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## NARRATING VALUES-BASED ENTREPRENEURS IN TOURISM

### ABSTRACT

This paper adds to previous conceptualisations of lifestyle entrepreneurship in tourism by framing the identity construction of such enterprises in terms of their ethical commitment to global issues, social and economic inequalities, and radical criticism of neoliberal capitalism. The study addresses a gap in the tourism studies literature which usually conceptualises entrepreneurs as either commercially oriented or lifestyle oriented. Such dichotomies do not easily accommodate entrepreneurs who are driven by a set of values associated with 'doing good'. A linguistic narrative analysis – combined with features of structural narrative analysis – is used to reveal three prominent entrepreneurial identities among a group of values-based Italian entrepreneurs: the intellectual and educational, the professional and entrepreneurial, and the empathic 'free speech'. These entrepreneurial identities challenge several assumptions about entrepreneurship in small non-commercially oriented tourism firms, thereby revealing some key theoretical and practical insights.

Keywords: *small firms; tourism; values; entrepreneurship; identity; narratives;*

### INTRODUCTION

Small tourism firms have been identified as both the lifeblood of local economic development and as constraints on innovation and growth (Thomas et al., 2011). They have been investigated according to their entrepreneurial identity and culture (Gray, 2002; Sadler-Smith et al., 2003; Shaw, 2004; Bredvold & Skálén, 2016), their management system and goals (Thomas, 1998; Hall & Risher, 2004), their internal reasons to adopt, or not, sustainable practices (Sampaio et al., 2011; Garay & Font, 2012; Font et al., 2016), as well as through concepts such as 'lifestyle entrepreneurship' (Ateljevic & Doorne, 2000; Shaw & Williams, 2004; Bredvold & Skálén, 2016). The literature broadly recognises the pivotal role of the owner-manager within small tourism firms (Legohérel et al., 2004; Sampaio et al., 2011; Bredvold & Skálén, 2016; Komppula, 2004; Kornilaki et al., 2019). Despite this academic attention, research on entrepreneurship is still relatively limited within tourism studies (Li, 2008, Thomas et al., 2011; Bredvold & Skálén, 2016; Power et al., 2017). Apart from Power et al.'s (2017) work on ethical entrepreneurship in tourism, existing research still broadly presents small tourism firms' entrepreneurship as operating between two dominant ideas: pro-growth commercially oriented and lifestyle oriented.

This study investigates entrepreneurs that are not commercially oriented nor fit the definition of lifestyle entrepreneurs, hitherto mainly understood as rejecting business opportunity to pursue personal lifestyle choices (Ateljevic & Doorne, 2000; Bredvold & Skalén, 2016; Klapper et al., 2018; Sweeney et al., 2018; Sun et al., 2019). The paper responds to calls for more research on the juncture of ethics, entrepreneurship and tourism (Power et al., 2017), for more research on lifestyle entrepreneurs (e.g. Sweeney et al. 2018), and for more methodological sophistication and theoretical work on entrepreneurship in tourism (Li, 2008). It does so by focusing on small tourism firms driven by an ethical approach to tourism, here referred to as 'values-based' firms. Their axiological frame of reference is founded upon criticism of neoliberal globalisation (Latouche, 2004; Easterly, 2006), parrhesiastic ethical commitment (Foucault, 2011), and a pro-social approach to cultural divides, global inequalities (Illich, 1971; Bauman, 2000; Franklin, 2003), and injustice (Jamal, 2019). The research aims to illuminate how the owner-managers of such firms understand and construct their *values-based* entrepreneurial identity while operating their business in a globalized market-oriented world. In doing so, the objectives are, firstly, to cast a novel perspective to the notion of entrepreneurship in small tourism firms; secondly, to develop further knowledge on the axiology of small tourism firms interweaving ethics, entrepreneurship and tourism.

This study takes issue with previous conceptualisations of lifestyle-oriented entrepreneurship which downplay in the role of values and the ethical commitment of some as they seek to challenge prominent practices within the tourism industry. Specifically, it examines entrepreneurs aiming to 'make a difference' with regards to global inequalities and injustice through ethical tourism action (Power et al., 2017; Kornilaki & Font, 2019). Ethical tourism is used here to indicate a general approach (Tribe, 2002); like tourism being conducted ethically (Jamal, 2004). We use a narrative approach, contributing to a growing body of research that is adopting novel methods to both explore and critically discuss lifestyle entrepreneurship (e.g. Bredvold & Skålén, 2016, Klapper et al., 2018; Sweeney et al., 2018; Sun et al., 2019; Tomassini et al., 2019). This exploratory study is ideographic; it examines entrepreneurship among a constituency of Italian owner-managers who define themselves as entrepreneurs who operate between the urgency of profit rationales - as firms operating in the market system - and their non-profit driven values. First-person accounts of *values-based* entrepreneurs who are members of the Italian consortium *Associazione Italiana Turismo Responsabile* (AITR)<sup>1</sup> are analysed. Founded in 1998, AITR is the first Italian

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<sup>1</sup> Translated as 'Italian Association of Responsible Tourism'

network concerned with ethical tourism; it is a not for profit consortium representing Italian small tour operators, hospitality firms, NGOs, and associations sharing a common ethical vision of tourism grounded into the principles of social and economic justice (<http://www.aitr.org/turismo-responsabile/cose-il-turismo-responsabile/>).

