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CHANGE IN BUSINESS MODELS AND IMPLICATION ON UNIVERSITY EDUCATION IN TOURISM

MARIANA ASSENOVA

Geography of Tourism Department

e-mails: mariana@gea.uni-sofia.bg; mariana.assenova@gmail.com

Mariana Assenova. CHANGE IN BUSINESS MODELS AND IMPLICATION ON UNIVERSITY EDUCATION IN TOURISM

The paper presents the emerging new business models and provides examples for their evidence in tourism industry. The new business models discussed include those, based on sustainability and on the principle of circular economy, the sharing economy and collaborative consumption patterns, co-creation and dematerialization of product etc. The change in business models requires adaptation of the learning objectives in terms of knowledge, skills and competences of the students. On that bases current changes in the curricula for the education and training at Sofia University and the needs for future changes are discussed.

Key words: business models, tourism industry, tourism education.

INTRODUCTION

In the last decade the striving for sustainability, facilitated by the development of technology and the change of consumer behavior, has led to dramatic changes in the way value is produced and delivered in the tourism sector. In order to succeed in the competition regarding change trends, the tourism enterprises need to choose appropriate business models to guarantee their success based on their strengths and weaknesses, and the environmental opportunities and threats (Mosleh et al., 2015).

Although in some cases, change of a business model is forced by internal factors, most often business model changes are caused by external factors – political, economic, social and/or environmental. One of the key external factors is the transition towards Sustainable Consumption and Production (SCP). SCP is about using fewer resources, including energy and water, and producing less waste and pollution (UNEP, 2015a), resulting in resource efficient and cleaner production, life-cycle thinking, eco-innovation and eco-design, as well as in the development of sharing economy and collaborative consumption patterns. The rapid advancement of ICTs has considerably changed the role of each player in the value-creation process of the industry. The effective use of information technology is considered to be crucial for tourism businesses' competitiveness, as it influences their ability to differentiate their offerings, as well as their production and delivery costs (Soteriades et al., 2004). The adoption of ICTs demonstrated a great number of new opportunities in terms of business models, like e-business and e-commerce (Hanne, 2014). The contemporary tourist is more responsible and environmentally conscious, much experienced and always-connected. He expects to receive customer service, and also the opportunity to make additional bookings, not only before the trip but also during the trip (Rossini, 2014), thus also pushing the change of business models. As a result of those changes tourism industry is constantly evolving, appearing to be an attractive business sector for new start-ups and at the same time challenging the existing companies to maintain their market share (Hanne, 2014).

Due to the outlined driving factors and changes a number of challenges and opportunities for knowledge development and learning arise. Evolving and increased knowledge, specific skills and learning competences are required by the sector and they have to be considered when updating the curricula of university education in tourism.

METHODOLOGY

The paper aims at presenting and discussing some current and emerging business models in tourism industry, and their impact on the learning objectives, the content of tourism curricula and education initiatives of the Geography of Tourism Department at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski". For that purpose, a literature review is made to identify and systemize the new business models on the tourism market as an object of research. The specific subject of study is the adaptation of the learning objectives of university education in tourism in response to emerging business models and the respective knowledge, skills and competences that have to be acquired by students to comply with the rapid transformation of the market and the related job requirements. In that context the reaction of the Geography of Tourism Department is discussed in terms of curricula changes and non-formal education.

From methodological point of view, it is very important to clarify what a business model is, and what should be considered as a new business model. There is no consensus on what is a business model due to the dynamic nature of this concept, but most of the authors relate this concept to the creation and delivery of value by a business (Mosleh et al., 2015). The definition of UNEP (2014) ascertains that a business model describes how a company does business. It incorporates the strategic issues (such as strategic positioning and strategic

goals) into a conceptual model that explicitly states how the business functions. The business model allows designing and realizing the business structure and systems that constitute the company's operational and physical form. Similar is the understanding of Osterwalder and Pigneur (2009), stating that a business model describes the rationale of how an organization creates, delivers, and captures value, and is regarded as a blueprint for a strategy to be implemented through organizational structures, processes and systems. According to the same authors, a business model can best be described with 4 main areas of a business – customers, offer, infrastructure, and financial viability.

Fang (2013) and Mosleh et al. (2015) also consider the business model as a 4-dimensional system structure, modifying the idea of Osterwalder and Pigneur (2009). According to Fang (2013) it consists of customer interface, enterprise core strategy, strategic resources and the value network, while Mosleh et al. suggest the 4 main components to be product/service, customer interface, infrastructure management and financial model.

