

INNOVATION IN SLOVENIAN TOURISM ORGANISATIONS

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Preliminary communication

Received 29 January 2015

Revised 20 April 2015

20 May 2015

Abstract

The purpose – Slovenian tourism organisations must constantly focus on developing variety innovations for organisations. In this paper, we present a study conducted on innovation practices in Slovenian tourism organisations.

Design/methodology – In a survey conducted on Slovenia tourism organisations, we obtained data and identified their innovation performance and the innovation climate in their area of business. There are three main hypothesis tested.

Findings – The research sample of 41 organisations found that most innovation in tourism organisations came through the introduction of new services (90%), followed by innovation through new organisational methods (73%), and found a high-level climate for innovation. Worse was its assessment of research activity within organisations and cooperation with external institutions (eg. universities and research institutes) and investment in innovation activities within their research and development. Results obtained from the research showed a mean value for the innovation climate-instrument of 3.83 indicating a high innovation climate for the Slovenian tourism companies included in the sample survey. Mostly, (publicly known as) more innovative active organisations responded to our survey. From such results, we find that tourism organisations included in the survey are aware of the importance of innovation, teaching organisations to communicate well and network with other organisations, are adaptable to change and engaged with their own ideas in support of the organisation's management.

Originality of the research – The contribution of the research is that it has applied the generic instrument for measuring innovation climate on tourism and the first time climate is measured in Slovenia.

Keywords innovation, innovation climate, tourism organisations, tourism, Slovenia.

INTRODUCTION

Innovation is, because of its uniqueness and exclusivity, an important factor in economic development and may represent a key competitive advantage for a tourism organisation or tourist destination. Slovenia, according to the World Economic Forum (WEF) and according to research for The Travel & Tourism Competitiveness Report (2013), occupies 36th place among 140 countries on its tourism competitiveness index. According to these results, it is worth mentioning a high rank for tourism infrastructure, where we achieved 14th place; progress is also obvious in several other index areas such as human, natural and cultural resources. Due to political and legal constraints and the business environment, competitive advantages for Slovenia are worse, and as such, action is required (WEF, 2013). The results of the competitiveness index reveal the need for on-going development and implementation of innovation, especially in the

business environment, which is crucial for the successful operation of Slovenian tourism. In discussing research on innovation in Slovenian tourism organisation, we find a great need to integrate research in order to achieve better results. Long-term research into the Slovenian tourism business environment is particularly necessary to realise high results. With assumptions based on results of the World Economic Forum, the article highlights the results of a survey into Slovenian tourism organisations for their innovation in operations and business, and the climate for innovation itself.

It is important that, due to the social and economic conditions currently prevailing in the country, Slovenian tourism organisations continuously focus on developing a variety of innovations in their organisations. Successfully introducing innovation for tourism organisations increases the value of the tourism product or experience, and represents profitability for the organisation in a competitive market. The research problem in a study of innovation in Slovenian tourism organisations lies mainly in the lack of research on service innovation. The main purpose of this article is to present the results of research carried out on the innovation in tourism and to note the lack of appropriate and, in particular, long-term research in this field. This will come with the set of measurable objectives, which include appropriate selected areas of research on innovative operations and business, and the climate for innovation in Slovenian tourism organisations.

In the following article, we first conduct a literature review of innovation research and go on to focus on the results of a survey of innovation in Slovenian tourist organisations.

REVIEW OF THE RESEARCH LITERATURE

A discussion on innovation involves new or improved offerings (product or service) that are brought to the market, and which bring increased value through improved quality or lower prices to the customer respectively. Eurostat, which provides European statistical surveys in accordance with (OECD, 2005), identifies innovation as a new or significantly improved product (goods or services) that appears on the market. Likar (2006) defines innovation as a new or significantly improved product, process or service that appears on the market and represents a significant improvement for the customer successfully introducing innovations increases added value, profitability in the market and a gives competitive advantage. Innovation is also the driving force of evolution, where systems adapt to internal changes or changes to the surrounding environment. Innovations take place in all areas of business, societal, cultural, social and private life thus becoming a key factor in economic development. Hall (2008) identified innovation as a process of development and adoption of new ideas, products and services to solve a specific problem. Each country has its own innovation characteristics.

