KOLI NATIONAL PARK: INCUBATION FOR REGIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION THROUGH MULTI-LEVEL ENTREPRENEURSHIP (INTERACTIVE PAPER)

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INTERACTIVE PAPER SESSION

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Principal Topic

Reformulating the ‘incubator’ concept returns this to its roots. The focus is an analysis of the formation, development and impact of a National Park, Koli NP in Northern Karelia, a remote area on the Finno-Russian border. Unlike all other Finnish National Parks, Koli is managed by a research organisation, METLA, the Finnish Forest Research Institute. It thus has some interesting similarities to consciously instituted university-based incubators, which are designed to exploit the knowledge base of the incubator’s host. Koli’s incubator role, however, is ‘accidental’. We thus distinguish ‘accidental’ and ‘purposive’ incubators.

Method

Case method through interviews with Koli staff and local entrepreneurs.

Results and Implications

A National Park might appear an unlikely source of entrepreneurial activity, yet Koli has contributed to the establishment of about 250 new firms over a 20 year period, while clearly meeting its main, conservation-related, goals. This was not the original intention: no decision was ever made to set up an ‘incubator’ in any conscious way. However, when the term ‘incubator’ was introduced into the entrepreneurship literature in the early days of the entrepreneurship field by Cooper, it had a more general meaning: the organisation in which a new business founder was working immediately prior to the entrepreneurial event. This broader conception of the immediately antecedent organisational situation has since received relatively little attention.

Koli NP itself has a restrictive budget; perversely, this seems to have encouraged the CEO to look for external resources to capitalise on the economic opportunities identified rather than discouraging him from pursuing them. These resources have often been generated in collaboration with a very strong local community-based (co-operative) enterprise. The multiple objectives of this organisation include social and environmental ones. However, it is also willing to provide seed-capital to individual members setting up ‘normal’ profit-seeking firms. Together, this co-operative and Park also have the appropriate organisational standing and legal forms to leverage public sector resources.

The paper considers entrepreneurship at the level of the CEO, the NP, the ‘community’ and the next generation of enterprises. It concludes that the ‘incubator’ function is spread across the community but centred on the NP itself.

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