



Entrepreneurial Skills for Sustainable Development in Rural Tourism Firms, an on Going Study: Case of Region Souss Massa, South of Morocco

Touhfa BELGNAOUI¹, Rachid OUMLIL², Aziz SAIR³

¹Ph.D Student. Ibn Zohr University, ERGMT at ENCG Agadir, Morocco

²Professor of Management, Strategy & Information Systems. Ibn Zohr University, ERGMT and LaRGe at ENCG Agadir, Morocco

³Professor of Management. , Ibn Zohr University, ERGMT at ENCG Agadir, Morocco

ARTICLE INFO

Published Online:
08 May 2018

ABSTRACT

Nowadays, entrepreneurial skills for a sustainable development has become a major strategic issue for a growing number of companies, especially in rural tourism. knowing that the focus of rural tourism firms may differ from one another depending on their attributes but assuming that their main objective is to move up the value chain toward the production of sustainable higher value added services and products in order to gain a significant competitive edge and position their destination as a destination of choice. Unmistakable, every company 's success will rely on the quality of its people but to what extend can we redevelop or sharpen their skills to succeed in such volatile, complex industry. The purpose of this communication is to to identify entrepreneurial skills needed for rural firms to continue progressing and meeting sustainability standards, and to explore the conventional and ecological organisations in rural tourism needs toward entrepreneurial skills to operate effectively and efficiently. Hence, the research question is what are the entrepreneurial competencies for sustainable rural tourism firms within the Souss Massa region located in the south of Morocco ? To answer this question, authors conduct an exploratory study on ten rural tourism entrepreneurs within Morocco Souss Massa region. The choice of this region is due to the fact that rural zone occupies a largely extended part of Souss Massa area and it is characterized as promising economic growth engine for rural tourism firms and local community. The study concerned pivot actors of the rural tourism organizations. Moreover, authors explore the conventional and ecological organisations in rural tourism needs toward entrepreneurial skills to operate effectively and efficiently.

Corresponding Author:

Touhfa BELGNAOUI

KEYWORDS: Rural Tourism, Sustainable Development, Tourism Firms, Entrepreneurial Skills.

I. THE THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Entrepreneurship and Entrepreneurial Competencies

Entrepreneurship was developed in a methodical way since the beginning of industrial revolution in Europe. Scholars came up with different approaches that hinges on key personal attributes and other environmental opportunities. The business venture and operation tend to be very complex in today competitive environment with fast changing way of doing and rapid growth of technology advancement. The entrepreneur should be ready to react and interact vigilantly with the environmental forces in order to ensure his business success. For that purpose, he needs to be equipped with a set of entrepreneurial competences (Wickham 2006). A wide range of definitions can be found for the terms entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial competencies. Entrepreneurialism is often associated with economic growth, creating jobs, ceasing environmental opportunities and using resources in efficient manner (Lazear, 2005).

Entrepreneurs are portrayed as money-driven, growth- and production-orientated individuals who chase purely economic goals (Gartner, 1988). Such a standpoint clearly neglects, however, the capacity and intentions of entrepreneurs to create new opportunities in which ecological and societal goals are carefully integrated into viable, profitable and therefore sustainable business model (Lans, Blok, and Wesselink, 2014). To choose the definition of entrepreneurship most appropriate for the rural area context, it is important to keep in mind the entrepreneurial skills and competencies required to enhance the quality of life for individuals, families and communities in order to sustain a healthy economy and environment Rae (2007). Indeed, success or failure of rural entrepreneurship will depend largely on a participatory approach where all stakeholders should come along to ensure sustainable economic growth and business profit. *“Developing countries don't dispose to the necessary tools and mechanisms to*

