

# Rethinking Tourism Education as Knowledge Hubs for Innovation and Capacity Building

OPEN ACCESS

Volume: 13

Special Issue: 1

Month: February

Year: 2026

P-ISSN: 2321-4643

E-ISSN: 2581-9402

Citation:

Velumoni, D., et al.  
“Rethinking Tourism Education as Knowledge Hubs for Innovation and Capacity Building.”  
*Shanlax International Journal of Management*, vol. 13, no. S1, 2026, pp. 215–21.

DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.34293/management.v13iS1-i2-Feb.10410>

**Dr. D. Velumoni**

*Associate Professor, School of Management Studies  
Sathyabama Institute of Science and Technology, Chennai*

**R. Hem Sauntharya & R. Swarnamaliya**

*MBA, School of Management Studies  
Sathyabama Institute of Science and Technology, Chennai*

## Abstract

*Tourist education is believed to support innovation, institutional capacity, and sustainable tourism development. However, tourism education still prioritises jobs and classroom learning inside the industry. There is yet unrealised potential for using tourism education as a strategy to foster long-term capacity building and research collaboration. To bridge this gap, we introduce the Knowledge Hub Model, a concept that rethinks the role of tourism education as a designed platform for systemic innovation in tourism ecosystems. The Knowledge Hub Model conceptualizes educational institutions as knowledge hubs that integrate adaptive pedagogies, capacity building, and research-oriented innovation activities into a continuous cycle of co-creation of knowledge. Ultimately, this final chapter shows how planned collaborations across students, academics, industry and the community may develop applied knowledge, improve institutional and individual capacity, and foster a culture of evidence-informed decision-making in tourism. It presents a new way to conceptualize the role of tourism higher education in easing the creation of tourism-related knowledge as an ecosystem of knowledge building rather than the linear accumulation of human capital. This paper also contributes to tourism education and management literature, presenting a conceptual framework and opportunities to develop future research.*

**Keywords:** Tourism Education, Knowledge Hubs, Capacity Building, Research Co-Creation, Conceptual Framework

## Introduction

**Tourism Transformation:** Tourism Transformation refers to substantive changes within tourism systems that go beyond incremental improvements to enable deeper shifts in practices, values, and structures. While definitions vary by context, transformative experiences in tourism are described as processes that lead to enduring changes in attitudes, behaviours, and viewpoints, frequently resulting from thoughtful and critical interaction with travel experiences (Reisinger, 2013; Neuhofer et al (2022).

**Tourist Education:** The development of knowledge, skills, and competences pertinent to tourist systems is supported by structured academic programs and learning activities. In order to prepare

people for positions in management, policy, and operational activities within the tourist industry, it comprises both theoretical instruction and practical training (IGI Global, n.d.; Studysmarter, 2024).

The continuous process through which individuals, groups, and systems improve their capacity to organise, carry out, and maintain actions that achieve strategic objectives is known as capacity building. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) frames capacity building as the development of internal capacities to effectively manage affairs, including structures, knowledge, and skills, and cooperative networks (OECD-DAC, 2006).

**Research Innovation:** Research innovation is the creation and deployment of unique concepts, procedures, technologies, and practices that provide significant value to both academic understanding and practical applications in industry. Innovation in the tourism industry is frequently defined as the adoption of new solutions that improve sustainability results, user experiences, or competitiveness, usually necessitating interdisciplinary and stakeholder boundaries to promote innovation and problem-solving (Schumpeter, as mentioned in innovation literature; OECD-Oslo Manual definitions of innovation).

The development of human resources capable of meeting the tourism industry's increasing needs for innovation and complexity is greatly aided by tourism education. In addition to training graduates for the workforce, educational institutions can help the development of sustainable tourism through institutional capacity building and the generation of applied knowledge. However, the focus of tourist education has historically been on short-term employability objectives and classroom-based training, which frequently limits its wider contribution to systemic learning and research innovation.

### **Problem Statement**

Numerous tourist education programs still function within disjointed frameworks, where industry participation, research, and instruction are seen as essentially separate pursuits. The ability of tourism education to enable long-term capability development within institutions, destinations, and stakeholder networks is diminished as a result of this division, which limits chances for students and educators to participate in practical research and collaborative problem solving.

