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**The Impact of Sense of Place on Entrepreneurial Orientation
of Rural Entrepreneurs: With Special Reference to Small and
Medium Scale Manufacturing Enterprises in Kurunegala
District, Sri Lanka.**

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Abstracts

Entrepreneurship has been recognized as a significant contributor to the development of the global economy across various sectors. As a result, there has been a noticeable increase in the number of rural entrepreneurs who are involved in small and medium-scale manufacturing enterprises, leading to significant changes in the labor force contribution. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the impact of spatial factors on the entrepreneurial orientation of rural entrepreneurs engaged in small and medium-scale manufacturing enterprises in the Kurunegala district of Sri Lanka. To achieve this, the research employs both inductive and deductive research approaches and both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods. The findings of this study indicate that a Sense of Place is a crucial spatial factor with a moderate positive correlation with entrepreneurial orientation. Sense of Place explains 25.9% of the variability of the dependent variable. The study highlights that the selected rural entrepreneurs' understanding and connection to the surrounding environment and community contribute significantly to their entrepreneurial

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orientation. Furthermore, the qualitative data analysis identified the hidden and intangible truth of the case. Based on the research findings, the study recommends enhancing entrepreneurial orientation by effectively connecting a Sense of Place and implementing future industrial planning in the selected area. Further research is necessary to investigate the unexplained factors related to the relationship between independent and dependent variables, which can provide additional insight into the dynamics of entrepreneurial orientation in the Kurunegala district. This research could further promote the development of small and medium-scale manufacturing enterprises in rural areas and contribute to the region's overall economic development.

Keywords: Sense of Place, Entrepreneurial Orientation, Rural Entrepreneurs, Manufacturing Enterprises

Introduction

Regarding the economic development of developed or developing nations, entrepreneurs make an immense contribution to the main sectors of an economy. An entrepreneur is a unique person acting as a manager in their business operations by assuming risks, gaining rewards for their success, and tolerating losses in failures (Henderson, 2002). Rural entrepreneurs are crucial; they create a new organization through which new products are introduced, a new market is created or catered for, or a new technology is introduced to the rural environment (Wortman, 1990). In the present scenario, the number of rural entrepreneurs engaged in small and medium-scale manufacturing enterprises has started to grow, making significant changes to the labour force contribution of a country (Ruchkina et al., 2017).

Considering the rural entrepreneurs in Sri Lanka, Small and Medium Scale Enterprises (SMEs) can be highlighted as a momentous business wet ground. These firms have become crucial as a source of employment. Similarly, those are crucial for efficient division and resource spread through local human and material utilization. Entrepreneurs in the manufacturing sector have more enthusiastic feelings to involve with SMEs in many countries, including Sri Lanka. Thus, it has become one of the major income generators in third-world countries as well as developed nations (Islam et al., 2011). According to Gamage (2003), SMEs are the backbone of all countries today.

According to Miller (1983), the success of a manufacturing SME is usually based on one particular thing: Entrepreneurial Orientation (EO). Entrepreneurial orientation can energize established companies with risk-taking, innovations and active behaviors (Lumpkin & Dess, 1996). As Miller (1983) states, the EO is a prominent contributor to a firm's success. Miller has developed the concept of EO, which comprises three dimensions: innovativeness, reactivity and risk-taking. Frank, Kessler & Fink (2010), as cited in Guth & Ginsberg (1990), explain Entrepreneurial Orientation as "a potential means for revitalizing established companies, that accomplished through risk-taking, innovation and proactive behaviors."

Although several factors determine entrepreneurial orientation, spatial factors make a noteworthy impact on the entrepreneurial orientation of rural entrepreneurs. Out of the four well-known traditions in Geography, spatial tradition is crucial (Pattison, 1990). Spatial tradition, of which the roots are strongly linked to western thought, maintains that it is important to perform the spatial analysis of the act, separating it from the happenings of experience, such as distance, location, direction, accessibility, and position (Murphy, 2014). Some of the main spatial factors affecting entrepreneurial orientation are the sense of place, proximity to home with family relations, social relations, availability of raw materials, and the traditional caste system. Among them, a Sense of Place has become very significant when identifying various activities in the world, and micro and macroeconomic activities can be identified as one of the prominent areas with considerable impact towards a country's economic growth.

