Knowledge Management and Knowledge Transfer in a Tourism Destination

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Abstract: The paper compares the work of the UNWTO Knowledge Network with Czech tourism practice. It shows that our tourism practice is behind in the implementation of knowledge management. The paper describes the environment as a source of data and information in respect to knowledge. One of the important sources of knowledge is academic research. The paper describes the current approach of academic research to the needs of tourism practice, including the knowledge creation in a tourism business and in the academic sphere. A prerequisite for the successful implementation of knowledge management in the practice of tourism is, on the one hand, a change in the method of academic research (finding problems with subsequent problem solving) and the application of a suitable knowledge transfer model on the other. The basis for such a model is a network concept of the destination, and accepting risks in the field of knowledge management.

Keywords: knowledge management; knowledge sharing; knowledge transfer; tourism

JEL Classification: Z3; M2; J5

1. Introduction

In order to successfully face global challenges, the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) at its Algarve forum held on 1-3 June 2011 in Vilamoura, Portugal, stressed the significance of taking advantage of innovation and providing for the full use of networks and information-communication technologies into practice. The issue is apparent in regional development, climate change, tourism impact on the environment, product innovation, or competitiveness. All that, however, requires competent decision making based on relevant knowledge. The forum gathered an UNWTO network of people, so called UNWTO Knowledge Network, or UNWTO.Know, which agreed on forming a community supporting technology, innovation and knowledge management in tourism. Discussion and negotiations were transferred into guidelines and policy programs known as the UNWTO Algarve Consensus. Resulting concept Tourism and Science: Bridging Theory and Practice now has eight papers (UNWTO, 2011).

Knowledge management is a hot issue in general and tourism is no different. Already in 2015, there was a conference on knowledge management in tourism and hospitality held in Prague. That is going to be followed in 2022. The primary goal of the conference is sharing knowledge and practical experience in gastro services, including new trends and innovations, but also risks (ICKMTH, 2022). The conference is going to gather academic scientists and researchers to exchange and share experience and research results on all aspects of knowledge management in tourism and hospitality.

The UNWTO.Know platform as well as the above-mentioned conference inspired the author in this paper goal setting. Literature analysis combined with orientation survey revealed that there is a gap between the academic research and practice needs. Based on this, the paper tries to describe what needs to be included in the discussion with companies, should the academic sphere be involved in the implementation of knowledge management in tourism companies. For this purpose, at first knowledge, knowledge management system and knowledge transfer are characterized. Furthermore, the need to create an effective system of knowledge sharing and transfer in tourism is justified.

1.1. Knowledge, Knowledge Management

The word "knowledge" does not have universal definition. The difference comes from different multidisciplinary perspectives, where knowledge is discussed. We may use the commonly accepted definition of knowledge as provided by Davenport and Prusak (1998, p. 5): *"Knowledge is a fluid mix of framed experience, values, contextual information, and expert insight………embedded not only in documents or repositories, but also in organizational routines, processes, practices, and norms"*. The definition simply shows its academic origin. Yet, there is also a concept of usable knowledge, which is important for the needs of practice. It is based on the fact that *"a person is sufficiently sure of the correctness of the knowledge or belief so that it will be used to make decisions, to solve problems…"* (Hunt, 2003, p. 107).

Probably the most used classification of knowledge was brought by Polányi (1967), who distinguishes knowledge: implicit (tacit, or also personalized knowledge, i.e. knowledge coming from personal experience), and explicit (that is knowledge that can be specifically expressed in numbers, words or rules). On the other hand, Narvaez et al. (2017) classifies knowledge by characteristics such as what, why, how and who: declarative knowledge (know-what), is fact-based knowledge; causal knowledge (know-why), knowledge that is more specialized; procedural knowledge (know-how), is knowledge related to our abilities to do something; knowledge of resources (know-who) is probably the most important as it shows who can handle the task and how. In addition to the type of knowledge, their content categorization is also important, for example based on the work of Nonaka et al. (2000) or tourism-specific according to Bouncken and Pyo (2003).

