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Lifestyle entrepreneurship in tourism: the role of identity and local practices in shaping innovation

Emma Verri

Master's in Hospitality and Tourism Management

Supervisor:
Ph.D, Álvaro de Borba Cruz Lopes Dias,
Associate Professor with Habilitation,
Department of Marketing, Operations and General Management at
Iscte Business School

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Resumo

O empreendedorismo de estilo de vida tem vindo a afirmar-se como uma forma distinta de iniciativa empresarial no turismo, caracterizada por motivações não económicas, como a procura de qualidade de vida, a paixão por um passatempo e a ligação a um lugar. Embora tenha sido amplamente estudado numa perspetiva qualitativa e em relação às suas motivações, existe ainda evidência empírica limitada sobre a forma como os empreendedores de estilo de vida contribuem para a inovação e para o desenvolvimento local. Este estudo procura colmatar essa lacuna através de uma abordagem quantitativa que examina a relação entre identidade empreendedora, práticas locais (emprego, colaboração e aprovisionamento) e integração comunitária, a partir de uma análise do setor turístico em Itália. Com base em 150 respostas a inquéritos, o modelo de investigação foi testado através de Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). Os resultados revelam que a identidade empreendedora é o fator mais determinante da inovação, sobretudo através das dimensões ligadas à criatividade e ao reconhecimento de oportunidades. O emprego local e a colaboração entre empresas contribuem significativamente para a integração comunitária, ao passo que as cadeias de fornecimento locais não demonstram o mesmo efeito. Contrariamente ao que sugeriam alguns estudos anteriores, a integração comunitária não fomenta diretamente a inovação, o que indica que é a identidade que funciona como o principal mecanismo de transformação da autenticidade e dos fatores contextuais em resultados inovadores. Estes resultados oferecem novos contributos teóricos ao clarificar o peso relativo da identidade e do enraizamento local no empreendedorismo de estilo de vida. Fornecem igualmente orientações práticas para decisores políticos e para os próprios empreendedores. Em vez de apostar apenas em incentivos financeiros ou em intervenções centradas na oferta, poderão gerar-se maiores benefícios através do reforço das redes de colaboração, do apoio ao emprego local e do estímulo à identidade empreendedora como fonte de propostas turísticas autênticas e competitivas.

Palavras-chave: Empreendedorismo de estilo de vida, Desenvolvimento local, Identidade empreendedora, Integração comunitária, Inovação, Enraizamento local

JEL Classificação: Z30, Z32

Abstract

Lifestyle entrepreneurship has emerged as a distinct form of venturing within tourism, characterized by non-economic motives such as quality of life, passion for a hobby, and attachment to a place. While extensively studied from a qualitative perspective and on their motives, limited empirical evidence exists regarding how lifestyle entrepreneurs contribute to innovation and local development. This study seeks to address this gap by adopting a quantitative approach to examine the interplay between entrepreneurial identity, local practices (hiring, collaboration, and purchasing), and community integration by conducting an analysis in the Italian tourism sector. Based on 150 survey responses, the research model was tested through Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). The findings reveal that entrepreneurial identity is the strongest driver of innovation, particularly through creativity and opportunity oriented dimensions. Local employment and business collaboration significantly enhance community integration, whereas local supply chains do not show the same effect. Contrary to previous assumptions, community integration does not directly foster innovation, suggesting that identity functions as the key mechanism through which authenticity and contextual factors are transformed into innovative outcomes. The results provide new theoretical insights by clarifying the relative weight of identity and embeddedness in lifestyle entrepreneurship. They also offer practical guidance for both policymakers and entrepreneurs. Rather than focusing solely on financial incentives or supply-side interventions, greater benefits may come from strengthening collaborative networks, supporting local employment, and nurturing entrepreneurial identity as a source of authentic and competitive tourism offerings.

Keywords: Lifestyle entrepreneurship, Local development, Entrepreneurial identity, Community integration, Innovation, Local embeddedness

JEL Classification: Z30, Z32

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Lifestyle entrepreneurship refers to a form of self-employment moved by non-economic motives rather than being profit-driven (Ateljevic & Doorne, 2000; Marchant & Mottiar, 2011; Peters et al., 2009).

The literature about this topic has experienced rapid growth within the past two decades. It has focused especially on the motives that drive these entrepreneurs to establish tourism ventures and on their overall satisfaction in running the business (Ivanycheva, D., 2024). Their priorities tend to be quality of life, place attachment, or personal preferences, as opposed to economic growth (Ivanycheva et al., 2024; Marchant & Mottiar, 2011). Academic research indeed highlights the limitations of applying purely economic frameworks to study the development and formation of lifestyle entrepreneurship, since their behavior and outcomes are not easily explained by profit-maximization logics (Peters et al., 2009). At the same time, lifestyle entrepreneurs are increasingly recognized as important actors in tourism destinations, contributing not only to niche product development but also to the social and cultural vibrancy of the areas where they operate (Bosworth & Farrell, 2011; Dias & Silva, 2021b). Their embeddedness in place and reliance on local resources position them as potential drivers for innovation and community well-being, even if their contributions often remain underexplored or fragmented in the literature.

In particular, their strong link to the place in which they operate has not been fully examined in relation to its role as a source of entrepreneurial opportunities and as a factor influencing innovative outcomes (Dias & Silva, 2021b; Kibler et al., 2015). Thomas et al. (2011) conclude that the assumption of small and medium enterprises significantly contributing to destinations or local economies remains open to research. To the best of existing knowledge, this issue has not yet been investigated through quantitative analysis in the context of lifestyle entrepreneurship, leaving important gaps about their impact on innovation and local development. A recent research review states that although lifestyle entrepreneurship has been widely discussed in tourism studies, several aspects remain insufficiently addressed.

Current research often acknowledges their contribution to cultural continuity, authenticity, and the creation of distinctive visitor experiences (Ivanycheva et al., 2024), yet these dimensions are still marginal in mainstream entrepreneurship debates, which tend to privilege growth-oriented ventures. As a result, the small-scale but meaningful innovations that lifestyle entrepreneurs introduce, frequently rooted in creativity, passion, or the reinterpretation of traditions, are not always captured by dominant theories (Ivanycheva et al., 2024). Concepts

such as identity and authenticity, while explored in specific craft-based sectors, also deserve further attention in the broader lifestyle entrepreneurship context (Ivanycheva et al., 2024), where they are essential to how entrepreneurs run their businesses and interact with their surroundings (Ivanycheva et al., 2024; Mottiar, 2007). Moreover, the impact of these entrepreneurs cannot be reduced to their individual motives alone. Their integration into destinations, their collaborations with other businesses, and their participation in local social and professional networks are still not well understood (Mottiar, 2007).

Given the increasing presence of lifestyle ventures in tourism, research should move beyond descriptive accounts to examine systematically how their practices influence both community well-being and the entrepreneurs' own capacity to innovate (Mottiar, 2007). This perspective becomes even more relevant when considered in light of recent debates on regenerative tourism, which emphasize community, natural environments, and the interconnections between social and ecological systems (Larson et al., 2022). From this viewpoint, community development is not only an economic outcome but also a process through which collaboration and shared practices shape individual, social, and ecological well-being (Larson et al., 2022; Aquino et al., 2024). In rural contexts especially, the creation of networks is seen as a pivotal mechanism to foster innovation and support transformations that strengthen both sustainability and community resilience (Aquino et al., 2024).

This study contributes to the agenda by adopting a quantitative approach to analyze the interplay between entrepreneurial identity, local practices, and community integration, dimensions that have often been studied in isolation. By testing them within a single model, the research provides new empirical evidence on their relative importance in shaping innovation and destination development. This integrated and quantitative perspective distinguishes the present work from much of the existing research, which has largely remained qualitative, descriptive, or focused on single aspects of lifestyle entrepreneurship.

