Chapter 9

Robust Innovation Anchors in Rural Wellbeing Tourism

Anne-Mette Hjalager
University of Southern Denmark, Denmark

Kaarina Tervo-Kankare
University of Oulu, Finland

Anja Tuohino
University of Eastern Finland, Finland

Henna Konu
University of Eastern Finland, Finland

ABSTRACT

Innovation in tourism does not take place in a vacuum. Innovators find inspiration from many sources. This article identifies ten innovation anchors, e.g. critical trends that can guide the long-term innovation activity and lead to fundamentally new products, services, delivery mechanisms, organizational models, means of collaboration etc. Innovation anchors are robust as they are found persistently in the recent scholarly literature and appear on a consistent base in business related evidence. Rural wellbeing tourism is area of inquiry. The study reveals that innovation, in the future, can take further advantage of the following: 1) Towards a holistic wellbeing, 2) Connecting with nature and its resources, 3) Altruism included, 4) The rural as a medical prescription, 5) Work-life balance, 6) Wellbeing diversification the rural way, 7) Taking advantage of the climate squeeze, 8) Opening the digital channels, 9) A new puritanism rural style, and 10) The gear dimension.

INTRODUCTION

Tourism is a phenomenon under perpetual change and development. The geographical features constitute imperative attraction values (Hall & Page, 2014). Simultaneously, the material and immaterial features of the geography stimulate the innovation of new touristic products and services. In an era of increasing local as well as global completion, the careful and creative interpretation of what happens in the geographical space becomes more important.

The purpose of this chapter is to identify and discuss the foundations – innovation anchors - for the future of innovation in tourism. Innovation anchors are robust piles in the ground, they are developments and prospects that are likely to be of guiding value for innovating enterprises and destinations (Hjalager, 2002; Kozak, 2014; Mei et al, 2012). Accordingly, the study addresses trends in tourism, and there is a specific emphasis on wellbeing tourism.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-0201-2.ch009
The study also aims at contributing to the rural tourism research, hopefully with the future oriented view stimulating new directions in a research tradition which has had a focus on mainly authenticity and stability. There is a distinct need for further inquiries into innovations at the business level illuminating new business models in rural wellbeing. The study also attempts to move innovation studies further.

By definition, rural wellbeing tourism is a form of tourism that takes place in rural settings and that interconnects actively with local nature and community resources. Based on the rural tangible and intangible, openly accessible and commercial ingredients, wellbeing tourism is holistic mode of travel that integrates physical and mental wellness and health and contributes to wider positive social and individual life experiences.

Rural wellbeing tourism is related to wellness and health tourism, for example as defined by Sheldon and Bushell (2009), but it has a broader stance, and it might be seen as a further development of historical spa and wellness trends (Connell, 2006; Erfurt-Cooper & Cooper, 2009; Müller & Lanz Kaufmann, 2001; Smith & Puczko, 2009, 2014). Over the past decades spa and wellness tourism has increased in popularity, and a mushrooming of concepts takes place, for example into facets of spiritual tourism, thalasso specialities, occupational wellness tourism, yoga and meditation, and many forms of sauna (Smith & Puczko, 2009, 2014). The development of the traditional spa and wellness resorts towards a more holistic paradigm is prevalent. According to García-Altés (2005) diverse demographic, economic and lifestyle related factors have enhanced this. Many people are stressed by living in work-obsessed, time-pressured, materialistic and over-individualistic societies (Laing & Weiler, 2008; Sheldon & Bushell, 2009; Smith & Puzckó, 2009, 2014). In addition, the aging population, changes in lifestyle and alternatives in tourism, where experienced travellers seek new experiences (Konu & Laukkanen, 2010), add to the increased emphasis on more holistically oriented wellness products (Koh et al., 2010; Lehto et al., 2006; Mak et al., 2009).

Smith and Puzckó (2009) have listed both internal and external factors that affect the growth of and the increased demand for wellness tourism. External factors include governmental policy, nutrition, psychology, therapy, and healing and medicine. Internal factors are the search for a community, a desire to “downsize”, new spirituality, time-poor and cash-rich elite manners, and curiosity. They also mention fashion and tradition, obsession with self and celebrity, and fitness and sport.

It can be concluded that the main motivating push factors in the wellbeing and wellness tourism sector seem to be relaxation, escape, pampering, physical activity, avoiding burn out and mental wellbeing. Relaxation is in many cases connected to “rest” and “physical relaxation”. Escape is in many studies seen as one of the most important motivations. Pampering seems to be a motivation that is characteristic of wellness and spa tourism (Laesser, 2011; Mak et al., 2009). Pampering is also connected to the enjoyment of comfort (Laesser, 2011). Physical activity includes sports and multiple activities, and also physical health and appearance with wellbeing implications. Mental wellbeing is a motivation that can be seen to be specific to wellness tourism. It includes motivations such as “to seek mental peacefulness” (Mak et al., 2009) and “to help me gain a sense of balance” (Lehto et al., 2006).

Health tourism and medical tourism concepts are used in conjunction with wellness tourism. According to García-Altés (2005) health tourism is based on travelling outside the home to take care of one’s health, and the purpose of the trip can be healing illness or preventing it and promoting general health related wellbeing (Finnish Tourist Board, 2005; Kandampully, 2013; Suontausta & Tyni, 2005). In addition to preventing illness and maintaining wellbeing, the goal of wellbeing tourism is to experience pleasure and luxury. As forms of tourism, wellbeing tourism and healthcare tourism are not very distant from each other. For instance, healthcare tourists may travel to the same destinations and use the