

# **TOURISM MICROENTREPRENEURSHIP**

**Edited by** Duarte B. Morais

BRIDGING TOURISM THEORY  
AND PRACTICE

**VOLUME 12**

**TOURISM  
MICROENTREPRENEURSHIP**

# BRIDGING TOURISM THEORY AND PRACTICE

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BRIDGING TOURISM THEORY AND  
PRACTICE VOLUME 12

# TOURISM MICROENTREPRENEURSHIP

EDITED BY

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*North Carolina State University, USA*



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# INTRODUCTION: HENCE TOURISM MICROENTREPRENEURSHIP

Duarte B. Morais

## ABSTRACT

*Microentrepreneurs have played a role in the tourism industry for a long time; however, they are now becoming more visible and increasingly influential stakeholders due to information technologies that enable them to reach prospective visitors, and because their economic activity is more transparent and taxable by governments. Nevertheless, tourism microentrepreneurship is still understudied, and destination practitioners are largely unprepared to fuel microentrepreneurial development and to integrate these genuine, local experiences with the formal sector components of the industry. This chapter provides an introductory overview of related knowledge as a basis for identification of themes in research on tourism microentrepreneurship.*

**Keywords:** Tourism microentrepreneurship; sharing economy; destination stewardship; informal sector; endogenous development

## INTRODUCTION

Seminal authors such as MacCannell (1973), Turner and Ash (1975), and Urry (1990) highlight that tourists seek genuine experiences in authentic destination communities. Traditionally, however, only the most adventurous tourists were able and willing to venture out of comfortable, convenient, and affordable tourist bubbles to connect directly with host communities (Cohen, 1972). Most tourists settled for pseudo-events because they were led to do so by a tourism industry focused on maximizing their share of each tourist's expenditure. In other words, "the all-embracing mythology and machinery of international tourism

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everywhere substitutes [authentic host cultures with] highly-coloured, hygienic, approximations, paraphrases and reproductions” (Turner & Ash, 1975, p. 184), available for a good price and at the click of a button. During the last few decades, however, advances in global mobility and information technologies have gradually given shape to a new tourism subculture in which tourists attempt to rely as little as possible on the formal sector and prefer to solicit services and experiences directly from host community members—i.e., tourism microentrepreneurs. These microentrepreneurs are individuals who launch new enterprises, or add value to existing ones, employing no more than five employees, and providing tourism experiences, food, lodging or transportation, with the aim to support their livelihood and desired lifestyle (Ferreira, Morais, Pollack, & Bunds, 2018).

Tourism microentrepreneurs are supported by information and communication technologies (ICT) that democratize access to generating and disseminating information about destinations (Payton, Morais, & Heath, 2015). ICTs have eroded the monopoly of some *infomediaries* that directed market interest to their chosen destinations and businesses (Buhalis & Law, 2008). Online travel agencies challenged traditional distribution models and allowed tourists to shop for deals on some aspects of their vacations and to be less structured about other aspects. Crowdsourcing traveler platforms like TripAdvisor allowed tourists to learn the opinions of other travelers, and web blogs allowed tourists to learn about the way local destination communities wanted to portray themselves to visitors (Wang & Morais, 2014). In turn, these developments gave rise to web-based platforms where microentrepreneurs from destination communities marketed tourism services directly to potential tourists (Payton et al., 2015). Some of these web-based platforms attracted investment capital very rapidly and expanded into destinations with a maverick-like attitude that challenged the status quo of formal sector stakeholders (e.g., AirBnB entered destinations despite the resistance of the local hospitality industry and destination governments). Destination governments pursued lawsuits and scrambled to develop new policies regulating the gig economy, to control its impact on destinations and to ensure that this burgeoning economic activity was taxed and therefore contributed to local governance. In sum, although informal businesses have been allowed to glean the scraps of the formal tourism system for a very long time, during the last decades tourism microentrepreneurs have gained prominence as a stakeholder group because of their association with high profile tech companies worth billions of dollars, their conspicuous visibility to tourists, and the tax revenues they generate for destination governments.