The central research questions guiding the research are:

'*What is the role of lifestyle entrepreneurship in shaping innovation and community development within tourism?*' and '*how do lifestyle entrepreneurs in tourism create value for themselves and their communities?*'

More specifically, throughout the study, the following questions will be assessed:

'*How do local practices (hiring, collaboration, supply) influence the community integration of lifestyle entrepreneurs?*', '*does community integration foster innovation in lifestyle tourism ventures?*', and '*what role do entrepreneurial identity and passion play in shaping innovation orientation among lifestyle entrepreneurs?*'.

Accordingly, the research is structured around three core objectives. First, it seeks to evaluate the extent to which local practices, specifically hiring, collaboration, and sourcing, contribute to the community integration of lifestyle entrepreneurs. Second, it aims to determine

whether community embeddedness translates into innovative outcomes within tourism ventures. Third, it investigates how entrepreneurial identity functions as a driver of innovation, clarifying the mechanisms through which personal passions and self-concept influence entrepreneurial behavior.

To address these objectives, the study adopts Italy as its research context, offering a pertinent case for exploring lifestyle entrepreneurship in tourism. The country is among the global leaders in international visitor arrivals, with 458,4 millions in 2024 (ISTAT, 2025). Tourism contributes around 10% of national GDP, generating over €225 billion in 2024, confirming the sector as one of the pillars of the Italian economy (ISTAT, 2025). At the same time, Italy's economic structure is characterized by the prevalence of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). With over 4 million SMEs producing more than 65% of national value added, the Italian context is dominated by small-scale, place-based businesses (Di Bella et al., 2023). In particular, family-owned firms, which are often associated with lifestyle-oriented ventures, account for the vast majority of Italian enterprises, representing over 80% of the total. Their incidence is especially strong in the tourism-related sectors, with accommodation and food services reaching nearly 87% of family-run businesses (ISTAT, 2023). This entrepreneurial landscape makes Italy a suitable setting to explore the research questions.

The study first engages with the existing literature to frame the concepts of entrepreneurial identity, local practices, and community integration, from which the research hypotheses are derived. It then outlines the methodological approach adopted to test these hypotheses and presents the empirical findings. The results are subsequently interpreted in relation to previous studies, highlighting both areas of alignment and points of divergence. Finally, the work concludes with its theoretical contributions, practical implications, and directions for future research, aiming to enrich the understanding of lifestyle entrepreneurship in tourism and its role in fostering innovation and local development.

CHAPTER 2

Theoretical framework

2.1 Lifestyle entrepreneurs

Lifestyle entrepreneurship has increasingly attracted scholarly attention as a distinct form of venturing that prioritizes personal fulfillment, authenticity, and attachment to place, while still playing an important role in tourism development (Ateljevic & Doorne, 2000; Bosworth & Farrell, 2011). From the literature, three types of lifestyle entrepreneurs were identified based on their motives or antecedents: activity-driven, expression-driven, and location-driven (Ivanycheva et al., 2024). The founders of activity-driven enterprises are often moved by the combination of their business with recreational activities and hobbies, such as sports or farming (Milanesi, 2018). They build their venture around their passion and make a living out of it (Carson & Carson, 2018; Ivanycheva et al., 2024). Expression-driven entrepreneurs act out of their artistic expression, normally having to do with craftsmanship (Bakas et al., 2019; Ivanycheva et al., 2024). While finally, location-based ones are motivated by living in a particular place they desire or they are somehow attached to (Getz & Carlsen, 2000; Marchant & Mottiar, 2011). These types of entrepreneurs are often escaping from urban environments, value a good work-life balance (Ateljevic & Doorne, 2000; Ivanycheva et al., 2024), and might be influenced by past experiences of travel (Marchant & Mottiar, 2011).

Korsgaard, Müller, and Tanvig, 2015 identified rural entrepreneurship as a form of lifestyle entrepreneurship, where the actors don't engage with the place for profit reasons but for the social life within it and to fulfill personal, community, or cultural desires, and they consider the place where they act as a meaningful location. Small family businesses are as well often associated with lifestyle entrepreneurship because of their similar social and moral values that are incompatible to purely economic goals (Bosworth et al., 2011; Morrison, 2006).

Lifestyle-oriented entrepreneurs often play a role in enhancing the attractiveness and uniqueness of local tourism through the development of niche products and experiences (Carson & Carson, 2018; Dias et al., 2020; Dias et al., 2021b). Examples include agritourism businesses that integrate farm-to-table gastronomy, artisans offering craft-based workshops, or small lodgings that design experience packages centered on local heritage and traditions. Their tailored offerings not only contribute to diversifying the tourism sector but also generate added value for the local community by supporting cultural vibrancy, improving quality of life, and fostering sustainable economic development over time (Carson & Carson, 2018; Ivanycheva et al., 2024; Wang et al., 2019). Their deep connection to the local area serves as a key differentiating factor that enhances their competitiveness compared to larger firms (Dias

& Silva, 2021b; Kibler et al., 2015), allowing them to leverage the distinct self-identity and competitive advantage associated with small-scale dimensions and personalized experiences (Carlsen et al., 2008; Morrison & Teixeira, 2004). Researchers also point out the ability of lifestyle entrepreneurs to effectively leverage kinship and social networks (Bosworth et al., 2011; Carlsen et al., 2008), which further reinforces their embeddedness in the local context.

This close engagement with the community not only supports their business operations but also contributes to broader sustainability outcomes, as it encourages socially inclusive practices, supports local economies, and often aligns with environmentally conscious values (Antunes et al., 2023). In contrast to mass-market tourism models that prioritize growth over long-term responsibility, lifestyle entrepreneurship tends to foster a more balanced and sustainable approach to destination development (Antunes et al., 2023; Duarte et al., 2023). Contributing to this is the strategic use of local resources and knowledge (Dias et al., 2021a; Korsgaard et al., 2015), which not only enhances authenticity and cultural value but can also support the revitalization of the area where they operate (Dias & Silva, 2021b). By repurposing traditional assets such as local products and heritage, these entrepreneurs help generate new economic and social dynamics that support the regeneration of small communities and rural areas (Cunha et al., 2020; Diaz & Silva, 2021b). Their businesses often create jobs, stimulate local supply chains, and reinforce the perceived value of place-based identity (Bosworth et al., 2011; Cunha et al., 2020). Moreover, the personalized nature of their services, along with a desire to share and preserve local culture, nature, and knowledge, positions them as active contributors to community development and sustainable regional transformation (Cunha et al., 2020; Marchant et al., 2011; Morrison, 2006; Wang et al., 2019).

Innovation in tourism is the introduction of new products or services that emerge from the creative combination of resources and the entrepreneur's subjective perception of opportunities (Yachin, 2019). Yachin (2019) highlights that product ideas often arise from how entrepreneurs interpret and combine available resources, influenced by their traits, knowledge, and social interactions. In parallel, identity research highlights that entrepreneurs are not simply venture creators, but individuals engaged in activities that hold deep personal meaning (Mmbaga et al., 2020). Identity can therefore predict behaviors, decisions, and the capacity to act on opportunities (Belchior & Castro-Silva, 2023). Research on identity can consequently offer an important framework to better understand entrepreneurial processes in tourism.

Entrepreneur satisfaction also plays a relevant role, as it can influence both the willingness to remain in the destination and the drive to continue investing in the business (Getz & Carlsen, 2000; Dias et al., 2021b). This aspect is a crucial factor for this kind of entrepreneurs, because of their nature and goals. Their satisfaction often goes beyond financial outcomes, reflecting the achievement of a desired lifestyle (Bredvold & Skålén, 2016).

2.2 Local supply chains and community integration

The motives driving entrepreneurs are thought to impact the type of venture they create and the way they operate it. This also means it has an impact on the types of resources they acquire and on their community-oriented value creation (Korsgaards et al., 2015).