Kurunegala district can be identified as the highest representations in rural manufacturing firms among all districts in Sri Lanka. Referring to the rural manufacturing firms enumerated during the last six years in Kurunegala district, the number of establishments that could be found on early years has significantly dropped down by next several years (Small Enterprises Development Division Kurunegala, 2018). Survey Data (2018) has revealed that the main reason for these drop downs connect with less improvement in entrepreneurial orientation because entrepreneurial orientation is the most effective factor which could make direct impact on small and medium scale manufacturing business performances (Gamage, 2003). Although several spatial factors determine entrepreneurial orientation, it is the sense of place

that makes a noteworthy impact on entrepreneurial orientation of rural entrepreneurs (Survey Data, 2018). Accordingly, the main objective of the study was to assess the impact of sense of place on entrepreneurial orientation of selected rural entrepreneurs in small and medium scale manufacturing enterprises and to emphasize the importance of sense of place on entrepreneurial orientation for future industrial planning.

Location and trade are considered as the grandfather of economics and there are two intertwined aspects such as, location impact on trade flows and trade impacts on location decisions. Location theory is one of the most essential components in spatial economics and regional economics. The location relating to industrial businesses was examined by Weber in 1909 and highlighted the location solution of cost minimizing based on resource output of a new business. Also, he highlighted the product output as well. The spatial attentiveness of economic activities in an urban area has been explored widely with the argument of agglomeration benefits to the city development through information, skills, growth of trades, relevant equipment, and skilled labor. In 1933, Christaller developed the Central place theory by highlighting the spatial interconnection between multiple products. The spatial organization of economic activities is connected to advantages of agglomeration and that is the basic idea of the theory. This theory can be identified as a momentous of location theory and a better platform for spatial planning. In the period of postwar the theory "Growth pole", Cumulative causation model, forward and backward linkages has also been developed (Gorter & Nijkamp, 2001).

Many research in Sri Lanka have focused on many economic related concepts and principles, institutional interventions and government policies which make impact on entrepreneurial orientation of rural entrepreneurs, but less attention was given towards spatial factors like "Sense of Place" affecting for entrepreneurial orientation of rural entrepreneurs. Accordingly, the research gap of the study can be highlighted.

The present study, centered on a sample study carried out in one of the foremost districts in Sri Lanka where the most Rural Entrepreneurs are spread, takes the initiative in filling the knowledge gap on the relationship between sense of place and Entrepreneurial Orientation of Rural Entrepreneurs in Small and Medium Scale Manufacturing Enterprises. Hence, the findings of this study make an enormous contribution to uplift rural entrepreneur-engaged

SMEs, and to find appropriate solutions so that the full contribution of the field can be revived for future industrial planning and the GDP growth in Sri Lanka.

Literature Review

The concept of 'sense of place' refers to the strength of people's relationships with a place, which is a concept employed in studying human-place bonding, attachment and place meaning. Sense of place is defined as an overarching impression encompassing the general ways in which people feel about places, sense it, and assign concepts and values to it (Abeyrathna & Wijesinghe, 2020). Sense of place includes several dimensions; knowledge of being located in a place, belonging to a place, attachment to a place, identifying with the place goals, involvement in a place, sacrifice for a place. The concept of sense of place makes a considerable impact on engaging economic activities in rural areas (Najafi & Shariff, 2011).

