

Contemporary Issues in Business, Management and Education 2013

Exploring barriers to innovation in tourism industry – the case of southern region of Poland

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Abstract

This paper provides evidence for different factors hampering the innovative activity of micro, small and medium-sized tourist enterprises (MSMTEs). Innovation barriers are identified and explored within the framework of innovative chain of the regional tourism along its three main dimensions: organisational, environmental and innovation-process specifics. Empirical evidence is obtained through surveys conducted in 2012 in the southern region of Poland. The questionnaires were administered to representative samples of local tourist business stakeholders (MSMTEs, local governments, economic self-governments, tourists, local communities). The main conclusion is that the organisational, environmental and innovation-process related barriers to innovation in tourist sector appear to be closely and mutually interrelated. Furthermore, most of identified barriers emerge or tend to aggravate at the interfaces between local tourist business stakeholders.

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Selection and peer-review under responsibility of the Contemporary Issues in Business, Management and Education conference.

Keywords: barriers; innovation; tourism industry; SMEs; regional tourism.

1. Introduction

Due to an impressive growth of tourism industry reflected in a systematic increase in the share of global GDP (WTTC 2011) tourism is commonly recognized as a key driver for socio-economic progress (<http://www2.unwto.org/en/content/why-tourism>). However, this highly dynamic growth rate is accompanied by an exceptionally intense competition (Ottenbacher & Gnoth, 2005; Pivcevic & Petric, 2011; Keller, 2006) that generate a high pressure on tourist enterprises to continuously innovate in order to survive and grow (Bednarczyk, 2011;

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Hjalager, 2002; Sundbo, Orfila-Sintes & Sørensen, 2007; Weiermair, 2006). Surprisingly, the empirical studies and official statistics indicate a rather modest level of innovation in tourism sector (Hjalager, 2002; Pivcevic & Petric 2011; Camison & Monfort-Mir, 2012) and provide to a large extend a hazy picture of the potential reasons for that tendency (Hjalager, 2010). An emerging literature on tourism innovation management reflects a fragmentary knowledge on the subject with numerous undeveloped areas not covered by a thorough empirical investigation (Hjalager, 2010). One of those areas often mentioned on a conceptual level but rarely explored empirically concerns barriers to innovation in tourism (Hjalager, 2010). Therefore, the aim of the article is to fill the cognitive gap by providing evidence for different factors hampering the innovative activity of micro, small and medium-sized tourist enterprises (MSMTEs) identified and explored within the framework of innovative chain of the regional tourism. Barriers are investigated at the initial stage of the innovation process since according to Community Innovation Survey 2006 a large proportion of tourist enterprises abandons its innovative activity at the concept stage. The empirical evidence was collected through surveys conducted in 2012 among local tourism business stakeholders in the southern region of Poland.

This paper is structured as follows: Section 2 introduces a theoretical background; Section 3 describes data and methodology of the research; Section 4 presents results; Section 5 discusses conclusions and implications.

2. Theoretical background

2.1. Environment related barriers

The majority of authors underline that structural and behavioural peculiarities of tourism sector can generate substantial barriers to innovations. Discussions concern more or less a common list of industry features inducing innovation barriers, yet not often supported by a comprehensive empirical investigation (Table 1).

Table 1. Specific features of tourism industry inducing barriers to innovation

Feature	Induced barrier to innovation	Authors
Heterogeneity of business models	Low market transparency and difficulties in concept testing;	(Ottenbacher & Harrington, 2010; Camison & Monfort-Mir, 2012)
Industry dominated by MSMTEs	Low absorptive capacity for innovation; insufficient tacit knowledge for know-how driven innovations; change inertia; low awareness about importance of innovation; undeveloped innovation systems in tourism industry; high transaction costs for setting collaborative structures	(Pivcevic & Petric, 2011; Hjalager, 2002; Camison & Monfort-Mir, 2012; Weiermair, 2006; Beritelli & Rome, 2006; Pompl & Buer, 2006; Nordin, 2003; ECORYS, 2009; Keller, 2006)
Volatile developmental dynamics	High rate of closure of tourist SMEs and volatility of ownership of tourism businesses deters development of trust-based collaborative relations and knowledge accumulation; contribute to a negative image of the industry on the labor market; difficulties in attracting highly skilled human resources	(Pechlaner, Fischer & Hammann, 2009; Hjalager, 2002; Camison & Monfort-Mir, 2012; Nordin, 2003; Jacob & Groizard, 2007; Decelle, 2006)
Vulnerability to demand fluctuations	Highly income elastic, seasonal and volatile demand raises the risk of unstable and uncertain market for innovations, induces strategic incrementalism; high rate of human capital renewal that hampers accumulation of new knowledge and deters attracting highly skilled human resources	(Tisdell, 2002; du Cluzeau, 2006; Dwyer & Edwards, 2009; Hjalager, 2002; Sundbo et al., 2007; Decelle, 2006; Camison & Monfort-Mir, 2012)
Culture of little trust	Inefficient knowledge transfer; weak propensity toward collaboration in innovation	(Hjalager, 2002; Pechlaner et al., 2009; Najda-Janoszka, 2013,
Undeveloped tourism policy	Institutional inertia; mismatch between needs of tourism business and the institutional offers; weak support structure for tourist business; administrative burden;	(Hjalager, 2010; Keller, 2006; Weiermair, 2006; ECORYS, 2009)
Limited legal protection of innovations	Dominance of imitators and adopters over genuine innovators; weak disposition toward cooperation in innovation; free-rider attitude	(Hjalager, 2002; Najda-Janoszka, 2013; Decelle, 2006; Sundbo et al., 2007; Nordin, 2003)

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