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## Architectural innovations are competitive advantage for hotels in tourism industry?: What customers, managers and employees think about it?

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### Abstract

This study aims to find an answer for the question that is whether architectural innovations are supplying an advantage for hotels in tourism sector. So, the study focuses on measuring and comparing the perceptions of tourists, managers and employees about architectural design advantage of tourism hotels. And Granada, a five-stars and 12-months servicing hotel in Alanya destination, was selected as a research hotel because of its interesting and modern architectural design. Also, satisfaction level of tourists and employees from Granada's ship design and decorative (interior) design was examined in the study. At the end of the survey completed in December 2012, a total of 297 completed questionnaires were returned, 200 (20.3 percent response rate) from 771 customers (tourists) staying at the hotel, and 97 (32.3 percent response rate) from 300 hotel staffs. Research results indicate that customers, employees and managers believe that architectural innovations are advantage in competition for hotels in tourism industry. According to the research results, both customers and staffs are very satisfied from Granada's ship (external) and decorative (interior) design. Furthermore, T-Test results do show that there are statistical differences between the evaluations of hotel staffs and customers with some research items.

*Keywords:* Architectural innovations, Tourism industry, Alanya

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### 1. Introduction

Innovation has become one of the most important issues for all organizations to acquire new technological capabilities and explore new business process for staying profitable in the long run. Because living in an environment characterized by rapid change, variety of customer requirements and severe competition force the organizations to create innovation that is able to meet customer requirements and introduce new products or processes (Vanhaverbeke and Peeters, 2005). In other words, organizations are more competitive with innovation in today's cutthroat competition environment (De Jong and Vermuelen, 2006). Innovation is not only strategic for organizations but also

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has a key role in developing the economy, in composing industrial competitiveness, in improving the standard of living, and in creating a better quality of life (Gopalakrishnan and Damanpour, 1997; Ar and Baki, 2010). So that innovation is a consistent process. And this process helps the countries to boost their productivity and sustainable growth (Şener et al., 2010; OECD, 2008). In other words, innovation is an important competition tool for all companies, industries and countries since it increases efficiency and profitability, and helps to enter new markets and/or enlarge the current market (Karatepe et al., 2010). Accordingly, all tourism firms and agents are motivated predominantly by economic driving forces to introduce or imitate new products/services and production processes (Hjalager, 1997). Tourists meet interesting innovation patterns in hotels parking lots, security systems, staffs costumes, eco-foods, energy saving equipments etc. Innovation wind dominating sectors is also changing the exterior and interior faces of the hotels. While hotels are turning into ship, plane, fish, ball, castle, or jail designs, innovations in decorative designs are changing the atmosphere of lobbies, rooms, bathrooms, restaurants, and meeting rooms. At this point, finding answers for some questions creates a great interest. What do customers, managers and employees think about architectural innovations for hotels? Are architectural innovations advantage for hotels in competition? Innovations in architectural designs are required? Architectural innovations have an influence on customers buying decisions? Originality in architectural design creates attractiveness? In this context, this study focuses on the innovations in tourism industry and mainly examines how architectural innovations in hotels have an influence on customers, employees, and managers. Firstly, the study examines the literature with innovation and tourism. And then, the survey results conducted on hotel staffs and customers to understand perceptions with architectural innovations and satisfaction from hotel exterior and interior design are presented.

## **2. Literature Review**

Innovation is generally understood as the successful introduction of a new thing or method; embodiment, combination, or synthesis of knowledge in original, relevant, valued new products, processes, or services (Luecke and Katz, 2003). And also innovation is simply defined as the process of transforming a creative idea to a marketable product (Duygulu, 2007). A long-definition describes the innovation as the doors opening to both global and international competitive advantage through: providing the marketplace with new or unique products/services; creating entry barriers that provide the necessary resources to develop innovation through learning; and creating new values that reshape the rules of competitive environment (Llorens et al., 2005). As an interesting definition, Finland's Old Prime Minister Esko Aho, describes innovation by comparing it to R&D with the words "R&D is transforming money to information, and innovation is transforming information to money" (Yetiş, 2009; Karatepe et al., 2010). Adding new ones to these definitions is possible in the literature, but the common belief with innovation is its strategic role in success and sustainable competitive advantage of all organizations and countries. In other words, all types of innovation are very important for all companies and countries. For example, World Economic Forum (WEF) defines the most developed countries as the ones whose economies are driven by innovation (Arslan, 2009). And Barack Obama confirms the strategic value of innovation with "the capital of 21st century" statement in his speech (Karatepe et al., 2010). In the literature and organizational context, innovation may be linked to performance and growth through improvements in efficiency, productivity, quality, competitive positioning, market share, etc. All organizations can innovate, including for example hospitals, universities, and local governments (Zehir, et al., 2010).

As the world's largest industry, innovation has also become critical for creating and sustaining competitive advantage in tourism industry (Erdil and Kalkan, 2010; Chen et al., 2009; Cook et al., 2007; Otto and Ritchie, 1996). In this dynamic sector, highly exposed to global competition, tourism firms need to innovate to survive, because otherwise their offerings are likely to become obsolete and have no demand. Also tourism is identified as one of the most promising sectors of growth for the world economy. It means that tourism firms need to be more innovative in the future (Sundbo et al., 2007; Meneses and Teixeira, 2009).

However, research on the innovation in tourism has been limited, Hjalager (1997) made a great contribution to this field presenting innovation patterns in sustainable tourism. Hjalager found necessary to sub-divide the innovations into the following types: product innovations, classical process innovations, process innovations in information handling, management innovations and institutional innovations. In Hjalager's study, the emphasis were placed on innovations connected to the issue of environmental sustainability. For example, nature tourism products, development of supplementary natural resources, green establishments and product developments limiting tourism volumes were examined under product innovations title (Hjalager, 1997). Also Aldebert et al. (2011) used three types of innovation in tourism: product innovation (defined as the introduction of a good or service that is new or significantly improved with respect to its characteristics or intended use), process innovation (implementation of a new or significantly

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