

**INNOVATION IN THE EXPERIENCE ECONOMY:
AN OPEN-INNOVATION FRAMEWORK FOR NATURE BASED
TOURISM EXPERIENCES**

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ABSTRACT

Innovation of nature tourism experiences are discussed by merging insights from the open innovation paradigm, tourism-innovation and the practice based perspective. It is argued that understanding innovation in this sector of tourism requires the integration of multiple elements including people, nature, wildlife, technologies and networks across organizations. The paper attempts to develop a proposal of a conceptual model that can be applied to tourism innovation research. The model will be discussed and illustrated with examples from whale watching in Iceland. The paper concludes that the recognition of the specific characteristics of tourism-innovation and the practice turn in organizational studies could develop the 'open service innovation model' further in the direction of a model for experience-innovation.

Key words: open innovation, practice based perspective, tourism experience, nature based tourism

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1 INTRODUCTION

There are various approaches existing in the literature with regard to innovation in tourism. The classical innovation literature has, until recently, primarily been concerned with the manufacturing industries but gradually the service industries have also recognized for their innovative potential (Hjalager 2010). Tourism innovation has many features in common with innovation in the service sector as a whole (Hall, Hall et al. 2008) but there are differences as well, especially in those sub-sectors of tourism who's core business is to offer experiences. Experiences occur when a company intentionally uses services as the stage, and goods as props, to engage individual customers in a way that creates a memorable event (Pine and Gilmore 1998). Although experiences have typically been lumped in with services, they are a distinct economic offering, as different from services as services are from goods (Pine and Gilmore 1998) and in order to understand the process of innovation of tourism experiences, the specific distinctions need to be taken into account.

This paper is focusing on innovation of *nature based* tourism where sustainability has become a core concept for innovation and therefore has been a topic of growing interest among researchers and policy makers (Hjalager 1997; Hjalager 2002; Gustafsson and Johnson 2003; Sørensen 2004; Sundbo 2007; Hall, Hall et al. 2008; Hjalager 2010). Nature based tourism (NBT) can be understood as tourism 'primarily concerned with the direct enjoyment of some relatively undisturbed phenomena of nature' (Valentine 1992) and tourism companies and destinations offering these kinds of experiences are depending on the quality and quantity of their natural resources to create experiences for their customer. Hence, the need to address sustainability issues like climate change, loss of biodiversity, environmental degradation, the global economic crisis (Papatheodorou et al, 2010) and new tourist demands and attitudes has triggered the learning and innovation capacities of tourism businesses to anticipate and adapt accordingly (Halme 2001).

All types of innovations are generally acknowledged to be the result of complex processes (Sørensen, 2004; Fisher, 1999; Asheim and Cooke; 1999) rather than 'simple' outcomes of the personal creativity of entrepreneurs (Schumpeter, 1961). Hjalager (1997) applies this to tourism and argues that tourist attractions and destinations can be regarded as networks of actors and resources collaborating with each other. The concept of 'open innovation' has been developed during the last decade to capture this 'openness' of innovative processes within and between organizations. A first understanding of 'open innovation' has been developed for the manufacturing sector (Chesbrough, Vanhaverbeke et al. 2006) which has recently been further expanded to innovation of services as well (Chesbrough 2011). However, to understand the process of innovation of experiences in general, and nature based tourism experiences in specific, the paradigm of open innovation needs to be explored further in order to be made applicable to experience innovation as well.

The purpose of this work-in progress paper is to propose a conceptual model for open innovation of nature based tourism experiences. As the theory of open innovation is still very young, this paper will contribute conceptually to the further development of the open innovation paradigm. The main question this paper seeks to answer is how the open service innovation model can be developed further for understanding open innovation processes of tourism experiences. The theoretical tools to be used for this task are 1) the open innovation paradigm, 2) tourism innovation literature and 3) insights from practice based perspectives. Experience characteristics, addressed in innovation and tourism literature, need to be taken into account when developing a

model for open experience innovation. Innovation has been recognized as a complex process, a key component of which is the sharing of codified and particularly uncoded, tacit knowledge (Paget, Dimanche et al. 2010). The role of knowledge and learning therefore also needs to be addressed in an open experience innovation model and this is when the 'practice approach' will be provide insights to develop the model further. Studies on learning and knowing in organizations have gone through a practice turn where 'knowledge' (which induced its conceptualization in terms of 'object' or 'resource') was replaced by 'knowing', that is, an activity and process (a practice) which unfolds over time (Gherardi 2009). In the remaining of this paper the theoretical background will be laid out. This will form the basis for the proposal of the open experience innovation model. The model will be discussed and illustrated with examples from whale watching in Iceland.