Research highlights that lifestyle entrepreneurs are significantly involved in the local community and their activities are positive contributions to the local area in terms of employment, local trade, and strengthening the regional tourism identity (Bosworth et al., 2011; Marchant et al., 2011). They are believed to have the potential to contribute to the local community by hiring and buying locally, meaning they can play an important role in the development of the destination by retaining locally the money earned by the business (Bosworth et al., 2011; Dias et al., 2020; Jack & Anderson, 2002). Morrison (2006) advocates the potential power of small family tourism businesses to support social and economic development in the communities they are located in, through generating employment opportunities, offering services, and sourcing goods and services from local suppliers and community-based trades. Building on this, Wang et al. (2018) demonstrate that lifestyle-oriented motivations often translate into socially responsible behaviors, such as sourcing from local suppliers, supporting community events, or protecting cultural and environmental resources. These practices reinforce the fact that local integration is not merely a strategic choice, but also an outcome of entrepreneurs' values and lifestyle priorities.

Jack et al., 2002 identified potential for researching the role of social capital in fostering local embeddedness along with the capacity of networks to serve as a mechanism for achieving this embeddedness. Social capital refers to the resources that individuals can derive from their participation in social networks and structures (Lin, 2001; Lin et al., 2017) and it contributes to community engagement through the acquisition of resources and information (Arnott et al., 2021). The concept of social capital encompasses the presence of valuable resources within a social context, the individual's ability to access these resources, and the capacity to utilize them effectively to pursue goals (Lin, 2001). This links to Anderson et al., 2002, stating that social capital is a process: it refers both to the outcome and to the medium, and it consists in constructing bridges (Anderson et al., 2002; Klapper et al., 2018).

There are three dimensions of relational capital according to Nahapiet et al., 1998: structural, cognitive, and relational capital. These refer respectively to the overall structure of the network, the shared understandings and meanings, and lastly to the quality and content of the relations (Klapper et al., 2018; Nahapiet et al., 1998). The study of Bosworth and Farrell (2011) found that strong local ties, as an expression of social capital, often translate into a commitment to engage with and support other local neighboring businesses. The research

made by Griggio and Oxenswärdh (2021) found that several lifestyle entrepreneurs emphasize the importance of building long-lasting networks with local producers and stakeholders, recognizing these collaborations as a key step toward developing sustainable and community-oriented ventures.

While previous research highlights that lifestyle entrepreneurs are often embedded in the local business environment, most findings remain exploratory (Mottiar, Z., 2007). With the growing presence of these actors in tourism destinations, it is essential to further investigate how their practices, such as hiring local workers, sourcing from local suppliers, and collaborating with other businesses, affect their integration into the local community. Building on this gap, the present study proposes the following hypotheses:

H1: *local hiring, collaboration with businesses, and supply, positively influence the community integration of lifestyle entrepreneurs.*
H1a: *the employment of local workers influences the community integration of lifestyle entrepreneurs.*
H1b: *the collaboration with other local businesses influences the community integration of lifestyle entrepreneurs.*
H1c: *sourcing inputs from local suppliers influences the community integration of lifestyle entrepreneurs.*

Hypothesis 1 encompasses local hiring, local supply, and local collaborations with other businesses, and assumes their positive influence on the community integration of lifestyle entrepreneurs. The analysis will consider the three variables of local work, local business collaboration, and local supply as separate hypotheses respectively in H1a, H1b, and H1c.

2.3 Innovation and community integration

In the literature, lifestyle ventures are described as making modest reinvestments to stay competitive (Morris et al., 2018; Neumeyer & Santos, 2018). At the same time, it is strongly believed these actors have less interest in growing their businesses compared to profit-oriented entrepreneurs (Fu et al., 2019; Thomas et al., 2011). Because of the motives that lead them to establishing the venture, they are found to play a key role in fostering innovation within destinations by offering unique products or services, while also contributing to the diversification and broader development of the local tourism offer (Bosworth & Farrell, 2011; Fu et al., 2019). Research highlights that innovation among tourism lifestyle entrepreneurs is not only influenced by economic goals, but is often driven by personal satisfaction, creativity, and the lifestyle they pursue (Dias et al., 2020; Dias & Silva, 2021b). From this we could

consequently argue that, while lifestyle entrepreneurs might not make substantial financial investments in business expansion or infrastructure (Morris et al., 2018), the innovation they bring emerges from their creative adaptation to local resources, a deep understanding of the destination, personal passions, and the desire to offer meaningful experiences rather than from scale-oriented strategies (Dias et al., 2021).

Lifestyle ventures' activities are closely tied to local identity and community values which can help foster regional development (Dias & Silva, 2021b) and contribute to maintaining and promoting distinctive, small-scale market offerings (Ateljevic & Doorne, 2000). By offering visitors authentic and original experiences rooted in the local context, lifestyle entrepreneurs form the basis for both innovation and differentiation within their businesses (Dias et al., 2020; Kibler et al., 2015). Dias et al. (2021b) conclude indeed that "community attachment has a positive influence on entrepreneurial self-efficacy, innovation and willingness to stay" (p. 701). Local embeddedness allows entrepreneurs to perceive and respond to context-specific opportunities that may not be visible to outsiders. Their understanding of the local structure, made possible through networks and interpersonal relationships, fosters a form of contextual innovation (Jack & Anderson, 2002). Carson and Carson (2018) highlight the same, especially for location-driven lifestyle entrepreneurs, arguing that they are better able to turn local assets into commercial products compared to other businesses (Carson & Carson, 2018; Ivanycheva et al., 2024).

The work of literature review by Ivanycheva, D., et al. (2024) on lifestyle entrepreneurship, gathered the knowledge that lifestyle entrepreneurs often prioritize collaboration over rivalry with one another, compared to the depiction of traditional entrepreneurship (Ateljevic & Doorne, 2000; Ivanycheva et al., 2024). This might be due to the personal principles that guide their businesses or the distinctive nature of the offerings they bring to the market (Ivanycheva et al., 2024). Social connections not only facilitate their integration but also serve as a foundation for trust, reciprocity, and collaboration, which are essential to sustaining innovative practices and long-term engagement with the local economy (Jack & Anderson, 2002). These entrepreneurs often develop products in collaboration with other businesses which are innovative and often reflect the local cultural heritage (Dias et al., 2021a).

Although innovation in tourism is inherently complex and poses particular challenges for small-scale enterprises (Cooper, 2015; Dias & Silva, 2021b), the close stakeholder relationships and link to the place can serve as an advantage (Dias & Silva, 2021b). Findings from Dias and Silva (2021b) suggest that a strong connection to the place combined with active involvement in local networks, contribute significantly to fostering innovation and competitiveness among small rural tourism businesses. In such settings, entrepreneurial opportunities often emerge not through formal business planning, but through informal, socially embedded dynamics (Bosworth & Farrell, 2011; Yachin, 2019). Relationships and

embeddedness in the local context enable entrepreneurs to access knowledge (Dias et al., 2021a), resources, and collaborative dynamics that foster original and place-specific solutions. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2: *the community integration of lifestyle entrepreneurs influences their innovation.*

Which allows to investigate to what degree deeper community integration plays a central role in shaping innovation among lifestyle entrepreneurs.

2.4 Entrepreneurs identity and innovation

Passion is the core and reason to exist of lifestyle entrepreneurs, whether it is for a place, a hobby, or a lifestyle (Ivanycheva et al., 2024). The establishment of a business that aligns with personal values, offers autonomy, and provides a sense of fulfillment is often their main purpose. For many lifestyle entrepreneurs, entrepreneurship becomes an end in itself (Ateljevic & Doorne, 2000; Ivanycheva et al., 2024; Peters et al., 2009).

Entrepreneurial identity, as conceptualised by Cardon et al. (2013), is rooted in the central roles entrepreneurs claim for themselves, such as inventor, founder, or developer. The passion associated with these roles fosters intense positive feelings and intrinsic motivation, which, in turn, can drive persistence, creativity, and opportunity recognition (Cardon et al., 2013). This passion reflects not only strong emotional engagement, but also a deep personal connection to the activities that define these roles (Cardon et al., 2009). Unlike employees, who tend to identify with the organizations they work for, many entrepreneurs are instead identified through their ventures (Mmbaga et al., 2020). This strong alignment between self-identity and business purpose can serve as a driving force for innovation, with lifestyle entrepreneurs frequently acting as initiators of novel products and services in tourism (Ateljevic & Doorne, 2000; Cardon et al., 2013).