Nina (1997) states that reviewing the concept of place in Geography is a comprehensive endeavor. In terms of grasping the idea of entrepreneurship, the concept of place is very important, which is why it is a fundamental perspective in entrepreneur research. According to Agnew (1987) in Geography, the concept of place has been traditionally conceptualized under three significant realms. In economic geography as well as in location theory, places are generally conceptualized as 'locations' (Nina, 1997), which can be examined and explained objectively via economic variables. "Sense of place" is highly discussed in humanistic or cultural geography (Nina, 1997), of which the main focus is a person's subjective perception of and connection to places. The term 'Locale' is the most frequently used term in social geography, in which places are considered as contexts or backgrounds within which social interactions take place and social relations are established (Nina, 1997). In entrepreneur research, location, sense of place and locale are perceptions related to place. For instance, in attempts to confirm the location of economic activities, firstly according to central place theory (threshold population and range) which perceives place as location, secondly, according to entrepreneurs' place attachment, for instance, place being comprehended as sense of place, and thirdly, in relation to entrepreneurs' social networks, for instance, place understood as locale. The comprehension of place can be identified in relation to social and cultural category and also in relation to

economic activity; all contribute to understanding the association between place and entrepreneurship (Nina, 1997).

According to Altman & Low (2012) culturally based place attachment can be identified in six different processes. A utilitarian relationship between people and land is referred to in economic bonding with place attachment; for instance, attachments that develops as a result of ownership of working in a certain place, are particularly experienced in distant rural areas with higher unemployment levels. Michelacci & Silva (2007), emphasize that entrepreneurs' choice of location depends on the family background as well as other social factors. Entrepreneurship as well as choosing the business location are affected by the experience in a community relating to a specific entrepreneurial environment or culture (Michelacci & Silva, 2007). These factors highlight the relationship between the "sense of place" and establishment of business in a particular place.

Considering the key studies on sense of place affecting entrepreneurial orientation one study emphasizes the importance of sense of place towards new experiments and innovations through a qualitative study. Scott (1999) has highlighted how characteristics and associations linked with place may be beneficial for creative industries. Certain decision makings related to business take place as a result of place attachment or place belongingness. When it comes to delegation of authority in terms of problem solving and decision making, entrepreneurs often favor the place based social relations and structures. Good place attachment could increase Competitive aggressiveness via appropriate business tactics (Munkejord, 2017). Garg (n.d.) has highlighted how the traditional caste-based occupation mobility makes an impact on innovativeness. Decline of the autonomy of successive generations in the family firms' context has been subject to various arguments (Martin & Lumpkin, 2003). Zellweger & Sieger (2012) have interviewed both family and non-family firms and showed the importance of internal autonomy which empowers everybody as a driver of entrepreneurial work. A study based on a steel measuring tape manufacturing clusters in China reveals that networks evolved in traditional manufacturing clusters highly connect with emotional linkages. Cluster networks create an innovative learning climate. Similarly, aspects such as sharing, caring, integrating, cooperating are recognized to be the most prominent entrepreneurial strategies observed in different traditional

manufacturing groups. These reasons lead to good entrepreneurial orientation (Li, Li & Liu, 2011).

Various theories discuss the concept of entrepreneurial orientation and various types of factors that affect entrepreneurial orientation, including economic, political, cultural, and environmental factors. However, only a few works, out of those, have focused on spatial factors like sense of place that affect the entrepreneurial orientation of rural entrepreneurs.

Methodology

With regards to the methodology of the research, the research approach refers to both inductive and deductive research approaches. Pragmatism was leading as the research philosophy. Sense of place is the independent variable, which was measured by using several indicators namely, place attraction, knowledge of being located in the place, belonging to a place, identifying with the place goals, scarifies for a place. Entrepreneurial orientation is the dependent variable, which was measured by using several dimensions such as, level of autonomy, level of innovativeness, level of risk taking, competitive aggressiveness. Accordingly, the conceptual framework can be illustrated as follows.

