration experiences
of intra-EU migrant entrepreneurs in rural areas, or, more specifically, lifestyle expat-pre-
neurs – a concept best reflecting the nature of these migrants. Campground business
emerges as a powerful locomotive of lifestyle migration, offering a perfect opportunity
to achieve the dream of an independent business placed in a rural idyll. Motivations per-
taining to the quality of life and well-being found in our article were in line with the
general conceptualisation of lifestyle migrants (Benson & O’Reilly, 2009; Eimermann,
2013; 2014; 2015a; Knowles & Harper, 2009; Luck et al., 2010; Santacreu et al., 2009).
More unexpected, however, are the invisible integration challenges faced by these
migrants. Despite being “cosmopolitan entrepreneurial migrants” par excellence, camp-
ground entrepreneurs still face integration issues not accounted for in the dominant
employment-centric integration discourses. These challenges can be captured through
looking at the facet of social connections of integration, as suggested in the framework
by Ager and Strang (2008). It demonstrates these migrants often find themselves caught
in contradictory narratives, simultaneously being perceived as the “eternal newcomers”
by their host communities and as ideal “non-migrants” by the regional authorities. A
specific set of challenges is embedded in the very nature of campground business,
which has not been discussed before, and thus this research fills an existing knowledge
gap in the literature.

Future research attention should be paid to climate and natural environment as key
migration motivations, as these emerged as important findings outside the scope of this
article. It can be argued that lifestyle migrants in the Swedish north can also be understood
as environmental migrants. With the advance of climate change, it can only be expected
that such migrants will grow in numbers, be those unwillingly escaping unfavourable
climate conditions or those having the luxury to choose a climate most suitable for
their lifestyle desires. Northern peripheries of Europe, therefore, despite being perceived
as “low-amenity” areas (Carson et al., 2017; Vuin, Carson, Carson, & Garrett, 2016)
become attractive to a certain group of migrants. More longitudinal research is needed
to understand if there is a long-term migration trend to higher altitudes, both of short-
and long-term nature, and what the implications are for the regional development, local
livelihoods and the environment.
References


