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Most Destinations Fail at Innovation: Current issues in Tourism

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ABSTRACT

Tourism accounts for an amazing 11% of global GDP and provides more than 200 million people worldwide a means of livelihood, however current problems which plague tourism highlight a worrying trend of unsuccessful innovation ideas across the world's destinations. While the industry will continue to grow at the rate of 5% per year, tourism destinations find it difficult to meet customers' fast changing expectations and marketplace demands. Among those challenges are insufficient workforce, climate change impacts, and over tourism. And, in fact, the recent tourism trends show that to get to successful tourism destination one needs to include in a management approach interrogation, technology and sustainability. Fragmented governance models and risk averse decision making has increased the gap between innovative destinations and those who are trying to maintain a traditional approach. This will be followed by looking into why most destinations fail at innovation and what solutions we can answer build tourism innovation ecosystems that work. This analysis provides a comprehensive framework towards tourism innovation towards that of the destination managers and stakeholders' strategic resource allocation to smart tourism initiatives.

1. The Innovation Crisis in Tourism Destinations

Modern tourism is led by innovation, the leading force of change and progress, providing the key to how destinations adapt and compete. Recently France leads the world of tourism with 100 million international tourist arrivals in 2023 and as the nation is likely to grow into its unicorns, it shows how tourism may thrive on innovation ecosystems with nearly 60,000 startups and over 30 unicorns [1]-[3].

1.1 Defining Innovation in Modern Tourism Contexts

Tourism innovation includes introducing new ideas, technologies and practices with regard to improving travel experience and tourism industry efficiency. Succeeding in innovation will require that it satisfies a number of requirements, for instance, market expansion and customer satisfaction. Now the tourism sector requires five different types of innovations: introduction of new products, the substitution of the existing production methods, opening new markets, finding new supply sources and new industrial organization.

Between the two, three factors that play key roles in determining tourists innovation success in a tourism destination include: supply driven determinants such as new skills and services; demand driven forces like shifting leisure patterns; as well as the resulting competition from global market forces. The fact that even France has managed to run such structured programs (i.e. the 'Welcome to France' and 'French Tech' initiatives) with an economic impact of supporting 25,000 startups and creating over 1.1 million direct and indirect jobs is very notable indeed [4]-[8].

1.2 The Widening Competitive Gap Between Innovative and Traditional Destinations

The competition between destinations has intensified as result of the digital platform proliferation, and the importance of capability to innovate have become ever more important for survival. Traditional destinations often let the destination management carry on as business as usual, which in turn lags the ability of more innovative competitors to change. Some new data indicates that more than 50 percent of travelers now prefer destinations providing unique technology driven experiences.

The main reason for still widening competitive gap is mostly three. Innovative destinations spend enormous amounts investing in smart tourism initiatives and the associated digital infrastructure. Second, they create strong collaborative networks across the stakeholder groups. Third, they have flexible governance models, which helps the organization adapt quickly to changing markets.

1.3 Faster Innovation Cycles in Demand of Current Tourism Trends

Indeed, the tourism landscape is subjected to unprecedented pressure to accelerate the innovation cycles. Artificial intelligence has become a key tool reconfiguring the whole industry especially in customer service or itinerary planning, and in operational efficiency. Further, sustainability is becoming a major focal point, and the traveler increasingly wants eco choices and ethical travel.

Another major trend changing how destinations serve modern travelers is smart technology adoption. For example, 44% of travelers want on trip notifications from mobile application, 41% want self servicecheckin, 41% want contactless mobile payment options. In addition, more than 30 percent of U.S. travelers are willing to pay premium prices for their personalized experiences. Yet another challenge that destinations have to innovate in, is the rise of transformative travel. As travelers strive for more meaning and more experiences that create change in both their life and the communities they travel to. To play its part in this shift, destinations are going to have to start creating new products and experiences that engage their community and allow them to be part of nature based activities.