The paper is structured as follows. Firstly, it opens with a review of relevant research into entrepreneurship in small tourism firms and how a narrative approach has been used to identify entrepreneurial identities. Secondly, we present the research design and the methods used to examine the first-person narratives and life-stories of *values-based* entrepreneurs in Italy. Thirdly, the paper discusses how the adopted narrative approach results in a set of original findings that identify three main *values-based* entrepreneurial identities: intellectual and educational, professional and entrepreneurial, and empathic 'free speech'. Finally, the article discusses the research findings and concludes with an overview of their theoretical and practical implications, challenging several assumptions about and conceptualisations of entrepreneurship in small tourism firms.

#### **ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND SMALL TOURISM FIRMS**

Tourism is often identified by officials as a policy domain that can promote improvements in economic welfare. Since the 1980s, the prevalence of free-market neoliberalism led to the creation of an increasing number of small businesses either because of precarity of employment or in response to market opportunities. Tourism was not immune to such developments (Solvoll et al., 2015). Given their centrality to many development projects, it is surprising that entrepreneurship and small business development has been largely absent from recent critical debates on the ideology of sustainable tourism (Burrai et al., 2019), the juncture among ethical entrepreneurship and tourism (Power et al., 2017), the future of sustainable tourism (Boluk et al., 2019), and efforts to rethink tourism in terms of de-growth (Higgins-Desbiolles et al., 2019).

In this paper we explore the diverse identities of entrepreneurs whose axiological frame of reference is founded upon criticism of neoliberal globalisation (Latouche, 2004; Easterly, 2006), parrhesiastic ethical commitment (Foucault, 2011), and a pro-social approach to cultural divides, global inequalities (Illich, 1971; Bauman, 2000; Franklin, 2003), and injustice (Jamal, 2019). We refer to such entrepreneurs as 'values-based'. Rokeach (1979, p. 262) defines values as: "shared prescriptive or proscriptive beliefs about ideal modes of behaviour and end-state of existence that are activated by, yet transcend, object and situation". Values are manifested verbally and behaviourally, since they appear through what a person says or does (Rescher, 1982). Schwartz (1992) presents values as expressing a motivational concern, and actions

are taken to pursue motivational goals. Our understanding of entrepreneurship is grounded on the Schumpeter's (2000) notion of entrepreneur, conceived not as an economic agent but as a 'wild spirit'; a subject intent on doing new things or existing things in a different way.

Business growth has usually been considered the defining criterion for establishing whether small firms are classified as entrepreneurial or non-entrepreneurial, (Komppula, 2004). In tourism, the study of entrepreneurial attitudes requires a broader perspective embracing both economic and not economic factors, together with the understanding of the firms' owner-managers' personal motivations (Skokic & Morrison, 2011). This has resulted in broader conceptualisations, notably in relation to notions of lifestyle-oriented entrepreneurship driven by the owner-managers' personal lifestyle choices, motivations and preference (Skokic & Morrison, 2011; Sweeney et al., 2018; Sun et al., 2019).

The literature on small tourism firms recognises the pivotal role of the owner-manager but rarely associates their owners with Schumpeterian entrepreneurship (Ateljevic, 2007; Sampaio et al., 2011; Legohérel et al., 2004; Bredvold & Skalén, 2016; Kornilaki et al., 2019). In many cases, the personality of the owner-manager, along with their personal values and objectives, cannot be dissociated from those of the firm, with significant consequences for its organisational and strategic management (Legohérel et al., 2004; Hemingway, 2005; Bredvold & Skalén, 2016; Sweeney et al., 2018). Moreover, according to several commentators, strategic management is actually a feature of entrepreneurial ventures that barely emerges in small firms, consequently the approach to strategic planning and management seems to separate the entrepreneur from the owner-manager (Burns, 2016; Hitt & Ireland, 2017; Meyer et al., 2017; Parker, 2018). This is why investigating entrepreneurship in small tourism firms requires a broader and different stance on the construction of entrepreneurial identity.