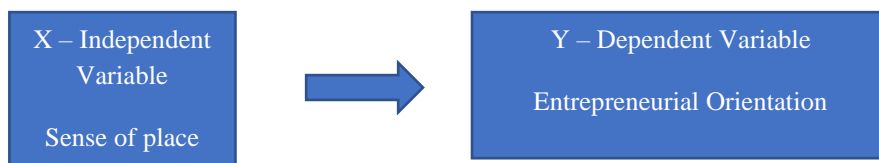


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework
Source: Author Developed (2020)

Following are the tested hypotheses of the research.

H0: There is no significant relationship between Sense of Place and Entrepreneurial Orientation of Rural Entrepreneurs in Manufacturing sector SMEs in Kurunegala.

H1: There is a significant relationship between Sense of Place and Entrepreneurial Orientation of Rural Entrepreneurs in Manufacturing sector SMEs in Kurunegala.

The population for this study comprised all rural manufacturing sector SMEs in Kurunegala district. As per the Department of census and statistics (2018), this area is consisted of 6794 rural manufacturing sector SMEs. The sample identified for this study was 300 SMEs according to the Stratified Random Sampling method as the population belongs to eight different manufacturing strata. Eight different manufacturing strata were identified based on the International Standard of Industrial Classification. Quota, convenient and purposive sampling technique was used to collect qualitative data. The data were collected through primary and secondary data collection methods. The primary data gathering methods of the research can be mentioned as questionnaires, in-depth interviews, focus group discussions and case studies. Questionnaires were disseminated to the respondents after visiting the study area. It was a structured format prepared according to pre-determined concepts. The other primary data collection methods were used to collect the invisible and hidden truth regarding the research problem and these data collection methods were very helpful under deductive (Theory Building) research approach. Books, journal articles, statistical reports, and newspapers were used as the secondary data collection methods of the research. These data collection methods play a vital role in getting better understanding regarding the previous literature on the research topic.

With regards to the methods of quantitative data analysis, descriptive statistical analysis that consists of factor analysis, reliability test, validity test, normality test and frequency analysis were applied. Inferential analysis consists of simple regression analysis, correlation analysis, spatial autocorrelation, and buffer analysis. The main purpose of the regression analysis was to assess the impact of independent variables on the dependent variable and to find the intensity of the factor. According to Sekaran & Bougie (2010), simple regression refers to an analysis association with one independent variable and dependent variable. In this study, simple regression was run. Simple regression was done with the intention of assessing the impact of the independent variable with the dependent variable by highlighting the intensity of the factor. The explanatory power of the model shows whether the model is strong enough to predict the linear relationship between sense of place and entrepreneurial orientation. Pearson correlation analysis signposts the strength, direction, and significance of bivariate relationships among two variables. Thus, Pearson correlation analysis was run to find the strength of

association, direction, and significant bivariate relationships between sense of place and entrepreneurial orientation.

Considering the methods of qualitative data analysis, the researcher has used content analysis and triangulations. Content analysis of the research refers to systematic technique to compress a lot of words of text into less content based on coding method. Triangulations was used to collect and analyze qualitative data, because it refers to using more than one approach to the investigation and improve confidence of findings. Various data collection methods consist of different advantages and disadvantages so that the weakness arising from one method can be reduced by another method. It increased the validation of data via cross verification.

Results and Findings

Considering the nature of the business, the most preferred rural manufacturing SME in Kurunegala district can be recognized as "Other manufacturing industries" (42.3%) and "Food, beverage, and tobacco manufacturing" (17.0%) while the least engaged manufacturing establishment was Chemicals and Chemical, Petroleum, Coal, Rubber and Plastic Products (0.7%) (Figure 4.1). The majority (61.0%) of SMEs consists of "5 to 10" number of employees while 1.3% of SMEs consist of "More than 50, Less than 199" number of employees in Kurunegala district's manufacturing sector.

