

Commercial Home Accommodation as a Tool for Rural Tourism in Uasin Gishu County in Kenya

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Abstract

This paper examines the extent to which commercial home accommodation could contribute to growth of rural tourism and the acceptability and challenges in providing commercial accommodation. The study was undertaken in Uasin Gishu county in Kenya. The study adopted descriptive survey design which targeted 500 potential entrepreneurs. Cluster sampling was used to select the study area while judgmental, convenience and snowball sampling techniques were used to identify the respondents. The sample size comprised of 120 potential entrepreneurs of commercial homes. Questionnaires were used to collect data. Descriptive statistics was used to analyze data. The results revealed that entrepreneurs believe that home accommodation can be instrumental in the development of rural tourism as the cost of investment was relatively low and does not put great demands on the entrepreneur. However, it was clear that entrepreneurs are reluctant to embrace it for fear of exposing their families to external influences and deprivation of privacy. Entrepreneurs were also uncertain about their ability to meet and satisfy tourists in terms of hospitality and communication, although they are willing to meet the challenge for economic gains. The findings may be beneficial to entrepreneurs in Uasin Gishu county as they can exploit the opportunity as the county government benefits from increased revenue from taxes.

Keywords: Home stay; Commercial homes; Uasin Gishu; Rural tourism

1. Introduction

A commercial home enterprise is where the home or a home construct is used for the purpose of generating income through accommodation letting. It generally involves demeaning (house) work (Oakley 1974) and 'dirty work', where staff must deal with guests' 'intimate bodily functions' (Guerrier and Adib 2000: 261). The host's motive is ulterior (to secure a profit) and the money exchange absolves the guest from any feeling of mutual obligation and loyalty (Lashley, 2000).

Opportunities for entrepreneurial activities are now increasingly available in traditional as well as non-traditional areas. However, the supply of entrepreneurs has not been increasing at the same pace. Small business enterprises play an important role in the economic development of a country. The development of these enterprises, both in the formal and informal economic sectors, is proposed as a way to achieve sustainable socio-economic development and eliminate poverty (Bhargava, 2007). Commercial hospitality activities provide potential entrepreneurs with business opportunities in which they feel they already possess the key skills or a setting to exercise their hospitality skills and a personal need to be hospitable (Lee-Ross and Lashley, 2009). In some cases, hosts accept and treat paying guest as they would family and friends. In other words, there are few 'no go areas'; guests and hosts dine together, use the same sitting room and sleep in bedrooms still adorned with family bric-a-brac. At the other end of the scale, guests and hosts occupy different parts of the property, eating in separate dining rooms, sitting in different rooms and guests sleep in bedrooms which have been made to be depersonalized (Lee-Ross and Lashley, 2009).

Would be entrepreneurs, typically, have acted as hosts, provided accommodation, food and drink to guests who either visited or stayed in their home. In turn, they themselves will typically have been guests in other people's homes and received these 'hospitality services' from other hosts as friends, relatives or other acquaintances. So for many new entrants to the industry, there is no perceived skill deficit which might hamper their decision to pursue an entrepreneurial decision to buy a guest house, hotel, bed and breakfast, pub, Inn, restaurant or café (Lee-Ross and Lashley, 2009). Furthermore, individuals with domestic dwellings of the right size, location or structure have been able to consider turning part of their domestic space over to commercial activities. Accommodation services, in particular, lend themselves to this commercialization of the home, or parts of it, to commercial activities. But there are also examples of individuals using domestic premises to provide food and beverage services through outside catering, banqueting and contract catering in workplaces. Licensing restrictions over the sale of alcohol, will in many countries, limit the conversion of the domestic space to commercial bars and pubs, but many of these licensed premises were originally domestic dwellings (Lee-Ross and Lashley, 2009).

Rural residents of Uasin Gishu county are endowed with large farms in which they have large houses. However, in the past, several residents dwelt in the rural parts but recently, many of them seek opportunities in towns and cities which have left the houses under-utilized. In addition, several residents who previously depended on farming as their source of livelihood, have with the changing times and interest, migrated to urban areas to seek

more lucrative jobs and business ventures which have left the large houses almost unoccupied. With high inflation and hard economic situations, commercial home accommodation offers a perfect opportunity for rural home owners to seize by converting homes to commercial settings. The study sought to answer the following questions:

- i). Is providing commercial home accommodation acceptable to entrepreneurs?
- ii). What reasons would make provision of commercial home accommodation be acceptable?
- iii). What are the potential contributions of commercial home accommodation to rural tourism?
- iv). What are the potential challenges in provision of commercial home accommodation?