2 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

This section draws from the existing literature on open and networked innovation where many of the existing approaches emerged from business models focused on product- or manufacturing based thinking. The rise of services has caused these approaches to change and now we are witnessing again a change from a service based to a more experienced based economy. As Pine and Gilmore argued, experiences are as different from services as services are from products (1998) so we can expect that thinking about innovation will evolve further in the direction of experiences as well.

2.1 Open innovation in manufacturing

A workable definition of innovation is that of a the multi-stage process whereby organizations transform ideas into new/improved products, services or processes in order to advance, compete en differentiate themselves successfully in their marketplace (Baregheh et al.,2009). Joseph Schumpeter (1961) was the first to focus on the role of innovation in economic and social change and saw innovation as a development process, activating a number of processes and individuals. Innovation in tourism is generally characterized by everything that differs from business as usual or which represents a discontinuance of previous practice in some sense for the innovating firm (Hjalager 2010). So, innovating is not just the conception of a new idea, or the invention of a new device, nor the development of a new market but it is all these things together acting in an integrated fashion.

Swan has argued that literature from different theoretical perspectives, like marketing, industrial ecology, tourism studies, have highlighted the positive role of networks in relation to innovation, arguing that innovation is more likely to occur between collaborating groups and organizations (Swan, 2005). In the same paper, Swan has defined networked innovation as 'innovation that occurs through relationships that are negotiated in an ongoing communicative process, and which relies on neither market nor hierarchical mechanisms of control'. It is at the interstices between individuals and organizations, through the operation of local and global networks that distributed knowledge can be brought together and integrated into new products, processes and services (Swan, 2005). This definition and approach have led to the further development of concepts that focus on, and try to grasp, interrelatedness. The idea of innovation systems for example is that single actors do not innovate in isolation; they are part of networks. The literature on innovation systems is mostly oriented towards incremental change, building on existing competencies, moving along a technical trajectory according to a techno-economic paradigm (Nooteboom, 2000). Asheim and Isaksen

(2002) argue that being able to integrate global knowledge and networks into local innovative processes is of crucial importance. Networking becomes a skill that companies can develop to enhance competitive advantage. So, networked innovation is not only an ontological state of being, a way to make sense of the phenomena, but a business strategy as well. In addition to learning about and adapting to change, connecting to sources of knowledge, values and ideas outside the company can be a way to differentiate from other businesses by means of the unique character of those relations. This becomes important because innovation strategies look increasingly similar and commoditized, so more and more organizations try to further improve their innovation performance through intensifying collaboration and learning across industry networks and partnerships, opening up their innovation (Chesbrough 2003).

The idea that innovating firms need to open up to outside relationships has received the buzz-word label of ‘open innovation’ (Chesbrough, Vanhaverbeke et al. 2006)(2003) which has recently been extended to services (Chesbrough 2011). Openness generally refers to ways of sharing with others and inviting their participation. Open innovation is the use of purposive inflows and outflows of knowledge to accelerate internal innovation and expand the markets for external use of innovation (Chesbrough, Vanhaverbeke et al. 2006; Chesbrough 2011). Open innovation suggests that valuable ideas can come from inside or outside the company and can go to the market from inside or outside the company as well (Chesbrough, Vanhaverbeke et al. 2006). A benefit from OI for value-creation comes from the participation of many more individuals and firms in the market. OI combines internal and external ideas into new products, new architectures, and new systems through a network of actors (Chesbrough, Vanhaverbeke et al. 2006; Chesbrough 2011). Chesbrough argues that any business (whether a product or a service) can be conceived as a series of processes that convert input into output through a series of specified activities or steps. Also processes in services are developed and coordinated to create and deliver offerings to customers, receive payment for these offerings, and handle issues that might arise after the offerings are purchased

