Tourism innovation policy in Spain: the evaluation of a cluster experience

Evolution and transformation in tourism destinations: Revitalisation through innovation?

International Workshop of the Regional Studies Association
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Research done under the framework of the project (2012-2014):

“Methodology, criteria and implementation of the cluster theory in consolidated tourism areas: innovation, competitiveness and territorial synergies”.

1 GENERAL FRAMEWORK AND STUDY OBJECTIVES

2 THE AEI PROGRAMME

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4 RESULTS PRESENTATION

5 CONCLUSIONS
GENERAL FRAMEWORK

- A research gap: the study of tourism innovation from a policy perspective. Still fragmented and largely ignored (Hjalager, 2012).

- Limited literature on tourism innovation policies (Hall, 2009; Hjalager, 2010, Hall&Williams, 2008). Empirically weak or vague evidence on outcomes or effectiveness.

- Symptomatic of a more general lack of research on tourism policies (Velasco, 2011).
1 STUDY OBJECTIVES

- Evaluate the implementation of an innovation policy Programme applied to tourism: the Innovative Business Groups (Agrupaciones Empresariales Innovadoras, AEIs for its initials in Spain).
- Evaluate the policy outcomes from a qualitative perspective: both funding beneficiaries and policy responsible.
- Determine the nature of the activities and type of innovation resulting
- Identify barriers and facilitators to policy objectives and outcomes
THE AEI PROGRAMME

Competition and innovation in the business sector through a cluster approach

Innovation policy

Spanish R+D+I Plan 2008-2011

Promote cooperation in R+D

Tourism policy

Tourism Plan Horizon 2020

Promote innovation in tourism

Specific programme of action under the Tourism innovation Programme. 30 different sectors participating by 2013. 13% belong to the tourism sector.
The AEIs are defined as ‘a combination of *businesses* and public or private *training and research centers* in a *geographic area* or *specific industrial sector* involved in processes of *collaborative exchange* to obtain benefits from the execution of *innovative joint projects*’ (AEI Base Regulatory Order 2691/2006, subsequently updated).
The Programme provides financial support for four main types of actions:

a) Preparation of strategic plans.
b) Coordination and management structures for existing AEIs
c) Development of specific projects to strengthen businesses’ potential for innovation
d) Promotion of joint actions between Spanish AEIs and as well as clusters in other EU countries.
THE CLUSTER ECOSYSTEM

AEIs with a clear thematic specialisation

AEIs specialized in new technologies

AEIs linked to a territorial area

Source: Ivars, Rodríguez y Vera (unpublished material)
Fig. 1 Life cycle of the AEI Programme, 2008-2013

Phases
1. Objectives formulation
2. Take off
3. Economic crisis
4. Decisions about future

Funding allocation

<table>
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<th>Phases</th>
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<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>1.898.566,75</td>
<td>1.797.545,85</td>
<td>Radical reduction of public funding</td>
<td>Compulsory renewal of the cluster condition after 4 years’ trajectory for most AEIs</td>
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<td>2009</td>
<td>First projects development</td>
<td>1.797.545,85</td>
<td>Decrease of the firms’ activity. Innovation, not a priority</td>
<td>Uncertainty</td>
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<td>2010</td>
<td>Availability of funding</td>
<td>497.790,82</td>
<td>Barriers linked to external and internal funding</td>
<td>OPTIONS</td>
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</table>
|        | Great expectations with the Programme. | 497.790,82 | Disappointment and, in some cases, sense of unfulfilled expectations | Continuity. Re-evaluation of objectives and renew commitment for another 4 years (at a more realistic scale). Towards a maturity phase?
| 2011   | Initial illusion: active participation of actors in the strategic plans | 399.572 | 377.663 | Disappearance and formal end of the cluster condition. |
| 2012   | 833.369,00 |  |  |
| 2013   |  |

Continuity. Re-evaluation of objectives and renew commitment for another 4 years (at a more realistic scale). Towards a maturity phase?

Disappearance and formal end of the cluster condition.

Incapacity to overcome barriers (loss of interest and commitment questioning, cluster managers might have disappear., etc.)
3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A) Internal documents relating to Programme management facilitated by Segittur.

B) Management responsible for the tourism AEIs. Semi structured phone interviews to 28 AEI managers from the 33 officially listed. November and December 2012.

C) Face to face interviews with the two main individuals in Segittur responsible for supervising the overall AEI Programme for tourism.
4 RESULTS

Fig. Main activities undertaken by the tourist AEIs
4 RESULTS

» Networking activities
» Projects involving basic research (exploratory studies): 11
» Three types of R+D projects involving a prototype development: 30
  » never implemented
  » implemented at pilot stage
  » in a commercialization stage
» Most common types of innovation in projects: organizational and product/service innovation
» Predominance of projects with a technological component
» Incremental rather than radical innovations
RESULTS

» Difficult to quantify the outcomes of the Programme.
» Abandonment of 11 AEIs.
» Lack of tangible innovations: only 4 projects only being commercialized.
» Intangible benefits:
  » Changes in cognitive and behavioral attitude towards innovation and cooperation (work processes).
  » Innovation awareness and initial impulse to R+D projects.
  » Access to new and complementary knowledge.
Fig. Positive impacts of the AEI Programme

- Promotion of sinergies and cooperation among actors
- Initial impulse to solid structure
- Reflection about innovation
- Access to funding
- Being an AEI means added value, recognition
- Relation with other AEIs

Fig. Evaluation of the AEI Programme

- Very positive
- Positive
- Neither positive or negative
- Negative

Author's interviews/survey

Universitat d’Alacant
Universidad de Alicante
Where the cluster idea has been more effective and the innovation outcomes more successful?

>> Resources availability
>> Type of innovator
>> Previous collaboration trajectory
>> Regional policies in innovation
>> Bottom-up impulse
4 RESULTS

EXTERNAL AND INTERNAL BARRIERS TO INNOVATION

EXTERNAL BARRIERS

- ECONOMIC CRISIS
- TOURISM SECTOR STRUCTURAL AND CULTURAL BARRIERS
- TOURISM AND INNOVATION POLICY/STRATEGY
- AEI PROGRAMME INADEQUACIES

INTERNAL BARRIERS

- FINANCIAL (LACK OF INTERNAL FUNDS)
- STRATEGY RELATED
- STRUCTURAL RELATED

RESULTS
CONCLUSIONS

» Empirical evidence of the gap between policy theory and action (outcomes).

» Policy outcomes initially disappointing but a more nuanced evaluation recognizes positive benefits overall.

» Artificial clusters linked to a funding opportunity?

» This policy has stimulated the propensity to innovate. After, different policies need to focus on the intensity.

» Economic crisis a severe testing ground but there is a vicious circle of mutually reinforcing barriers to innovation.
Thank you very much for your attention!

Further queries:

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