Naturally, knowledge must be appropriately managed, or handled, to provide for the best results. That is called knowledge management, or KM. Knowledge management is a subject of many publications, where it is mostly defined as a set of processes consisting of the generation, identification, collection, processing and sharing of individual and collective knowledge using information technology (e.g. Ciampi, 2008). Dalkir (2005) defines KM as a planned and systematic coordination of sources (people and technology), processes and organizational structures in order to create value. Knowledge transfer (KT), on the other hand, involves variety of interactions between individuals or groups of people, between teams or organizations (e.g. Joshi et al., 2004).

From the practical point of view, it is desirable to design a pragmatic model of KM. A decision making model, for example, may be used. Choo (2001) came up with the "Known organization" concept, which provides a picture on the organization from information

perspective, i.e. how an organization utilize information to overcome external changes and to boost internal growth. Another model which can be used in practice is the one proposed by Zack (1999), which applies knowledge gap (what a corporation should know) and a strategic gap (what a corporation should do, or can do). In addition to the above-mentioned models, there are other KM models, e.g. Dalkir (2005), Evans et al. (2014) etc.

1.2. Tourism Industry, Tourism Enterprise and Tourism Business Environment

Tourism industry, or travel industry, are human activities related to travelling to other locations. That can be domestically or internationally, for leisure, business or social purposes. It closely relates to accommodation (hoteling), hospitality and the transport industry. For many countries it is the main source of economic income, or GDP (UNWTO).

The primary element of tourism is a destination, i.e. target place of our journey, regardless of its purpose, such as culture, sport, or leisure. Štumpf (2015) states that destination management is formed by a variety of businesses, which all mutually provide services to tourists. These businesses may be, according to Roth (2003 in Štumpf, 2015, p. 57): „information services: information centres; gastro services: restaurants, hotels, bars; accommodation services: hotels, hostels, camps, etc.; transport services: regional buses, lifts, boats, etc.; entertainment services: sport centres, cinemas, theatres, etc."

Naturally, there are also trends visible in tourism that form its development, such as environment protection and security. These have impact on tourists, ecosystems as well as tourism-related activities. Additionally, there is a virtual world, such as the Internet and social media, where tourists search for opportunities to spend their time and money, but also provide retrospective thoughts or reviews of their experience. In order to gain competitive advantage, service providers must differentiate among tourists to provide specific and one-to-one targeted marketing, but also communicate with them. These trends require analytical skills to identify and recognize client´s demand for information.

According to Damonte et al. (1991), there are two interactive and mutually interrelated segments in an organization's external business environment. One is the operating environment (Porter's 5 Forces), and the other is the remote environment (it depends on conditions such as general political, economic, social and technological).

All this shows that doing business in tourism is heavily influenced by the environment. Therefore, any business to be competitive must monitor its environment in order to be able to quickly react to business opportunities, or threats. In addition, current business environment is very unstable, or even turbulent (e.g. Volberda and van Bruggen, 1997). Yet, besides the turbulent concept, there is also VUCA concept. VUCA has become the standard description of contemporary environment. It also has huge impact on KM. VUCA factors are described by many authors, such as e.g. Ambler (2012), Kambil (2008), Mack et al. (2016), Sullivan (2012) etc. deal with VUCA concept from the management perspectives.

1.3. Environment as a Source of Data and Information

Each environment can be understood as a source of data and information that is scattered in it. Internal environment of a business is represented by data and information processes on

personal, financial, or marketing issues. These processes are under the control of management. But even in this environment there is some degree of uncertainty, resulting from individual decisions, human errors, and communication, or ambiguity. For internal environment, the most important is knowledge on marketing and financial issues, but also risk management, and crisis management.

Tuomi (1999) issued a paper, in which talks on data, information and knowledge hierarchy. Tuomi claims that data come up after we have information, and information come up after knowledge is gained. It is in opposite to general understanding that data are represented by simple facts, while the data become information after their analysis and handling. Tuomi claims that already in the identification and collection processes of even primary data there is always some knowledge already present.

The relationships between knowledge, information and data is given, for example, by Becerra-Fernandez and Sabherwal (2015).