Emerging challenges need to be addressed with innovation, especially for climate action and connectivity, looking ahead at destinations. Significant portion of the world GDP (about 10%) is served by the tourism sector and does require it to adopt comprehensive innovation strategies combining technological advancement with sustainable practices and benefits to the community. A successful destination understands that innovation has to happen on its own but is also an integral part of an overall integrated approach including the environmental, the social and the economic sustainability.

1.4 Structural Barriers to Tourism Innovation

Structural barriers still hinder innovation at tourism destinations, and up persisting challenges to the advancement of the industry. The sources of these impediments are the complexities of organizational dynamics and the deep entrenched industry practice opposing change.

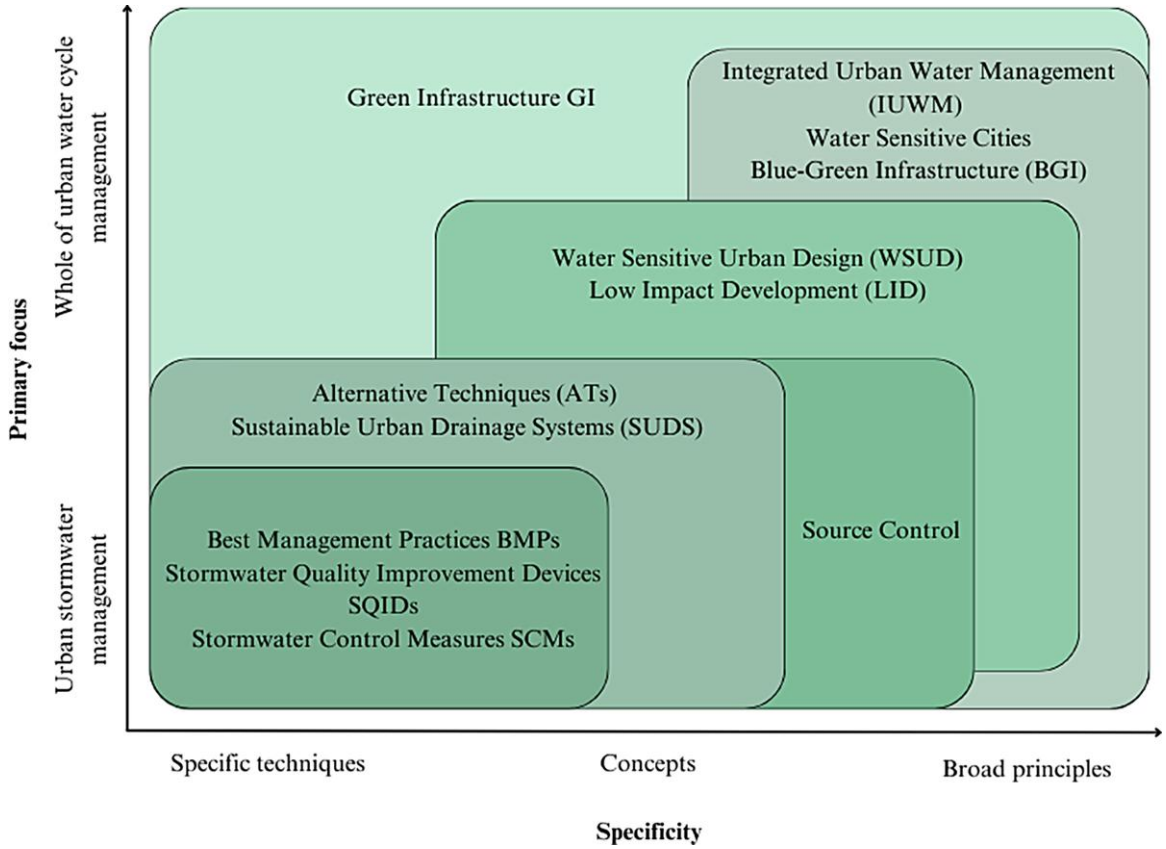

Fig 1. Fragmented Governance Models Severely Stunt Coordinated Action

There are many problems in the tourism sector, but the major problem is fragmented governance structures, which include inconsistent and uncoordinated management systems characteristic. Scattered resource allocation, disjointed governance mechanism, and fragmentation results to substantially high operational costs. There are very many instances of policy disputes and execution deviation in the segmented pattern of management, thus hindering tourism development.