2. Literature review

2.1 Rural tourism

Rural tourism may be defined very broadly as the entire tourism activity in a rural area (Keane, 1992; OECD, 1994) or else as a quiet specific tourism form or product, closely related to and motivated by features of 'rurality'. An example is 'agri-tourism', which may be considered a specific segment within rural tourism (Wilson *et al.*, 2001). Lane (1994) suggests that rural tourism is that which is: located in rural areas; functionally rural; rural in scale; traditional in character, organically and slowly growing; and controlled by local people.

The significance of rural tourism for the development of rural areas may be outstanding, due to potentially significant multiplier effects (Walmsley, 2003). Additionally, tourists may increase the areas' attractiveness in the eyes of the local population, enhancing their pride and self-esteem (Kastenholz, 2004). Correspondingly, rural tourism, through promoting endogenous development based on natural and cultural heritage, may contribute to the preservation of heritage as well as to the retention of residents in poorly developed rural areas (Lane, 1994; Gannon, 1994; OECD, 1994). That is why rural tourism, if carefully planned, managed and marketed, may significantly enhance economic, social and cultural development (Page and Getz, 1997).

2.2 The commercial-home paradigm

Several historical accounts of the use of the commercial home for tourist accommodation note that it has a long history in many countries, but that in the second half of the twentieth century the use of commercial homes for tourist accommodation has varied greatly across different geographical regions (Ames, 1999; Kaufman *et al.*, 1996; Lanier, 2000; Sakach, 2004). More specifically, it has been suggested that in Europe there has been a continuing tradition of commercial home use as a budget form of accommodation.

In the United States, Canada, Africa, Australia and New Zealand, however, the commercial home has only recently been taken up again as a form of tourist accommodation. In these settings, this type of accommodation is typically more expensive than standard forms of accommodation and is seen as an alternative or specialist type of experience (Ames, 1999; England Research, 2005; Kaufman *et al.*, 1996; Lanier, 2000; Lubetkin, 1999; McGehee and Kim, 2004; Pearce, 1990; Sakach, 2004).

The sector is dominated by micro-firms often based on owner management with few, if any, employees outside of family members. Many decide to offer commercial-accommodation services because they are perceived to face low barriers to entry. For guests, there may be the perceived attraction of staying with a 'real' family in a domestic setting, but the reality is of 'private' areas exclusively for family members and guest areas which have been depersonalized to make the accommodation look more like professional hotel areas. Commercial domain hospitality is distinguished by its 'market driven relationship which allows a customer a freedom of action that individuals would not dream of demanding in a domestic setting (Lashley, 2000: 12).

The hotel has been the dominant paradigm that has long determined, and served as, a commercial accommodation role model. Its counterpoint, the private home, is often represented as the antithesis to the hotel (Douglas, 1991; Ritzer, 1993). Recently, however, the commercial home enterprise has been proposed as a distinctive alternative to both the hotel and the private home whilst simultaneously acknowledging hotel and private home influences (Lynch, 2003; 2005a; 2005b; 2005c; Lynch and MacWhannell, 2000). Development of these enterprises, is proposed as a way to achieve sustainable socio-economic development and eliminate poverty (Bhargava, 2007).

Home is a space free from public scrutiny, political engagements and non-familial relationships. It is a space of security, intimacy and regeneration (Allan and Crow, 1989). In the commercial home, the host and/or family do not need to live on the premises all the time. The visitor may nevertheless be very conscious of the presence of the host family, for example, furnishings, locked cupboards, choice of reading material and music, or the presence of notices, say, on operating the boiler. The important feature in such cases is the presence of the host in absentia, i.e. evidence of the emotional engagement (Lynch, 2000a) or personal expression of the host (Lynch, 2005c: 535).

