

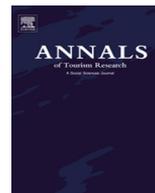


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Innovativeness and business performances in tourism SMEs

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ABSTRACT

Research on innovation in the tourism industry has gained relevance, and in recent years knowledge of this complex phenomenon has increased. The article proposes a two-stage interactive model based on innovative capability, environment and other contextual factors of firms, in order to explain first, the innovative outcomes in products and processes and, subsequently, the influence of these outcomes on the profitability of SMEs in the Andalusian hospitality industry. The model has undergone various hypothesis tests, thus demonstrating its validity, the importance of the main explanatory variables and the existence of a positive linear relationship between innovative outcomes in products and processes, and business profitability.

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Introduction

Research on innovation in the tourism industry has acquired growing relevance in recent years (Hall, 2009a; Paget, Dimanche, & Mounet, 2010). Various aspects related to this area have been treated in an increasingly abundant literature (Hjalager, 2010). Thus, for example, contributions were made during the last decade on networks and clusters in tourism innovation (Novelli, Schmitz, & Spencer, 2006), innovation systems in tourism (Hall & Williams, 2008), the appearance of new tourism products, (Edwards, Martinac, & Miller, 2008), tourism innovation and internationalization (Williams & Shaw, 2011), the application of new IT, communication and management technologies in tourism

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activities (Moscardo, 2008), and, recently, cross border regional innovation systems and the influence of tourism on facilitating innovative processes (Weidenfeld, 2013). However, despite the growing interest in empirical research on innovation, no model has been developed for the innovative behavior of firms in tourism. Given the noteworthy differences in innovations in services (Drejer, 2004; Martínez-Ros & Orfila-Sintes, 2012) and specifically in tourism (Hjalager, 2010; Križaj, Brodnik, & Bukovec, 2014; Volo, 2006), the literature pinpoints the need for a specific study on innovative behavior (Camisón & Montfort-Mir, 2012) and its economic outcomes in tourism firms (Lin, 2013). Understanding of innovation patterns in these firms is fundamental to developing an innovation policy that contributes in greater measure to increasing productivity (Blake, Sinclair, & Campos-Soria, 2006), profitability (Martínez-Ros & Orfila-Sintes, 2012) and competitiveness in firms and tourist destinations (Camisón & Montfort-Mir, 2012).

The study of innovation in services has been taken on from different analytical perspectives. The “assimilation, differentiation, inversion, and integration” (Gallouj, 2010) or “assimilation–demarcation–integration” discussion (Gallouj & Savona, 2009) categorizes literature on innovation in services (Gallouj & Djellal, 2010). In the specific case of tourism, the literature mentions the possibility of following two very different research focuses: those of the “converging and diverging line” (Hjalager, 2010, p. 8). However, mainstream innovation research has rarely broached the area of tourism (Alsos, Eide, & Madsen, 2014). Rather than using the strategy of assimilation, which transfers to tourism the theories and models of mainstream innovation research, other researchers adopt a divergent strategy in order to develop new context-sensitive models for tourism (Alsos et al., 2014). Although tourism is a very special and well-defined sector that requires analysis of a divergent nature (Song, Dwyer, Li, & Cao, 2012), the convergent focus brings general knowledge on innovation nearer to tourism research and could be of great interest (Camisón & Montfort-Mir, 2012). Accordingly, existing theories on innovation developed in other sectors can improve understanding of the same phenomenon within the context of tourism (Clausen & Madsen, 2014). The use of the convergent focus provides advantages in terms of comparability beneficial to tourism studies and research on innovation in general (Hjalager, 2010). This focus creates synergies in the advancement of knowledge of innovation and facilitates joint planning of innovation support.

In a field where research-based knowledge remains scarce (Alsos et al., 2014), it is of interest to employ a diversity of research strategies (Gallouj, 2010) in order to more successfully handle the heterogeneity and complexity of innovation in tourism. Collaboration or synthesis between the convergent and divergent focuses acquires meaning, giving rise to a mixed approach or integration focus. This research strategy is promising for the study of innovation in services (Gallouj & Savona, 2009) and namely in tourism (Alsos et al., 2014), and can be directed toward the design of theoretical models with integrative analyses of innovation (Gallouj, 2010).

The purpose of this paper is to analyze innovativeness and its relation with business performances in a sample of Andalusian SMEs belonging to the hospitality industry. To this end, a two-stage model was formulated and contrasted. Said model explains the level of innovation and its relation with profitability in these firms, thus providing a micro-level view of the innovation process in tourism. This model is justified in the recent research of Hjalager (2010) and Alsos et al. (2014), whose papers acknowledge the existence of different gaps in current research on tourism. This research paper covers some of said gaps, the first directly related to limited knowledge on innovative activity in tourism (Hjalager, 2010). Due to the paucity of empirical research on relevant aspects of innovation in tourism (Abelsen, Eide, Kvidal, & Leenheer, 2014; Alsos et al., 2014; Clausen & Madsen, 2014; Hjalager, 2014; Rønningen & Lien, 2014; Sundbo, Orfila-Sintes, & Sørensen, 2007), more empirical evidence and quantitative knowledge on innovation in this sector are needed (Clausen & Madsen, 2014; Hjalager, 2010; Rønningen & Lien, 2014). Our paper undertakes the study of innovation through a multivariate analysis of the factors influencing innovative outcomes.

Another relevant research gap refers to the relationship between innovation and economic performances in tourism firms (Hjalager, 2010). This limitation is common in studies that analyze innovation (Crossan & Apaydin, 2010). To contribute to moderating said limitation, a hypothesis contrast was carried out testing the positive impact of innovation on profitability; the intensity of this relationship was later analyzed in organizations in the sector. Likewise, as the literature

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