Thus, according to Fang (2013), business model innovation includes customer interface innovation, enterprise core strategic reform, strategic resources regaining, and restructuring and optimization of the value network, all of which belong to the technology innovation, management innovation, market innovation and system innovation. Fang (2013) also points out that entrepreneurs will have to combine various components, to set up a new profit system and a new standard through competition, so that the business model can be innovated, which represents a systematic innovation of a combination of all kinds of traditional innovation. The types of innovations in tourism are summarized as organizational innovation, product/service innovation, marketing and commercialization innovation, process innovation (Rodriguez et al., 2015; Carvalho and Costa, 2011).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

CURRENT AND EMERGING BUSINESS MODELS IN TOURISM BASED ON TECHNOLOGY DEVELOPMENT

Making an overview of the most important business models in the travel sector nowadays, Hanne (2014) concludes, that the main categories can be demonstrated as accommodations (such as hotels or other tourist residences), complementary services (including restaurants, cafes or museums) and last, but not least, distributors. The last Hanne (2014) further distinguishes into several subcategories, namely:

- Traditional travel agencies – their main function is to act as an intermediary selling tourism products to customers on behalf of suppliers, such as an airline or hotel. They provide a personal human relationship, which often enhances a feeling of trust and security. But the old mass holiday packages are no longer attractive to the “new” tourist and thus, a change in business strategy towards a more individual approach needs to be adopted.
- Online Travel Agencies (Expedia Inc., Orbitz, etc.) – they also act as an intermediary between travel-related products, as well as information and customers, but only operate online and do not engage in any offline channels to reach their target customers. They provide the possibility to put together customized holiday and saving of costs in terms

of travel agent fees. OTAs need to identify customers' expectations and desires in detail in order to ensure a high service quality and to reduce the degree of uncertainty which is often associated with online transactions.

- Computer reservation system (CRS)/Global distribution system (GDS) – CRSs are originally designed and operated by airlines, but nowadays further developed into other complementary services concerning tourism products. They have the ability to store current information about all available services and possess the right infrastructure for the transformation of these data. Their financial structure is based on a commission-per-reserve or flat for adhesion. Further developed into GDSs they enable direct access to suppliers and allow sales to travel agencies and partnership with companies, such as Expedia Inc.
- Infomediaries – newly developed business model supposed to help buyers and suppliers to understand a particular market. It allows sharing information and experiences about past vacations with other interested tourists on platforms, such as Tripadvisor or Trivago. They also offer virtual communities where people can initiate discussions and exchange experiences. Their financial structure is primarily based on revenue per advertising and sales.
- Platforms (AirBnB or Couchsurfing) – they provide a social network where apartment owners can offer their accommodations to travelers online. These platforms work similar to other social media systems in terms of creating own profiles of travelers for potential fit to owners.

Exploring the e-tourism business models Soteriades et al. (2004) identify the following developed and implemented business models:

- Brokerage in 3 forms: marketplace exchange (eg. Orbitz.com), demand collection system (eg. Priceline.com) and auction broker.
- Advertising model (portal).
- Infomediary model (e.g. Expedia, Travelocity, BargainHolidays and Travelselect).
- E-tailing, comprising e-store, e-mail, e-broker.

Another classification of e-business models, to a certain extent overlapping with the above mentioned, is presented by Gursoy et al. (2015), distinguishing the following types: agency, merchant, distressed inventory, demand collection and comparison shopping. Gursoy et al. (2015) briefly describe them as follows:

- Agency – traditional travel agency business model, intermediary between tourism providers and consumers. They charge a commission from providers by deducting a fee from the final product cost.
- Merchant – the e-mediary receives inventory from providers at a discounted rate and then add a service fee to the price to account for their own service and transactional costs.
- Distressed inventory – a subsection of the merchant model, the focus is on selling distressed inventory which is available from about 2 weeks, prior to the consumption date (eg. Lasminute.com).
- Demand collection – takes advantage of the information sharing and communication via internet to form a new way of pricing products and services by finding the balance between sellers ready to offer below the retail price and buyer's interest in trade-offs.

- Comparison shopping – typical for tourism e-mediaries, providing the service of comparing prices of flights, accommodation, etc, offered by a number of providers and other e-mediaries. The variations depend on how the revenue is gathered: (1) either through allowing providers to upload their data directly on the website or through sophisticated meta-crawlers to scan provider databases for cheaper rates; and (2) revenue model based on advertising, consumer service fee or commission fee.