In order to ensure the reliability of measures, Cronbach's coefficient alpha was calculated. All Cronbach's Alpha values ranging from 0 to 1 show the consistency or stability of the collected data for the study. The Cronbach's Alpha values of the questions under two variables show significant relationships. The Alpha values for Sense of Place was 0.853. The factor Entrepreneurial Orientation was determined by the dimensions "Level of Autonomy", "Level of Innovativeness", "Level of Risk Taking", and "Competitive Aggressiveness". There were three measures of indicators for each dimension and for the questions under these items, the Cronbach's alpha was 0.728, 0.824, 0.782, 0.806, respectively. It suggests very strong reliability. The correlation coefficient between Sense of Place and Entrepreneurial Orientation is 0.509 with p-value of $0.000 < 0.01$ (Table 1). Thus, null hypothesis (H_0) is rejected. There is a moderate positive correlation between

Sense of Place and Entrepreneurial Orientation. Accordingly, a good sense of place leads to better entrepreneurial orientation.

Table 1: Correlation between Sense of Place and Entrepreneurial Orientation

		SPTOTAL	EOTOTAL
SPTOTAL	Pearson Correlation	1	.509**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	300	300
EOTOTAL	Pearson Correlation	.509**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	300	300

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: Survey Data (2020)

Regression analysis was run to quantify the relationship between independent variables and dependent variables. Also, it was important to test the intensity of the independent variable. According to the below table (Table 2), the R^2 or the Coefficient of Determination is the proportion of variance in the problematic variable that can be explained by independent variable. Therefore, it can be decided that the sense of place explains 25.9% of the variability of dependent variable. In accordance with the coefficient results, Standardized Coefficients Beta value for sense of place is 0.509. The regression coefficient of the independent variables is 0.922. With regards to the respective statistical significance levels, the value is less than 0.01 and therefore it can be concluded that the variable is statistically significant.

Table 2: Regression Analysis

Variable	R	R Squar	F change	B valu	Beta valu	t value	Sig.valu
s		e		e	e		e
SP	0.50	0.259	104.21	0.922	0.509	10.20	0.000
	9		4			9	

Source: Survey Data (2020)

Some statistical findings were proved further by the qualitative data analysis and found more invisible realities related to the association between independent and the dependent variables. Accordingly, in-depth interviews and focus group discussions were conducted to achieve objectives of the research. Similarly, case studies were used to find the intensity of the variable, "Sense of Place".

Accordingly, both old and young entrepreneurs have highlighted the importance of place inherent traditional designs for innovative performances. But when checking the same product related to both generations, youth entrepreneurs do new experiments and timely innovations by infusing traditional knowledge than that of old entrepreneurs. All entrepreneurs except Paper, Paper Products, Printing and Publishing, have highlighted the importance of place inherent business techniques and traditional designs towards the innovative outputs. "Autonomy in problem solving and decision making" considerably depends on the place-based addiction and trustworthiness of rural people in this area. But in some entrepreneurs' case, they have hired workers from different places so that they do not prefer delegating authority to those workers. It was also proved that competitive aggressiveness is not highly visible within the village groups who have a good sense of place. According to the entrepreneurs, they tend to make competition with the new entrepreneurs who come from other villages or areas. But the entrepreneurs who enumerated their firms close by main roads have mentioned some controversial ideas by highlighting the necessity of aggressive promotion campaigns and watchfulness on competitors. It was found that the exploratory case studies acted as a significant role player in finding real life factors relating to the Sense of Place and Entrepreneurial Orientation. The exploratory case stories were analyzed by using coding methods as follows and ultimately it led to building a researchers' own theory by highlighting the inductive reasoning of the case.