The concept of the home is identified as a powerful physical, cultural, emotional and temporal construct (Lynch, 2005a). It is the home concept that distinguishes commercial homes from other forms of accommodation such as those hotels where the host's private home is not on the premises, and where the boundaries distinguishing public space, which is open to staff and visitors, from private space, which is open to staff only, are relatively distinct. For instance, self-catering cottages may share the fact of being a private home but not that of a

host/family living continuously on the same premises.

Commercial homes differ according to the degree of host/guest separation (Figure 1). Commercialized hospitality within the private home where the owners live on the premises and public space is shared by visitors and the owner's family – this category may be subdivided by the degree of integration of the visitor with the family and their activities, for example, private house bed and breakfasts, host families, commercialized hospitality where the owner lives on the premises and the unit is also the family home but where public space for the visitor is separated from that of the family, for example, small hotels, town houses, guesthouses and some bed and breakfasts and self-catering where the home owners live off the premises ... [and] the home is usually a second home (Lynch and MacWhannell, 2000: 104–5).

3. Research methodology

The study was undertaken in Uasin Gishu county in Kenya. The target population was 500 potential entrepreneurs and was based on a descriptive survey research design. Cluster sampling was used to select the study area while judgmental, convenience and snowball sampling techniques were used to identify the respondents. The sample size comprised of 120 potential entrepreneurs of commercial homes. Data was collected using questionnaires containing both structured and unstructured questions administered to the potential entrepreneurs. Descriptive statistics was used to analyze data.

4. Result

4.1 Profile of respondents

Majority (56%) of the respondents were female mainly because the study was carried out during the day and most women were at their homes while their husbands were out to work. The age of the respondents were 18-30 yrs (39%), 31-40 (37%) and the rest were above 40 (24%). Most of the respondents had attained some form of education with the majority having secondary education (46%), followed by primary education (40%) while only 14% had attained college education. With regard to the occupation of the respondents, 78% were engaged in farming activities, 14% engaged in business while a small percentage of 8% were not involved in any occupation.

4.2 Acceptability and reasons for acceptability of commercial home accommodation

Majority (60%) of the respondents felt that they could accept to use their homes for commercial accommodation while 40% were not ready.

Entrepreneurs gave various reasons for their acceptability to use their homes for commercial accommodation. Improved standards of living resulting from income generated was rated by a majority of 80% as the top most reason for the acceptability followed by perceived low risk of the venture which was rated by 77% of the respondents. Seventy five percent and 71% respondents were would accept to use their homes for commercial accommodation owing to the fact that no rent would be paid for use of their own houses and the ability to work from their homes, respectively. This explains why majority of them prefer staying in their rural homes.

In addition 65% of the respondents felt that commercial home accommodation would provide a source of income and give them an opportunity to meet new people hence their acceptability for the venture. According to them, meeting new people may open opportunities for scholarships, employment for their children and sponsorship for various projects as well as creating a chance to send their children to the visitors' countries at one point in time. However a minority of 39% were enthusiastic that acceptability of commercial home accommodation would give them an opportunity to interact with tourists. However many were sceptical about interacting with tourists probably due to fear or inferiority complex.

4.4 Contribution of commercial homes to rural tourism development

Majority (72%) of the respondents felt that commercial home accommodation ventures would encourage preservation of culture and packaging the same as a tourist attraction. Tourist attractions to keep the visitors such as agro-tourism activities would be developed and in the process other forms of tourism would be packaged and sold. In addition, respondents felt that they would build cultural homes to display their culture, cuisine and lifestyles, hence become an income generating venture, therefore developing rural tourism. From the findings, 62% of the respondents felt that nature trails would be developed to encourage rural tourism. Not worthy is the fact that some flora and vegetation are still in their natural state thus with encouragement, regenerating it would not be difficult.

4.5 Challenges of commercial home accommodation

Respondents were asked to mention some of the anticipated challenges of adopting commercial home accommodation. Insecurity was mentioned as a challenge especially towards visitors not from their ethnic community and male visitors. Hence, they expressed that they would feel more secure with visitors from their ethnic affiliation and had a bias towards women visitors or if male, should be accompanied by females. The entrepreneurs also noted that they feared giving away their privacy as a result of hosting visitors in and around their home and also being unable to meet the visitors anticipated standards of service. They were not confident that they would be able to cook for the guests to their satisfaction. In addition they raised concerns over possible interference with morals resulting from children emulating behaviour, language and actions they see from the

visitors. Family time would also be interrupted as tourists may need a lot of attention and overlap of space where the family feels that their space has been taken over. Another fear was accountability of guest security and fear of any consequences thereto which would have direct bearing on the family members. Entrepreneurs were apprehensive of their inferiority complex which may affect service delivery and eventual visitor satisfaction. Entrepreneurs believe that they should work during the day and rest from evening thus with potential tourists working for 24 hours would be inevitable as it may be difficult to control the visitors times. Language barrier and inability to effectively communicate with visitors was a potential challenge especially if the tourists spoke in foreign languages that the family does not understand.