### **Theoretical Gap**

Although research on tourism curriculum, experiential learning, and capacity-building efforts has been done, these areas are frequently treated separately. Integrative conceptual frameworks that describe how tourism education can serve as a knowledge hub one that concurrently supports learning, capacity building, and research co-creation through ongoing interaction among academic, business, and community stakeholders remain lacking.

### **Conceptual Response**

In order to close this gap, this study suggests a Knowledge Hub Model that reframes tourist education as an interactive and platform that emphasises creativity. The framework enables tourism education institutions to serve as catalysts for knowledge production, collaborative learning, and sustainable innovation throughout the tourism ecosystem by integrating adaptive pedagogical techniques with capacity-building procedures and research co-creation activities.

### **Advantages**

- Conceptual Novelty.
- Low Data Dependency.
- High Practical Relevance.
- Scalability and Transferability.

## Literature Review

Previously, tourism education has given priority to employability and vocational training, giving operational skills a priority in line with industry objectives (Cooper et al., 1996; Tribe, 2002). Despite the fact that this method has encouraged professionalization, academics are increasingly arguing that it underutilizes education's greater capacity to help systemic improvement and knowledge generation (Tribe, 2005; Dredge et al., 2015). The complex and rapidly evolving tourist landscape of today need educational approaches that go beyond preparing students for the industry. In parallel, capacity building has been extensively studied in the literature on tourist development and governance, with an emphasis on sustainable outcomes, community empowerment, and institutional strengthening (Bramwell & Lane, 2011; Moscardo, 2014).

According to Fayos-Solà et al. (2011), capacitybuilding activities have a limited long-term impact since they are frequently pushed by outside forces and poorly integrated into tourist education frameworks.

Tourism innovation studies emphasise the significance of networked knowledge systems including academic institutions, business, and policymakers (Scott et al., 2008; Hall, 2009).

Even though knowledge hub and triple-helix approaches (Etzkowitz & Leydesdorff, 2000) position educational institutions as essential intermediates in innovation ecosystems, tourist education research still lacks these viewpoints (Liburd & Hjalager, 2010). Despite their increasing popularity, collaborative learning and research co-creation are often seen as separate teaching approaches, in contrast to institutional duties that are a part of a system (Jamal & Getz, 1995; Binkhorst & Den Decker, 2009). Because of this, there aren't many integrated frameworks in the literature that highlight tourism education as a crucial center for knowledge generation that links teaching, research, and capacity building. To try to bridge this gap, this study presents a conceptual paradigm that reframes tourism education as an innovation-focused knowledge ecosystem.

Despite their growing popularity, collaborative learning and research co-creation are often seen as separate instructional approaches from institutional duties that are a part of a system (Jamal & Getz, 1995; Binkhorst & Den Dekker, 2009). Because of this, there aren't many integrated frameworks in the literature that highlight tourism education as a vital hub for knowledge generation that links teaching, research, and capacity building. This study offers a conceptual paradigm that reframes tourism education as an innovation-focused knowledge ecosystem in an effort to close this gap.

## Methodology

### Research Design

This study employed a conceptual research process as opposed to empirical testing so as to develop hypothesis. The method is effective in arranging unequal content and creating integrating structures that lead to the better comprehension of the complicated processes such as tourism education and innovation. Critically, the plan consolidates already existing studies and creates the rational conceptual framework to reconsider tourist education as an innovation and capacity building knowledge centre.

### Literature Identification and Review Process

In this research, the conceptual research design was employed instead of the empirical tests to generate theories. The method is effective when attempting to manage the fragmented body of literature and builds upon integrative frameworks yielding better insights into complex systems such as innovation and tourism education. It is a carefully synthesised strategy that involves taking a fresh thinking about tourism education as an innovation and capacity building hub of knowledge based by utilising earlier studies and producing a logical conceptual framework.