At the same time, lifestyle and family-run businesses are often described as risk-averse and lacking strong growth ambitions (Getz & Carlsen, 2000; Morrison, 2006). Yet, their commitment to supporting the household or preserving their lifestyle encourages them to pursue alternative forms of entrepreneurship, developing distinctive comparative advantages that enable survival and differentiation (Bosworth & Farrell, 2011). In this sense, even when growth is not the primary goal, innovation may arise through small-scale adjustments, creative uses of resources, and a strong emphasis on authenticity (Bosworth & Farrell, 2011; Dias et al., 2021a).

An identity-based perspective highlights that entrepreneurs are not just business founders but people driven by activities that hold deep personal meaning, which helps explain their

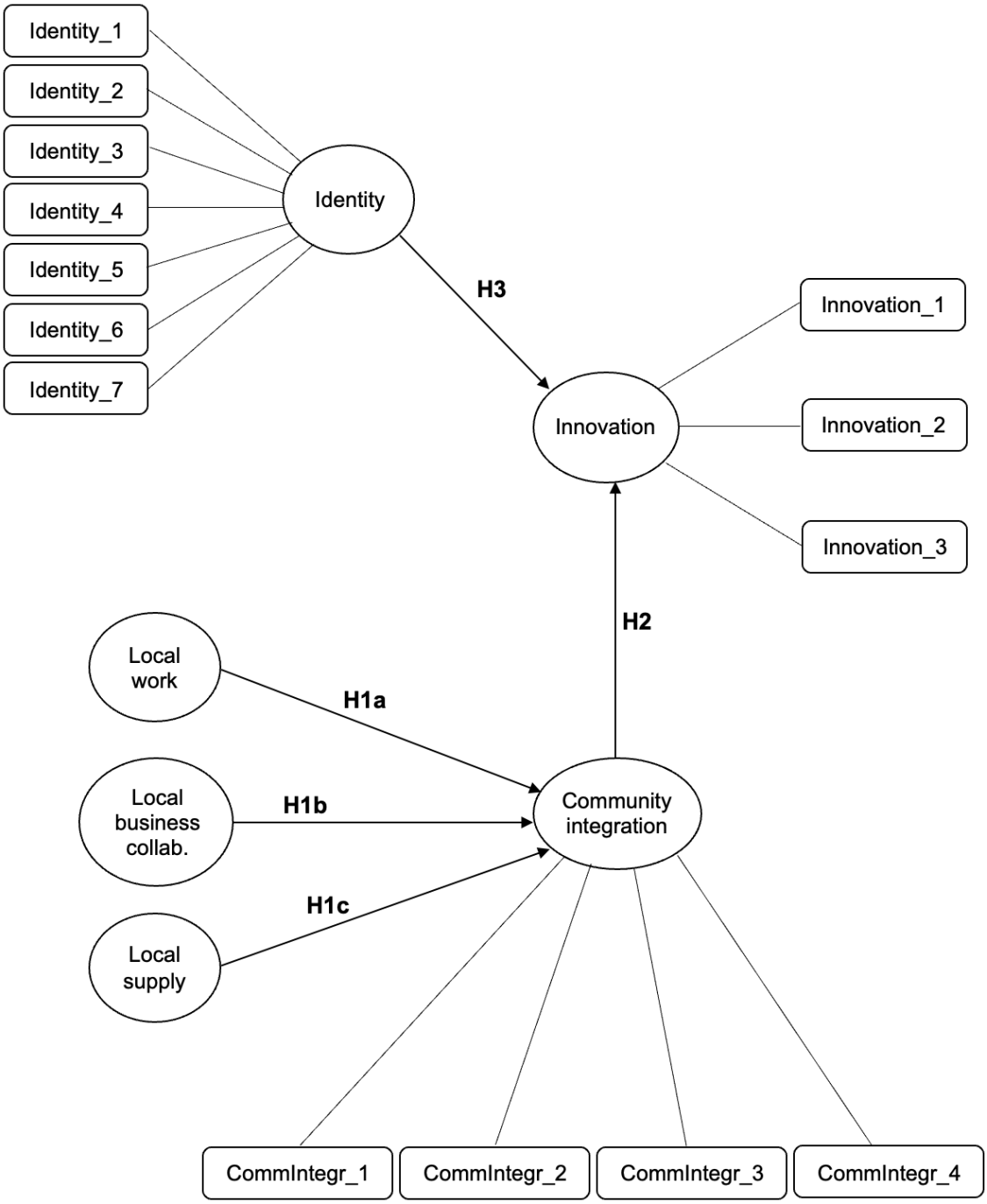
distinctive motivations and choices (Mmbaga et al., 2020). Because identity shapes not only how opportunities are perceived but also how entrepreneurs act upon them, it directly influences innovation outcomes and behaviors (Belchior & Castro-Silva, 2023). This connection is particularly important for lifestyle entrepreneurs, who often operate in uncertain and less structured environments, where identity may represent a central point for guiding action and a source of persistence (Belchior & Castro-Silva, 2023; Mmbaga et al., 2020).

According to Korsgaard et al., 2015, entrepreneurship "can be understood as the recombination of resources to generate value" (p. 10), with lifestyle entrepreneurs often demonstrating an openness to different value dimensions: economic, social, cultural, and environmental (Anderson & Jack, 2002; Dias & Silva, 2021a; Korsgaard et al., 2015). The construction of entrepreneurial identity may vary, with some entrepreneurs deliberately embracing the role of "founder" or "business owner," while others gradually develop their identity through hobbies or part-time activities that evolve into full-time ventures (Mmbaga et al., 2020). These kinds of entrepreneurs rarely start with explicit business ambitions, but discover entrepreneurial opportunities through experimentation, eventually realizing that their activity can be commercialized (Shah & Tripsas, 2007). Lifestyle entrepreneurs may develop their role identity even unintentionally, by for instance transforming hobbies or personal passions into entrepreneurial ventures (Mmbaga et al., 2020; Shah & Tripsas, 2007). The process of constructing an entrepreneurial identity is indeed a dynamic one (Bredvold & Skålén, 2016) which can also be influenced by social ties and group memberships (Mmbaga et al., 2020).

Research on lifestyle entrepreneurs also points to the role of entrepreneurial self-efficacy (ESE), defined as the belief in one's ability to successfully perform entrepreneurial tasks (McGee et al., 2009). Recent findings suggest that innovative behavior and ESE reinforce each other, since innovation strengthens self-perceptions of capability, while higher ESE makes entrepreneurs more inclined to engage in innovative practices (Dias et al., 2021b). This reinforces the idea that entrepreneurial identity, encompassing both self-definition and perceived competence, is connected to the pursuit of innovation. As entrepreneurial identity becomes a salient part of the self, innovation can emerge as both a behavioral outcome and a means of expressing that identity (Murnieks & Mosakowski, 2007). This explains why lifestyle entrepreneurs, despite limited growth ambitions, often act as initiators of novelty within tourism (Ateljevic & Doorne, 2000). According to the literature, entrepreneurial identity influences not only the goals they pursue but also their ability to identify and act upon opportunities, ultimately shaping both the degree and the nature of innovation within their ventures (Cardon et al., 2013; Morris et al., 2018). The following hypothesis has therefore been formulated:

H3: *Entrepreneurial identity positively influences innovation orientation.*

Figure 2.1 – Conceptual model



CHAPTER 3

Methodology

3.1 Questionnaire Design

The general aim of the questionnaire was to quantitatively investigate lifestyle entrepreneurs in relation to the depiction the literature makes about them, the characteristics and behaviors the research suggests and assumes, in particular regarding their involvement in the local community, their economic impact, and link to innovation.