We are witnessing today a paradox in which destinations consist of many governance entities yet not a system of coordination among them. Both this type of situation and those in resource utilization create policy conflicts and implementation gaps. The problem is much more than the organizational structure statement alone – it is an issue in the entire tourism ecosystem, ranging from resource management to stakeholder engagement [9]-[14].

2. Short-Term Profit Focus vs. Long-Term Innovation Investment

The industry's primary path towards innovation stems from its emphasis on fast results and not sustainable long term development. With this short term mindset, it's evident that tourist destinations become degraded environmentally, eroded culturally and ultimately become economically inequal. Destinations often sacrifice long term value creation for short term wins and achieve high pressures of hitting the quarterly targets.

The engagement of tourism enterprises, in particular, micro small and medium sized businesses, with research institutions to transfer specialized knowledge is very low. This disconnect results in:

2.1 Risk-Averse Decision Making in Tourism Management

Tourism management innovation is hindered by a very barrierous risk aversion. Research shows that people with lower risk appetites lean towards status quo and shun new experiences. In the tourism organisations likewise, they are reluctant to change, as usually, their organizational norms are established and there is fear that the new technology will displace jobs.There is a need for fundamental shift in industry's approach to risk management. The majority of current decision making processes are long term ineffective, especially in the problems with multiple dimensions. However, recent research suggests that adopting a mixed behaviour that is risk averse and risk taking can enhance the objectivity of the decisions. This hybrid approach focuses on high performing criteria in attributes where potential performance is desirable and risk in critical operational factors.

Several interconnected factors explain it in this resistance of tourism sector to the innovation. Resource limitations and low awareness of innovation importance makes the small scale enterprises. The increasingly intense competition in digital platform calls for destinations to stand out by an innovative practice.

Political will and leadership is therefore required to help overcome these structural barriers and destinations need to adopt integrated approaches to tourism governance. Strengthening institutional links, partnerships between the economy and the science sector, and effective networks for transfer of knowledge are included in this. Additionally, it is time to turn the attention towards making the collaborative networks that span into various stakeholder groups perform a more coordinated and efficient innovation initiative.

This requires taking on the structural barriers that exist and taking on systematic changes. Specifically, this will entail the development of tourism innovative incubators that are robust and tailored to challenge within the tourism sector and the establishment of public private partnerships that can promote sustainable innovations. There is no way beyond acknowledging and proactively trying to remove those barriers in order for destinations to build real innovation in their tourism ecosystems for the benefit of all involved [15]-[18].

2.2 The Technology Implementation Paradox

Digital transformation is the leading tourism development but destinations are caught in a paradoxical situation where massive technology investments do not lead to real innovation. This paradox stems from a series of organizational, cultural and human factors that must be closely examined.