Tourism, as a whole, and each tourism provider and customer/user/buyer, as its basic unit, should follow the evolutionary process in our society, perceiving and evaluating mechanisms that allow it to exist (Schumpeter, 1961; Sundbo et al., 2007). Innovation in tourism is a concept that falls within the scope of service and innovation and cannot

be directly explained by general concepts of innovation (Tintore et al., 2003; Hall, 2008; Camisón and Monfort-Mir, 2012; Križaj et al., 2014).

In the field of innovation and tourism, many authors of scientific and professional work highlight the incompatibility between general and service-based innovation. In view of different characteristics and factors, there is a requirement to measure and describe different models of innovation in the service industry (Sundbo 1997; Stevens & Dimitriadis, 2005; OECD, 2005; Thomas and Wood, 2014). Križaj (2009) defines innovation in tourism as quality planning and successfully introducing innovations and improvements that contain elements of novelty, originality and systematic business thinking. Innovation is thus becoming a key factor in economic development and success, which is becoming more marked in the tourist industry as well. Tourism innovation can also be defined as improvements in the technical, functional or commercial features (Bieger & Weinert, 2006). Hjalager (2010) proposed five different types of innovations in tourism: product or service innovations, process innovations, managerial innovations, management innovations and institutional innovations. Macerinskiene and Mikaliuniene (2014) are using Oslo's manual categories: product, process, marketing and organisational innovations.

Tourism organisations with a clear positioning that differentiates them from the competition will thereby become increasingly important providers of the tourist market. Clear positioning and differentiation are both critical success factors, which represent a significant challenge for tourism organisations. Accomplishing distinctive advantages in relation to the competition within the tourism industry is becoming more demanding. Innovation by tourism enterprises in terms of uniqueness plays a key role in gaining distinct advantages over the competition. Innovation within the operations of tourism enterprises is an important and exclusive research priority until the moment one starts to imitate other providers. Historically, we can highlight the innovative travel products born of conventional thinking introduced by Thomas Cook (Hjalager, 2010), which devised a comprehensive concept of appropriately priced organized travel and entertainment for a brand new segment of guests (Brendon, 1991; Garay and Cànoves, 2011). Similarly, the Disney Corporation's breakthrough tourism innovation of linking the film industry and media provided the concept of worldwide theme parks to a global audience (Weth, 2007; Ford et al., 2012).

Slovenian tourism organisations driven by the social and economic conditions currently prevailing in the country must constantly focus on the development of various innovations in the business (Križaj and Zakonjšek, 2011; Dwyer et al., 2012; Tomšič and Križaj, 2014). Business systems must also operate strategically, and appropriately plan their activities for the marketplace. At a time when modern tourists are seeking tourism products primarily as experiences, it is especially important for tourism organisations to elevate their tourism experiences by introducing innovation. A survey conducted on tourism organisations in Slovenia will answer questions about the importance of innovative processes both within the company (innovation climate), as well as in the scope of tourism products.

METHODOLOGY

The research process requires that a study define the research problem and objective analysis in a conceptual sense. Whatever the form of research, the research investigator's initial preparations are to first define the problem in the conceptual sense, determining the concepts and identifying the basic relationships that need to be explored (Hair et al., 1998, 25). At this stage, we reviewed relevant and accessible literature to develop the theoretical foundations of the research areas on the operations of Slovenian tourism organisations in the field of innovation in tourism. At this time, we encountered a number of difficulties in obtaining resources, because the area of innovation within Slovenian companies is not well researched and calls out for additional exploration.

The first phase of literature review and the design of theoretical framework allows for preparation of the research. Using the literature review, we formed the research questions and developed the fundamental theoretical constructs. Research was based on the literature review, with identified specifics of innovation in tourism in mind (Camisón and Monfort-Mir, 2012) and following guidelines of Innobarometer, carried out for OECD by the world's largest research company, Gallup, between 2001 - 2009 (Gallup, 2004; 2006; 2009). After reviewing the available literature, we divided the content into 3 parts, as follows:

- general information on Slovenian tourism organisations,
- innovation within Slovenian tourism organisations, and
- the innovation climate for Slovenian tourism organisations.

A questionnaire was developed to survey the operations of companies working towards innovation in tourism, consisting of open and closed questions, where responses were recorded in agreement or otherwise. In the last part, focussing on the innovation climate, respondents had the opportunity to answer using a five-point Likert scale, with a range of responses (1- strongly disagree, and five - strongly agree). In parallel, we prepared a database of respondents, which included all the companies/organisations involved with tourism in Slovenia. Data was obtained from the databases of the Agency of the Republic of Slovenia for Public Legal Records and Related Services (AJPES) and Ministry of Economics, and an online survey sent electronically to tourism organisations in Slovenia. All together on 156 different addresses. Senior managers of tourism organisations in Slovenia completed questionnaires. In total, there were 41 respondents to the online survey, from variety organisations of different legal structures. Response rate was 26, 3 %, what is quite common for research done in Slovenia.