The questionnaire used for this study was developed based on a review of the existing academic literature, with items adapted from established constructs relevant to lifestyle entrepreneurship. In order to assess the clarity, relevance, and coherence of the questionnaire, two preliminary interviews were conducted with entrepreneurs who identify with a lifestyle-driven approach in tourism. Their feedback was used to validate the wording and overall structure of the questionnaire and ensure its suitability for the target respondents.

The first questions were made to collect background and demographic information about the entrepreneur's business, including the type of activity, year of establishment, number of employees, legal form, the location where the business operates (e.g., rural, urban, seaside, mountain area), and the range of number of inhabitants in their area.

Following, the survey was structured to evaluate multiple dimensions of their business activities, community involvement, and entrepreneurial orientation. These were close-ended questions with response formats varying depending on the type of question. Some items were based on Likert-type scales, particularly those measuring perceptions, attitudes, and frequency of behaviors (e.g., involvement in the local community, innovation, or entrepreneurial identity), with options ranging from "never" to "very often" or "completely disagree" to "completely agree." Other questions were based on interval ranges (e.g., percentage of local suppliers or workers, or proportion of local purchases). Innovativeness was measured using items adapted from Kropp et al. (2006), focusing on creativity and problem-solving. Items relating to local supply and collaboration, as well as community integration and local economic impact, were drawn from Besser and Miller (2001), who examined small business owners' social responsibility and embeddedness in the local community. Finally, to capture aspects of entrepreneurial identity, items were adapted from Cardon et al. (2013), which conceptualizes identity through entrepreneurial passion and self-definition.

3.2 Data Collection

This study is based on primary data which was collected through a self-administered online survey created and carried out through Google Forms. Participation in the survey was entirely voluntary and respondents were informed that the questionnaire was anonymous, intended solely for academic purposes, and that the data would have been used confidentially and exclusively within that scope. Given that the research is based entirely in Italy and targets Italian tourism businesses, the questionnaire was administered in Italian. Additionally, since the term lifestyle entrepreneur does not have a direct Italian translation and may not be widely recognized, a brief explanation of the concept was provided at the beginning of the survey to ensure clarity and shared understanding.

The questionnaire included a total of 19 questions, structured into several thematic and more detailed subsections. Apart from the initial part gathering general information about the business, all remaining questions were designed as close-ended, using multiple-choice formats to facilitate consistency in responses and ease of analysis.

The target population consisted of small and medium-sized tourism enterprises operating in Italy, with the specific aim of reaching the entrepreneurs themselves. To access suitable respondents, the researcher contacted a variety of industry-related associations and organizations by phone, requesting their collaboration and availability in distributing the questionnaire to their affiliated businesses. The contacted entities included for example hotelier associations and regional unions representing tourism ventures, local tourism offices responsible for tourism promotion, destination management companies or municipality offices. In some cases, these organizations agreed to share the questionnaire directly with their contacts via email. Lastly, a small number of businesses personally known to the researcher were also invited to participate in the study.

The geographical reach of the distribution covered well-known tourist areas and destinations across Italy but also rural areas where the tourism model of ‘agriturismo’ often takes place. Research states indeed that lifestyle motives are more common in rural areas compared to urban ones (Ivanycheva et al., 2024).

3.3 Sample Description

The final dataset consists of 150 responses collected through non-probabilistic purposive sampling and it includes a wide variety of business types. The most represented categories in the sample are agriturismi (38%), followed by hotels (21%), holiday rentals and short-term accommodations (11%), restaurants and bars (9%), and B&Bs (8%). A smaller number of

respondents belong to beach properties, marketing and real estate agencies, event organizers, campsites, wineries, and other rural tourism-related ventures.

In terms of size, the sample is largely composed of micro and small enterprises. A significant portion (27%) reported having no employees, meaning they are owner-managed firms, while 13% had only one employee. Approximately 22% operate with two to four employees, and 14% employ between five and nine workers. Medium-sized structures are also represented, with 15% having between 10 and 15 employees, and a few outliers with over 30 employees.

As for geographical location, the majority of businesses are situated in rural or nature-oriented areas: 32% are in the mountains or hilly regions, 23% in the countryside and rural areas, and 14% in lake areas. Coastal locations account for 16%, while 11% are based in urban or suburban zones.

Population-wise, over half of the businesses (51%) are located in small municipalities with fewer than 5,000 inhabitants, followed by 23% in towns with 5,001 to 10,000 residents. About 19% are based in mid-sized cities (10,001–100,000 inhabitants), while only 7% operate in large urban centers (over 100,000 residents).

The age of the businesses is also diverse. While 17% were founded in the last five years and 19% between six and ten years ago, a substantial number (23%) have been operating for 11 to 20 years. Notably, several respondents (10%) reported running businesses older than 50 years, including four over a century old, reflecting the presence of multi-generational or heritage tourism enterprises in the sample.

3.4 Statistical analysis

The testing of the proposed hypothesis was carried out through Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) (Hair et al., 2017; Hair Jr et al., 2021), a variance-based approach suitable for exploring causal relationships and assessing predictive models. SmartPLS 3 was employed to conduct the analysis, a software which enables the simultaneous assessment of the measurement and structural models (Ringle et al., 2015).

First, the measurement model was assessed to verify the reliability and validity of the constructs included in the study. This involved examining the quality of the indicators and their ability to represent the intended latent variables. Once the adequacy of the measurement model was confirmed, the structural model was analyzed to test the hypothesized relationships among constructs and determine the explanatory power of the model.

To test the quality of the measurement model, the criteria proposed by Hair et al. (2017) were followed. Starting with the reliability test, all standardized factor loadings were above the threshold of 0,708 recommended by Hair et al. (2017). Measures of internal consistency also

met the standards, with Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability (CR) values for each construct exceeding 0.70 (Hair et al., 2017). Convergent validity was supported as well with all CR values above 0.70 and the average variance extracted (AVE) for each construct surpassing the 0.50 benchmark (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988; Hair et al., 2017). Discriminant validity was assessed using both the Fornell–Larcker criterion and the heterotrait–monotrait ratio (HTMT) as suggested (Hair et al., 2017; Hair Jr et al., 2021). In Table 3.1, the bolded diagonal values represent the square roots of AVE, the correlations between constructs are shown below the diagonal, and the HTMT values are displayed above the diagonal. The Fornell–Larcker test, requiring the square root of AVE for each construct to be greater than its correlations with any other construct, was satisfied (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Providing further confirmation of discriminant validity, the HTMT coefficients (values above the diagonal in Table 3.1) were all within the 0.85 threshold recommended in the literature for conceptually distinct constructs (Hair et al., 2017; Hair Jr et al., 2021).

Turning to the structural model, collinearity diagnostics indicated no critical issues, with all variance inflation factor (VIF) values below the cut-off of 5 (Hair et al., 2017). The coefficient of determination (R^2) values indicated that the predictors explained 27.6% of the variance in *Community Integration* (R^2 adjusted = 26.1%) and 53.3% of the variance in *Innovation* (R^2 adjusted = 52.7%). According to the guidelines by Hair Jr et al. (2021), these values can be interpreted as weak-to-moderate for *Community Integration* and moderate for *Innovation*. Predictive relevance, assessed through Stone–Geisser's Q^2 values obtained via blindfolding, was found to be 0.249 for *Community Integration* and 0.524 for *Innovation*, both exceeding the threshold of zero and indicating adequate predictive capability of the model, with a particularly strong result for *Innovation* (Geisser, 1974).

Bootstrapping was used to assess the significance of the structural paths, allowing to estimate the precision of the parameter estimates and to obtain t-statistics and p-values for hypothesis testing (Hair Jr et al., 2021).

Table 3.1 - Composite reliability, average variance extracted, correlations, and discriminant validity checks.

Latent variables	α	CR	AVE	1	2	3
(1) Community integration	0,906	0,932	0,776	**0,881**	0,164	0,170
(2) Identity	0,930	0,943	0,704	0,154	**0,839**	0,805
(3) Innovation	0,857	0,913	0,777	0,149	0,729	**0,881**

Table 3.2 - Structural model assessment.