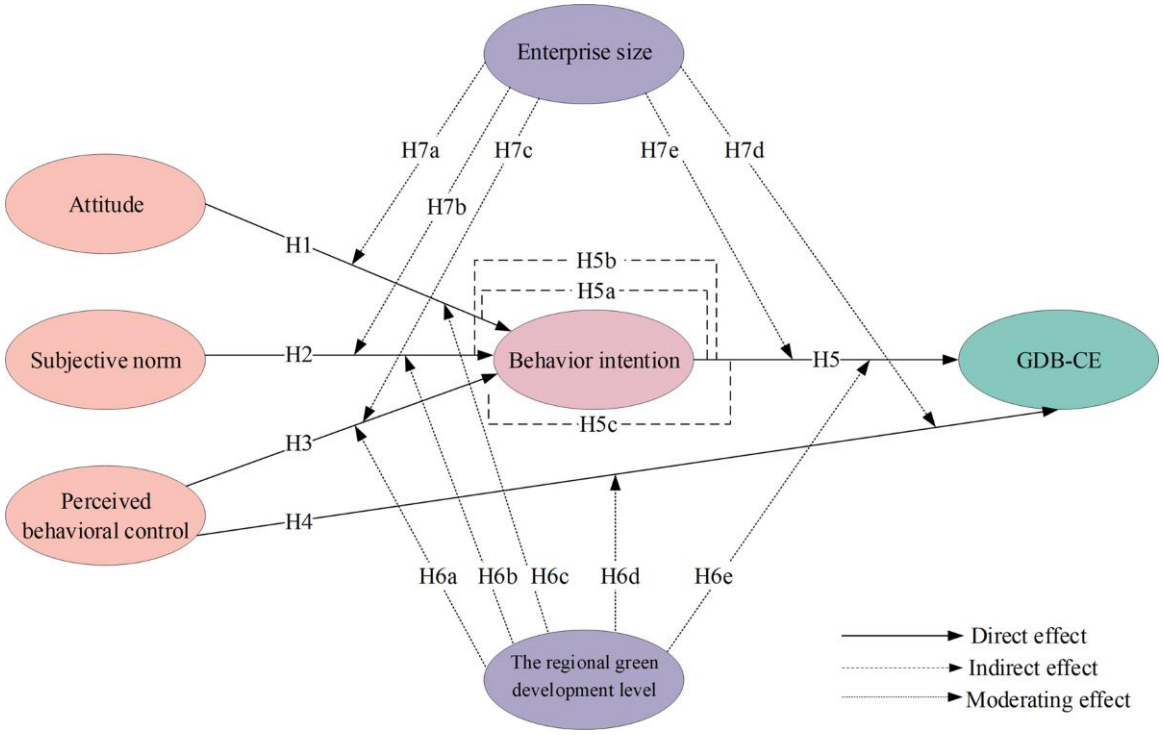

Fig 2. Destinations Invest in Technology Without Achieving Innovation

With digital transformation seen as an indispensable condition for the sustainability of tourism organizations, they have to cope with increasing pressure to adjust to it. Despite spending tremendous amounts of money on digital, many destinations fail to achieve real innovation outcomes. The major problem is that we do not have in-depth knowledge of the changes in customer demands and preferences.

Indeed, the integration of different technologies, for example mobile applications and virtual reality tourism experiences, have changed travel planning, experiencing, and sharing travel in outstanding fashion. However, many of the tourism SMEs retain the heavenly human resources and technical skills necessary for digitization but still lack it. The existence of this skills gap is a substantial barrier to innovation in part because the training of staff requires a large amount of time spent and constant technical support.

High cost and in particular uncertainty associated with technology investments dissuade many tourism businesses, such as family enterprises, from fully adopting digital innovation. In addition, management's ignorance about the dynamic and potential of digitization tends to increase scepticism regarding adoption of different digital technologies.

There is often a challenge of data management in service of creating a tourism organization which is effective in meeting the contemporary legal requirements as well as maintaining customer trust. In addition, some of the companies face problems of tracking down such staff which are specialized in analyzing market trends and manufacturing personalized offerings matching the needs of the customers [19]-[23].

3. The Missing Human Element in Smart Tourism Initiatives

At present, smart technology shows to have a positive effect on the tourism experience, however the industry often defaults to a human element. Thus, the implementation of new technologies is particular as these affect the performance along with the wellbeing of employees. The technological stress brings this technological stress to employees onboard and has a very negative impact on employee engagement and wellbeing, which in turn negatively impacts the service quality.