As outlined earlier, tourism microentrepreneurship has historically occurred at the margins of destination systems. Therefore, it is not surprising that this population is understudied and that practitioners are largely unprepared to fuel microentrepreneurial development. Moreover, most destinations continue to lack processes to integrate these informal businesses with the formal sector components of the industry. Hence, this volume provides an overview of related knowledge to enable researchers and practitioners to adapt and embrace the advent of the era of tourism microentrepreneurship.

## TOURISM MICROENTREPRENEURSHIP

Host community involvement in tourism microentrepreneurship is often identified as a suitable strategy to temper the industry's tendency for maximizing profit and externalizing negative social and environmental impacts (Ateljevic, 2009; Ditta-Apichai, Kattiyapornpong, & Gretzel, 2020; Mao, 2014; Morais et al., 2012). Tourism microentrepreneurship can be used by host communities to leverage extant traditional culture and local knowledge in ways that make small businesses complementary to the more standardized services provided by formal sector companies and to help their destinations be more resilient to fluctuations of tourism markets (Adams & Sandarupa, 2018; Wang & Morais, 2014). Tourism microentrepreneurs are able to use and repurpose resources outside of the reach of formal sector companies to create more unique and more authentic experiences which, if integrated appropriately by the formal tourism system, can make the destination more competitive (Ateljevic & Doorne, 2000; Yachin & Ioannides, 2020). Additionally, tourism microentrepreneurship is proposed as a key strategy to ensure that host communities earn their fair share of economic benefits from tourism development (Morais et al., 2012). Tourism microentrepreneurship also puts local people in direct interaction with tourists and with tourism businesses, which enables them to understand tourists and the tourism system from personal experience. As a result, under favorable conditions, tourism microentrepreneurs can become very insightful stakeholders in their destinations' governance.

Researchers have devoted some attention to examining the types of conditions under which tourism microentrepreneurship is likely to produce desired local socioeconomic benefits. For example, at a macro level, Mao (2014) identified geographic areas in the Southeastern United States of America (USA) region where tourism companies, and natural and cultural heritage resources were spatially clustered with tourism microentrepreneurship and associated with improved socioeconomic indicators. His research revealed how in selected areas in this polarized region (i.e., relatively affluent urban growth centers dispersed among economically depressed rural areas), tourism microentrepreneurship, hospitality and food companies, natural resources (e.g., protected areas), and cultural resources (e.g., museums, galleries) formed synergistic industry clusters that reduced poverty and improved education levels and health measures.

At the community level, Nyaupane and Poudel (2011) reported that ecotourism microentrepreneurs in Nepal achieved improved livelihoods as a result of their activity, and that communities reduced the harvesting of sensitive natural resources when tourism activity was supported by national parks and conservation organizations. Additional evidence from a natural resource rich area, Namibia's Okavango Delta, documented that the involvement of poor indigenous communities in communitarian wildlife tourism microentrepreneurship supported by international conservation organizations and the national government generated a complex set of socioeconomic benefits (Morais, KC, Mao, & Mosimane, 2015). For example, Morais and his colleagues reported that these small tourism cooperatives used income earned from tourism to address pressing needs like purchasing a four wheel drive vehicle to transport sick people to the nearest health center,

pay stipends for teachers to live and work in their village, and hire neighboring villagers to repair their homes with mud and cow dung.

Women are generally the most vulnerable group in under-resourced communities and the informal sector has less entry barriers for them (Wilkinson & Pratiwi, 1995). Accordingly, there is a significant body of research exploring how women can accrue benefits from involvement in tourism microentrepreneurship. LaPan, Morais, Wallace, and Barbieri (2016a), for example, reported that indigenous women in Guatemala experienced significant improvements in livelihoods from their involvement in tourism microentrepreneurship when local government and non-profit organizations supported them with microcredit and training. Indeed, research suggests that tourism microentrepreneurship allows indigenous women to improve their income independence, business skills, and language skills; and that they can leverage those gains to benefit the wellbeing of their families and their communities (LaPan, Morais, Wallace, & Barbieri, 2016b; Morais, Yarnal, Dong, & Dowler, 2005; Usher & Morais, 2010; Wilkinson & Pratiwi, 1995).