Path	Path coefficient	Standard errors	*t* statistics	*p* values
Community integration → Innovation	0,038	0,061	0,614	0,539
Identity → Innovation	0,723	0,054	13,358	**0,000**
Local business collab. → Community integration	0,445	0,064	6,976	**0,000**
Local supply → Community integration	0,085	0,067	1,279	0,201
Local work → Community integration	0,142	0,071	2,011	**0,044**

Bold values indicate statistical significance p < 0.05.

Table 3.3 - IPMA

	Innovation	Performance
Community integration	0,038	54,210
Identity	0,723	78,102
Local business collab.	0,017	53,333
Local supply	0,003	63,453
Local work	0,005	52,503

Table 3.4 - Outer loadings for *Innovation*

	Outer loadings
Identity_1	0,762
Identity_2	0,805
Identity_3	0,824
Identity_4	0,857
Identity_5	0,883
Identity_6	0,859
Identity_7	0,877

CHAPTER 4

Results and discussion

Table 3.2 shows the path loadings coefficients reflecting the relationships between the constructs and provides evidence for hypothesis testing.

The results indicate that *identity* has a very strong positive effect on *innovation* (β = 0,723, p < 0.001), supporting H3. The same applies to the effect of *local business collaboration* to *community integration* (β = 0,445, p < 0.001) which confirms hypothesis H1b. Finally, *local work* affects *community integration* (β = 0,142, p < 0.05) providing support for H1a (Hair Jr et al., 2017). On the contrary, the paths from *community integration* to *innovation* and from *local supply* to *community integration* are not statistically significant (Hair Jr et al., 2021; Hair et al., 2017), indicating that H2 and H1c are not supported by the data.

4.1 The key role of entrepreneurs' identity

The findings on path coefficients clearly highlight entrepreneurial identity as a very powerful driver of innovation within lifestyle ventures, providing robust support for H3: *Entrepreneurial identity positively influences innovation orientation*.

In addition, an Importance-Performance Map Analysis (IPMA) was carried out for innovation (Table 3.4). The analysis shows that identity is by far the most critical determinant of innovation, combining the highest level of importance (0.723) with the strongest performance (78.102). In contrast, *community integration* and the local dimensions (*local business collaboration, local supply,* and *local work*) exhibit considerably lower importance scores, suggesting that their role in directly fostering innovation is less substantial.

These results indicate that, although local embeddedness and collaboration may remain relevant for other aspects of lifestyle entrepreneurship, innovation appears to be primarily shaped by identity-related factors. This is consistent with the literature that positions identity and passion as central forces behind entrepreneurial creativity and novelty (Cardon et al., 2013; Ivanycheva et al., 2024). The strong alignment between self-concept and business activity means that innovation often emerges as a way for entrepreneurs to express and validate their identity (Murnieks & Mosakowski, 2007). This explains why lifestyle entrepreneurs, despite being frequently risk-averse and less growth-oriented (Getz & Carlsen, 2000; Morrison, 2006), still emerge as key initiators of novelty within tourism (Ateljevic & Doorne, 2000).

Looking more closely at the outer loadings, not all dimensions of identity contributed equally. *Identity_5* ("I enjoy searching for new ideas for products or services") and *Identity_7*

(“Scanning the environment for new opportunities excites me”) emerged as the strongest indicators. This suggests that the aspects of identity that are linked to creativity and opportunity recognition are especially influential in stimulating innovation. In line with these findings, Cardon et al. (2013) emphasize that the inventor-related dimension of entrepreneurial identity is particularly associated with creativity and innovation. In this sense, innovation among lifestyle entrepreneurs is most strongly activated when their self-concept is linked to curiosity, opportunity recognition, and experimentation, rather than to roles such as “founder” or “business owner,” which appear less decisive in this context. This is confirmed by the outer loadings of *Idenity_2* (“I feel that being the founder of a company is a fundamental part of who I am”) and *Identity_3* (“Nurturing and growing the company is essential to my personal fulfillment”) being among the lowest.

The prominence of creativity and opportunity-oriented dimensions also resonates with Yachin (2019) analysis of the entrepreneur–opportunity nexus, which stresses that innovation does not emerge from opportunities alone but from the entrepreneur’s subjective perception of them. According to this perspective, innovation does not simply result from the presence of objective opportunities in the environment, but from how entrepreneurs perceive and interpret them through their own traits, knowledge, and orientations (Yachin, 2019). In rural micro-tourism firms, Yachin (2019) identifies internal drivers, supply chain dynamics, and reactions to contextual changes as triggers of innovation, yet all of them ultimately require the entrepreneur’s interpretation to become actionable.

The fact that creativity and opportunity oriented dimensions emerged as the strongest indicators of innovation is also consistent with studies highlighting that entrepreneurial identity often develops from passions or hobbies, sometimes unintentionally (Mmbaga et al., 2020; Shah & Tripsas, 2007), suggesting these dimensions are a common characteristic of lifestyle entrepreneurs. The findings confirm that identity shapes not only entrepreneurs’ goals but also their ability to recognize and pursue opportunities (Cardon et al., 2013; Morris et al. 2018). For some entrepreneurs, innovating might not only be a strategic response but also a way to remain consistent with their values and to express themselves through their businesses. The overlap between self and enterprise means that novelty often emerges directly from how they perceive themselves (Cardon et al., 2013; Dias et al., 2021b) and the lifestyle they seek to sustain (Murnieks & Mosakowski, 2007).

These results suggest that entrepreneurial identity is more than a background characteristic. It represents the main engine of innovation within lifestyle entrepreneurship. It is the personal meaning entrepreneurs attach to their roles, and especially the creativity and opportunity oriented dimensions of their identity, that most strongly stimulate innovative outcomes.

4.2 Local practices: hiring, collaboration, supply

The results reveal that not all the investigated local practices contribute equally to community integration. Local hiring and collaboration emerged as significant positive drivers, reinforcing trust and social capital in line with the argument of Jack and Anderson (2002) that networks and embeddedness can be built through people and relationships. Hypotheses H1a (*the employment of local workers influences the community integration of lifestyle entrepreneurs*) and H1b (*the collaboration with other local businesses influences the community integration of lifestyle entrepreneurs*) are therefore confirmed.

Descriptive evidence is supporting this as well. More than 50% of respondents reported that over three-quarters of their employees reside locally, and a considerable number (over 80%) collaborate with at least one other local business, with many engaging in four or more collaborations. These findings underline how labor ties and inter-business cooperation foster mutual support and strengthen the local tourism ecosystem, aligning with Morrison (2006) and Bosworth and Farrell (2011) on the role of small businesses in sustaining community well-being. By contrast, local supply did not show a significant effect on integration, despite prior research suggesting its importance (Besser & Miller, 2001; Bosworth et al., 2011). While survey results indicate that a substantial share of entrepreneurs sources more than half of their inputs locally, this practice does not consistently translate into stronger community ties according to the results. H1c (*sourcing inputs from local suppliers influences the community integration of lifestyle entrepreneurs*) is therefore rejected in the present study. One possible explanation is that supply chains are influenced by factors such as price, quality, and availability, making them less directly embedded in the local context than hiring and collaborating.

This study therefore offers a novel empirical contribution by demonstrating that not all dimensions of local embeddedness carry the same weight. Employment and collaboration appear to be more reliable levers of integration, while supply plays a more contingent role, finally showing that community integration is primarily driven by practices rooted in social interaction and trust-building rather than by supply relations alone.

4.3 Community integration

The results show that community integration does not have a direct effect on innovation, and H2 (*the community integration of lifestyle entrepreneurs influences their innovation*) is therefore not supported.