manage rural development” (Whelan 1991, p 13). The rural entrepreneur cannot be risk averse, he needs to be motivated, innovative, and willing to invest in rural areas to create from nothing something that has a value added and can bring good to all parties involved (Das, 2014). According to Ritchie and Crouch (2003) entrepreneurship, referring to new endeavor development and small businesses, contributes to destination development by creating cooperation and also competition “coo-petition”. The latter, can be viewed in developing countries as a threat because of lack of technology usage and inadequate skills, the link between entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial competences is weak if not absent (Das, 2014). We need rather to look at it as a complementary entrepreneurship approach to benefit from each other resources and create a core product with other complementary services that can be shared among micro, small and medium scale enterprises. “*The relationship between entrepreneurship and sustainable development has been dealt with through various schools of thought often resulting in new types of entrepreneurs such as the eco-preneur and the social- preneur*” (Lans, Blok & wesselink 2014, p 37). Clear that each type of these entrepreneurs will have a different vision and objectives. For the social- preneur, he will focus on the societal value creation and better life style for local community whereas the eco-preneur will focus primarily on the environmental opportunities. The term ‘sustainable entrepreneurship’ has been viewed more recently as an overarching way of looking at the contribution of entrepreneurial endeavors to social, ecological and economic aspects: or, in other words, sustainable development (Schaltegger and Wagner, 2011). Hence, we can conclude that sustainable entrepreneurship is seen as a way of creating a competitive advantage by identifying sustainability as new business opportunities, resulting in new and sustainable products, methods of production or ways of organizing business processes in a sustainable way. According to Lans, Blok and Wesselink 2014, it is unlikely to develop overnight the competencies required for sustainable entrepreneurship, research show such practice requires higher order learning processes. Some competencies can be core competencies and others can be secondary competencies but it is essential for entrepreneurs to have a variety of set of skills to manage successfully (Phelan & Shaply, 2012). In Rural tourism there are some challenges to overcome. Thus, the conditions and opportunities in villages are not the same in the urban areas. Rural entrepreneurs need to adapt their skills and develop new ones to succeed in their endeavor.

Rural Tourism

Rural tourism represents an integration of perhaps two of the most influential yet contradictory features of our contemporary time (George, Mair, H & Reid, D. G, 2009). According to Shamssoddine (2015), rural tourism is known as an alternative approach for attaining sustainable rural

development attempts to present a new strategy to revitalize rural areas through complementary activities or to transform them according to natural and human resources. Rural tourism in general refers to small family enterprises and lifestyle entrepreneurship (Pesonen & Komppula, 2010). Although, in emerging economies sustainability and rural tourism still new concepts for most rural entrepreneurs when you have a high rate of poverty hard to apply the concept of sustainability. Indeed, principles of sustainable entrepreneurship in rural tourism and the equilibrium among the three dimensions of sustainability ecological, socio-cultural and economical still tough to realize and will depend largely on the orientation of the rural entrepreneur, his competencies and his environment. The correlation between entrepreneurship and sustainable development has been dealt with through various schools of thought, (Lans, Blok & Wesselink, 2014). Rural tourism experts are incessantly in search of successful rural development and that has a low negative on tourism while maximizing positive impact and ensuring sustainability (George, Mair & Reid, 2009). Thus, small and micro entrepreneurs in rural tourism require the possession and mobilization of multiple skills and often they need to be polyvalent to ensure also the managerial and entrepreneurial tasks to help develop new product and use the resources effectively and efficiently. In order to stimulate the performance of rural entrepreneurs assessment and exploitation of rural business opportunities for sustainable development need to be acknowledged by everyone implicated in the value chain of the business. Indeed, entrepreneurial competencies for rural tourism become fundamental to ensure economic growth and sustainability.

Entrepreneurial Competences within Rural Tourism

“*During the last decades a significant increase in the average level of human capital has taken place in all developed economies this has put the analysis of human capital at the forefront of research and studies*” (Dwyer & Forsyth, 2006, p398). A firm success relies heavily on its human capital competencies. The firm’s financial asset is supplemented with its human asset. In rural areas small businesses and entrepreneurs are the foundation of tourism (Sunı & Komppula, 2014). Indeed, the evaluation of entrepreneurial rural competencies and understanding their cause and effect on the rural tourism firms performance will rely heavily on how first these competences are perceived by the rural tourism entrepreneur. Scholars worked on too many definitions adapted to the word “Competence” in different context and industries. Man et al (2002) define competencies as “*a higher level characteristics, representing the capability of the entrepreneurs to perform a job successfully*”. (Prahald and Hamel first hyped the word “competence” in Harvard Business review 1990. Competence can be as simple knowledge and know- how that can create a value added and help the organization

position itself better than the competition in a given market. The firm competitive advantage relies heavily on the heterogeneity of the resources (Penrose 1959). In rural tourism these resources can be nature, heritage, culture, climate, authenticity and much more other resources that can create a unique and memorable experience to the tourist but how these resources are valued and used that’s the challenge and the problematic that Moroccan rural entrepreneurs in tourism continue to face to maintain sustainability. This cannot be an easy task, organizations face different obstacles in their effort of sustainable development (Bon, 2009). Developing countries where infrastructure, government policies and support programs are not well implemented.

