

Session G1

Measuring Technological and Environmental Readiness Levels at Smart Hotels. Their Impact on Visitors' Preferences - Alexandros Apostolakis, Oleg Badunenko and Shabbar Jaffry.

The hotel sector worldwide is facing considerable pressure from two particular directions; heightened environmental concerns amongst discerning customers and rising expectations due to technological advancements in the industry. In turn, smart hotels, as a new managerial development in the industry, try to make use of both elements, technology and the environment in order to become more appealing and attractive to potential guests.

In order to do that, smart hotels have to strive for technological, as well as environmental readiness at the same time. Smart hotels with high levels of technological and environmental readiness will have a higher probability of attracting visitors, as compared to their counterparts. In the current paper, we adopt a structural equation modeling (SEM) approach within a stated preference evaluation framework to examine the degree to which smart hotels at a traditional mass tourism destination exhibit technological and environmental readiness. In turn, we evaluate the impact of the technological and environmental indexes on the probability of choice.

The empirical findings indicate that environmental policy certification standards, as well as waste management policies contribute significantly towards smart hotels' environmental readiness levels. On the other hand, customer – centric technologies focusing on the hotel's room ambience contribute by approximately 17% towards smart hotels' technological readiness levels. Furthermore, the analysis of our research indicated that whereas the degree of technology readiness and price have a negative and statistically significant effect on the probability of choice, environmental readiness exhibits a positive effect on the probability of choosing between different hotels.

Tourism Innovation and Economic Growth: The Case of French And Spanish Regions - Yvan Arnold Tegui and Suarez Tostado Marta Luisa

Tourism plays a key role in national and regional economic development. As such, tourism destinations need to develop competitive positions in order to maintain a preferential position. Among these positioning attributes is tourism innovation, which is emerging as a crucial element in stimulating the creation of added value and regional economic growth. It plays a central role in the evolving dynamics of regions, maintaining strategic positioning and promoting differentiation and sustainability in the sector. This study examines the impact of tourism investment and innovation on the economic development of regions (at NUTS 2 level) in France and Spain. By analysing how tourism innovation measured by tourism investments aligned with Europe's objectives (Green Europe, Tourism Innovation, etc.) interact to influence the regional innovation score (RIS), we assess their contribution to regional economic growth, measured by tourism GDP and gross value added. The methodology is based on panel data analysis, with the use of longitudinal data covering the NUTS2 regions of France and Spain over the period 2014 to 2019. By targeting the capture of evolving dynamics over time, this approach offers a crucial perspective for assessing the cumulative impact of tourism innovation and investment on regional economic and innovative performance. The results are intended to enlighten decision-makers, economic players and stakeholders, identifying potential levers for stimulating economic growth, encouraging innovation, and fostering sustainable development in the regions.

Beyond Borders: The Role and Motives and Different Forms of Capital in Informal Tourism Entrepreneurial Success - Alicia Fourie, Andrea Saayman and Derick Blaauw

Informal entrepreneurship, particularly within the tourism sector, plays an integral role in the economic fabric of South Africa. Given the significance of the tourism industry in contributing to overall economic growth, informal entrepreneurial activities are a crucial and distinctive feature of the South African economic landscape (WTO, 2019). Informal entrepreneurship also plays a pivotal role in shaping economic activities, participating in the provision of tourism goods and services at budget prices, engaging in strategic networks and supply chains, and providing sustainable livelihoods by absorbing excess labour and mitigating unemployment (Chen, 2006; Jones, Mondar & Edwards, 2006; Evans, Syrett & Williams, 2006). However, the informal economy is often framed in a negative way and characterised as underdeveloped, and illegal (Williams, 2008). Slowly, the notion that entrepreneurs have been driven towards this sector because of no other options available is being challenged by the view that participation in this sector is voluntary (Williams & Nadin, 2010).

However, engaging as an entrepreneur and starting any business requires capital of different forms. The literature distinguishes between financial capital, social capital, psychological capital and human capital. While the relationship between social capital, psychological capital and entrepreneurial success have been studied (see Mahfud et al., 2020) and the influence of the various forms of capital on SME entrepreneur success (see Alsafty, Abadir & Sharaawy, 2020), little is known about these relationships in the informal sector. This paper aims to fill this void by studying the relationship between necessity- versus opportunity-oriented entrepreneurial motivations, different forms of capital available to these informal entrepreneurs and their business success.

Our measures of entrepreneurial motives to enter into tourism are based on the work of Szivas (2001), while financial capital, social capital and human capital are derived from Stošić Panić (2017), Kim and Shim (2018) and Skuras et al. (2005). For psychological capital, the Conner-Richardson Resilience Scale is utilised. Entrepreneurial success is measured not only by income from business activities, but also the entrepreneur's ability to adapt to shocks, such as that caused by COVID-19.

The structured questionnaire was interviewer administered to informal entrepreneurs in three of South Africa's main tourist cities, Johannesburg, Durban and Cape Town. Data collection spanned from 2022 – 2023, and altogether 363 completed questionnaires are used in data analysis, which include the use of multivariate statistics as well as regression analysis.

The paper is situated within the existing literature on informal entrepreneurship and by incorporating a South African perspective this paper provides valuable insights into the broader discourse on informal entrepreneurship within the global tourism sector.