The shift from desktop to mobile internet access is also having a significant impact on the travel industry making smartphones and tablets an important booking channel, as well as customer service tool (Rossini, 2014). This technological shift is affecting travel companies, and online travel agencies in particular, resulting in the development of their mobile services and even of mobile travel agency (MTA business models). Rossini (2014) distinguishes different types of online travel intermediaries which can be defined as mobile travel agencies:

1. Online travel agencies only active in the mobile channel and focusing on last minute reservations at discounted rates (eg. Hotel Tonight, Blink).
2. Online travel agencies expecting mobile devices to become their main distribution channel in the next few years and, therefore, focusing on them in terms of investments on apps development and promotion (eg. OTAs, Ctrip and eLong in China).
3. Evolution of online travel agencies into mobile travel agencies – a new business model increasingly built around the central role of mobile devices and of consumers always being connected and reachable through them beyond the time of the booking throughout the whole travel experience.

EMERGING NEW BUSINESS MODELS IN TOURISM AS RESPONSE TO SUSTAINABILITY TRENDS

SCP connects environmental and social concerns with economic processes and markets on both, the supply (production) and demand (consumption) side. From the production side, SCP refers to a set of cleaner production practices and the eco-efficiency of production systems, enabled by innovation and technological change. SCP also implies changing the consumption patterns of households and governments through changes in lifestyle and individual consumer behaviour and choices, as well as through changes in procurement strategies in the public sector (UNEP, 2015b). The business models for SCP are classified by Rabbiosi (2015) as follows:

1. Sustainability: triple bottom line, mainstreaming of sustainability in business decision-making.

Triple bottom line is accounting reporting that consists of three Ps: profit, people and planet. It aims to measure the financial, social and environmental performance of the corporation over a period of time. The UN Global Compact Initiative and sustainability reporting is an example of non-financial transparent corporate sustainability reporting to stakeholders, involving many tourist companies.

The mainstreaming of sustainability in decision-making presupposes lifecycle approach, rethinking of the supply and value chain, development and application of a business model, shaped by a new business strategy, which incorporates sustainability throughout all business operations, known as eco-innovation (UNEP, 2014).

2. Business models based on the principle of circular economy (closing the loop), sharing economy and collaborative consumption patterns.

The circular business models include: (a) Circular Supply Chain – provide renewable energy and bio-based or fully recyclable materials in place of traditional inputs to enable regenerative use of the same resources again and again; (b) Recovery and Recycling/reverse logistics – recover useful resources or energy from disposed products or by-products, effectively turning waste disposal costs into resource management revenues for any business; (c) Product Life Extension – extend the working life of products and components by repairing, upgrading or reselling them to transition from product to lifecycle revenue generation. Opportunities also exist to reduce the environmental impact of existing products by changing the way in which they are used. Two such opportunities that are gaining momentum, are through product service system (PSS) and the growing field of collaborative consumption (UNEP, 2015a).

PSS is an approach that has the potential to lessen consumption or consumerism. With PSS, markets are created for utilities as opposed to products. The premise behind this shift is that consumers seek the service of a product and not the product itself. The focus on fulfilling customers' needs rather than on product purchases, and the shift is from product ownership towards product utility and, consequently, towards a product's impacts throughout its lifecycle leading to cost reductions and efficiency gains. In PSS consumers' choice is driven by both, environmental and economic interests, and consumer demands are competitively satisfied in a more environmentally sustainable manner (UNEP, 2015a). Typical examples are car-share and bike-share programmes all over the world. An interesting example of PSS is the chemical leasing model applied by Ecolab in cleaning (incl. accommodation establishments), where clients pay per part cleaned, instead of the volume of solvents.

Collaborative consumption (CC) is a business model, in which consumers also choose to pay for access to assets instead of full ownership (LearnAirbnb, 2016). It can be likened to old market behaviours of bartering, sharing, lending and swapping, but is done through network technologies. The acceptance of this behaviour by consumers is driven by a number of factors (peer-to-peer technology, resurgence of community, environmental concerns, cost consciousness) and governed by a set of principles (trust between strangers, belief in commons, idling capacity, critical mass). Examples of growing CC trends, such as AirBnB (an online platform for sharing accommodation across the globe), HomeAway (connecting homeowners and property managers with travelers who seek the space, value and amenities of vacation rental homes as an alternative to hotels), Couchsurfing (bypassing the typical hotel experience by staying at the home of a local and learning about their culture), Zipcar (a global car-sharing program) and Uber provide significant scope for reduced consumption. Collaborative consumption model is also emerging in tour guiding (Vayable, Viator, ToursByLocals, AnyRoad) and F&B (Kitchensurfing, Cookening, EatFeastly) (Ivanova, 2015).