Back from two years developing a show, he quickly observes that the industry's high employee turnover rate compounds these challenges. Low company loyalty and the seasonal employment pattern create extra barriers leading to the inability to maintain service quality through technological implementation. However, organizational learning will play a moderating role, sometimes even intensifying the relationship between the technological stress and the employee engagement.

Director of Tourism for Jamaica opines that although advances in artificial intelligence are wonderful, the human touch will always be irreplaceable in travel and tourism. Human staff is the only one that can give you the nuance in which local experiences such as the best times for

outdoor excursion or personal recommendations based on own experience.

Human interaction should be supported by the smart tourism technologies, rather than replaced. To achieve that the key is by allowing technology to aid people and keep the personal touch that creates quality tourism experiences. This is one of a kind approach and involves careful mapping of customer journey and identifying all the contact points between the service provider and the client.

Successful innovation of the current trends in tourism is dependent on a balance. Features that should boost the operational efficiency, if the smart technology is employed, are multilingual robot receptions and content solutions fuelled by AI. However, these approaches to implementing these two approaches should complement rather than provide an alternative to the human element that makes tourism experiences unforgettable and authentic [24]-[26].

3.1 Resource Allocation Failures

But very few are successful tourism destinations requiring precise resource allocation, yet quite a few face fundamental challenges that make it difficult for them to be effective innovators. The allocation failure experienced in this case arises out of complex organizational dynamics and deeply embedded practices of industry.

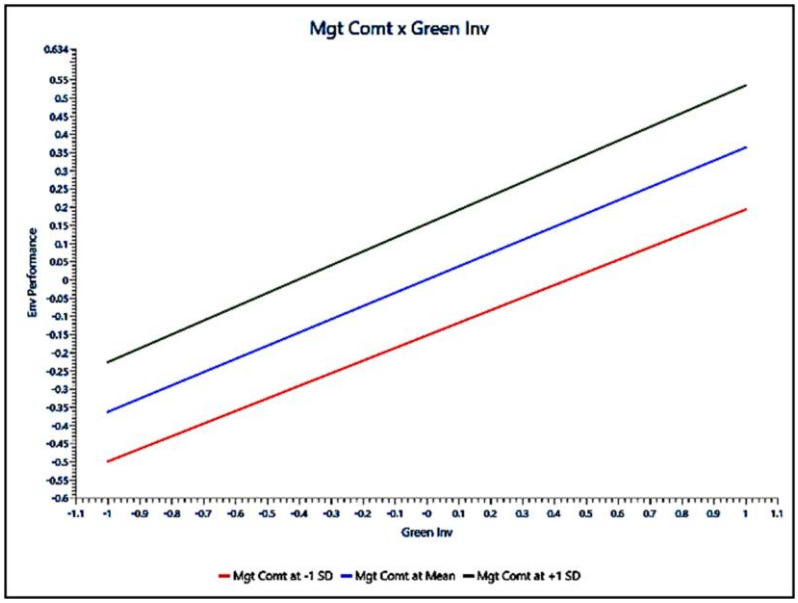

Fig 3. Budgetary Constraints and Misaligned Priorities

There are substantial obstacles for tourism destinations struggling to implement sustainable innovations due to financial limitations. Particularly, small and medium sized enterprises experience difficulties of high initial capital requirements and operational costs. In developing regions especially, these constraints are even more pronounced: funding scarcity, and expensive operations make it harder to develop tourism that is both sustainable and profitable.

The tourism sector's financial challenges are significantly beyond simply financial boundaries. Facilitating knowledge transfer and knowledge businesses in cross border tourism development is a nontrivial task. If destinations let short term gains outweigh strategic innovation investments, it means that they lose the chance of sustainable growth and competitive advantage.