Based on the literature review and prior interviews conducted among senior managers tourism organisations in Slovenia, the following hypotheses were set:

- H1: Tourism organisation are mainly active in introducing new services and products.
- H2: The most common motivators for innovation activity within tourism organisation are to increase the organisation's competitiveness and market share.
- H3: The innovation climate in tourism organisations is at a high level.

Following completion of the survey, data analysis utilising the appropriate descriptive statistical methods, interpretation of results and conclusions were completed.

RESULTS

In the first section, senior management working in Slovenian tourism industry were asked to respond to some general questions about their organisations. A sample survey representing 41 Slovenian tourism organisations, most of which requested anonymity, having an average of 34.5 employees, excluding the largest, which employs up to 2,500 people. Table 1 presents the results of Slovenian tourism organisation and the activities they undertake.

Table 1: **Type of organisation**

	No.	%
ACCOMODATION	20	49
RESTAURANT	3	7
GUIDE SERVICES	2	5
SPORT CENTERS	3	7
RENT A CAR	1	2
OTHER TOURISM SERVICES (travel agencies, LTO, ...)	8	20
UNDEFINED TOURISM SERVICES (entertainment, attractions, ...)	4	10
TOTAL	41	100

Source: Research results

Looking at Table 1 it can be seen that majority of the respondents are from accommodation sector. Concerning the section on innovation, respondents were questioned regarding innovation operations in Slovenian tourism organisations.

Table 2: **Type of innovation**

	YES	NO	DON'T KNOW
NEW SERVICES	90	5	5
NEW ORGANISATIONAL METHODS	73	24	2
NEW PRODUCTS	63	32	2
NEW SUPPORT PROCESSES	61	37	2
NEW PROCESSES	56	39	5
NEW LOGISTIC, NEW DISTRIBUTION	46	46	7
RESEARCH INSIDE THE COMPANY	39	56	5
RESEARCH OUTSIDE THE COMPANY	24	76	0
PATENTS	5	93	2

Source: Research results

Innovation is any novelty in the business that maintains or enhances its competitive advantage. Prior to replying, respondents were asked to note how innovation took place, whether the company introduced new or significantly modified products or

services, processes, organisational or marketing methods. In doing so, we were interested in whether the companies in the previous 3 years utilised any of the following activities: introduction of new or highly improved products or services; introduction of new or highly improved processes for production or services; introduction of new or highly improved logistics, delivery or distribution processes; introduction of new or highly improved support processes such as maintenance, purchasing, accounting; introduction of new or highly improved organisational methods, such as organisational structure, new ways of integrating and cooperating with other organisations, and quality systems. We were also interested in whether they applied for a patent, conducted research on innovation within the company or hired a research firm as an external partner (e.g. consulting firms, universities, research institutes).

From Table 2 it is clear that the highest degree of innovation was through the introduction of new services (90%), with 73% of respondents also introducing new organisational methods. The high level for introducing new services stems from the fact that this survey is not representative of the entire (tourism industry) population, as those participating, in particular, are tourist organisations where innovation is already taking place. In our assessment, this is less than 10% of all tourism organisations in Slovenia. The results suggest poor research activity within the organisation and are especially critical of collaboration with external institutions, such as universities and other research institutions, as integration with external partners is becoming increasingly important for Slovenian tourism companies, who can thereby engage with important strategic partners towards innovative business for a competitive market.

When researching tourism organisations in Slovenia, we were also interested in the most common motivators for innovation activities. According to the reviewed existing literature and Innobarometer (Gallup, 2004, 2006, 2009), respondents could choose two of the following responses as motivators: market share and profits, protect the independence of the company, increase competitiveness, job creation, compliance with new environmental legislation, raising share value, consideration of any other legislation, and others.