#### A NARRATIVE APPROACH TO ENTREPRENEURIAL IDENTITY

Identity has been traditionally understood as an established collection of beliefs, values, and experiences existing in the individual and conveying a definition and sense of self (Erikson, 1950). In this paper, 'identity' is seen as the process of constructing meaning on the basis of cultural attributes, values, beliefs and experiences, affording these a higher priority than other sources of meaning (Castells, 2011). **Conceptually, this paper draws on the idea that 'self-identity' is not a fixed characteristic possessed by an individual, but it is the 'self' as reflexively understood by the person while constructing his/her own biography (Giddens, 1991, p.53). As Ricouer (1991, p. 77)**

**Commented [TR1]: [ARE1]** I didn't really understand the point here

**Commented [LT2R1]: [ARE2]** I hope it is clearer in this way. The point is that it is required a broader & different perspective to explore entrepreneurial identity in small tourism firms so far understood as missing features of strategic management...

puts it: “the narrative constructs the durable character of an individual, which one can call his or her narrative identity”. We explore how small firms’ owner-managers understand their entrepreneurial identity through a narrative approach rooted into the formative capacity of stories and narratives (Johansson, 2004; Bredvold & Skálén, 2016; Tomassini et al., 2019).

Several commentators have examined processes of identity construction whereby individuals recount their personal story - or re-storying their life after a challenging event - in many contexts (Riessman, 1993; Carless & Sparkes, 2008; Smith & Sparkes, 2008). These studies reveal individual biographical sense-making, the creation of meaningful senses of self and identity, together with conveying consistency to the whole biographical story. In other words, they extract a perspective on the kinds of claims they make about themselves, especially in relation to the ‘outside’ world. With regards to tourism studies, there is still a lacuna of research on both the identity construction of tourism entrepreneurs and the use of a narrative approach (for a notable exception, see Bredvold & Skálén’s (2016) study on the identity construction of lifestyle entrepreneurs and the work of Power et al. (2017) on the nature of ethical entrepreneurship in tourism).

Using a narrative understanding of entrepreneurial identity construction allows us to problematise owner-managers’ senses of self as entrepreneurs, and their driving values and beliefs. Many theorisations on entrepreneurship are grounded in Weber’s (1930) seminal conceptualisation of ‘Ideal Type’; identifying a socially constructed common type of capitalistic entrepreneur seeking profit and capital accumulation with a rationality grounded in the axiology of the Protestant ethics of XIX century (Mody & Day, 2014; Power et al, 1917; Granovetter, 2018). Power et al. (2017) critically discuss the juncture between ethics, tourism and entrepreneurship exploring the construction of a Weberian Ideal Type of ethical tourism entrepreneur. Conversely, this study focuses on the narration of entrepreneurial identity by owner-managers whose axiological frame of reference is founded upon criticism of neoliberal globalisation of the XXI century (Latouche, 2004; Easterly, 2006), parrhesiastic ethical commitment (Foucault, 2011), and pro-social approached to cultural divide, global inequalities (Illich, 1971; Bauman, 2000; Franklin, 2003), and injustice (Jamal, 2019).

Mitchell (1996) claims that no ‘typical’ entrepreneur exists and argues that focusing on the private dimensions of the person enables access to instructive aspects such as their personal reasoning, their emotions and experiences (Mitchell et al., 2002).

Scrutinising the ways in which entrepreneurs recount their lives and experiences, sheds lights on the extent to which their identities are linked to the ways they operate their businesses (Johansson, 2004). For Johansson (2004), entrepreneurs embody their firms and their visions of business by telling stories about them. We adopt a narrative approach based on story-telling interviews to investigate entrepreneurs as individuals within a social context, exploring how they construct an entrepreneurial identity (Johansson, 2004; Bredvold & Skálén, 2016). Adopting a life story approach, it is possible to examine the way entrepreneurs articulate and explain who they are, both to others and, indirectly, to themselves.

## RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

This study is framed within a social constructivism paradigm. Thus, various subjective (and multiple) meanings are attached to experiences in order to understand the world individuals live and work in. Meanings are idiosyncratic but are (re-)formed through interaction with others and through historical and cultural rules operating at individual levels (Creswell, 1994). Denzin (1996, p. 220) claims that “there are not ‘stories’ out there waiting to be told and no certain truths waiting to be recorded; there are only ‘stories’ yet to be constructed” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Hence, using an inductive process, an explorative approach is adopted in order to understand the identify construction of *values-based* entrepreneurs. A narrative approach is adopted as a strategy of inquiry.

A purposive sample drawn from members of the Italian oldest consortium of ethical tourism practitioners - *Associazione Italiana Turismo Responsabile* (AITR) – was selected for participation in this study. The AITR enabled a degree of shared outlook among participants to be assumed which was subsequently refined. Participants were identified by a search of AITR member websites and selected if they claimed to contribute to ethical goals such as poverty reduction, local development, environmental conservation or the safeguarding of cultural heritage, and operated within developing countries. Ten tour operators in AITR matched the requisite characteristics and were invited to participate in the study and seven agreed. Each was prepared to allow access and time sufficient to undertake a detailed qualitative study of this kind (Ritchie et al, 2013).

Narrative researchers often work with what others might consider to be small samples. This is deemed acceptable because the approach involves detailed and extended investigation of the narratives, together with a comparison between them in order to

find new insights, rather than those that are 'representative' (see Riessman, 1989; Johansson, 2004; Carless & Douglas, 2008; Carless & Sparkes, 2008; and Bredvold & Skålèn, 2016).