Some models are based on the fact that no material is used to deliver the same level of functionality to the user. It could be done by sharing, borrowing and the organization of group services (eg. by hotels) that facilitate and cater for consumer needs. Dematerialization is enabled by digital technologies (eg. by replacing physical newsprint or brochures with virtual online content).

3. Focus on radical innovation through partnerships and collaboration.

Digital technologies radically transform the value chains, so that they no longer need additional physical resources to grow rather than establish strategic alliances among e-mediaries in the form of channel relationships (access of distribution channels of others), collaborative relationships (collective distribution of products by competitors, “co-opetition”), communicative partnerships (use of infomediary channels and portals), complementary relationships (distribution and cross-sell of related products and services) and converse relationships (distribution of unrelated products) (Gursoy et al., 2015).

4. Democratization of production (maker movement and 3d printing).

The maker movement is the umbrella term for independent inventors and designers running own small businesses, dedicated to creating and selling self-made products, combined with open-source learning, contemporary design and powerful personal technology like 3-D printers. Apart from creation, co-creation could also be the core of emerging business models through development of new concepts and products (goods and services), together with customer, business partner and expert stakeholders. The consumption of products involves and depends to some degree on customer co-creation at the mental inner level. In the experience economy customers more frequently expect to be involved in the value creation of products and other interactions (Alsos et al., 2014). Creative tourism is by definition similar to the maker movement or “do-it-yourself” as it involves making or doing things oneself. Another example is the recently developed business models for the re-use of cultural objects for tourism, based on responsive web application that helps to recreate a painting with friends and family, upload and share it “twinned” with the original for others to enjoy (Kreinberger et al., 2014).

5. Social innovation and inclusive economy.

These business models are based on engaging private sector by government for the creation of new goods and services that meet social needs (eg. energy or water access, education) or target price sensitive consumers with unmet demand in order to improve their lives.

ADAPTATION OF THE LEARNING OBJECTIVES IN RESPONSE TO EMERGING BUSINESS MODELS

The challenge of learning to adapt to the new trends and changing business models goes beyond the domain of formal educational systems and programmes, touching all aspects of life, all sectors and every region (UNEP, 2015a). But university education in tourism also needs to adapt its learning objectives in terms of knowledge, skills and competences of the students.

Tourism sector is nowadays characterized by accelerated changes, lack of predictability and multiple economic, financial and environmental crises, which imply different type and forms of knowledge and learning, helping entrepreneurs, managers and employees to adapt to the constant demand for (at least partial) transformation. There is a need for constant identification of ongoing knowledge processes, understanding ways of productive engagement with various “knowledge holders”, testing and evaluating impacts of resulting innovations. This presents demands for new competencies and for educational systems that facilitate such competencies (UNEP, 2015a). The specific needs transformed in learning objectives in terms of knowledge, skills and competences, are summarized as follows:

- Knowledge – broadening the learning orientation from understanding of the problem, analyzing it, identification of solutions, focusing on the proposed solution to understanding the consequences of the intervention (UNEP, 2015a), understanding the business model concept and its evolution, current and emerging business models in tourism, awareness of sustainability approaches and technology in tourism operations; in-depth knowledge on ICTs and their application in tourism; and involving tourists in co-creation of products.
- Skills – abilities to systematically examine real life situations, relating them to strategic actions while engaging trans-disciplinary knowledge and keeping long-term perspective (UNEP, 2015a), to analyze and generate new business models, to work in an online environment, plan and expand online operation, to develop and maintain communication and partnership relationships.
- Competences – related to values and attitudes, life-long evolving learning, creatively put knowledge into practice and co-invent new SCP and/or technological systems together with other actors.

CHALLENGES OF TOURISM EDUCATION AT SOFIA UNIVERSITY

The Geography of Tourism Programme at Sofia University “St. Kl. Ohridski” was launched in 1967 and since the introducing of bachelor and master degrees in Tourism in 1993 the undergraduate programme of 4 years duration was revised many times – in 2003, 2006, 2011 and 2013. Multidisciplinary approach to curriculum design is applied by combining solid theoretical knowledge with practical experience (Dogramadjieva et al. 2015), including a whole semester industrial placement in the 3-rd year of study, considered as the main competitive advantage. In the last several years a number of questionnaire surveys among graduating students have been carried out to assess the level of their satisfaction with the curriculum content, the quality of the education process and the contribution of different subjects (including sustainability aspects) in acquiring the knowledge, skills and competences expected by the sector (Marinov and Dogramadjieva, 2013; Dogramadjieva et al., 2016). Special attention has been paid to the benefits and problems of industrial placement of the students (Vodenska and Minkovski, 2005; Marinov, 2008; Minkovski and Yaneva, 2016; Marinov et al., 2017).