#### *Understanding Tourism Microentrepreneurs*

There is mounting evidence of the income-earning opportunities afforded by tourism microentrepreneurship, and of its potential to improve local wellbeing and magnify local voices in tourism development. Accordingly, it is thus important to understand what motivates and hinders microentrepreneurs so that effective training, mentoring and policy can be developed to facilitate their recruitment and success. A number of themes may be identified.

*Microentrepreneurs Balance Pecuniary with Non-pecuniary Motives.* Until recently, tourism development practitioners and engaged academics relied on the general entrepreneurship literature (Carland & Carland, 1997) to inform their work with tourism entrepreneurs but tourism scholars have noted that aspects of entrepreneurship theory are not readily applicable to understanding and enabling small and micro tourism entrepreneurship (Hallak, Lindsay, & Brown, 2011). Approximately two decades ago researchers noted that small tourism entrepreneurs are driven largely by non-economic motives, and they prefer to contain the growth of their businesses rather than pursuing unbridled growth (Ateljevic & Doorne, 2000; Cunha, Kastenholz, & Carneiro, 2011; Getz & Carlsen, 2005; Peters & Schuckert, 2014). Research with hospitality microentrepreneurs from Egypt revealed that economic motivations were dominant and that many participants felt constrained by limited financial capital (Mohammad, 2020). However, research from both New Zealand (Ateljevic & Doorne, 2000) and Portugal (Cunha et al., 2011) suggests that many tourism microentrepreneurs in those regions are motivated to earn income only to the extent of optimizing their family's wellbeing. These findings are substantiated by Peters and Schuckert (2014) who reported that "small business entrepreneurs' quality of life considerations play an important role when planning the future of their firm" (p. 731). Furthermore, evidence suggests that tourism microentrepreneurs are communitarian, and they create

innovation in tourism regionally by serving as bridges between the origin tourist markets and the pleasure periphery where they live (Ateljevic & Doorne, 2000).

*Microentrepreneurs Want to Speak Their Truths.* Microentrepreneurs are mostly outside systems of power and often become dissatisfied with how their region and their people are represented to others through the media, tourism promotions and even organized tours (Nazariadli, Morais, Bunds, Baran, & Supak, 2019). They crave the opportunity to speak for themselves about important aspects of their identity because they feel that the public holds incorrect stereotypes about them. Wang and Morais (2014) explain that tourism microentrepreneurship creates stages in which people are able to form and disseminate self-narratives without the need to obtain anyone's approval.

Accordingly, in addition to the aforementioned motivations to earn income, tourism microentrepreneurs are often eager to speak their versions of their truths. Evidence for this proposition is growing. For example, based on research in under-resourced rural communities in the USA, Guatemala and Portugal, Morais, Wallace, Rodrigues, España, and Wang (2014) reported that tourism microentrepreneurs strive to earn supplemental income to improve the resilience of their livelihoods, but these rural tourism microentrepreneurs also manifested strong non-economic motivations to share information about their local region, bring attention to dying traditional skills, and transmit their personal life stories.

Wang and Morais (2014) report how the Mosuo minority people from China use tourism web promotions and cultural performances in their village to resist government-sanctioned narratives about their matriarchal culture and replace them with narratives that they deem correct. Lastly, Nazariadli et al. (2019) used autophotography to assist rural tourism microentrepreneurs in North Carolina, USA in identifying images for promotions that would represent them in an appreciative manner that contrasted with the derogatory images of rural people seen in the media. Additional insight into this population was reported by Peroff (2016) who noted that farmers involved in tourism were highly motivated to improve their visitors' agricultural literacy. In Part I of this book, Chapters 1–4, provide additional insight into what drives and constraints tourism microentrepreneurs. Collectively they provide evidence that the motivations sought by microentrepreneurs are shaped by their socioeconomic conditions and by cultural norms that dictate gender roles and collectivism.

