

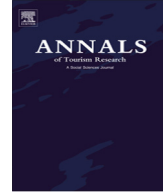


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Science and industry: Sharing knowledge for innovation



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ABSTRACT

This paper contributes to a better understanding of the absorption of scientific knowledge in tourism innovation processes. Based on a synthesis of the literature and empirical study we present the model of *Innovation through Co-creation*. The cases of researchers working together with three whale-watching firms have allowed us to illustrate examples of co-creation, knowledge sharing and reflexivity during tourism firms' innovation processes. Intensive interaction of the tourism industry with researchers pays off in terms of innovation because flows of knowledge are intimately linked to social capital developed through intensive and frequent shared practice. Besides the theoretical implications of our model, we contribute to the field by providing practical implications for how tourism firms can organize their learning and innovation processes.

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Introduction

This paper addresses the contribution of scientists to innovation processes in tourism and focuses on the sharing of tacit and explicit knowledge. Innovation can be defined as the process of making changes, large and small, radical and incremental that result in the introduction of something new

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for the organization and adds value to customers (O'Sullivan & Dooley, 2009). Knowledge is a prerequisite for tourism innovation (Hjalager, 2002) and the absorption, management and application of new knowledge to feed innovation processes is critical for the competitiveness of destinations and firms (Cooper, 2006; Weidenfeld, Williams, & Butler, 2010).

Innovation literature has recognized the importance of knowledge from different sources for innovation processes. For example, Chesbrough (2011) has argued for the 'open-innovation paradigm' where firms intentionally use internal and external sources of knowledge in their innovation processes. Instead of having all knowledge in house, firms can establish networks with relevant others to access and develop knowledge. For instance, customers have been mentioned as an important knowledge source for innovation (Foss, Laursen, & Pedersen, 2011) and the joint role of organizations and customers in value co-creation processes has been theorized by the increasingly popular service dominant logic (Cabiddu, Lui, & Piccoli, 2013). Open-innovation is a concept developed for the manufacturing and service sector and mostly applied in large, innovative firms. However, intentional knowledge search activities to capture external knowledge seem rare in tourism (Cooper, 2006). In addition, most tourism innovations are incremental and consist of a change in behavior (Hjalager, 2010; Sundbo, 1997).

In tourism, the value of the experience is not only created by the firm and its customers but is embedded in a larger social and physical context of *what is being experienced*. Value, therefore, can be co-created by all stakeholders involved during the practice of the experience, when knowledge is shared between them (Prahalad, 2004). This co-creation of value allows for knowledge transfer because customers, providers and other actors are engaged in joined practice. In this case, knowledge-sharing is not intentional, but a spontaneous consequence of co-creating the experience. Nevertheless, by strategically reflecting upon knowledge acquired in practice, tourism innovators can incorporate this knowledge into innovation processes (Sundbo & Fuglsang, 2002). Co-creation of the tourism experience is one example of a practice in which tourism firms interact with other stakeholders, however there are many other cooperation practices in which tourism firms are involved as well. So far, little has been written about how sharing of tacit and explicit knowledge between stakeholders in co-creational practices affects innovation processes in tourism. According to Cooper (2006) capturing the tacit knowledge that resides in the tourism industry is one of the major challenges and to date has not been formally addressed by researchers. Hjalager (2010) also recognizes that there still is an incomplete understanding of how innovation processes take place in tourism firms.

This paper addresses this gap in the literature by focusing on the role of scientists as external source of knowledge in co-creation processes in tourism. Traditional research outlets such as conferences and journals where explicit knowledge is communicated do not seem to reach tourism businesses. However, long-term interaction, sharing tacit knowledge and building social capital between scientists and tourism businesses facilitates the absorption of research-based knowledge in tourism innovation. The purpose of this paper is to contribute to a better understanding of the absorption of knowledge from scientists in innovation processes. Specifically, it focuses on the question *how do nature-based tourism firms absorb external knowledge from scientists in their innovation processes?* We will portray the significant business potential from integrating researchers throughout the innovation process. This study contributes to the literature in that it introduces a new model of *Innovation through Co-creation*, advances the concept of co-creation by including non-commercial relations for co-creating customer value and other tourism practices, and provides empirical evidence of examples of tourism innovations (and how they evolved).

Sources of knowledge within the nature-based tourism system

Within nature-based tourism (NBT), tourists are interested in getting in touch with nature, escaping the stresses of daily life, and seeing landscapes and wildlife. There are several sub-categories of NBT, such as eco-tourism, wildlife tourism, adventure tourism, captive tourism (e.g. zoological parks, aquariums), extractive tourism (hunting and fishing) and some types of health tourism (Hall, Hall, & Williams, 2008). Although NBT is a growing industry in general, wildlife tourism is the fastest growing component of NBT worldwide (Rodger et al., 2010). Many stakeholders, like the stakeholders of the host destination, including businesses and the government, tourists, and the setting itself are involved

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