2.2 Open service innovation

The concept of open service-innovation can be traced back to the evolution from a resource- to a service dominant logic in marketing literature. In an influential paper in the Journal of Marketing Vargo and Lusch argue that there has been a shift in marketing from a ‘resource dominant’ to a ‘service dominant’ logic (Vargo and Lusch 2008). In a resource dominant logic, value creation is perceived to take place in a value chain that has been identified by Porter (1985) as a tool to conceptualize businesses and how to innovate them. The value chain is a product-focused approach to thinking about a business where competitive advantages come from having better products, differentiated products or the lowest cost products. The resource dominant logic in general and value-chain in specific have framed the way practitioners think about their business in an important manner (Chesbrough 2011). However, Normann and Ramirez (1993) argue that the value-added notion is “outdated”, “grounded in the assumptions and models of an industrial economy. Chesbrough et al. (2003, 2006) have developed this further by arguing for a new business model based on a service dominant logic: ‘open service innovation’. In an open innovation setting, firms intentionally use internal and external sources of knowledge to turn new ideas into commercial products and services (Chesbrough, Vanhaverbeke et al. 2006). In the open-service paradigm, the value chain of Porter is still point of departure but co-creation and relationality are incorporated in the chain by letting processes and outputs interact with customers, external sources of

ideas, technologies and services. In Chesbrough's open service value chain there are still inputs, processes and outputs, but these are no longer interacting exclusively with internal support functions. Instead, they also interact with external sources of ideas, technologies and services which lead to open innovation (OI). One of the foundational premise of the service dominant logic, the customer as co-creator, plays a central role in the model for open-service innovation.

The service centered view is more customer-oriented which means that value is created through co-creation with suppliers, business partners, allies, and customers. This implies that value is defined by and co-created with the consumer rather than embedded in output. Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2000) understand co-creation as the joint creation of value by the company and the customer by allowing the customer to co-construct the service experience to suit his or her context. It is about joint problem definition and problem solving which requires continuous dialogue. The role of the company is to create an experience environment in which consumers can have active dialogue and co-construct personalized experiences; the product might be the same but the customers can construct different experiences. These kind of high-quality interactions that enable an individual customer to co-create unique service experiences with the company are the key to unlocking new sources of competitive advantage (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2000). Chesbrough (2011) also argues that co-creation with customers can create more meaningful experiences for customers, who will get more of what they really want. The role of customers in an 'open innovation process' is that of co-creators of service-experiences. However, companies can do more to involve customers in their innovation process than simply watch them. Many companies incorporate customers actively in the creative process and design of new products and services. This is not an easy task as much of the knowledge involved in providing or consuming services is tacit, gained from experience and difficult and expensive to write down (Chesbrough 2011). Customers can express their explicit needs (and to some extent their tacit needs as well) by talking about them or writing them down. However, tacit needs are expressed in interaction and this type of knowledge needs to be shared with the provider in order to transfer it. When customers share their tacit needs, a company has a unique insight that can help to differentiate in the market. Given that explicit knowledge is generally considered easier for competitors to imitate, tacit knowledge is increasingly seen as a key to competitiveness. (Weidenfeld, Williams et al. 2010). Managing co-creation effectively requires developing ways to share tacit knowledge. Tacit information is hard to convey, so repeated interaction between customers and suppliers is helpful and often necessary to transmit it (Chesbrough 2011).

3 OPEN EXPERIENCE INNOVATION

So far, the paradigm of open innovation has been discussed for manufacturing and service sectors. However, in addition we can identify and describe the economic offering of experiences because consumers unquestionably desire experiences, and more and more businesses are responding by explicitly designing and promoting them (Pine and Gilmore 1998). Experiences have always been at the heart of entertainment and tourism business like amusement-parks, theme-restaurants and nature based attractions. An experience occurs whenever companies intentionally stage it to engage customers. This is the difference from the service-experience discussed in the previous paragraph that occurs when companies deliver an intangible benefit for the customer. An experience however, is besides being intangible and beneficial, a memorable sensation as well. In that sense experience is a broader, more holistic concept than service.