This contrasts with a substantial body of literature that highlights the role of local embeddedness in shaping entrepreneurial novelty. For instance, Jack and Anderson (2002)

and Bosworth and Farrell (2011) emphasize that local networks and informal interactions often provide the knowledge and resources that enable context-specific innovations. From this perspective, deeper community ties are expected to facilitate trust and access to resources that can stimulate innovation. Similarly, Carson and Carson (2018) stress that location-driven lifestyle entrepreneurs are often better positioned than other businesses to transform local assets into commercial products, precisely because of their embeddedness in the local context. Dias et al. (2021b) also argue that community attachment fosters innovation through mechanisms such as co-creation with local stakeholders and the intertwining of production and consumption in tourism experiences (p. 707). Their framework further suggests that the wider context, including elements such as a creative atmosphere and a local entrepreneurial culture, indirectly promotes innovation by strengthening community attachment, which then acts as a channel for novelty (Dias et al., 2021b).

Yet, in the context of this study, no such direct relationship between community integration and innovation was observed. While lifestyle entrepreneurs are indeed integrated into their communities through hiring, collaborations, or local engagement, this embeddedness does not necessarily translate directly into innovative outcomes. Instead, the results of this study suggest that innovation is more strongly driven by entrepreneurial identity rather than by social integration alone. From this perspective, the non-significant effect of community integration on innovation does not mean that integration is irrelevant, but rather that its influence may be indirect. Embeddedness provides the social environment and legitimacy in which entrepreneurs operate, while innovation arises when these social and cultural ties are filtered through entrepreneurial identity and transformed into authentic market offerings.

A possible explanation for this divergence lies in how elements that Dias et al. (2021b) classify as contextual, such as creative atmosphere or the culture of entrepreneurship, are represented differently in this study. In the present model, these features are internalized at the individual level, captured by dimensions of entrepreneurial identity such as the enjoyment of developing new ideas or scanning the environment for opportunities. This shift from the external environment to the entrepreneur's self-concept may explain two key findings. First, why H2 (community integration → innovation) is not significant, since part of the variance that Dias et al. (2021b) attribute to context and attachment is instead here absorbed by identity. Second, it may explain why H3 (identity → innovation) emerges as particularly strong. Entrepreneurial identity may function as a lens that interprets signals from the surrounding environment, creative atmospheres, local norms, or networks, and converts them into innovative practices. In this sense, embeddedness may provide resources and legitimacy, but it is identity that determines whether and how these are translated into novelty.

CHAPTER 5

Conclusions

5.1 Theoretical contributions

This study contributes to the theoretical debate on lifestyle entrepreneurship by emphasizing the key role of entrepreneurial identity as the main driver of innovation. Prior research has already suggested that passion and identity are central in shaping entrepreneurial behavior (Cardon et al., 2013; Ivanycheva et al., 2024), but empirical confirmation of this mechanism within lifestyle ventures has remained limited.

The results highlight the explanatory power of identity not only in predicting motivations or role adoption, but also in clarifying the mechanisms that underlie entrepreneurial innovation. This process originates less from structural or environmental conditions and more from the creativity and opportunity oriented dimensions of identity. In this sense, identity operates not only as a motivational background but as the channel through which entrepreneurs interpret their environment, perceive opportunities, and transform them into new products and services. By showing that novelty is primarily activated when self-concept is tied to creativity, curiosity, and opportunity recognition, this study adds to identity-based perspectives of entrepreneurship and deepens the understanding of how innovation emerges in tourism contexts.

A further contribution lies in providing a more refined perspective on the role of local practices and community embeddedness. The findings show that local hiring and collaboration are reliable levers for fostering integration, while local supply chains, often highlighted in earlier studies, appear to play a more contingent role. This distinction refines the understanding of “local embeddedness” by demonstrating that not all dimensions carry equal weight in sustaining community ties.

At the same time, the absence of a direct relationship between community integration and innovation challenges the existing literature that describes embeddedness as a direct influence on entrepreneurial novelty. On the contrary, the evidence from this study points to identity as the mediating force. Embeddedness may provide resources, legitimacy, and networks, but it is through the entrepreneur’s self-concept and creative orientation that these elements are converted into innovative practices. In this way, the study contributes to theory by repositioning innovation as an outcome that depends primarily on individual identity, while also recognizing the supportive indirect role of community and local engagement.

5.2 Practical and managerial implications

The findings on local practices suggest that strengthening community integration requires prioritizing initiatives that support local employment and inter-firm collaboration. Programs that connect local workers with tourism businesses or encourage cooperative networks among small enterprises could represent effective levers for reinforcing ties with the community. By contrast, relying solely on local sourcing as a mechanism for community and local integration may be less effective, since supply chains are often shaped by conditions and factors other than relational ones. Instead, joint initiatives, shared marketing, and partnerships across businesses are more likely to yield tangible benefits for communities than interventions limited to promoting local purchasing. By engaging local workers and building strong ties with neighboring firms, lifestyle entrepreneurs can create offerings that reflect the culture, traditions, and identity of the destination.

This would strengthen their embeddedness in the territory but also enhance the perceived authenticity of their products and services, a quality highly valued by tourists (Paulauskaite et al., 2017). In this way, collaboration and employment can become more than economic choices or strategies. They represent means to embed the business within the local context, ensuring that authenticity becomes a shared asset that benefits both entrepreneurs and the wider community. Examples of such practices include small hotels or B&Bs working with local farmers to serve traditional food products, agritourism ventures partnering with guides or nearby wineries to design experiential tours, or artisans collaborating with tourism businesses to showcase local crafts. These forms of cooperation turn everyday economic activity into opportunities to highlight local culture, strengthening both the authenticity of the visitor experience and the vitality of the local economy.

The analysis also emphasizes that entrepreneurial identity, and the inclination to innovate embedded within it, is intrinsic in the entrepreneurs' self-being. From a policy perspective, this suggests that supporting innovation in lifestyle ventures may require more than providing financial incentives or strengthening supply chains. Interventions that nurture entrepreneurs' self-concept, such as training programs fostering creativity or mentoring that validates their personal values, could be effective in stimulating innovation outcomes. At the destination level, policies that encourage entrepreneurs to integrate their personal passions into market offerings may enhance distinctiveness and competitiveness of rural and small-scale tourism areas.

In their narrative analysis of lifestyle entrepreneurs' identity, Bredvold and Skålén (2016) distinguish between the "modern lifestyle entrepreneur" (p. 103), whose identity is shaped by creativity, trend discovery, and openness to new opportunities, and the "loyal lifestyle entrepreneur" (p. 103), aligning with dimensions such as being a founder or focusing on firm growth. According to them, both types reflect the authenticity of the place, but in different ways.

The modern lifestyle entrepreneur does so by reinterpreting traditions within the experience economy, while the loyal type sustains authenticity through continuity and the preservation of cultural values rather than through novelty (Bredvold & Skålén, 2016). Rather than opposing novelty, authenticity can provide the grounding from which new products and experiences emerge, if seen through the lens of entrepreneurial identity.

As Dias et al. (2020) and Dias and Silva (2021a) observe, lifestyle entrepreneurs frequently draw on local traditions and cultural practices not to replicate them unchanged, but to creatively adapt and reinterpret them, generating distinctive and competitive tourism offerings. What attracts tourists to their businesses is often not whether entrepreneurs simply preserve or completely reinvent traditions, but how they manage to keep their offer genuine while making it relevant for the market. For entrepreneurs themselves, this highlights the importance of remaining connected to the essence of the place and to their own values, as authenticity expressed through their businesses can become a key driver of both competitiveness and innovation.

Finally, the lack of a direct link between community integration and innovation explains that embeddedness alone is not sufficient to generate novelty. Rather, it is the interplay between identity, authenticity, and personal creativity that transforms local engagement into distinctive outcomes. For policymakers, this implies that interventions aiming to foster innovation should not assume that strengthening community ties automatically produces innovative results. Instead, strategies should combine support for embeddedness with measures that stimulate creativity and reinforce entrepreneurial identity.