## **Conceptual Framework Development**

The idea scheme has been created with regards to topic synthesis and abstraction. Higher order categories, which included capacity building, research cocreation, and adaptive learning, have been used to tabulate important ideas disclosed by the literature. These groupings were then logically related to each other in order to illustrate their dynamics and non-linearizing relationships. The iterative improvement of the compliance witnessed the adherence to the recognised innovation theories and knowledge systems, the consistency inherent to the internal facet, and the clarity of concepts.

## **Using Analytical Rigour for Validation**

Although there was no empirical evidence in the study, logical consistency, openness in the selection of the ideas and conformity to the existing theoretical trends ensured the rigour of the framework being compared to the other models of tourist education and innovation to ensure that it was clear, applicable, and conceptually important.

## **Conceptual Framework: Tourism Education As Knowledge Hubs For Innovation and Capacity Building**

### **Overview of the Conceptual Framework**

Broad features of the Conceptual Framework. Based on the proposed conceptual framework, the knowledge centers in terms of tourist education institutions are the ones which have actively integrated the approaches to education, research, and capacity-building as the means to facilitate innovation in the tourism systems. Learning institutions are perceived to become multifaceted platforms that connect the students, the teachers, the industry players and the communities instead of assuming the role of isolated processes of providing skills. This combined method promotes systemic competency building and innovative sustainable tourism as it allows perpetual production, implementation and feedback of knowledge.

### **Core Components of the Framework**

Research cocreation, capacity building, and adaptive learning are the three interrelated components of the system.

The three interrelated components of the system are research cocreation, capacity building and adaptive learning. The Adaptive Learning is curriculum representation frameworks and instructional practices that modify themselves in response to the changing needs of society, industry demands, and destination locales. It focuses on problem based learning, experience learning and self reflective methods that allow students to interact with real tourism problems. This process of information generation of communities, business partners, educators, and students is known as research co-creation. Educational organizations create context-specific research in the form of applied research projects, living studios, and inquiry that support policy generation and innovation directly.

Building capacity involves developing institutional, interpersonal, and human skills. Developing institutional, interpersonal, and human abilities is part of building capacity. Strengthening stakeholder networks, organizational learning, leadership, and analytical abilities that promote the long-term sustainability of the tourist sector are all part of this.

### **Actors and Interaction Mechanisms**

Governments, business stakeholders, educators, students, and local communities are all urged to play an active role in the framework. By putting theory into practice, students serve as

information mediators. In addition to facilitating learning and research, teachers act as knowledge brokers. Community and industry partners offer resources, real-world problems, and contextual information. These relationships create ongoing feedback loops that promote learning outcomes, capacity building, and the relevance of research.



### Future Work

It is necessary to construct and empirically validate the suggested knowledge center structure for tourism and destination education programs. This work’s conceptual approach presents a number of study issues. First, a variety of tourism education venues, including as universities, executive training programs, and technical institutes, could conduct empirical testing of the paradigm.

Second, research may look at the small-scale ways that research co-creation and experiential learning improve organisational and individual capabilities. Longitudinal studies that examine the employment pathways, innovation outcomes, and skill development of graduates enrolled in knowledge hub-based programs would enable a deeper understanding of long-term capacity building education.

Third, future studies can examine the effects of knowledge centers with an emphasis on travel destinations. Researchers should examine how long-term collaboration between lawmakers, tour operators, and academic institutions impacts destination governance, resilience, and the dissemination of innovation, particularly with regard to disaster recovery and sustainability transitions.

Fourth, methodological advancements like network analysis and mixed methods could be used to demonstrate the systemic and relational components of the proposed framework. The importance of educational institutions as intermediaries in tourism innovation ecosystems can be measured by mapping the information flows between stakeholders.