The lead researcher conducted all the unstructured interviews. Choosing an informal, conversational approach brought unanticipated narratives that led to deep and different understandings and meanings (Trahar, 2009). Interviews were held in Italian, the mother tongue of both the lead researcher and the research participants. The interviews were audio recorded and then transcribed. Data transcription was an essential part of the narrative analysis. After verbatim transcription, all the transcripts were edited to include additional linguistic details such as verbal emphases and pauses (www.lids.upenn.edu). The way the text was spoken permitted a preliminary understanding and interpretation of the narrative and its meanings. The narrative analysis was performed in Italian and, afterwards, the narrative data were translated into English.

There are multiple ways of interpreting and analysing the meanings constructed through a speaker-listener interaction. This study adopted a twofold approach: one derived from Labov's work on structural narrative analysis and a second, linguistic approach associated with Gee (Gee, 1991; Riessman, 1993; Labov & Waletzky, 1997). Structural narrative analysis focuses on structures that the narrator trusts, either consciously or unconsciously, to give meaning to experience (Smith & Sparkes, 2008; Smith & Sparkes, 2009). Narratives in storified form feature a beginning, middle and end. Within this structure, narrators achieve their communicative goals through specific linguistic choices. According to Labov, a fully formed narrative is made up of a set of key units: a plot summary [*Abstract*]; information about place, characters, time and situation [*Orientation*]; and a series of events terminated by a result [*Complication*]. The narrative concludes by presenting the attitude of the speaker towards these events [*Evaluation*], the outcome [*Resolution*], and a *coda* that returns the perspective to the present. This approach focuses on the role of temporal juncture in narratives, since the sequence of ordered clauses composes the skeleton structure of the narrative, wherein events are temporally and causally linked (Labov; 2003, 2010).

For data in a storified form, the study used features of the structural analysis advanced by Labov & Waletzky (1997) while, for data without a storified form; features of the linguistic approach to narrative advanced by Gee (1991) were used. The analysis of data without a storified form focused particularly on linguistic and extra-linguistic features, such as pauses, elongated vowels, emphasis, pitch, repetitions, discourse



markers, pitch glides and non-lexical elements. The use of linguistic and extra-linguistic features enables different lines of text and/or stretches of conversation to be grouped to the same topic in 'units'. These units, referred to by Gee (1991) as Stanzas or Strophes, are thematically coherent and tightly sequenced. As Riessman (1993, p. 45) explains: "Stanzas are a series of lines on a single topic that have a parallel structure and sound as if they go together by tending to be said at the same rate and with little hesitation between lines".

A combination of both approaches allows for the interpretation of narratives in non-storified form as well as in a chronological order with a plot. The adopted methodology helps to examine and interpret the entrepreneurial sense of self and identity among owner-managers of small values-driven tourism firms. Johansson (2004) claims that narrative approaches not only contribute to the construction of personal and organisational identity, but they also allow the articulation of experience and knowledge and help conceptualise and reconceptualise entrepreneurship. Moreover, when combined with a thorough data analysis, a narrative approach can deliver a set of nuanced findings conveying novel and innovative results (Tomassini et al., 2019). Personal narratives and stories pervade the individual identity-construction process, giving meaning to previous experiences, opinions and beliefs, and transforming fragmented experiences and opinions into a meaningful whole (Riessman, 1993; Johansson, 2004).

### **EMERGING NARRATIVES**

Despite the heterogeneous nature of personal narratives and first-person accounts, the researchers acknowledge patterns in the participants' narratives in respect to their way of understanding their entrepreneurial identities, moral standards and business management. As shown in the work of Carless & Douglas (2008), and Bredvold & Skålen (2016), this permits the individual narratives to be reduced to three emerging narrative types (reflecting *values-based* entrepreneurial identities): i) *intellectual and educational*; ii) *professional and entrepreneurial*; and iii) *empathic 'free speech'*. The researchers understand identity as a collection of traits possessed by individuals, the perception of the self, and the process of meaning construction based on driving values, beliefs and meaningful experiences (Giddens, 1991; Castells, 2011). This means that the same participant may be associated with aspects of more than one narrative type (Bredvold & Skålen, 2016; Tomassini et al., 2019). This section presents and discusses these three narrative types by providing an overview of the articulated set of moral principles, values, beliefs and conceptualisations used by the participants to narrate their entrepreneurial identity and their firms. In presenting the research

findings, all the participants' names have been anonymised to guarantee privacy and confidentiality. Moreover, the stretches of texts have been 'cleaned' to remove the extra linguistic details.