3.2 Human Capital Deficiencies in Tourism Innovation Management

Human resource management of the tourism industry is a critical issue since it is based on qualification and availability of seasonal workplaces. Given that it generally fails to meet quality targets required by visitors, innovation in formation, organisation and governance is a crucial factor in developing competitiveness for the sector. Both organizational competitiveness and destination attractiveness are strongly reliant on human capital. The principal difficulty is to obtain necessary abilities, the management of them, and constant formation in order that human resources could serve as an advantage. There is little interaction between research institution and tourism enterprise in specialized knowledge transfer for the bottleneck of innovation capacity.

Leadership failure all over the world defines the current labor gap situation. During the pandemic, this crisis only became more severe when inconsistent government responses to controlling industry closures and reopenings contributed to uncertain job security and low morale among

employees in countries. The availability of qualified talent—combining professional experience, interpersonal skills, decision-making abilities, and emotional intelligence—provides destinations with distinct competitive advantages [27]-[29].

4. Knowledge Silos Preventing Cross-Sector Learning

The knowledge management is a major acting axis of organizational competitiveness and innovation as a knowledge sharing and management practice stimulator. In companies, organizational silos are formed as separate units locked in one area without any coordination or sharing of information, resources, and processes with other units. Whenever there are barriers, these silos form and this restricts the free flow of information and the effective of collaboration.

Communication is the main cause that keeps various organizations siloed. Also, usually this is related to the absence of practices that stimulate knowledge sharing between experienced and junior employees, as sharing knowledge could undermine job security. In the organizations with complex hierarchical structures such as organizational risk of isolation becomes very visible, where each department works as a separated silo.

Isolated departments do not engage in internal competition, or more importantly, are not likely to share new ideas competently. With no clear goals and organizational values, it is easy for the teams to focus on their own objectives of which they do not align with the company mission. It is through the active involvement of leaders, employees and management, that these things can be prevented as one builds understanding of the current organisational culture before it can be improved.

4.1 Measuring Innovation: The Metrics Problem

The measurement of innovation in tourism faces both difficulties in terms of the choice of the indicator and a lack of effectiveness of the survey methods as the sector has its own and specific features which the way they are realizing the innovation is not reflected in the survey methods and indicators. Research shows that serious biases and anomalies in the current measurement process do not allow for a proper understanding of innovation at a micro level.

4.2 Outdated KPIs That Discourage Experimentation

Typically, tourism KPIs consist of only measurable metrics like website visits, click-through rates, impressions, etc. Most of these metrics lack threshold when it comes to measuring long term innovation success. Despite the persisting dominance of revenue generation as a key performance indicator across tourism destinations, the innovation development process is widely ignored as a key issue.

Meanwhile, currently used KPIs give the condition to implement metric manipulation rather than real innovation. Organizations of tourism are only only measured by the numbers of these metrics can boost numbers with disregard of the overall organizational objectives. However, by adhering to this method, the creativity and experimentation in the company comprised of qualified employees become stifled because they don't want to take the risk of doing something that might result in their performance metrics getting worse.

Limitations in the tourism contexts are illustrated through the widely used tool of the Community Innovation Survey (CIS). Summary: The findings of the survey's excessive emphasis on R&D and technology do not adequately capture essential innovations that relate to services. Furthermore, its way of naming and categorizing innovation types frequently dazzles or confuses respondents to the point that it does not assess their actual activities in innovation.

4.3 Quantitative vs. Qualitative Assessment of Tourism Innovation

As such, there are 2 traditional types of tourism research methodology: qualitative and quantitative. Quantitative methods require numerical data to be analyzed based on statistics whereas qualitative research works on the motivations and behaviour behind an event. However, for complete innovation assessment, the tourism industry needs both approaches.

Broad insights of quantitative research could be relevant to larger group of people. These methods prove useful in measuring tangible outcomes (visitor numbers, revenue growth, etc.) but especially so for measuring things like revenue growth or visitor numbers. However, crucial qualitative aspects of innovation such as the development of innovative ways to provide customers with good experiences or the innovation of service delivery methods rarely elude their attention.