II. METHODOLOGY

Qualitative Research

As the main objective of this communication is to explore how rural entrepreneurial competences is conceived by the Moroccan rural tourism entrepreneurs. This exploratory study will help us get familiar better with the phenomenon of study and produce a valid knowledge by interacting directly with the practitioners (Thierat et coll, 2007). Developing rural tourism is an ongoing debate in South of Morocco region which is pretty affluent in terms of natural resources but hard for rural tourism firms to sustain their performance within functional relationship with nature, heritage , culture and community characteristics. The set of entrepreneurial skills required is not well defined yet. We conducted an exploratory study using individual semi-directed interviews with ten local rural tourism entrepreneurs. The interview guide included three questions the first question focused on the general profile of the entrepreneurs. The second one focused on how they define entrepreneurial competencies for rural tourism. The third question focuses on success and sustainability of rural tourism firm relies on what competences. The data collected was analysed by Tropes software version 8.4 to understand better the personal perception of the rural entrepreneurial competencies by Moroccan rural tourism practitioners in order to ensure rural tourism firms sustainability and an economic growth for SM region.

Rural Tourism in Souss Massa Region

According to Regional Center of Tourism about 145 tourism firms operating in rural areas of SMD region, 40 who have the quality label certification and meet the international standards. Seventy are operational but not sure about their performance standards and others went out of business. In order to stimulate the performance of rural entrepreneurs assessment and exploitation of rural business opportunities for sustainable development need to be acknowledged by everyone implicated in the value chain of the business. Rural tourism in Morocco still not well structured although a lot of effort is been done since 1997 and the vision 2020 supports clearly the development of the hinterland of the SM

region and the rest of Morocco by putting sustainable development at the heart of the rural tourism development strategy. We cannot forget that rural tourism fragility surpasses its dynamism in SM region thereby to better understand the evolution of the rural tourism, it is fundamental to identify and understand the role of all the key players and put into work the right set of managerial competencies and entrepreneurial competencies that will help with decision making and eventually will ensure the development of rural tourism in the region.

Characteristics of the Sample Population

Table 1.1 Description of the rural entrepreneurs interviewed

Code/Per interviewee	Gender /Age	Marital Status	Level of Education
E1	35/F	Divorced	Master degree
E2	40/F	Married	High school
E3	34/F	Single	Master degree
E4	33/F	Married	High school
E5	42/H	Married	PHD
E6	42/H	Married	Bachelor degree
E7	46/H	Married	High school
E8	42/H	Married	PHD
E9	35/H	Married	Master
E10	42/H	Married	Bachelor

III. FINDING & DISCUSSION

Amazingly, how women culture and risk appetite on investing in rural entrepreneurship started to change in the SM region, from the sample population interviewed we noticed the number of female was 4 and male was 6 not much of difference. It appears that women are ready to take the risk of taking up entrepreneurial activity when it can be done in their own family surrounding within the support of their local community (Anthopulu, 2010). The age range of the rural entrepreneurs interviewed varied between 33 and 46 years old. It makes clear that the probability of entering a business venture starts in 30’s and in some other countries perhaps later in life (Liang, Wang & Lazear, 2014). Also their level of education was pretty good, 7 of the respondents are highly educated.

The analysis of education and the language variable helped us realize that they are moderating variables in terms of technology usage and networking which are perceived by the rural tourism entrepreneurs as vital competencies to attract local and foreign markets, (E7) one of the ten respondents did not use technology at all. The interviewees

were owner/manager, they ensure the strategic part of their business and the operational part “Jack of all trades” a view that is supported by several scholars (Lazear 2005, wagner 2003, Thompson 2011) and multitasking was perceived by Moroccan rural entrepreneurs as an important competency. Both entrepreneurial managerial skills set are fundamentals to run the business successfully. Furthermore, the majority of them are married and attested that they do get the family support in running their business. The sense of ownership is critical, you have to feel that “your skin is in it” to give the best of your performance and stimulate creativity not necessarily with a big “C” creativity due to the limited resources but anything that will change the rule of the game and create a value added to the service provided or the product offered. Selling a unique memorable authentic experience is very important in rural or urban tourism. Moreover, the ten respondents view entrepreneurial competences as lifestyle you have to be passionate and love what you do. What becomes clear from the finding that Moroccan rural entrepreneurial competences are perceived as (a) multitasking, (b) creativity, (c) flexibility, (c) endurance (d) passion, (e) networking, (f) perseverance. We noticed the majority of competencies are behavioral and others have to do with ability to perform to gain a competitive advantage.