### The intellectual and educational narrative type

Participants presented themselves as multifaceted people with a good level of education and have developed different perspectives about tourism through their exposure to a variety of situations and experiences. Through the narratives, participants introduced themselves according to a plurality of roles: the firm's founder-owner/manager, a journalist and writer (Participant 1), a guide (Participant 7), and an expert in a specific sector (Participant 2). Hence, understanding their narratives was useful in order to identify their comprehension and identity construction. These self-introduction narratives used different subjects so that the perspective ranged from 'I'—a multifaceted founder-owner/manager—to 'we'—the firm's work team—to 'they'—customers, local partners and beneficiaries. **By assuming the point of view of local partners, local communities, beneficiaries and travellers, participants' narratives disclose the idea that the process of enlarging points of view goes together with an expansion of the firm's moral circle, thereby overcoming participants' individuality so as to embrace their firms and their external network. Narrations of the enlargement of the firm's moral circle illustrate how the attempt to build novel bonds among people acts as a fundamental resource to contrast fragmentations (Bauman, 2000) and global injustice (Jamal, 2019).**

Their firms are an embodiment of their personal values and beliefs, an emanation of their own personalities, experiences and desires, as Participant 1 and Participant 2 stress:

*My personal experience of course affects a lot what Firm 1 became over time, because Firm 1 stemmed out of my interest, mainly together with few friends. I had very clear ideas about this [...] For us dealing with responsible tourism means quite a different idea: first of all, it means criticising tourism, it means discussing tourism, first of all [...]* (Participant 1)

*I was still at the college when we started following some ethnic minorities for a festival taking place here in Italy [...] so, then, from there, we started all the educational journey in our area of interest [...]* (Participant 2)

Participants characterise themselves as neither managers nor entrepreneurs, but rather as individuals and citizens concerned with global challenges. They understand

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**[ARE4]** Als, in tenewparagaphs abov you ue present tene. is that constent throughtout the pper?

**Commented [LT4R3]:** I changed the present tense into simple past in the above text and also in few other key points of the results section. I hope it is more homogeneous now. About this specific phrase actually I did not change it from the first original submission; I just moved this stretch of text (from 'Though the narrative...' till 'external network') due to the merge of results & discussion sessions. Moreover since Referees 1 stresses that he/she particularly likes this interpretation, I do not know how to reshape it in another way >> i.e. from her/his comments: *Page 14, sentence beginning with 'By assuming the point of view...' – this is a very interesting interpretation.*

their identity first as private citizens, then as managers.

*I am not a manager, I can have managerial skills, but it's a somewhat tight situation for me, I don't want to become just a manager [...]* (Participant 1)

This narrative type pictures a founder-owner/manager as deeply imbued with the challenges of the contemporary world. They narrate their personal and professional background as a path leading towards a proactive ethical vision of their firm within tourism, as Participant 5 highlights:

*In my field I have seen a bit of everything, so to speak [...] Tourism means contributing to an economy, it means helping in developing a different way of doing business in tourism, see? I mean this is, in my opinion, somewhat at the centre of doing responsible tourism, at least our way [...]*

Participants understand the firm's identity as a private entity called to educate people and travellers towards an authentic and responsible relationship with other cultures, as Participant 1 says:

*The relationship you establish with local people is certainly effective, when you can mediate a meeting in an intelligent manner, that is meeting people, people from an Indian village is a memorable experience, that I would like everyone to experience; as a friend of mine used to say, Firm 1's travels should be mandatory by law. I mean, he jokes but cross-culture is an opportunity [...]*

Participants narrate their atypical entrepreneurial identity as juxtaposed with the traditional tourism sector rooted within a liquid, uncertain society (Bauman, 2000). Interviewed by Franklin (2003, p. 207), Bauman says: "when speaking of 'tourist' or 'tourism' as metaphors of contemporary life, I have in mind certain aspects of the tourism condition and/or experience – like being in a place temporarily and knowing it, not belonging to the place, not locked into the local life 'for better or worse' [...] It is that characteristic of contemporary life to which I primarily refer when speaking of the *tourism syndrome*". The participants' narratives, on the contrary, construct their own identity by stressing the risks and frailties of the 'tourist syndrome'. The participants struggle with tourists' looseness of ties with places, their moral disengagement, the time-limited dimension of their experiences, and the reduction of society to simply being consumers of experiences. This entrepreneurial narrative type constructs its own identity by recounting authentic, real travel experiences where there is the time to know, and commit to, people and destinations in a meaningful way.