5. Conclusion

Entrepreneurs opine that home accommodation can be instrumental in development of rural tourism due to the fact that the cost of investment is relatively low and the enterprises do not to put great demands on the entrepreneur. Entrepreneurs are willing to beat the challenge for economic gains as it provides an opportunity for entrepreneurs to exploit, increase revenue and improve standards to living. Despite the possible benefits, entrepreneurs are cautious about embracing the venture for fear of exposing their families to external influences and deprivation of privacy. They are also uncertain about their ability to meet and satisfy tourists in terms of hospitality and communication. It is recommended that the Ministry of Tourism embrace commercial home accommodation and come up with standards and policies to guide the sector. Consequently, they should facilitate training of entrepreneurs on the same to ensure that quality service is provided to tourists. There is also need to sensitize entrepreneurs on the benefits to enable them accept the concept. Academicians, researchers and tourism planners should visit countries that have embraced the same in order to borrow a leaf.

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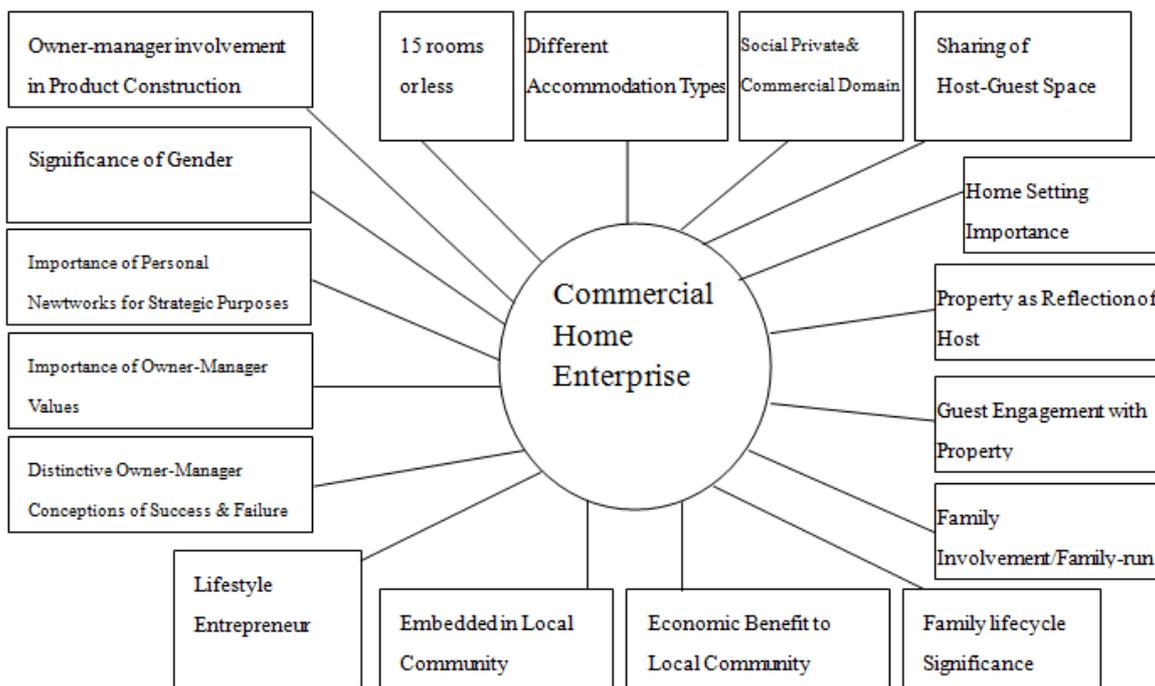


Figure 1 The commercial home enterprise

Source: Lynch, 2005c: 549