Detailed analysis of the current curriculum structure and content of undergraduate students in tourism at Sofia University within the context of higher tourism education in Bulgaria and the “philosophic practitioner” concept has been made by Dogramadjieva et al. (2016). The specially conducted questionnaire survey aimed to identify and compare the students’ and the employers’ perceptions, regarding general importance and goals of higher tourism education and particularly, the balance of job-specific skills and competences, and broader conceptual knowledge in the undergraduate tourism curriculum at Sofia University. The results show that both groups agree that higher tourism education should prepare students to provide quality service, as well as to occupy managerial positions in tourism industry, but also develop key values, such as culture tolerance, social justice and environmental responsibility. They also evaluate transferable interpersonal, organizational and leadership skills higher than technical tourism-specific ones. Another important result is that employers appreciate higher the

holistic understanding of tourism and the broader interdisciplinary approach ensuring wide knowledge in different tourism-related fields, as well as profound understanding of tourism as a system (Dogramadjieva et al., 2016). The main direction of improvement should be the integration of more practical elements in the education process and collaboration with business representatives. Furthermore, industrial placement employers' recommendations (Marinov et al., 2017) indicate that they expect a better development of students' certain personal characteristics (acquisition of self-confidence, stronger initiative, responsibility etc.), as well as development of knowledge (deepening the theoretical knowledge, foreign languages, handling reservation systems, better acquaintance with the trends and innovations of tourism market etc.) and skills (especially communicative ones).

Based on the results of the above mentioned research done by the members of the departments and to respond to the transformation of the market and the emerging new business models, the Geography of Tourism Department has undertaken a number of initiatives in several directions:

1. Redesign, update and development of new curricula.

In 2013 a thorough review of the bachelor and master degree curricula was made, aiming at optimization and including new courses. A new discipline "Sustainable Tourism Development – Standards & Certification" was proposed to the bachelor students as an elective, and the "Computer Information Systems in Tourism" received increased class hours. In 2016 the master degree curricula were revised and 2 of them were reduced by one semester. A new curriculum was developed for bachelor graduates in other professional fields. E-marketing was included in an existing discipline.

2. Update of disciplines' content and inviting practitioners as guest lecturers.

The disciplines' syllabi and content are annually updated by lecturers, adding new topics and reflecting on new developments. Representatives of all GDS and selected touroperators, operating in internet environment, are invited to present the systems and to demonstrate their functionality.

3. Involving students in research and applied projects.

In 2014 and 2015 the bachelor students were involved in research projects contacted with external donors – survey of cruise tourism in the Bulgarian section of the Danube River (2014), pilot testing of the European Tourism Indicator System (ETIS) in the Danube Region (2014) and in Sofia Capital Municipality (2014–2015), and full implementation of ETIS in the Danube Region (2015). In the form of educational field practice 72 students were involved in research activities, representing 71% of all enrolled 2nd year students. Students acquired knowledge about the sustainability issues in the destinations, the role of monitoring and the use of indicator systems. They developed their capacity and skills for undertaking market research, team working and communication, work planning and reporting, critical evaluation and analysis. They also developed their competences by doing a real job through building the sense of self-responsibility and responsibility for others, attitude towards sustainability, work discipline, self-organization and independence, self-confidence and creativity (Assenova et al., 2016).

4. Non-formal education.

Being aware of the sustainable tourism management and monitoring, a significant number of students were motivated to take the opportunity provided by the department in cooperation

with the Association of Bulgarian Touroperators and Travel Agents to become certified sustainability managers through the online course of Travelife Sustainability System. Despite the extremely short deadline in January 2016 altogether, 70 3rd- and 4th-year students successfully completed the test and were awarded personal certificates as sustainability managers.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on literature review emerging business models on the tourism market are identified and systemized and their influence on the change of learning objectives of university education in tourism is discussed, reflecting on the experience of the Tourism Programme at Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”.

The literature review and the results of studies related to curricula effectiveness in terms of learning objectives show that tourism as a complex phenomenon nowadays is even more sophisticated to comprehend, generalize and explain. The changes due to technology development, environmental and social concerns in the sector are so accelerated, that practitioners are far ahead in putting creativity into action than scientists and university lecturers could systemize the existing practices and transfer adequate knowledge to the students. This discrepancy exerts pressure on the educational system which is too conservative to respond to the current business needs. To compensate the lag several measures are recommended:

- Rethink and redefine the learning objectives in terms of knowledge, skills and competences.
- Regular update of the curricula (every 2–3 years) and courses content (annually).
- Maintain constant links with the sector and invite guest lecturers from the tourism business.
- Involve students in real research and applied projects.

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