

Collaborative Innovation Within The French Business Ecosystem Of Mountain Sport Tourism

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The French market of Mountain Sport Tourism (MST) based its competitiveness on: 1) the comparative advantage which the mountain affords, 2) the advantages built (e. g.: infrastructures; Fabry, 2009), and 3) the companies capacity of innovation. In addition, the French MST activity has the characteristics of a specific Business Ecosystem, in the sense of James Moore (1996), with a large number of players: companies (services and industries) institutions (public and private), customers (national and international). The latter have converged in recent years towards the idea that collaborative innovation is fundamental for their economic development and international competitiveness. The business ecosystem theoretical framework (Moore, 1996) allows to analyse the role of market players interactions and co-evolution in the emerging of collaborative innovation. Hence, the aim of this research is to highlight the underlying logics emanating from the players (companies, local authorities and institutions) interactions to identify the factors that accelerate or block the collaborative innovation within this business ecosystem. The main issue of this research concerns the capacity of French business ecosystem of sport tourism to create or not the favourable conditions and players' interactions enabling the emergence of collaborative innovations.

Entrepreneurial and institutional, collective and individual approaches to innovation may refer to different economic cultures, and interests. The business ecosystem suppose that the different logics should converge around one or several pivotal players and to a joint vision (Moore, 1996). In these conditions, the business ecosystem may create a favourable climate for clients' satisfaction and market growth. It is therefore in the interest of players to develop investments conducive to collaborative innovation (e.g. Aerospace). The research was based on focus groups and semi-directive interviews. The survey covered 3 focus groups and 21 hours interviews with business leaders, representatives of professional organizations, local authorities, and experts belonging to the French MST business ecosystem.

The results highlight the inability of market, hierarchy (business) or public policy coordination to produce ecosystem innovations in MST, although actors are aware of its importance for the challenges to be met. This business ecosystem works well in terms of commercial development, but it still cannot produce strategic collaborative innovation. The prevalence of firms' competitive positions creates distrust for each other and thus blocks the favourable interactions to the emergence of collaborative innovation projects. Also, the firms' innovation still allows their market grow even if the conditions of international competition is becoming much harder. In other words, the companies' innovation is still an attractive growth driver, this does not encourage them to converge their efforts towards collaboration on innovation. The fact is that the switching from the model of firms' innovation to an ecosystem innovation in MST represents presently an important transaction costs (higher than the firms' current benefits; Bouhaouala, 2017).

In conclusion, the results show weaknesses in the governance of innovation within the mountain sport tourism business ecosystem and a lack of alignment on a shared vision by all players. It is therefore necessary to find innovative governance and financing methods favourable for collaborative innovation projects' emergence. The current models based, on public contributions (calls for projects and grants) and on companies' partnerships, do not match the real costs and the specific tempo of the mountain sport tourism ecosystem innovation process. In all cases when the change costs of the innovation model are higher than the benefits the companies prefer to keep their model as long as they can maintain a profitable market position. Thus, the role of the business ecosystem pivotal players is to reduce the distrust between players in order to enhance the collaborative innovation.

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