1.4. Knowledge Management in Tourism

Despite the fact that the role of knowledge in business management is generally recognized, in tourism the situation is quite different (Vikrant, 2018). Author also says that tourism had been very careful in its acceptation and implementation of KM, and that because of these reasons:

- There is ineffective relation between tourism and academic research. Businesses do not cooperate with researchers. In fact, there is even a question whether researchers are really interested in knowledge transfer.
- Tourism may be reluctant towards KM for its excessive time requirements and extensive financial costs.
- The KM concept has been proposed primarily for manufacturing industries and large companies. It does not respect specifics of accommodation and gastro services.
- As Grizelj (2003 in Vikrant, 2018) claims, the KM concept ignores networking, which is so characteristics for tourism destinations.

Also, according to Vikrant (2018), academics and businesses look at KM differently. The main difference is in the understanding of knowledge and its dissemination. Businesses accept mainly explicit knowledge, represented by numbers and figures, which may be easily handled. In other words, businesses look whether knowledge is static (allowing for routine work), or dynamic (when these change according to situations).

Tourism is also very specific for its balance between clients´ expectations and reality, we may also say a "supply-demand" balance. It is necessary to create a well-organized system of knowledge and its management in a destination, so that subjects in the destination can: create knowledge on the destination (for its economic, cultural, historical and environmental values), gather and analyse existing knowledge (especially knowledge on good-practice), provide access to knowledge to all stakeholders and general public, etc.

Tourism is often represented by small and medium enterprises (or SMEs). These generally have simple internal procedures. That also means that SMEs may be more flexible

and more acceptable towards internal changes. That, however, does not necessarily mean that implementation of knowledge management is easy. That is supported by McAdam and Reid (2001), or Wong and Aspinwall (2004).

As McAdam and Reid (2001) showed, there is somehow rigid understanding of KM at SMEs. There is a lack of systematic approach to knowledge sharing, and benefits of KM are seen rather externally (market environment) than inside an organization. Also, important findings from KM and tourism can be found in a paper published by Wong and Aspinwall (2004), who state that: SMEs often do not understand KM concept, and SMEs are too slow in the application of KM, i.e. KM agenda is often not prioritized. According to authors, SMEs are more suitable for KM implementation. It is often for their simple organizational structure, direct communication, and smaller number of employees. Their disadvantage, however, prevail, because managers often do not have competences and skills to promote implementation of KT.

Based on a recherche of available literature related to KM and KT in tourism, the following can be stated:

- Less attention is paid to KT in tourism than in other sectors (e.g. Xiao and Smith, 2007).
- KT in tourism refers to the transfer of knowledge between different regional actors (e.g. Czernek, 2017; Lopes and Farinha, 2020; Raisi et al., 2020; Ruhanen et al., 2021).
- SMEs in tourism have certain limitations related to the absorption of knowledge and innovations created at academic sphere (Carlisle et al., 2013; Pikkemaat and Zehrer, 2008).
- Research in tourism encounters obstacles arising from the characteristics of tourism, esp. seasonality, fragmentation, diverse workforce, low acceptance of research results, low attention to innovation etc. (e.g. Hjalager, 2002; Shaw and Williams, 2009).

1.5. Networking and Analysis of Tourism Destination

Tourism is often described as a network of interconnected organizations, which mutually cooperate to produce goods or provide services. The network shows relations as bonds between certain entities. These bonds represent also flows of data, information and knowledge. Bonds may be described or analysed qualitatively, or quantitatively.

Qualitative approach is used by e.g. Žemla (2016), Sørensen (2007). According to Žemla (2016), a destination is a primary element of tourism, it is a place of interactions between businesses and institutions. Naturally, destinations may also be seen as a network. That is also claimed by Halme (2001), who adds that a business alone cannot apply effective competitive strategy and sustainable development.

Mathematical (quantitative) approach to networking is applied by e.g. Baggio (2008), D´Agata et al. (2012). Bąkowska-Morawska (2014), or Del Chiappa and Baggio (2015) point out that networks are a suitable model for the process of KT and knowledge sharing both in the destination and in tourism company.

2. Methodology

The research methodology is based on procedures set by Peffers et al. (2007), which consists of the following six steps: 1) Problem identification; 2) Goal definition for theoretical solution; 3) Design and development; 4) Demonstration; 5) Evaluation; 6) Communication. Due to the complexity of creating an effective KT model that would have practical use in tourism, the author of this paper applies only the first two steps.