The theoretical tools to be used for developing a framework for open experience innovation are 1) the open innovation paradigm, 2) tourism innovation literature and 3) insights from practice based perspectives. In the remaining of this paragraph I will discuss how insights from tourism innovation and practice-based approaches could contribute to a further development of the open innovation paradigm in the direction of experiences.

3.1 Innovation in tourism

Innovation research in tourism is a young phenomenon that, according to Hjalager (2010), can follow a converging or diverging line. The converging approach acknowledges that tourism can learn from the mainstream innovation trajectory while the divergent track states that tourism is different from manufacturing and many other services, and the investigation of innovation must be based partly or fully upon other research angles and instruments (Hjalager 2010). I would like to propose a middleway for this paper that acknowledges commonalities but unique characteristics of tourism as well. What innovation in tourism has in common with manufacturing and services is its networked character. In recent years tourism research has increasingly begun to address the structures and characteristics in innovation systems as well (Hjalager 2010). Hjalager applied the concept of innovation-systems to tourism case-studies (2007) and found inter-firm relations and cooperation crucial for the transfer of information and inspiration, and eventually innovation (Hjalager 2010). She shows that sustainable regional innovation systems are those able to enhance institutional learning, to build social capital on a continual base and that are able to deal with global changes. Tourism companies in innovation networks should therefore be flexible and open-minded without losing their local connections and sustainable relationships (Hjalager 2007). Especially in nature based tourism where global ecological and economical processes influence the local market for experiences.

Studies have demonstrated that innovation in tourism follows patterns that are to some degree different from those in manufacturing (Sundbo, Orfila-Sintes et al. 2007). One of the main observation of the differences is that most innovations in services are not technological, but consist of a change of behavior (Sundbo 1997). For that reason tourism innovations are difficult to establish and at the same time relatively easy to imitate (Hjalager 2002; Sundbo 2007), especially when front stage processes are highly visible and the level of technology is relatively unsophisticated (Hall, Hall et al. 2008; Paget, Dimanche et al. 2010). According to Hall (2008) innovation in tourism has a series of particular characteristics:

- Tourism services are mostly intangible, and simultaneously involve production and consumption.
- The total tourism experience is made up of, and defined by, multiple encounters with tourism providers.
- The tourism industry is heavily reliant on information exchanges, whether in terms of information provided to tourists or the information accumulated by tourism companies about tourists.
- Most tourism sub-sectors are labor-intensive and the quality of the labor input shapes the tourism experience.
- Organizational factors are significant in tourism. The multiple encounters with different service providers that constitute a significant part of the tourism experience may be coordinated via a web of economic, communicative and social networks of producers (Hall et al., 2008: pp. 11-13).

These specific characteristics of innovation in tourism make them unique compared to other types of services. Like innovation in manufacturing and services, tourism innovation can be further refined into different innovation-categories (Hjalager 1997; Hjalager 2010) Hjalager (2010) distinguishes between product or service innovation, process innovation, organizational, innovation, market innovation and institutional innovation in tourism. Additionally, Tidd and Bessant (2009) talk about paradigm innovation which encompasses changes in the underlying mental models that frame what the organization does (Tidd and Bessant 2009). All these types of innovations are carried out with the objective of enhancing value-creation of the tourism experience. As discussed in the previous chapter, Chesbrough's understanding of value-creation in the service economy has been developed from Porter's value-chain. However, the value creation process of a tourism experience seems not well explained by the chain configuration basically because of the non-sequential production process of a tourism experience (Flagestad and Hope 2001). Tourism is a phenomenon where different actors meet and ever changing values and meetings with other cultures drive all actors involved in the tourism experience to continuous learning and innovation. One characteristic of tourism is the simultaneous production and consumption of the service or experience. Customers (tourists), artifacts, nature, wildlife, guides and by-standers are all engaged in the practice of creating the experience which leads to the adoption of a practice based perspective on experiences and innovation of experiences.

3.2 Practice based innovation

The notion of practice has perceived prominence in the context of wider debates on knowledge, learning and innovation (Savigny, Schatzki et al. ; Swan 2002). Corradi has explored the field of practice-based studies and has distinguished between different 'labels' of focus. All labels have in common that they study practice; however, the angle can be different. Practice is a term that seeks to be descriptive of fundamental phenomena in society by understanding practice as an 'empirical object' or as a 'way of seeing', an epistemology (Corradi 2010). In this paper I will understand practice as an epistemology and work mainly with the label of 'practice based perspective' in developing a framework for innovation of nature tourism experience.