Table 3: **Motive for innovation**

	%
INCREASE COMPETITIVENESS	85
MARKET SHARE AND PROFIT	63
MEETING REQUIREMENTS OF A NEW ENVIROMENTAL LEGISLATION	20
PROTECTION OF COMPANY'S INDEPEDENCE	15
CREATION OF NEW JOBS	12
OTHER	5
INCREASE OF THE STOCK VALUE	0
MEETING REQUIREMENTS OF OTHER LEGISLATION	0

Source: Research results

Due to its uniqueness and exclusivity, innovation is an important factor in economic development and may represent a key competitive advantage for a tourism business. From the results, which are presented in Table 3, we see that the greatest motivation for innovation activity in tourism organisations is to increase competitiveness, and was the main reason selected by 85% of respondents, followed by increased market share and profit (63%). For the majority of questions, respondents added comments to the question. Among the most interesting comments to this question was "Innovation is the protection of existence" and "We just want to be the best and to prove that we can do more than the others expect". From such responses, it is clear that the majority of respondents no longer need to raise awareness of the importance of innovation, they know it is necessary, so awareness campaigns should be guided by presenting different possibilities for improvement and, in particular, obtaining additional sources of finance for innovation.

Table 4: **Climate of innovation within the organisation part one**

STATEMENTS	1	2	3	4	5	M	*STD. DEV.	**CV
1. Employees have a clear idea that innovation contributes to increasing the competitiveness of our organisation:	0	13	12	51	24	3,87	1,7	43,0
2. We have a well-established processes to help us efficiently develop new products/services from idea to market:	2	15	27	49	7	3,43	1,6	45,7
3. Our organisation does not inhibit innovation, but it implements:	0	5	17	49	29	4,02	1,5	38,4
4. We understand the needs of our customers (end users):	0	0	10	61	29	4,19	1,2	29,1
5. Employees know what our competitive advantage is, or what makes us competitive:	0	5	27	39	29	3,92	1,7	42,7
6. We have developed mechanisms to ensure that all employees (not just the marketing department) understands customer needs:	2	17	27	44	10	3,41	1,7	49,5
7. Our employees are involved in making proposals for the improvement of products and processes:	2	2	9	46	41	4,21	1,5	35,4
8. We take time to review potential improvements to existing projects:	2	12	15	44	27	3,8	1,8	48,0
9. We learn from mistakes:	0	5	5	29	61	4,46	1,4	32,4
10. There are specific tools and techniques for forecasting business risks and opportunities:	7	41	20	32	0	2,75	1,7	60,3

5- Strongly agree (in %)

4- Agree (in %)

3- Neither agree or disagree (in %)

2- Disagree (in %)

1- Strongly disagree (in %)

M- Mean value (in %)

*standard deviation

** Coefficient of variation

Source: Research results

In the last part of the study, we were interested in the innovation climate in tourism organisations in Slovenia. The main players for a good innovation climate in organisations are definitely employees. Using research and applying typical metrics, we wanted to assess the organisational innovation climate in tourism organisations. Respondents gave opinions on 20 statements, based on Likert scale responses 1 - strongly disagree, to five - strongly agree. Frequency, mean value, standard deviation and coefficient of variance are shown in the Table 4 and 5.

Table 5: **Climate of innovation within the organisation part two**

STATEMENTS	1	2	3	4	5	M	*STD. DEV.	**CV
1. We have a clear system that allows for selection of successful innovation projects:	5	32	37	26	0	2,85	1,5	51,0
2. Our organisational structure allows us to make decisions quickly:	2	5	22	39	32	3,92	1,7	44,4
3. We cooperate with other organisations on the development of new products and processes:	7	5	29	37	22	3,6	1,9	51,9
4. Any lessons learned are kept and passed on to other employees in the organisation:	0	5	20	51	24	3,95	1,5	38,4
5. We are committed to networking with partners outside our organisation who can help us to improve the business (eg. educational institutions):	0	5	17	46	32	4,04	1,6	38,8
6. The organisation's management supports innovation in the enterprise and practice:	0	2	15	34	49	4,29	1,5	36,0
7. Our organisation is flexible enough to develop new products/services and enable rapid implementation of small-scale projects:	0	2	22	49	27	4,00	1,5	37,5
8. Communication within the organisation is carried out across the whole organisational structure, both vertically and horizontally:	0	2	24	37	37	4,07	1,6	40,3
9. Our organisation maintains close contacts with prevailing market users to facilitate development:	5	12	22	56	5	3,65	1,5	41,6
10. We learn from other organisations:	0	2	10	54	34	4,19	1,4	32,7

5- Strongly agree (in %)

4- Agree (in %)