The structural features of the tourism are unique and make innovation measurement complex. The relatively small industry size based on fragmented nature makes it difficult to achieve the maximum innovation rate. Change assessment is complex when small enterprises tend to be resistant to change and conserve the organizational cultures [30]-[33].

More and more, the tourism organizations recognize the demand that balanced measurement approaches are needed. Most recent studies stress

a combination of Schumpeterian theory and a dynamic-capabilities assessment to provide an adequate overall picture of technological and organizational innovations. The advantages of this integrated approach involve cross national comparisons while taking into account sector specific characteristics.

The emergence of metrics of tourism is conditioned both on the direct response and branding campaigns. In the context of digital branding initiatives, different KPIs are required such as customer lifetime value and incremental searches. In addition, sophisticated tools are needed to measure effectiveness in co-op marketing partnerships between destination marketing organization and local stakeholders and support data driven insights.

5. Case Studies: Innovation Success Stories Against the Odds

In the midst of global challenges, there are a handful of destinations doing business differently than anyone else, which offer important lessons for those in similar situations. These success stories show that strategic planning and community engagement work better than typical barriers of innovation.

5.1 Barcelona's Transformation Through Integrated Smart Tourism

It all started with Barcelona's comprehensive IT strategy that began in 2011, which was designed to make the city more efficient and boost its economy in this highly sophisticated and competitive world of smart tourism. So in 2012 the city launched an innovative City Operating System (City OS) to unite the different data sources with smart tourism solutions. On this platform it becomes easy to integrate tourists, service providers and city officials.

The digital transformation is not simply a matter of technological implementation, as the city is also aiming for it to be something that benefits not just technological methods. With initiatives such as Barcelona Sustainable Gastronomy, the destination turned visitors toward the online repository to connect with restaurants who were sustainability focused. Furthermore, by generating participatory processes, the Smart Citizen platform makes residents have an impact in the development of their city.

5.2 New Zealand's Risk-Taking Approach to Destination Marketing

The tourism New Zealand is a great example of bold innovation in a destination marketing using data. Initially having very little insight into the company's marketing activities across nine global markets, the organization suffered some teething problems. By finding new ways to use their clever thinking strategically and creatively, they designed a system which changed the way they marketed their tourism adventure.

The 2024-2028 statement holds the organization to ambitious goals such as to increase visitor spend by USD 5.00B by 2027/28 under the precondition of achieving 70% of the total growth through off peak growth. The goals of their strategy are to help build year round desire for New Zealand, to convert desire into off peak visitation and to accelerate the sector in becoming the world leader in sustainability.

Tourism New Zealand's use of this kind of data analytics has produced amazing results. By exploiting the ride interval and the distribution of space allocations caused by the campaigns that they have run historically, they optimized their global marketing effort. Using this data driven strategy we were able to figure out when to invest in which markets and when given markets were covered already.

5.3 Rwanda's Community-Centered Tourism Innovation Model

The community based tourism (CBT) approach which is spearheaded by Rwanda is at the core of its CDC tourism success story. Located in Kenya, the country has developed itself as a top performer in implementing the sustainable tourism practices targeting broader community's welfare in addition to visitor's experiences. However, it is their innovative model that focuses on tourism as a creative collaboration between tourists and local communities, which leads to sustainable economic development and protects cultural patrimony.This year the country's tourism took USD 445 million; a huge rise driven by the rise in air connectivity and rise in the MICE sector. According to Rwanda's progressive policy, 10 percent of the tourism income from gorilla tracking and safaris goes directly toward local community initiative.

The Rwandan Revenue Share Program of 2005 guarantees investment in national park surroundings. By 2018, this initiative had distributed more than USD 1.8 million of funds through 158 community based projects for indispensable infrastructure – clean drinking water facilities, health centres, schools.

