Valuing Open Innovation Environments in Tourism Education and Research. The case of INNOTOUR

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Abstract

The world has changed tremendously since the publication of *Our Common Future* by the World Commission for Environment and Development (1987), which elevated the concept of sustainable development from grassroots initiatives to the forefront of global politics and arguably public awareness. Some initiatives and progress can be documented in tourism research and the industry towards a more sustainable future. Yet the scale of efforts remains overshadowed by the scope of problems (Ottosson and Samuelsson 2008). Two of these are human induced climate change and the recent global financial crisis that draw attention to the value of knowledge and problem of borrowing from resources that do not exist.

Many tourism educators and scholars are intimately aware of the seismic changes and mega-trends facing the tourism industry (Dwyer *et. al* 2007). Still it is questionable whether the tourism sector altogether is well prepared for these new futures. Although some enterprises and (semi)public organisations are highly professional, the general picture of the industry is bleak when it comes to competences, innovativeness and leadership. The majority of enterprises are small and with limited resources for comprehensive turnarounds. For better or worse, the sector is very volatile, and new entrants may – or may not - bring with them strategic capabilities and capital for needed investments. Moreover, it seems that few undergraduate and graduate tourism programs are preparing students to work within complex adaptive systems let alone act as global stewards in a quickly changing world. Kant, in his 1798 work "The Conflict of the Faculties," wrote that universities should "handle the entire content of learning by mass production, so to speak, by a division of labor, so that for every branch of the sciences there would be a public teacher or professor appointed as its trustee." This mass-production university model has led to separation where there ought to be collaboration and to ever-increasing specialization (Taylor 2009). In the words of Sheldon *et al.* (2008):

"Tourism educational programs need to fundamentally re-tool and redesign – not incrementally by adding new courses – or simply by putting courses on-line - but by changing the nature of what is taught and how it is taught. Skills and knowledge sets must be redefined, structures and assumptions need to be questioned, and old ways of doing things must be transcended".

Tourism education should accordingly provide students with a dynamic learning experience that will enable them to operate sustainably and professionally in a fast-changing and service-intensive sector. This is similar to what Tribe (2002) refers to as "philosophical practitioners". Embedding the value of stewardship towards the tourism industry and the world in which it operates the delivery of such education calls for new learning structures, methods and environments that are flexible in response to external change by integrating innovative, accessible learning opportunities (Liburd and Hjalager 2009). An epistemological space exists within studies of tourism for post-disciplinary approaches based on even greater flexibility, plurality, synthesis and synergy as argued by Coles *et al.* (2006). The underlying hypothesis of this paper is that the Web 2.0 provides opportunities to rethink and reorganise traditional power and knowledge structures and interaction in tourism education and research within and beyond the university setting. This paper provides examples of these new directions. First, the concepts of open innovation and Web 2.0 will be presented. We report on early findings from an experimental platform entitled INNOTOUR, which is a hub for innovation in tourism (www.innotour.com). INNOTOUR consists of activities in 3 principal and interconnected sections:

The learning exchange. This is the extended classroom and pedagogical field. The main objectives of the activities are to develop learning materials, test and expand them and share them in and beyond the classroom. Students are deeply involved in all aspects of the knowledge creation process. This process incorporates creativity, critical thinking and intercultural collaboration and networking for change and innovation.

The knowledge accelerator. Various representations of knowledge are found in this sector, and the knowledge is a raw material for, and results of student work and academic research. Knowledge is information connecting to existing knowledge that is created through processes of connecting and reflecting. The site will efficiently link up to other websites and thereby expand the usability and comprehensiveness. Very importantly, the resources are also made available as input to enterprises' innovative activities. The knowledge sources come in many formats – written material, videos, interactive resources, ipod-downloads etc. Contributions are uncensored but must adhere to ethical principles, and user feedback is the mode of ensuring a push towards a continuous higher quality and broader scope.

The revenue generator. This section attempt – over time - to create an economic sustainability in INNOTOUR and to ensure an income flow that helps to expand the

resources and activities for the benefit of students, staff and enterprises. A commercial corner is suggested. A further vision is to involve INNOTOUR in microfinance activities related to tourism entrepreneurs in the developing world. Some resources and activities may be developed to become accessible only at a fee such as for example participation in seminars, teacher training or costumer tailored barometer data provision.

There are interlinkages between all three sections. E.g. good student work will be resources for enterprises. Cases from enterprises and microfinance will inspire teaching. Test results and bloggings can inform academic research. Etc. Etc.

The paper reviews preliminary learning experiences from the INNOTOUR platform as an advanced tool for collaborative, open source education in tourism. We further argue that adequate and robust theories and dynamic learning practices must be developed and researched in open-source systems that are embedded in a culture of innovation, collaboration and sustainability. Finally, we point to immediate challenges and resistance to change in tourism education and research.

Key words: Web 2.0.; Tourism education and research; Innovation; Sustainable development.

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