*We started these trips featuring some key ingredients [...] a key point has always been to have enough time available, an ongoing travel flexibility, because in my opinion if this dimension of time and flexibility are missed, you go nowhere, because things remain blurred. Because when you travel somehow, something always happens so you have to understand things, and for this you have to take some time [...] So, focusing the whole organisational effectiveness on the encounters, on the authenticity of encounters, is really a tough bet, but it is also what characterises you, and makes you different from everyone else, because, well, an encounter will be different each time [...]* (Participant 1)

Participants present their identities around the concept of de-growth, understood as an artisanal dimension valuing uniqueness. As Latouche (2004, vol. 11) states: 'it might be more accurate and less alarming if we replaced the world de-growth with 'not growth'. We could then start talking about 'a-growthism', as in 'a-theism'". De-growth is juxtaposed with the failures and weaknesses of mainstream tourism and the contemporary economy, and the rationale of this narrative type follows the principles of local development, coupled with a feeling of belonging, ownership and humanistic principles. Participants understand de-growth as not denaturing themselves and their job. For Participant 1 and Participant 7 it is a matter of preserving an artisanal quality:

*We are travel artisans, because, among other things we chose not to grow because...this is a very specific thing, but it means quality to us [...]* (Participant 1)

*I did not want Firm 7 to be part of a big productive chain. I wanted to maintain the strong artisanal dimension; a very personalised relationship also with our customers [...]* (Participant 7)

For Participant 2, it is connected to the ability to maintain the control:

*Now I tell you, then you laugh, so, as Firm 2, we are two employees. We have always labelled as independent. We have always chosen to be independent [...]*

In summary, participants introduce themselves as global citizens. Their firms are recounted as entities imbued with an artisan production and consumption that values time, human relationships and cultural exchange. This narrative type resonates with the literature discussing atypical entrepreneurial identities (Mitchell, 1996; Johansson, 2004) that go beyond the paradigm of the capitalistic entrepreneur driven by profit-making motives (Weber, 1930; Schumpeter, 2000; Shaw, 2004). Participants disclose a more complex understanding of their entrepreneurial identity. They make sense of

themselves as multifaceted persons with a heterogeneous personal and professional background, who, finally, decided to create a firm not to pursue personal lifestyle choices but as an embodiment of their proactive ethical vision on global issues.

### **The professional and entrepreneurial narrative type**

The Schumpeterian model of entrepreneurial innovation and disruption helps to locate participants' understandings and identity construction (Schumpeter, 2000; Bredvold & Skåln, 2016). Participants narrated themselves as inexperienced outsiders who—thanks to their systematic, creative, and professional work—have been able to become successful managers of fruitful firms. Participants understand their entrepreneurial identity as enabling the capacity to embody a successful enterprise: able both to embrace the world's complexity and to sit in contrast with global inequalities and injustice (Jamal, 2019). Participants largely understand themselves and their firms as professional and entrepreneurial subjects with strong organisational and managerial skills. This narrative type depicts participants, at first, as 'rebellious' citizens disappointed by the global economy and willing to take the risk to promote a change. They introduce themselves not only as being outsiders to the tourism sector but also as being able to create successful and innovative small tourism firms as Participant 3 and Participant 4 stress:

*Firm 3 was born at first as an idea, I don't say as a rebellion because it would be too much, but I say as a concept of moving information to independent travellers [...]* (Participant 3)

*I thought it was an idea [an ethical tourism tour operator] well...I liked it for sure, and then it could have been also a winning one. I must admit I don't know on which bases, I had no business plan, nothing so sophisticated [...]* (Participant 4)

Participants understand their entrepreneurial identity as emerging not only as the result of a long and peculiar path, but also as an innovative approach to the tourism and development agenda that goes beyond the constraints of profit / non-profit attitudes, to combine ethical and commercially oriented goals (Power et al., 2017). Participants present themselves and their firms as subjects combining values-driven goals within an efficient, professional and entrepreneurial approach resulting in tangible commercial outcomes, as Participant 3 stresses:

*Over the years we have done very significant things, so, well, there, you feel like you are actually building on fertile soil, even if it's a place full of hardships and mishaps, in many cases but it is a fertile ground for receiving innovation and creativity, right? A will of enterprise [...]*

Participants understand their identity not as replicating an entrepreneurial lifestyle aimed at perpetuating lifestyle choices (Ateljevic & Doorne, 2000; Shaw, 2004; Shaw & Williams, 2004) but as being innovative and creative entrepreneurs able to produce disruption (Schumpeter, 2000). Participants perceive their capacity to adapt to be a crucial entrepreneurial skill.

*So, let's say what I think is Firm 6's greatest ability; it was to adapt and change, I mean to modify its goals using, however, the skills and knowledge that, over the years, it had matured [...]* (Participant 6)

Participant 7 calls this capacity 'genetic mutation':

*Afterwards, in nineteen hundred, sorry in two thousand and six, there was the genetic mutation, the cooperative had run out, let's say, also from a fiscal, social, administrative, and everything else, point of view, it was no longer, times have changed. From the cooperative, from the ashes of the cooperative, the company was born [...]*

This narrative type embodies the very idea of small-scale, liquid, innovative and resilient entrepreneurship recalling Easterly's (2006) theorisation of 'searcher' entrepreneurs. 'Searchers' are a new model of entrepreneurs facing inequalities and economic development challenges on a global scale, and working in small-scale, randomised ways. According to Easterly's theorisation (2006), 'searchers' know intimately and take responsibility for their products, and organise their firms based on stakeholder feedback, accountability and promptness. Participant 3 critically exemplifies the pivotal role that *values-based* entrepreneurs should have in supporting the construction of ethical tourism networks of suppliers and taking responsibility for the products they create and sell:

*I have always been saying to AITR: "look it is useless that we take part to... we participate, let's say, to competition notices where we give five thousand euros to print a guide explaining how to go on foot or on your hands along the road! We should spend five thousand euros to make training in Africa in order*

*to...that is, if there is a community, or three or four communities in a tourist circuit, which are informal, and to which we - two or three operators - send people, we must send one of us there, and we have those people build a company. This is what we must do; thus, you create a network that is, let's say, consistent with itself until the end point, otherwise, you are a hypocrite[...]*  
(Participant 3)

In summary, the professionalism and entrepreneurship narrative type is characterised by a combination of creativeness and innovation, a feeling of rebelliousness and a maverick approach concerning the inequalities of the global economy. The rebel and maverick self-introduction is reminiscent of Schumpeter's conception of entrepreneurs as 'wild spirits' striving to do new things or to get things done a new way (Schumpeter, 2000; Bredvold & Skálén 2016). Participants stressed their willingness to take risks and bet on their own ideas, beliefs and intuitions. This characterisation discloses an entrepreneurial identity constructed via juxtapositions, conflicts and a personal counterculture background.

#### **The empathic 'free speech' narrative type**

An understanding of how participants construct their identity as being empathic and speaking openly helps to grasp how they conceive their entrepreneurial identities. Some authors have already explored the role of emotions and empathic attitudes in management and consumer behaviours (Sampaio et al., 2011; Font et al., 2016). Nevertheless, the relation between emotions and empathy, and the search for an open and frank relationship with customers, competitors and collaborators has remained unexplored.

*And, therefore, with a situation that is also very empathic, as a whole, concerning the customer service, customers become almost travel mates even if you're not travelling with them, right? Therefore, you follow them a lot more [...]* (Participant 2)

In the empathic 'free speech' narrative type, participants' self-introduction revolved around a wide circle of people, ranging from the founder-owner/manager to the firms' work team, to its customers and network of partners. The work team is recounted as a group of people sharing ideas and visions; the customers as travel mates to accompany them in the course of their journeys, and the local partners as beneficiaries sharing the same visions and ideals. The sense of conviviality permeates the narration of relationships that are human based rather than professionally oriented. This

resonates with Illich's critical studies about moving beyond institutionalised relationships and rigid hierarchical roles (Illich, 1971). This narrative type intertwines features of conviviality, empathy and altruism with an enduring search for truth, accountability and transparency. Participants understand decisions mainly as a search for coherence between the personal dimension of individual citizens concerned with global inequalities, and the professional dimension of the firm's founder-owner/manager:

*Because to us it is transparent even with the traveller, so, that's exactly why we have an equally clear relationship with our contacts, and this is why we don't have big mysteries about concealing our contacts, so there are the names directly, and you can find them directly on our socials, but as we have all been in a very transparent relationship over the years, so we trust each other [...]*

(Participant 2)

With regards to this entrepreneurial narrative type, the ancient Greek concept of *Parrhesia* offers meaningful insights that help to understand participants' entrepreneurial identity and senses of self. *Parrhesia* literally means 'all-telling' and, by extension, 'to speak freely' and it pictures the moral obligation to tell the truth, to convey the truth to others in the face of an unbalanced power relationship. This understanding of participants' as parrhesiastic entrepreneurs is conceptually driven by the theorisations of Michel Foucault in his lectures about parrhesia at the University of California at Berkeley in 1983 (Foucault, 2011). The participants' *parrhesia* consists of the freedom openly to criticise the moral apathy and ambiguities of others, juxtaposing this with their own moral rectitude and frankness. Such parrhesiastic attitude stems out from an ethical commitment to 'doing good' being a 'good citizen'. Hence, the emotional attachment and empathy emerging from their first-person accounts depict a free, bottom-up speech that goes from a simple citizen that runs a firm to a more powerful part of society, both in economic and political terms.

*I give you an example: here in my city we have the Theatre, which is bankrupt with the whole supervisory board, which is also under investigation. The handling company is bankrupt, and the company failed as well; I mean it failed in the sense that every year its accounts are a hole, a chasm. So, I mean, the overall area of the tourism industry that eats up vast State resources, it produces such results, and what is asked from me? I mean, give me the chance, right? To develop...so give me a chance to think of a different way of*



*doing tourism, and maybe I will demonstrate you that I can have the same results as well, not me personally, right? I speak of this area [...] (Participant 5)*

In the empathic 'free speech' narrative type, the participants' self-introductions revolve around a wide circle of people, ranging from the founder-owner/managers of the firms to the firms' work teams, their customers and their networks of partners. A sense of belonging permeates the narrations of relationships that are human based rather than professionally oriented, as highlighted by Participant 2 and Participant 7:

*Because it is known that all your choices have been made following a principle. Knowing that you make a selection, definitely creates a type of affection other than the commercial one, right? So even esteem of you [...] (Participant 2)*

*A very personalised relationship with our customers, that I still struggle to call like this, I call the participants, I like it more [...] (Participant 7)*

In summary, the empathic 'free speech' narrative accounts display the participants' attribution to themselves of higher moral qualities and deeper understandings of reality than others. Apparently, this permits them not only to know and tell the truth but also to disclose to others what is more effective and fairer. This feature characterises an entrepreneurial identity adopting a wider point of view and embracing social and cultural values as innovative and competitive factors of success.