Ad1) Problem identification

The author from the recherche available literature learned that tourism is behind in the application of KM and KT. This has been supported by a simple survey of seven entrepreneurs active in accommodation and gastro services (these were small entrepreneurs located in the Hradec Kralove region). The research was carried out at the end of 2021. The survey was performed in the form of mutual discussions to find out the opinion on the issue. There was no statistical analysis made at this point. Besides KM, the orientation survey also mapped the level of managerial competencies and marketing skills. This type of survey was chosen as the most common type of qualitative research. It did not aim to describe the data set or verify hypotheses, but only to verify certain values – esp. whether or not managers have awareness of KM and whether they have appropriate competences in these areas.

The orientation survey was built on the question: "Have you ever thought about the use of knowledge management in your business practice?" The positive answer would be followed by other questions such as: "Would you be interested in further research on the use of KM in your business?" (see steps 2–6 of the methodology). Since there were mostly negative answers, the author concluded that entrepreneurs have very low awareness of working with knowledge and have no understanding on knowledge management. The survey also showed that tourism practice is primarily interested in knowledge coming from the academic sphere, which could help in solving common business problems.

Ad2) Goals definition for theoretical solution

The primary goal of the paper is to assess the knowledge transfer from academic institutions as the primary source of knowledge to tourism practice and suggest ways to improve the system of sharing and transfer of knowledge to tourism companies. Additionally, the design of a knowledge transfer model for tourism destinations will be outlined. The paper should also stimulate a discussion on the transfer of knowledge at the professional public.

Ad3) Design and development

Before the actual design of the KT model for tourism destinations, it will be desirable to evaluate the existing theoretical KT models and provoke a professional discussion. Only then the design a suitable model for practical use in tourism should be proposed (for a certain type of tourism business/destination). In the phases of KT model design and development, there should be a comparison with other models (to assess similarities, or differences) incl. identification of positives and negatives of the proposed KT model.

Ad 4–6) Practical use of the proposed model, its evaluation and communication

These steps will be related to the selection of a specific company/destination for the subsequent research. The proposed model will respect many factors that play role in knowledge transfer. For example, Hamid and Salim (2011) list some 28 factors related to the knowledge source and its recipient, management, communication and relationship. However, Frank et al. (2015) present 39 such factors.

3. Results

In the knowledge transfer, depending on the situation and requirements, the source and receiver of knowledge can exchange roles. Therefore, it is appropriate to take a quick view of the creation of knowledge in tourism enterprises and in academic institutions.

3.1. Knowledge Creation in Tourism Enterprises

Even before KM era tourism businesses used knowledge, but only the KM concept brought up the required systematic procedures. Gathering knowledge in a business is usually performed individually by personnel itself. Knowledge is used for business results, such as make products or provide services. In tourism business, knowledge is applied to problem solution and decision making. This explicit knowledge is set into internal documentation, such as procedures and manuals. However, new knowledge may be created by interpretation of generally available knowledge, or by innovation (e.g. Pitra & Mohelská, 2015).

This indicates that KM requires skilled workforce. However, one may ask: *Is also a small enterprise, which is active in the tourism sector, able to effectively gather or generate knowledge?* The answer may be found in a study published by Grimsdottir and Edvardsson (2018), who wrote: 1) Lack of or limited access of SMEs to primary sources of information may result in that they use second-hand sources, such as literature, conferences, research. 2) Only few SME employees are able to gather and analyse knowledge within their daily duties. Managers might do that, but they have other responsibilities as well. 3) Due to limited internal sources in SMEs we may expect that external sources play vital role in knowledge creation.

3.2. Knowledge Creation at Academic Institutions

The concept of KM was introduced at the academic ground. Then, KT to commercial subjects also comes to mind. Academic institutions study tourism environment primarily for educational purposes; research results are published and thus given to the public. Research is made in combination with other disciplines, such as marketing, management, economy, sociology, psychology, which is called multidisciplinary approach. At the same time, tourism enterprises are also studied from many perspectives, including environmental impact, or client satisfaction, and that by applying various methods and techniques, such as interviews, questionnaires and surveys, or observations. As a result, academic work comes up with new theories, models, or tools. That may be "Business process" (Raghu & Vinze, 2007), "Knowledge based- firm" (Gudas, 2012) or "Knowledge intensive firm" (Kemp, 2006).

