Chapter 11
Towards an Innovative Ecotourism Business Model Framework

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ABSTRACT

The authors have studied in depth small, family-owned, fish farming company because the demand and competition for farmed fish is increasing worldwide, and so is the awareness of its importance for further development of sustainable small business in EU and wider. This chapter contributes to the literature on sustainable business models with a descriptive case study of the complementarity of a fish farming company and ecotourism activities. In this view, innovation is crucial to promote sustainable business models that can achieve a solid economic performance, social responsibility, and at the same time take care of the natural environment. The case study of a sustainable business model (BM) in aquaculture has been analyzed with the use of a business model canvas that links various organizational-oriented elements of a business model with different stakeholder needs, especially customer needs.

INTRODUCTION

Mass tourism can be considered obsolete, because its negative consequences are becoming more and more visible. This is one of the reasons why tourist destinations’ stakeholders are pursuing new strategies and trying innovative, sustainable business models. Tourists are no more satisfied with a simple sun and sea offer, they are willing to discover something else. Low cost flying operators made it possible to visit most hidden locations, tourist flows change and get dispersed over the globe. Competition is increasing, investors quickly grab the opportunities and develop new resorts where there was prior no tourism infrastructure. So it’s the only option that destination managers have to think of new ways of marketing and link their destinations to other local businesses; storytelling is growing in its importance as other forms of intertwining hospitality services with experiential tourism, eco and sustainable tourism, food and wine tourism etc. Visitors are enjoying the cultural and natural heritage, local way of life, culinary culture and more. It is a perfect chance to embed community participation in the destinations’ tourism strategies.

There are several theories about the community participation (i.e. creation of social capital, joint decision making, collaboration processes, power redistribution, private-public partnerships) to be found in the tourism literature. Innovative, sustainability conscious entrepreneurs from different industries and branches are seeking new roads to expand their businesses organically.

An important part of the tourist offer is the cuisine, and in that view the quality of the food that tourists can delight at a particular destination. Aquaculture is one of the fastest growing food-producing industries, accounting for about half of the total fish supply (FAO Fisheries and Aquaculture Department, 2012; Fischer, Jorgensen, Josupeit, Kalikoski, & Lucas, 2015) and fish is traditionally considered to be a healthy diet. The demand and competition for farmed fish are increasing worldwide, as is the awareness of the importance of the further development of sustainable small business. In this view, innovation is crucial to enable sustainable business models that can achieve an expected economic performance and at the same time take care of the natural environment. Cagica Carvalho & Sarkar (2014) used an archetype and the market outcomes resulting from ‘the innovation strategies pursued to compare similarities and differences according to a firms’ geographical location to identify innovative patterns in tourism firms.

BACKGROUND

We are witnessing a continuing trend of growth in the world tourism, tourists are travelling more, cover longer distances and spend more money for leisure. Revenues from tourism industry rise, but it often occurs that destination’s environment suffers, and inhabitants are facing situations of cultural, economic and ecological impoverishment. Mass tourism is connected with many negative implications, so alternative forms of tourism have been developed globally. Therefore, tourism development planners should think about innovative approaches that will not endanger the quality of life of the inhabitants and the future of the tourism destination. Tools that they have at their disposal are regulation, information, zoning, etc. Sound policy and strategies should lead the ecotourism industry, as it is important to know which values we want to enforce, e.g. safeguarding cultural and natural heritage, ethical management of employees, and protecting local community. Development and conservation have to be planned in a balanced way, to avoid unwanted impacts.
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