IV. CONCLUSION

The analysis of our exploratory study showed that Moroccan entrepreneurs interviewed already dispose to some entrepreneurial competences discussed in the literature. Nevertheless, it is evident that rural tourism in Morocco still didn't not reach its highest potential and more work remains to be done to tackle the requisite skill set for rural entrepreneurship and how we can reconcile them with managerial competences since most of the rural entrepreneurs in rural areas are owner/ manager.

REFERENCES:

1. Anthopulu, T. (2010). Rural women in local agrofood production: Between entrepreneurial initiatives and family strategies. A case study in Greece. *Journal Of Rural Studies*, 26, p 394-403
2. Bon, V. (2009). Le développement durable: des fondements pour l'entreprise aux écueils manageriaux, *Management & Avenir*, 9: 29
3. Block, V. Lans, T. Wesse link, R. (2014). Learning apart and together: towards an integrated competence framework for sustainable entrepreneurship in higher education). *Journal of cleaner Production*, (37-47).
4. Das, Ch. (2014). Prospects and challenges for rural entrepreneurship development NER- A study. (1-5). *International Journal of Humanities & Social Science Studies*. Scholar publications, Karimganj, Assam, India.
5. Dwyer, P. Forsyth, P. (2006) *International Handbook on The Economics of Tourism*. Massachusetts USA: Edward Elger Publishing INC
6. Gartner, B. (1988). “Who is the entrepreneur? Is the wrong question” University of Baltimore Educational Foundation.
7. George, W. Mair, H & Reid, D. G. (2009). *Rural Tourism Development localism and culture change*. Bristol UK: Channel View Publications.
8. Hamel, G. Prahalad, C.K. (1990). *The Core Competencies of The Corporation*. *Harvard Business review*.
9. Komppula, R. Suni, J. (2014). Rural tourism as a facilitator of regional development.
10. *International conference on rural tourism and regional development*.
11. Lans, T. Blok, V. Wesselink, R. (2014). Learning apart and together: towards an integrated framework for sustainable entrepreneurship in higher education. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, (37-47).
12. Lazear, EP. (2005). Entrepreneurship. *Journal of Labor Economics* 23(4): 649–680
13. Liang, J. Wang, H. Lazear, EP. (2104). *Demographics & Entrepreneurship*. National Bureau of Economic Research. Cambridge Mass.
14. Man, T., Lau, T., and Chan, K.F. (2002), The competitiveness of small and medium enterprises. A conceptualization with focus on entrepreneurial competencies', *Journal of Business Venturing*, Vol. 17, No.2, pp. 123-142
15. Penrose, E. (1959). *The theory of the Growth of the Firm*, Oxford: Basil Balckwell
16. Pesonen, J., & Komppula, R. (2010). Rural wellbeing tourism: Motivations and expectations. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management*, 17, 150-157.
17. Phelan, C. Sharpley, R. (2012). Exploring entrepreneurial skills and competences in farm tourism. *Local economy*, vol 27, 103-118.
18. Rae D (2007) *Entrepreneurship: From Opportunity to Action*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
19. Ritchie, J. R. B., & Crouch, G. I. (2003). *The Competitive destination. A sustainable tourism perspective*. Oxon, UK: CABI Publishing
20. Shamsoddini, A. (2015) Evaluation of Tourism Status in Sustainable Rural Development by Reynard Model (Case Study: Pa Ghaleh Village, Mamasani County, Iran). *Open Journal of Ecology*, 5, 80-85.
21. Schaltegger, S., Wagner, M., 2011. Sustainable entrepreneurship and sustainability Innovation: categories and interactions. *Business Strategy and the Environment*

“Entrepreneurial Skills for Sustainable Development in Rural Tourism Firms, an on Going Study: Case of Region Souss Massa, South of Morocco”

22. Thietart, R.A, Coll, 2007, Méthodes de recherché en management, Paris, 3rd édition, Dunod, p 586.
23. Thompson P (2011) Entrepreneurs, Jack of all trades or hobos? Research Policy 40(5): 637–649.
24. Wagner J (2003) Testing Lazear’s Jack-of-all trades view of entrepreneurship with German micro data. Applied Economics Letters 10(11): 687–689.