The success of these destinations emphasizes the importance of the integrated approaches of tourism innovation. New Zealand's data driven marketing measure, Barcelona's smart city initiatives and Rwanda's community focused approach help demonstrate how destination can overcome traditional barriers in strategic planning and stakeholder involvement to overcome the barriers. The underlying message in these cases is that every step towards tourism innovation relies

on striking a balance between technological advancement and community support, to make tourism become a successful innovation in the 4.0 era, a process that combines digital transformation with social responsibilities.

5.4 The Innovation Ecosystem for Tourism Destinations

To support effective tourism innovation ecosystems, a systematic approach has to unite the disparate stakeholders around the common goals. Destinations can collaborate through strategic collaboration and sharing of resources, which will create sustainable frameworks for continuous innovation.

5.5 Collaborative Networking Across Stakeholder Groups

Fundamental shifts both in collaborative culture and in business practice is required in order to unlock innovation value in tourism. Firms can access wider resources and deliver innovative experiences that enlarge their customer base and foster further loyalty though open innovation. A number of companies must work together to succeed in delivering seamless, enriching experiences to meet a traveller's evolving needs from multiple destinations at once.

Regional Innovation Systems (RIS) contribute importantly to stimulate competition as well as cooperation between companies embedded in a regional system. These systems give primacy to relational assets, social capital and social relationships as chief movers of innovation. Joint value creation is a means through which open exchange of ideas, resources and experience creates better alternatives that better address evolving business and traveler needs.

The strategic partnerships work and industry collaborations are successful. For example, Marriott partnered with Alibaba Group to expand into the Chinese market through sharing of market presence, cost and risks of expansion. In like manner, Hilton and Uber fashioned services and loyalty programmes to entice further convenience and rewards incentives.

5.6 Towards the development of innovation incubators specific towards the challenges of tourism.

Tourism innovation incubators can be considered as a catalyst for tourism development through their service as shared resources and comprehensive support systems. Management assistance and office space and venture capital financing opportunities are provided by these facilities. The Tourism Incubator initiative in turn aims to find innovative ideas for tourism products and technology aimed at being launched commercially at dedicated boot camps.

The four core services provided by incubators are support of business planning, assistance for launching, guidance in operational management and growth. Marketing assistance, market research, high speed internet access, financial management support, and comprehensive business training programs are just a few of the other services employed by Aygan to aid additional businesses.

As tourism focused incubators, they also need to address the different current challenges in the (tourism) sector. This kind of approach can be seen in the HI Hub Incubator where the incubators provide specialized services such as help with business basics, networking activities, strategic industry partners help and basic marketing services. The main area of focus for these initiatives is for either new or current entrepreneurs instead of previously established organizations that want to broaden their existing offerings.

6. CONCLUSION

Public private partnerships (PPPs) are essential tools to fill infrastructure gaps and bring about growth opportunities. The collaboration is a blending of government regulatory authority and resources and private sector innovation and efficiency. However, for PPP activity, the typical activities include infrastructure development, investment facilitation and tourism promotion campaigns.Successful partnerships rely on mutual roles, responsibilities and goals of its members. The purposes relatively unachievable by either sector are met through resource sharing. As risks and responsibilities for money spread around stakeholders, they naturally mitigate their risks.The benefits of Tourism PPPs comprise sustainable development practices and improved visitor satisfaction. These are partnering that make exchanging of knowledge possible and replicating of industry best practices in another geographic area possible. Additionally, regions adopt innovative funding models, and adopt strategic planning to attract higher capital from global investors for larger investment projects.There are many mechanisms through which government initiatives around the world actively push for tourism in the spirit of effective public private tourism partnerships. They include infrastructure development investment, financial incentives like subsidies and tax breaks, joint tourism destination marketing campaigns and capacity building programs to enhance skills of the tourism sector. These collaborations are guided by policy frameworks that set the legal and strategic as well

as equitable and responsible conditions for the growth and development of both sectors.

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