Despite the lack of a direct connection, entrepreneurs should still value connections with the community. As Bosworth and Farrell (2011) demonstrate, entrepreneurial opportunities in lifestyle and rural contexts frequently originate not from formal planning processes but from informal interactions, local networks, and everyday circumstances. This highlights that innovation can emerge from the authenticity of lived experiences, where personal stories, social ties, and chance events intertwine with entrepreneurial identity. For lifestyle entrepreneurs, remaining receptive to such situational opportunities and embedding them within authentic value propositions can strengthen both the resilience of their businesses and their contribution to the local tourism economy. Yet, innovation ultimately depends on how these connections are interpreted and transformed through the entrepreneur's own creativity and identity.

The findings suggest that innovation in lifestyle entrepreneurship is not primarily a product of community integration, but of how entrepreneurs internalize and reinterpret their context through identity. Authenticity plays a pivotal role in this process: it is not only rooted in local traditions and community values, but also embedded in entrepreneurs' self-concept. This indicates that lifestyle entrepreneurs generate innovation most effectively when authenticity is

acknowledged both as a shared resource of the community and as a guiding principle of their own identity. Strengthening local ties remains important, but it is through entrepreneurs' creativity that these connections are turned into meaningful innovations that benefit their businesses and the wider destination.

5.3 Limitations and future research

Like any empirical investigation, this study has several limitations that need to be acknowledged.

First, the research design was cross-sectional, which restricts the possibility of observing changes in entrepreneurial behavior and innovation over time. Future longitudinal studies could provide deeper insights into how identity, local practices, and community integration evolve and interact across different stages of venture development. Second, the study relied on a non-probabilistic sample of Italian lifestyle entrepreneurs in the tourism sector. While this focus allowed for in-depth exploration within a specific national and cultural setting, it also limits the generalizability of the findings. For instance, the absence of a significant relationship between community integration and innovation might reflect cultural or contextual factors specific to Italy and could play out differently in other countries. Comparative studies across diverse contexts would therefore be valuable to examine whether these dynamics hold or whether local institutions and cultural settings alter the weight of identity and embeddedness in driving innovation.

A further limitation concerns the methodological approach. The reliance on survey data and quantitative indicators provides valuable statistical evidence but may not fully capture the complex and context-dependent meanings entrepreneurs attach to concepts such as innovation and authenticity. Yachin (2019), building on earlier critiques, emphasizes that quantitative studies of small-scale tourism firms often risk reducing innovation to the entrepreneurs' subjective interpretation of a complex concept, with limited capacity to account for the contextual circumstances in which it arises. Complementary qualitative research such as case studies or narrative analyses, could therefore enrich the understanding of how lifestyle entrepreneurs perceive opportunities, construct their identities, and translate local embeddedness into innovation. Combining quantitative and qualitative approaches would offer a more comprehensive view of the multifaceted processes at play that survey-based methods alone may overlook.

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Annex

Questionnaire

Quale tipo di business gestisci? (Ristorante, hotel, negozio di artigianato, tour, scuola di sport..) / *Type of business (restaurant, hotel, crafts shop, tour, sport school..)*

In che anno è stata fondata la tua attività? / *year of foundation*

Quanti dipendenti ha la tua impresa? / *number of employees*

Qual è la forma giuridica della tua impresa? (Ditta individuale, SRL, cooperativa, ecc.) / *legal form of the business*

In che posizione si trova la tua attività? / *location*

Quanti abitanti ha la località in cui svolgi la tua attività? / *population size*

Qual è la percentuale dei tuoi dipendenti che risiede nella tua area locale? / *% of workers living in the local area*
0-25%
26-50%
51-75%
76-100

Qual è la percentuale dei tuoi fornitori che si trova nella tua area locale? / *% of suppliers from the local area*
0-25%
26-50%
51-75%
76-100

Con quante altre imprese locali collabori regolarmente? / *How many other local businesses do you regularly collaborate with*
None
1-3
4-6

more than 6

Quanto sei coinvolto e integrato nella comunità locale? / *how much are you involved and integrated within the local community*

1. Partecipazione a eventi locali / *participation to local events*
2. Collaborazione con altre imprese o attività locali / *collaboration with other businesses or local activities*
3. Supporto a progetti e iniziative locali / *supporting local projects and initiatives*
4. Collaborazione con la comunità locale / *collaboration with local community*

[mai / *never* ; molto spesso / *very often*]

Quali sono le principali sfide che affronti come imprenditore? / *which are the main challenges you face as entrepreneur*

1. Burocrazia / *bureaucracy*
2. Accesso al credito / *access to credit*
3. Concorrenza / *competition*
4. Equilibrio tra lavoro e vita privata / *work life balance*
5. Regolamentazioni locali / *local regulations*
6. Stagionalità del mercato / *seasonality of the market*

[mai / *never* ; molto spesso / *very often*]

Come valuti il tuo impatto economico sulla comunità locale? / *how do you evaluate your economic impact on the local community*

[molto positivo / *very positive* ; molto negativo / *very negative*]

Ti consideri un lifestyle entrepreneur? / *do you consider yourself a lifestyle entrepreneur*

Sì / *yes*

No / *no*

Quanto sei soddisfatto della tua scelta di essere un imprenditore? / *how satisfied are you with your choice of being an entrepreneur*

[molto soddisfatto / *very satisfied* ; molto insoddisfatto / *very unsatisfied*]

Qual è la percentuale della tua spesa totale destinata ad acquisti o servizi locali? / *What percentage of your total expenditure is allocated to local purchases or services*

0-25%
26-50%
51-75%
76-100

Hai effettuato investimenti significativi negli ultimi tre anni? Se sì, in che cosa? / *did you make significative investments in the last three years, if yes in what*

1. Tecnologia / *technology*
2. Modernizzazione / *modernization*
3. Piccola espansione di capacità / *small capacity expansion*
4. Grande espansione / *big expansion*
5. Conformarsi a norme e regolamenti / *complying with regulations*

[nessuno / *none* ; investimento molto grande / *very big investment*]

Quali sono i principali benefici che la tua attività apporta alla comunità locale? / *which are the main benefits your activity brings to the local community*

1. Creazione di posti di lavoro / *job creation*
2. Sviluppo del turismo / *tourism development*
3. Miglioramento dei servizi locali / *improvement of local services*
4. Aumento dell'attività economica locale / *Increase in local economic activity*
5. Promozione della cultura locale / *promotion of local culture*

[nessuno / *none* ; molto significativo / *very significative*]

Quanto sei d'accordo con le seguenti affermazioni riguardanti l'innovazione nella tua attività? / *how do you agree with the following statements regarding innovation in your business*

1. Introduciamo attivamente miglioramenti e innovazioni nella nostra attività. / *We actively introduce improvements and innovations in our business*.
2. La nostra azienda è creativa nei suoi metodi operativi. / *Our company is creative in its operational methods*.
3. La nostra azienda cerca costantemente nuovi modi di fare le cose. / *Our company constantly seeks new ways of doing things.*

[completamente d'accordo / *completely agree* ; completamente in disaccordo / *completely disagree*]

Quanto sei d'accordo con le seguenti affermazioni riguardanti la tua esperienza come imprenditore? / *how do you agree with the following statements regarding your experience as entrepreneur*

1. Inventare nuove soluzioni ai problemi è una parte importante della mia identità. / *Inventing new solutions to problems is an important part of my identity*
2. Sento che essere il fondatore di un'azienda è una parte fondamentale di chi sono. / *I feel that being the founder of a company is a fundamental part of who I am*
3. Coltivare e far crescere l'azienda è essenziale per la mia realizzazione personale. / *Nurturing and growing the company is essential to my personal fulfillment*
4. È emozionante trovare nuovi modi per soddisfare esigenze di mercato non ancora coperte. / *It is exciting to find new ways to meet unmet market needs*
5. Mi diverte cercare nuove idee per prodotti o servizi da offrire. / *I enjoy searching for new ideas for products or services to offer*
6. Sono motivato a migliorare continuamente i prodotti o servizi esistenti. / *I am motivated to continuously improve existing products or services*
7. Scrutare l'ambiente alla ricerca di nuove opportunità mi entusiasma. / *Scanning the environment for new opportunities excites me*

[completamente d’accordo / *completely agree* ; completamente in disaccordo / *completely disagree*]