### *Microentrepreneurial Knowledge*

Tourism microentrepreneurship presents low legal and administrative entry barriers, which makes this kind of activity appealing to individuals outside centers of cultural, political and economic power (Wang & Morais, 2014). Furthermore, microentrepreneurs can make the most of traditional local knowledge and resources that are not useful in formal sector employment and business systems (Yachin & Ioannides, 2020), but can represent value to tourists seeking authentic cultural experiences, hidden local places, and genuine encounters with locals. In the context of nature-based tourism, for example, microentrepreneurs can share extant traditional knowledge about the local wildlife and flora with visitors allowing host

communities to benefit more from conservation (Morais et al., 2015; Morais, Bunn, Hoogendoorn, & KC, 2018). Additionally, in the context of cultural tourism, local knowledge can help microentrepreneurs develop products appealing to both foreign visitors and locals, develop more circular supply chains and employment, and build more successful and resilient business models (Adams & Sandarupa, 2018; Chapter 5). Additionally, in Chapter 6, Bakas, Duxbury, and Albino report how creativity, local sense of place, and trusted local networks are interacting to enable grassroots tourism microentrepreneurial success in two small Portuguese cities.

In addition to local knowledge, creativity and unique resources, micro-entrepreneurial success requires training and mentoring (Ferreira et al., 2018). However, research has shown that experience and training based on traditional entrepreneurship theory are not predictors of success for small and micro tourism businesses (Hallak et al., 2011). Researchers have started to examine ways to conceptualize the competencies of tourism microentrepreneurs (Ferreira et al., 2018), and they have found that the agencies charged with mentoring micro-entrepreneurs are not entirely equipped to do so effectively (Ferreira, Morais, Szabo, Bowen, & Jakes, 2020). Furthermore, nascent microentrepreneurs tend to rely on bonding ties with friends and family and have very limited trusted connections with local government support agencies that might help them identify resources or adopt innovations (KC et al., 2019a).

In terms of one of those competencies, microentrepreneurs' adoption of ICT innovations, Wang (Chapter 7) reports that rural tourism microentrepreneurs in the United States of America feel reluctant to adopt web platforms due to a perception of modest returns for significant effort invested. In contrast, Sarooghi and Rastkhiz (Chapter 8) reported that Iranian hospitality and experience microentrepreneurs perceive high value in using web platforms. Ditta-Apichai et al. (2020) identified various types of ICT platform membership models in Thailand, noted that some national platforms provided training and mentoring support, and indicated that these factors influenced the benefits microentrepreneurs obtained from the platforms. According to this nascent research, the extent to which ICT platforms are meeting the needs of tourism microentrepreneurs is highly variable but there is limited insight to explain such variation. Furthermore, limited research has been conducted regarding tourism microentrepreneurs' needs in other key competencies like innovation and reacting to externalities. Therefore, more research about knowledge gaps and adoption of innovations among nascent microentrepreneurs is needed so that more effective training, mentoring and support programs can be developed.

### *Integrated Destination Stewardship*

According to Destinations International, the most salient market trend for destinations is that tourists are "increasingly seeking a unique, authentic travel experience" (2019, p. 14), and as explained earlier, tourism microentrepreneurs are better suited than formal sector companies to supply these experiences. Accordingly, when well-integrated into local social networks and well-aligned with a shared

destination vision, tourism microentrepreneurs can make their destinations more competitive. For example, in Chapter 9, Čikić and Jovanović report on the characteristics of rural tourism microentrepreneurs in northern Serbia that are embedded in the endogenous character of the region and help the destination meet exogenous market trends for authentic rural experiences. Similarly, in Chapter 10, Bowen contrasts how the embeddedness of local place meanings in food microenterprises in destinations in the United Kingdom and France help explain their relative competitiveness. In Chapter 11, Freeze shares the perspective of a destination management organization (DMO) in the USA that has gradually embraced grassroots tourism microentrepreneurship in an attempt to become more competitive. However, as explained by Freeze, aligning the supply of microentrepreneurial experiences and services with the destination brand has become more challenging for DMOs with the proliferation of ICT sharing economy platforms.