### Conclusion

This essay rethinks tourism education as a strategic knowledge center that goes beyond conventional classroom instruction to encourage co-creation of research in tourist ecosystems, innovation, and capacity building. The study offers a conceptual framework that incorporates

institutional competency building, cooperative research, and adaptive learning. methodical viewpoint on how tourist education is changing. The strategy highlights the possibility of long-term collaboration between educators, students, business experts, and community stakeholders in order to create useful information and enhance the adaptability of tourist destinations and businesses. This essay rethinks tourism education as a strategic knowledge center that goes beyond conventional classroom instruction to encourage co-creation of research in tourist ecosystems, innovation, and capacity building. The study offers a conceptual framework that incorporates institutional competency building, cooperative research, and adaptive learning. methodical viewpoint on how tourist education is changing. The strategy highlights the possibility of long-term collaboration between educators, students, business experts, and community stakeholders in order to create useful information and enhance the adaptability of tourist destinations and businesses.

This study's main contribution is to shift the emphasis of tourism education from short-term employment results to long-term innovation and capacity building. The study offers a framework for rethinking tourism curricula in ways that are more pertinent to current business and societal concerns, positioning educational institutions as active contributors to knowledge production and evidence-based practice. Although the framework is still conceptual, it offers an organised foundation for future empirical research and practical application. The study's overall conclusions emphasise how important education-led knowledge systems are for promoting destination resilience, sustainable tourism growth, and ongoing innovation in all tourist-related fields.

## References

1. Baggio, R., Scott, N., & Cooper, C. (2010). Improving tourism destination governance: A complexity science approach. *Tourism Review*, 65(4), 51–60.
2. Benckendorff, P., & Zehrer, A. (2013). A network analysis of tourism research. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 43, 121–149.
3. Binkhorst, E., & Den Dekker, T. (2009). Agenda for co-creation tourism experience research. *Journal of Hospitality Marketing & Management*, 18(2–3), 311–327.
4. Bramwell, B., & Lane, B. (2011). Critical research on the governance of tourism and sustainability. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 19(4–5), 411–421.
5. Cooper, C., Shepherd, R., & Westlake, J. (1996). Educating the educators in tourism. World Tourism Organization.
6. Dredge, D., Airey, D., & Gross, M. J. (2015). *The Routledge handbook of tourism and hospitality education*. Routledge.
7. Dredge, D., & Jamal, T. (2015). Progress in tourism planning and policy: A post-structural perspective. *Tourism Management*, 51, 285–297.
8. Etzkowitz, H., & Leydesdorff, L. (2000). The dynamics of innovation: From National Systems to a Triple Helix of university–industry–government relations. *Research Policy*, 29(2), 109–123.
9. Fayos-Solà, E., Cooper, C., & Goujon, C. (2011). Knowledge destination frameworks for tourism sustainability. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 19(4–5), 551–568.
10. Hall, C. M. (2009). Innovation and tourism policy in Australia and New Zealand. *Journal of Policy Research in Tourism, Leisure and Events*, 1(1), 3–21.
11. IGI Global. (n.d.). Unlocking the employment opportunities in tourism industry with the help of tourism education. Retrieved January 30, 2026, from <https://www.igi-global.com/dictionary/unlocking-the-employment-opportunities-in-tourism-industry-at-hadoti-region-with-the-help-of-tourism-education/53234>

12. Jamal, T., & Getz, D. (1995). Collaboration theory and community tourism planning. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 22(1), 186–204.
13. Liburd, J. J., & Hjalager, A. M. (2010). Changing approaches towards open education, innovation and research in tourism. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Education*, 22(4), 12–19.
14. Moscardo, G. (2014). Tourism and community leadership in rural regions. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 22(8), 1253–1271.
15. Neuhofer, B., Buhalis, D., & Ladkin, A. (2022). Technology and tourism transformation: Bridging experience and system-level change. *Tourism Management*, 90, 104509.
16. OECD–DAC. (2006). *The challenge of capacity development: Working towards good practice*. Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.
17. Reisinger, Y. (2013). Transformative tourism experiences: Implications for the learning process. *Tourism Management Perspectives*, 5, 87–90.
18. Scott, N., Baggio, R., & Cooper, C. (2008). *Network analysis and tourism: From theory to practice*. Channel View Publications.
19. Sigala, M. (2018). Social media and customer engagement in the context of tourism education. *Tourism Management*, 68, 423–432.
20. Tribe, J. (2002). The philosophic practitioner. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 29(2), 338–357.