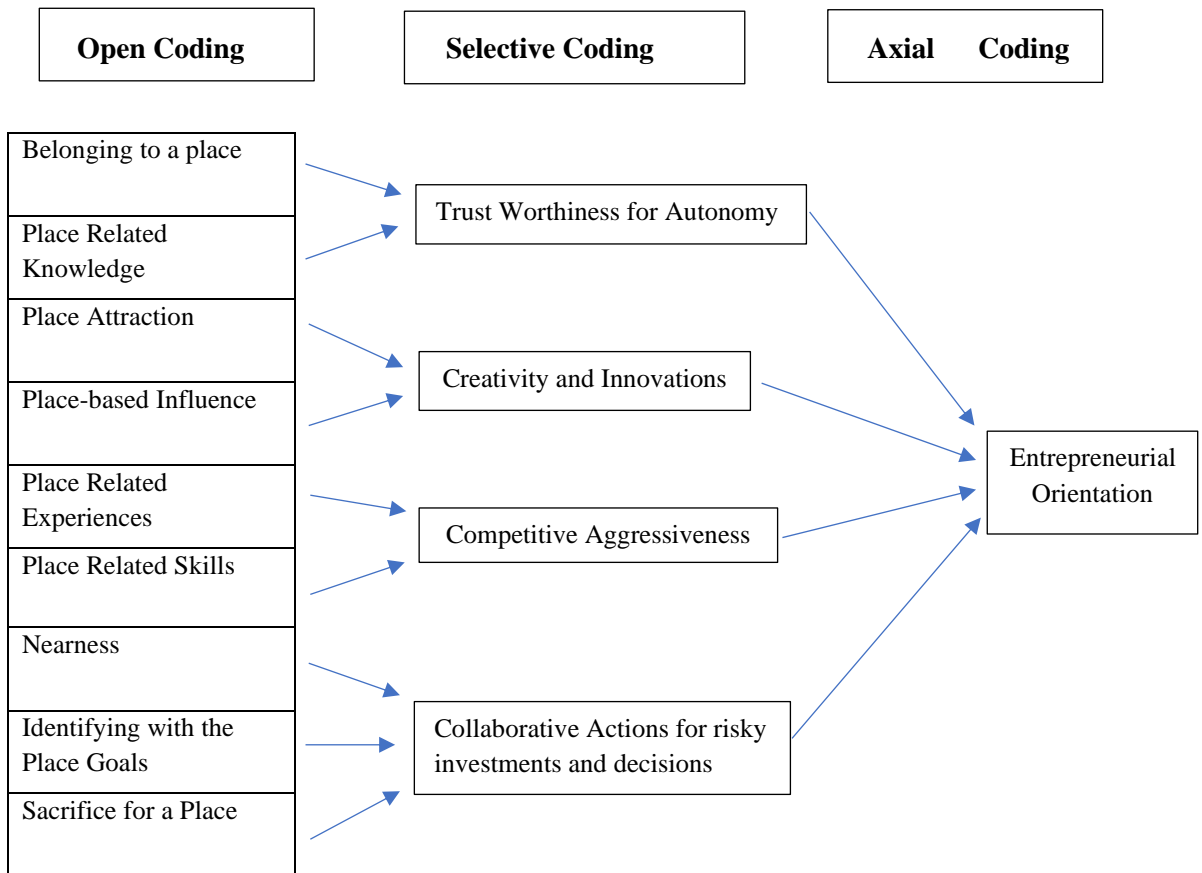


Figure 2: Theory Building through Coding Method

Source: Author Developed (2020)

Discussion

Drake (2003) discusses the connection between place and creativity in micro and small enterprises within creative industries. The study centered around Craft metalwork was conducted based on qualitative interviews. The findings suggest that creative workers are highly benefited by the place and traditional based reputation, which, for them, is an inspiration. Nevertheless, it was observed that certain craftsmen, instead of following the traditional designs and patterns identical to the locality, deviate from the tradition and experiment with new designs. Drake (2003) states creative workers are emotionally and personally responsive to a place, which influences how they utilize attributes of the place as a stimulus for creativity. Drake (2003) stresses the importance of sense of place in terms of innovation and experimentation, without,

however, examining the importance of sense of place for other dimensions of entrepreneurial orientation. The study by Scott (1999) discusses how characteristics and associations linked with place may be beneficial for creative industries. In this study, both old and young entrepreneurs have highlighted the importance of place inherent traditional designs for innovative performances. But when checking the same product related to both generations, youth entrepreneurs do new experiments and timely innovations by infusing traditional knowledge than that of old entrepreneurs. With regards to the focus group discussions of the current research, all entrepreneurs except Paper, Paper Products, Printing and Publishing, have highlighted the importance of place inherent business techniques and traditional designs towards the innovative outputs.