New knowledge is made upon research performed by applying new hypotheses and their verifications. Explicit knowledge of academic staff can be found in textbooks or papers. Tacit knowledge, on the other hand, is expressed as author´s experience and attitude and is

often presented in academics' articles. New knowledge does not necessarily come up as a new method, or procedure, but may also be unique know-how, formerly not considered in practice. Business knowledge is always put to the test as it succeeds in solving business problems or in formulating strategies (successful or less successful). The academic environment, on the other hand, is often cut out from these events. Therefore, academic-based knowledge should be first examined in business environment, and only then made available to the commercial world.

3.3. Knowledge Transfer from Academic Institutions to Tourism Business

Recherche of available literature showed, that today, we may see that focus is laid on technical and technological KT than to that in tourism. Liubchenko et al. (2019) come up with a proposal of university v. business relations. It might be used in tourism as well.

Schofield (2013) describes KT between university and commercial sector. She says that in order to reach effective KT common features of both sides are necessary. On the university side, these are the level of general as well as very specific knowledge, supported by motivation to perform primary research. The industry, on the other hand, has resources, such as financial ones, susceptibility to absorb new knowledge and promote changes.

Practical discussions of the author with experts revealed that tourism businesses do not seek for KM issues. They primarily deal with economic issues and core business existence (that was true especially at the time of coronavirus pandemic era). Therefore, implementation of KM from academic ground to tourism practice is subject of a change in the attitude of academic research. This is possible under certain conditions: Instead of the currently applied so-called top-bottom attitude, the focus should be made on the opposite, i.e. bottom-up. New hypothesis or idea, made up in a research room, or laboratory, may be well prepared, but may also still be misinterpreted, and also there are often biases in human thinking, as suggested by Kahneman et al. (1982). This approach is fine for primary research and its publication, but the use of the results in practice is highly questionable.

More suitable is therefore bottom-up approach. Researchers should first gather problems dealt with in tourism business practice and these bring up to the academic ground for further analysis and research. Results of the research should be transferred to daily life. The problem may be already at the very start as both, the researcher and the businessman, may not have the same understanding or opinion. This indicates that even academics should use some KM model, while it is very difficult to implement a KM model if the academics do not already have one inherited or implemented.

3.4. Prerequisite for the Design of a Knowledge Transfer Model for Tourism Destination

When making a KT model, one should always identify and evaluate knowledge flows in a business. According to Snider and Nissen (2003, cited in Koskinen & Ajmal, 2008), the knowledge flow is critical for the business success. The Snider and Nissen framework describe three kinds of knowledge flows: Knowledge as solution – it flows across organizational and geographical space. In this view, knowledge is created and used by other stakeholders or processes. Knowledge as experience – it flows across time. In this view,

knowledge is first created and stored and only later it is used. Knowledge as socially created – it is created through social interactions, i.e. between people.

According to Joshi et al. (2004), KT occurs when knowledge spreads from one entity to another or when one entity is affected by the experience of another entity. The authors confirmed the idea that KT takes place through the processes of education and learning. They also emphasize the core purpose of KT.

Research concerning with the application of KM in tourism practice and the subsequent design of the KT model should be carried out in the following steps:

1. Find the degree of KM awareness in various tourism companies/destinations at the management levels.
2. Define and understand the knowledge requirements in tourism companies/destinations.
3. Examine the level of procedures for the exchange of knowledge among employees in tourism companies/destinations (advantages, disadvantages).
4. Find out whether knowledge exchange is encouraged at the level of enterprises and destinations, in order to provide better tourism services.
5. Examine the level of customer satisfaction with tourism services in a destination.
6. Propose appropriate measures and proposal to improve KM practices in tourism destination.