DMOs stimulate, curate and promote local supply to optimize the local tourism economy in support of long-term community goals; however, these government organizations are struggling to fulfill their destination stewardship function because companies are increasingly bypassing them and using ICT platforms to connect directly with tourists (Destinations International, 2019). Evidence indicates that a select number of web platforms influence tourists' travel behaviors (David-Negre, Almedida-Santana, Hernández, & Moreno-Gil, 2018) which combined with their role in enabling price shopping has led to a rapid growth of popular destinations that are now facing overtourism (Dodds & Butler, 2019). The arrival of shared mobility businesses in tourism cities has disrupted local transportation and caused unsafe or at least unpleasant living conditions to residents. Additionally, the under-regulated proliferation of short-term vacation home rentals has gentrified historic centers in popular destinations due to the consolidation of real estate ownership by large agencies that substitute residential rentals for tourism rentals displacing and angering locals (Yrigoy, 2016). Destinations have attempted to react to these negative impacts by legislating the temperance of ICT sharing economy platforms with punitive measures like temporary bans, special new taxes, and visitor fees; but these efforts have yielded modest results.

Despite the best efforts of DMOs to proactively involve microentrepreneurs in the provision of local experiences aligned with a desired brand, hyperconnected members of the destination tend to overwhelm the supply through web marketplaces. Consequently, rather than empowering subaltern community groups with opportunities to gain visibility and earn income through the sharing of cultural self-representations with visitors, ICTs may tend to exacerbate inequities in access to dignified livelihoods and in processes of place-making.

In sum, nascent literature suggests that microentrepreneurial development can make destinations more equitable and competitive but for this potential to come to fruition there is a need for thoughtful and savvy destination stewardship. In Chapter 12, Ferreira et al. propose that optimal long-term competitiveness and equitable local benefits will be achieved when grassroots microentrepreneurship is synergistic with the formal sector of the tourism system, and they provide a roadmap for this process. In light of this scholarship, destination practitioners should explore ways to use ICT platforms and other tools to operationalize

synergies between formal and informal actors. In turn, researchers should continue to examine the ways in which microentrepreneurs' bridging ties with the formal sector can boost their success while also addressing macro trends and attracting investment (KC et al., 2019a).

## CONCLUSION

One is living the advent of the era of tourism microentrepreneurship as exemplified by the constant mainstream news about AirBnB, Uber, TripAdvisor, and other ICT platforms. Many academics continue disengaged with this emerging phenomenon and unprepared to conduct scholarship seeking to understand this informal sector of the tourism system. In turn, destination management practitioners are largely at a loss on how to interact with the burgeoning informal sector and the ICT platforms that enable their businesses. However, there is great interest among practitioners and academics and a growing body of knowledge exploring various aspects of tourism microentrepreneurship, and there are notable successful cases illustrating best practices about how destinations and private companies should catalyze tourism microentrepreneurship for increased destination competitiveness and equity. This volume includes emerging knowledge about tourism microentrepreneurship organized into three groups. In the first group of chapters, authors delve into the complex and layered motivations or benefits sought by tourism microentrepreneurs, as well as the barriers that they perceive in achieving those goals. The second group of chapters include explorations about the various types of knowledge leveraged by microentrepreneurs to make the most of untapped local resources and thrive in today's hyperconnected marketplace. The third group of chapters includes insights into successes and shortcomings of attempts to integrate microentrepreneurs into destination systems. Overall, this volume aims to elucidate practitioners and encourage more researchers and students to delve deeper into the intricacies of the development of microentrepreneurship and its impact on destination communities.