Finally, the pattern of results summarised in Table 1 reveals the complexity and novelty of the participants' narratives, disclosing a richness of meanings. This leads to a set of conclusions that are presented in the next section, together with the study's limitations and suggestions for further research.

	<i>The intellectual and educational narrative type</i>	<i>The professional and entrepreneurial narrative type</i>	<i>The empathic 'free speech' narrative type</i>
<i>The firm's origin</i>	The firm stems out from an idea, a personal vision of tourism	The firm originates from a sense of discomfort and rebelliousness in the face of inequalities	The firm originates from a sense of belonging and conviviality
<i>Being successful</i>	Building bridges to overcome fragmentation and cultural barriers	Evolving in time to search new opportunities	Being reliable, accountable and transparent

**Commented [TR5]: [ARE5]** this seems like a vryodd sub-heding. Noted! it's not a sub-heding!!

**Commented [LT6R5]: [ARE6]** Do you think it is clear enough?

<i>Choices &amp; decision-making</i>	Maintaining the route, you chose	Pursuing concrete, measurable success	Having an instinctual empathic approach in taking decisions and making choices
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Table 1 – Summary of the key features of the three narrative types

## CONCLUSION

This study contributes to a deeper understanding of diverse *values-based* entrepreneurial identities. The results reveal how participants largely construct their identity around proactive critiques of contemporary society, global economy and mainstream tourism.

The originality of this research lies in its capacity to reveal the strengths of the narrative approach in offering a nuanced analysis of values-based entrepreneurs. The participants narrate themselves as citizens willing to promote a change through their firms, being very critical of global economic outcomes. Their self-introductions as intellectuals, innovative entrepreneurs, *parrhesiasts* and empathic ‘truth tellers’ largely revolve around their culture and personal commitment to alternative paradigms of development and growth. While the literature often identifies small tourism firms not pursuing economic growth as ‘lifestyle entrepreneurs’ (Thomas et al., 2011), the participants of this study appear to reject such a description. Instead, they highlight the importance of challenging mainstream understandings of development via tourism and construct their entrepreneurial identity accordingly. Notwithstanding differences, there is a common acceptance that ‘being entrepreneurial’ is necessary in order to achieve their social goals.

Participants present themselves as ‘atypical’ entrepreneurs that are ethically committed without rejecting profit and business opportunities (Mitchell, 1996; Johansson, 2004; Bredvold & Skålén, 2016; Power et al., 2017). This research challenges two key assumptions about tourism firms that do not define themselves in commercial terms: their lack of a managerial and entrepreneurial identity, and their being predominantly led by lifestyle choices and personal interests. The research, therefore, questions the literature emphasising the lack of entrepreneurial culture and the informal management of small tourism firms (Ateljevic & Doorne, 2000; Gray, 2002; Sadler-Smith et al., 2003). On the contrary, the study reveals a Schumpeterian entrepreneurial culture and identity driven by a disruptive and rebellious mind-set that seeks to confront the failures in the global economy and the traditional tourism sector (Schumpeter, 2000), as well as disclosing features of strategic management in all the different emerging

entrepreneurial identities (Burns, 2016; Hitt & Ireland, 2017; Meyer et al., 2017; Parker, 2018). To that extent, the investigation helps to identify and characterise a peculiar, and still largely unexplored, set of novel managerial and entrepreneurial narratives in small tourism firms that are not lifestyle-oriented but are committed to meet both profit and non-profit outcomes.

This research project did not seek to identify universal principles. Instead, the intention was to explore new ways of understanding small tourism businesses; how *values-based* entrepreneurs in tourism construct their entrepreneurial identity through an axiology whose frame of reference is grounded into criticism of neoliberal globalisation, ethical commitment, and a proactive approach to global inequalities and injustices. In doing so, we acknowledge that our research has a set of limitations that call for further research. We propose that further research should explore different geographical and cultural contexts. This would also offer the opportunity to validate the research findings through other methodological approaches applied on a wider and different sampling of *values-based* entrepreneurs in tourism. We therefore suggest further investigation to deepen and scrutinise the conceptualisations emerged in this research. This means analysing each narrative type separately so as to understand better the diverse entrepreneurial identities and senses of self of small *values-based* tourism firms.

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