4. Discussion

KT models were developed by researchers with the aim of providing truly effective knowledge flows. There are many models currently known, such as Hansen (1999), Kwan and Cheung (2006), Liyanage et al. (2009), Narteh (2008), Szulanski (1996) etc. Even though none of these models is related to tourism, the author of the paper has chosen two of them that could serve as a topic for creating a KT model for tourism destinations: Szulanski (1996) and Liyanage et al. (2009).

According to Szulanski (1996), there are four stages in the transfer process: initiation, implementation, ramp-up and integration. The initiation stage is represented by the needs to take action in order to gather knowledge. In the implementation stage knowledge is transferred in from its origin, or source. Such transferred knowledge is then used in practice, allowing for process fine tuning. That is the ramp-up stage. Then the integration stage starts, and the knowledge is routinely applied into practice. Szulanski also claims that there are four attributes that may impact KT: Characteristics of the transferred knowledge: knowledge specifics, or uniqueness. Characteristics of the source of knowledge: motivation and credibility. Characteristics of the recipient knowledge: cumulation and retention capacity of knowledge. Characteristics of the transfer itself: organization, interactions and inter relations. The reason for choosing the Szulanski model for creating a KT model for tourism destinations is its connection with the factors influencing the KT process, as stated in the methodology.

The KT model of Liyanage et al. (2009) is a process model built on holistic approach (it reflects the fact that knowledge transfer may be influenced by many factors, both positive,

but also negative). KT is then realized in these steps: Knowledge identification (identification of suitable knowledge and its value). Knowledge acquisition (relates to the ability of gathering external knowledge). Knowledge transformation (knowledge conversion so that it is useful for the recipient, and potentially initiate further knowledge gain or improvement). Knowledge association (connection with internal organizational requirements). Knowledge application (acquired knowledge is applied in practice). The primary idea of the model is that should KT have any value, then it must be successfully transferred to recipients, and it is also applied in practice. That may be reached by effective communication and cooperation. Additionally, important is timely and effective feedback, in which knowledge value may be enhanced not only for its recipient but also knowledge source. The reason for choosing the Liyanage model is, in addition to the stated above, that it includes three important elements: networking (effective KT is subject of close interactions between participating entities, i.e. individuals, organizations); influencing factors (that can positively or negatively influence the process of KT), and performance measurement, which assesses the accuracy and quality of acquired knowledge to identify the efficiency of the KT process.

Risks associated with knowledge should not be neglected when evaluating any KM and KT model, as risks can be somewhat detrimental to the whole knowledge process. Ferraris (2019) highlights four key risks in KM: risk of knowledge obsolescence, risk of knowledge loss, risk of knowledge scarcity and risk of knowledge leakage.

5. Conclusion

The paper is focused on the KT between the academic institutions as the primary source of knowledge and tourism practice. The author suggests ways to improve the system of sharing and transfer of knowledge to the tourism companies through a suitable KT model. The paper points that tourism companies are lagging in systematic work with knowledge, and thus also in the application of knowledge management. Therefore, it would be appropriate to implement the concept of the knowledge transfer in tourism practice.

The academic sphere should play the key role in the process of implementing KM/KT into practice, providing that it remakes its current research approach. The so-called "bottom-up" approach is recommended. Its essence is first to identify specific problems that tourism subjects are facing, and then to look for suitable solutions that can be applied in practice. Before the actual application of KM in practice, it is necessary to verify KT model at a selected tourism company. Then, a methodology that would allow the extension of KM and KT processes according to the business characteristics and its requirements, should be created.

This is going to be the topic of author's further research. The author will design a theoretical KT model for the tourism destination and subsequently test it on a selected tourism company/destination. Based on the results suitable KT methodology will be defined. The basis of the KT practical model in tourism will be a network concept, based on a network of relationships between sources and recipients of knowledge, network of tasks and network of data, information and knowledge flows. The model will also include a Knowledge Risk Management approach accepting risks in the field of knowledge management – the risk of

obsolescence, loss, scarcity and leakage of knowledge according to Ferraris (2019). Further interviews will be made, which should include, for example, these questions: *How informed is the company´s management about KM and KT? What kind of training and education is done internally? Which business functions and activities are related to KT?* etc.

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