A practice based perspective could provide important additional insights into the nature and role of objects in innovation (Swan, Bresnen et al. 2007) because knowing, learning and innovation are understood as courses of action, materially mediated and situated within a field of human and non-human 'actants' (Gherardi 2006). Central to the practice perspective is acknowledgement of the social, historical and structural contexts in which knowledge is manufactured and it emphasizes the collective and provisional nature of knowledge (Corradi 2010). Practice is always the product of specific historical conditions resulting from previous practice and transformed into present practice (Gherardi 2000). In nature based tourism this context is made up of humans and non-humans, like for example artifacts or concepts or nature, and they play a special role in sharing knowledge, learning and innovation. Performing a practice, like creating a nature tourism experience, requires understanding this socio-technical context and how to align humans and non-humans to reach the goal of the practice.

From the practice-perspective, everybody and everything participating in practice contributes to the collective knowledge of that practice. Knowing and innovating have become material activities which means that sociality is related not only to human beings, but also to symbolic, cultural and natural artifacts (Corradi, Gherardi et al. 2010). Like humans, these non-humans can be mediators. They do not determine

collective action and do not act like actors but they take part in the action and ensure its continuity (Paget, Dimanche et al. 2010). The concept of practice thus adopted a renewed conception of materiality as a form of distributed agency that has an intimate relationship with humans (Gherardi 2009). When we look at knowing-in-practice, we define it as the mobilization of the knowledge embedded in humans and non-humans performing practices (Bruni 2007). From this perspective, innovations can be seen as new patterns of coordination between people and organizations, technologies and environmental phenomena (Leeuwis, 2003: 9). It implies a reordering of existing distributions of possibilities and constraints and the mobilization of new human and non-human resources and of sometimes unconventional, new alliances (Van der Duim 2007). This different configuration of people and things is the innovation and it is caused by a different working of interacting social and natural ordering processes. An innovation thus requires the altering of existing tourism-products, -services or -activities and working towards and implementing new ways of ordering them (Van der Duim 2007). These new alliances are formed in practice when people and ‘things’ interact, learn and change. For the tourism-business this means that in order to get high quality and original new material (innovations), all actors influencing the experience, should be deliberately and consciously included in the process. Hence, the ‘open-innovation’ network should consist of more than producers and consumers of tourism-experiences to create value that allows being competitive and different from other firms that offer the same product. Applied to nature tourism, this means that the interaction between tourism firms, customers, nature and wildlife and the quest for sustainability need to be taken into account in order to fully understand innovative processes in this sector. Once tourism innovators are aware of the potential of this enlarged network, they can intentionally design innovations based on what they learned during their interactions with other actors.

In an early paper, Gherardi (2000) explained practice as both our production of the world and the result of this process. In a later paper Gherardi (2009) followed up that practices can be analyzed in terms of their deliberate and non-deliberate consequences as they are being practiced. So, the practice of innovation can be understood as a collective (deliberate) production of the world. The results of producing the world depend on who’s included or excluded in the process. As a result, practice has become a way of seeing where the focus is on what people actually do rather than on what they say they do or on what they ought to be doing (Corradi, Gherardi et al. 2010). This seems especially relevant for understanding the relation between innovation in nature based tourism and the need to address sustainability where practice can reveal underlying values, knowledge and principles of the practitioners.

3.3 A framework for open experience innovation

In order to develop a model for open experience innovation, we should take the particularities of tourism and the practice turn in understanding organizational knowledge, learning and innovation into account. The linear understanding of service-value creation has evolved further towards a circular understanding of experience-value creation because of the non-sequential production process of a tourism experience. In staging an experience, the value-creating processes input, process and output embrace the ‘on stage’ experience as they happen simultaneously. This is the starting point to develop the open-service innovation framework further by including assumptions from practice based approaches.