3- Neither agree or disagree (in %)

2- Disagree (in %)

1- Strongly disagree (in %)

M- Mean value (in %)

*standard deviation

** Coefficient of variation

Source: Research results

Results obtained from the research showed a mean value for the innovation climate-instrument of 3.83 indicating a high innovation climate for the tourism organisations included in the sample survey. It has to be noted that more “R&D receptive” and innovative active organisations responded to our survey. From such results, we find that in general the tourism organisations included in the survey are aware of the importance of innovation, teaching organisations to communicate well and network with other organisations, are adaptable to change and engaged with their own ideas in support of the organisation's management. In terms of innovation climate, tourism organisations weaknesses are a lack of clear system for the selecting successful innovation projects and specific tools and techniques for forecasting business risks and opportunities. From these findings, we can conclude that tourism organisations included in the survey require more systematic and concerted actions on processes to increase the innovation climate.

CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

Innovation, as a field of study, has been the subject of global research, though with only small number applied to the field of tourism and tourism organisations. After reviewing the literature on innovation and innovation in tourism organisations, we found only the existence theoretical concepts, which did not stand up to greater empirical verification concerning innovation of tourism organisations in Slovenia. The prepared research and instruments were a good attempt of measuring innovation operations of companies in the tourism sector at the Slovene national level. Indeed, there is a need for large long-term research in the future and for increased scope of research activities in the field of innovation in Slovenian tourism organisations.

Based on a survey of 41 Slovenian tourism organisations, we can conclude that most innovations as reported by surveyed managers in the tourism organisations were in the introduction of new services (90%), and significant innovation in new organisational methods within the organisation (73%). The results confirm the first hypothesis. The respondents weakly rated research within companies and collaboration with external institutions (eg. universities and research institutes) and investment in innovation activities in the field of research and development. The responses indicate the need for process innovation or introduction of standardized processes to promote operational innovation.

Referring to motivators for the innovation activities within tourism organisations, respondents highlighted an increase in business competitiveness (85%) and increased market share and profit (63%). This is similar to results found (Tintoré et al. 2003) in a study on innovation in tourism, which was conducted between 20 tourism companies in the Balearic Islands, Spain and Macerinskiene & Mikaliuniene (2014) in Lithuania. The main motivators among the tourism organisations surveyed were meeting the increasingly numerous and diverse needs of today's tourists (50% of all surveyed companies), to increase their own market share (45%), competition (45%), raising the service quality levels (40%) and increased profits (30%). The results agree with the second hypothesis, confirming that an increase in competitiveness and increased

market share are important motivators for innovation activities in tourism organisations.

Company employees are certainly an important factor in ensuring an innovative climate, and it is noted that Slovenian tourism companies invest in their workers. Given the high average ratings on the innovation climate in tourism organizations included in the survey, the third hypothesis is confirmed. Workers in tourism organisations are also hoping for greater support from the state and the suitable financial conditions to counteract the unstimulating conditions in Slovenia.

The survey on innovation in tourism organisations in Slovenia also has some assumptions and limitations. The first phase failed to attract a greater number of appropriate responses from Slovenian tourism organisations. Given the difficulty in obtaining responses, we are aware that the results are not representative of the entire (tourism industry) population, with results mainly due to the participation of organisations who are, in professional and/or in general public, already known as active innovators. While this research gives a representative insight in the upper, generally more “R&D receptive” and innovative segment of tourism organisations, we believe that future studies should use larger samples to demonstrate the representativeness of the results of this research, and to obtain greater representativeness of the results and its applicability in general.

In conclusion, we note that the main eventual misinterpretation of the results obtained in this study could be an overly optimistic view of the current state of Slovenian tourism organisations. The research conducted serves as a basis and a pilot indicator for assessing innovation in Slovenian tourism organisations. In the last few years, both globally, as well as in the Slovenian tourist market, there are more and smaller innovative providers of tourist services with specific business aims and therefore the need for long-term research in these areas is essential. In the future, we would suggest carrying out national regular annual research into innovation in Slovenian tourism organisations.

Recommendations for future research are to increase the response rate, perform regular annual assessments, consider sharing a questionnaire among workers (last section dealing with innovation climate) and for management (other parts). However, it is necessary to adopt a holistic approach to this area of research, using a combination of qualitative and quantitative tests for innovation in Slovenian tourism organisations, and use those results to influence the quality and competitiveness of Slovenian tourism.

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