Munkejord (2017) states that certain decision making related to business takes place as a result of place attachment or place belongingness. When it comes to delegation of authority in terms of problem solving and decision making, entrepreneurs often favor the place based social relations and structures. Well established place embedded relationships strengthen the trustworthiness between entrepreneurs and workers (Munkejord, 2017), while it also gives better solutions to challenging or risky situations in the business. Based on proper place attachment, competitive aggressiveness could be increased with proper business tactics (Munkejord, 2017). According to the current research, "Autonomy in problem solving and decision making" considerably depends on the place-based addiction and trustworthiness of rural people in this area. All workers are nearby neighbors or family members and therefore it is very easy to delegate authority. But in some entrepreneurs' case, they have hired workers from different places so that they do not prefer delegating authority to those workers. Considering the Level of risk taking, it was proved that it is possible with place-based knowledge and place attachment. Accordingly, knowledge of being in the place helps build trustworthiness among workers and it leads to taking risks in manufacturing investments. But in some entrepreneurs' cases, it can be identified as a difficult task as they are running out of profits sometimes. It was also proved that competitive aggressiveness is not highly visible within the village groups who have a good sense of place. According to the entrepreneurs, they tend to make competition with the new entrepreneurs who come from other villages or areas. But the entrepreneurs who enumerated their firms close by main roads have mentioned some

controversial ideas by highlighting the necessity of aggressive promotion campaigns and watchfulness on competitors. The researcher has noticed that they are the people who do not have any place-based attachment or bonding for a long period.

Recommendations

The study at hand provides invaluable insights into enhancing entrepreneurial orientation within a selected area, primarily by establishing a strong connection with the Sense of Place. These insights pave the way for future industrial planning in the region, offering a comprehensive roadmap for economic development and sustainability.

One of the key challenges faced by small and medium-scale manufacturing firms in Sri Lanka, leading to their unfortunate demise, is the lack of adequate advisory support. To address this issue, it is imperative to establish a robust mechanism for delivering sound business advice to budding entrepreneurs. Furthermore, rural entrepreneurs should have access to service packages and theoretical knowledge that cover essential principles of management and accounting. Soliciting feedback from entrepreneurs is equally crucial, and this responsibility falls upon the institutions that provide support to rural industries.

Entrepreneurs in this region have an innate affinity for their native environment, which deters them from venturing elsewhere. Consequently, manufacturing firms tend to cluster near their homes or within their villages. In such a scenario, establishing purchasing centers in nearby suburban areas, offering fair value for products, becomes paramount.

In parallel, there must be proactive encouragement programs within the region that emphasize the significance of entrepreneurship. A critical aspect of this effort involves comparing available resources, such as land, raw materials, human resources, and natural resources, with those in neighboring areas. Highlighting the unique strengths and exceptional value of the region can serve as a compelling motivator. Additionally, initiatives involving experimental ventures and calculated risks should be pursued to stimulate entrepreneurial orientation and foster economic well-being in the area.

To improve industrial linkages, the selected area should facilitate subcontracting and specialization. This independence confers cost-benefit advantages to all economic activities in the region, thereby supporting coconut-related products, wood products, paper products, textiles, apparel products, food and beverages, non-metallic products, and chemical products. For example, utilizing coconut shells, husks, leaves, heartwood, and the core can yield a diverse range of products, including food and beverages, handicrafts, Koppara products, hair products, and powders. This interconnectedness forms a complex network of backward and forward industrial linkages, further reinforcing the region's economic viability.

Moreover, it is essential to recognize the impact of unexplained factors, including economic, political, socio-cultural, and environmental influences, on entrepreneurial orientation in Kurunegala district. Future studies should delve deeper into these areas to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics at play and to refine strategies for sustainable economic development.

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