From a practice perspective innovation can be understood as a changed alignment of humans and non-humans; they are all participants in the innovation and value-creation process. In nature based tourism, these non-humans, like nature and wildlife, are a central part of the staged experience and should therefore be included in understanding innovation and value-creation. Humans and non-humans are engaged in practice at the core of the value-creating process; in the experience. So, everybody and everything present in the experience influences the innovation and value-creation processes by means of learning new ideas and innovations that are directed in feedback-loops to the input, process and output of staging the experience. From the open-innovation paradigm follows that companies should deliberately include external ideas and innovations in their internal value-creating process. People working on creating the experience should therefore be understood as mediums to share knowledge and values from humans and non-humans that they learn during the experience, and bring them back into the organization so they can be incorporated in the next 'input, process and output' loop. During the staging of experiences, companies have 'access' to tacit knowledge and preferences of their customers. By sharing this tacit knowledge and using it to develop new ideas and innovations, companies can get a competitive advantage by delivering what the tourist wants and being different from other companies.

Especially in nature based tourism non-human actors are able to learn and change their behavior in reaction or in anticipation of a staged experience as well. For example whale-watching is an experience that consists of the close encounter between humans and whales. Cetaceans (whales and dolphins) are intelligent creatures capable of learning and have the capacity to recognize boats, adapt their behavior on previous experiences or see benefits from participating in the experience (curiosity of Humpback-whales or dolphins who like to 'ride on the waves' made by the whale-watching boats). Learning goes both ways and the knowledge and values that are created during these encounters are valuable input for developing new ideas and innovations to facilitate future experiences. The active engagement of other participants (human and non-human) in the experience means that individual customers rarely have the same experience, even though they are participating in the same staged experience. The individual experience is constructed through the interplay of the customers with all other humans and non-humans on stage and therefore will be constructed and interpreted differently by the different customers.

These assumptions can be visualized in the following framework for open experience innovation:

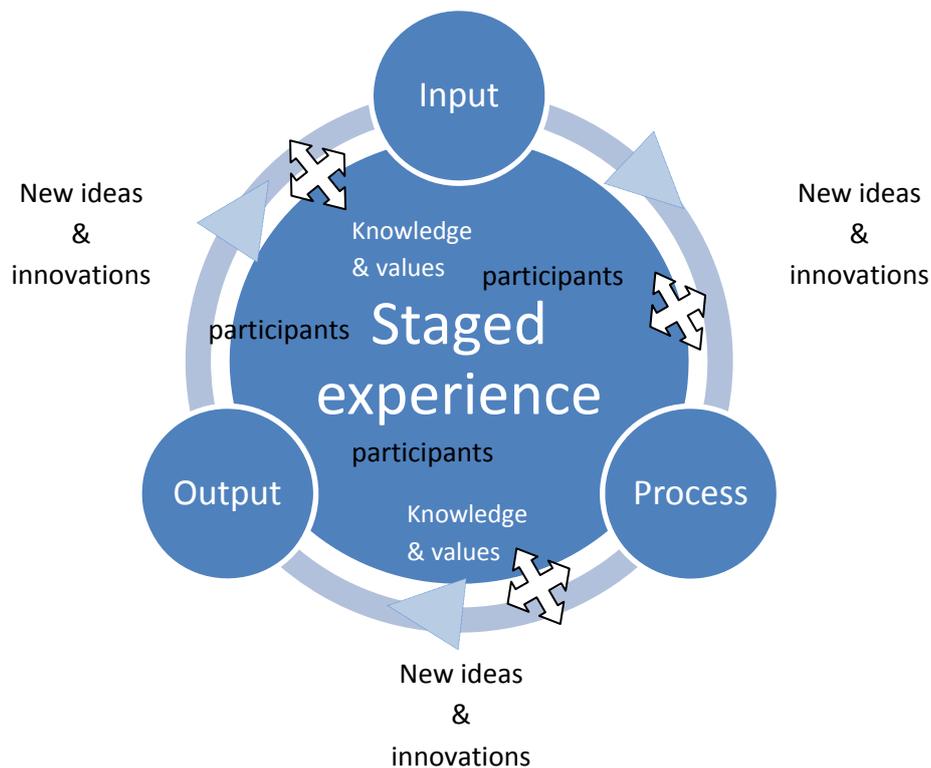


Figure 1: a framework for open experience innovation

The proposed framework advocates a more holistic perception of innovation of nature based tourism experiences than the chain based approach of open-service innovation. Actors are not so much understood like atoms with connections between them but more like body parts that need each other to exist and are able to produce a synergetic innovation network. The framework can be further illustrated with some examples from the nature based tourism experience of whale-watching. Whale watching has become a booming worldwide industry that attracts around 10 million people a year who spend more than 1.25 billion US dollars (Einarsson 2009). The number of whale-watchers is increasing by 12% a year, which is more than three times that of the overall tourism industry (Einarsson 2009). There are 495 communities in 87 countries and territories that now offer whale-watching tours. Seeing whales in their natural habitat is a dream of many people and a reason to visit places where you can go whale-watching. However, whales are an unpredictable resource for tourism firms. Their migration and visits to certain places depend on a wide range of variables like food, climate, mating etc. When whales visit a certain area less and less frequent, the tourism company has to innovate his or her product from ‘whale-watching’ to ‘nature experience’ not to raise false expectations or disappointed customers. Whales and other marine mammals get used to the frequent visits of whale-watching boats and their behavior changes accordingly. The product of the firm can change based on this interaction, for example from whale-watching on a boat to snorkeling with whales.

Including non-humans in the innovation process could help understanding the nature of some drivers and outcomes of innovations. For example, the role that non-humans play in the innovation and value-creation process could lead to the recognition of their intrinsic value. This might lead to abandoning a human-centered world-view and adoption a more eco-centered one. This wider, more open understanding creates space for approaching sustainability measures in nature based tourism that cannot be fully

understood using conventional frameworks of innovation. A whale-watching company in the Reykjavik area spends a lot of money and time on keeping an ecotourism-label which they consider 'the right thing to do'. They have invested a lot in sustainability and innovations of all types because of their set of values and ethical convictions: 'we are responsible for our environment and depend on nature for our income'. Their frequent interactions with nature and wildlife and encounters with foreign tourists with different values and knowledge had changed their way of doing business. Their innovations in the direction of sustainability can only be understood by including the role of nature, objects and other people in the process. The wider understanding of innovation and value-creation matters when sustainability is a political- or corporate objective. According to Wall (1997) most would agree that if tourism is to contribute to sustainable development it must be economically viable, environmentally sensitive, and culturally appropriate. A lot of different stakeholders and values are involved and the forms that this might take are likely to vary with location (Wall 1997). Sustainability is tailor-made by all actants involved and this is the key to being competitive in nature based tourism on a global scale; being differently local. It can give the tourism firm the opportunity to differentiate from other firms offering the same product but in a different way. Although sustainability issues are an agent of change that lead to innovations in nature based tourism that might result in sustainable development, careful management, compromises, and the balancing of competing interests will be required if this is to be the case. The basis of this careful management is knowledge and understanding of the different interests which can be gained by applying the conceptual framework proposed in this paper.

6 CONCLUDING REMARKS

The need for a tailor made model for innovation and value creation of nature based tourism experiences has led to the 'open experience innovation' model. The model takes the 'open service innovation' approach as a starting point and is developed further based on the characteristics of innovation in tourism and the practice turn in understanding learning and innovation.

An important issue in tourism is to differentiate, to offer a unique experience. This can be rather tricky as tourism products and innovations are easy to copy because they are more social than technological. One way to differentiate from competitors is by using tacit knowledge as a source for new ideas because tacit knowledge is much more difficult to grasp than explicit knowledge that everybody can read, see or hear. Successful access and implementation of such tacit knowledge helps nature based tourism firms to stay one step ahead of the (global) competition. Practice approaches can offer insight in how companies can get access to tacit knowledge and values to improve the experience they stage.

As argued in this paper, sustainability is vital for nature based tourism firms because they are directly dependent on natural and cultural resources. The need to address sustainability in nature based tourism can only be understood if values, objects and nature play a role in the innovation process. Enacted in a tourism experience, values and knowledge of everybody and everything involved come together. This induces learning and a feedback loop back to the tourism company performing the experience. Increased knowledge about the innovation process in nature based tourism, and a better understanding of sustainability as a driving force and outcome of innovation, has the potential to strengthen the practice of the open, co-creational process of innovation.

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