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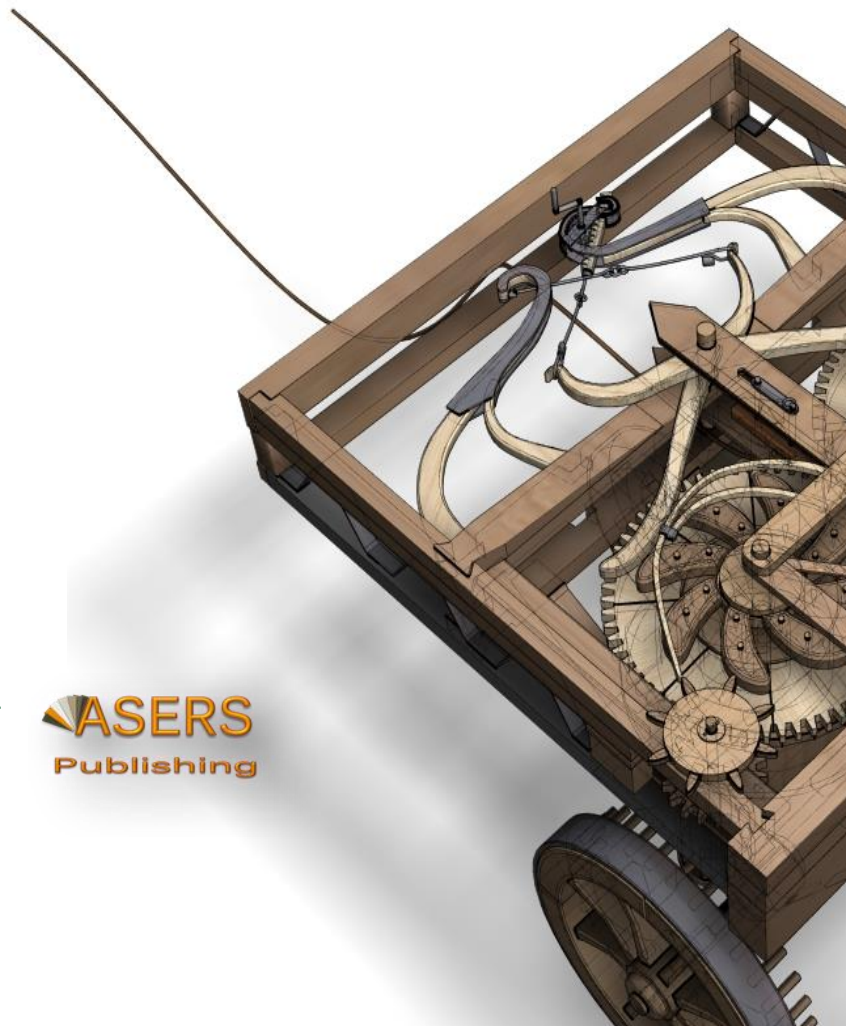
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Journal of Environmental Management and Tourism is an interdisciplinary research journal, aimed to publish articles and original research papers that should contribute to the development of both experimental and theoretical nature in the field of Environmental Management and Tourism Sciences.

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Strategies for Sustainable Rural Tourism Innovation: Evidence from Hanoi, Vietnam

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Abstract:

Rural tourism is an important driving force for developing rural areas that often face many challenges regarding economics, society, and the environment. Innovation in sustainable rural tourism is the basis for enhancing regeneration in tourism, meeting the goals of sustainable development, satisfying the needs of tourists, and enhancing economic, social, and environmental efficiency for rural areas. The research provides an in-depth understanding of sustainable rural tourism innovation. Therefore, it contributes to a better understanding of sustainable rural tourism innovation, which has not been extensively studied by researchers. Furthermore, it provides a typical case study of rural tourism innovation in a central urban area of developing countries, contributing to a better understanding of innovation in rural tourism destinations in developing country urban areas. The research also provides managers and policy-makers with insights that can be considered when building and implementing future rural tourism destination innovation policies.

Keywords: innovation; rural tourism; sustainable development; Hanoi; Vietnam.

JEL Classification: L83; O18; O31; R11.

Introduction

Rural areas have the potential for unlimited tourism development (Trigano 1980). Therefore, in recent decades, entertainment and tourism activities associated with rural areas have been increasingly emphasized for development (Oppermann *et al.* 1997). Rural tourism development not only helps rural areas create unique tourism products but also creates employment for local people, promotes economic and social development, and

preserves landscapes and the environment. One of the most important economic activities for sustainable development is the development of rural tourism (Togaymurodov *et al.* 2023).

Vietnam has a culture rooted in rice-based agriculture, where 62.9% of the population lives in rural areas (GSO 2022), and is engaged primarily in agriculture with low income. However, this area boasts beautiful, tranquil landscapes and diverse ethnic groups and cultures. It also conserves and preserves many local cultural values associated with agricultural production. Therefore, rural tourism development can be seen as a significant advantage for Vietnam (VNAT, 2012). In the National Target Program for New Rural Development in the period 2021-2025, the Government of Vietnam has identified rural tourism as one of the drivers for job creation, income improvement for rural residents, promoting the transformation of the rural economic structure, and simultaneously preserving traditional cultural values and protecting the environment, contributing to building sustainable new rural areas. Although rural tourism in Vietnam has been implemented in many different scales and locations, the level of attention and interest from localities needs to be improved and correspond with its potential.

Hanoi, the capital of Vietnam, covers an area of 3328.9 km² and consists of 30 district-level administrative units. As of 2021, the city's population is 8.3 million, with 50.9% of residents living in rural areas (GSO, 2022). With a history spanning over a millennium, Hanoi boasts numerous natural landscapes and tangible and intangible cultural heritage, making it rich in potential for developing rural tourism. Despite the recent diversification of rural tourism activities in Hanoi, challenges persist, including limited stakeholder awareness and coordination, monotonous tourism products, low competitiveness, insufficient human resources, and low economic efficiency and sustainability. Rural tourism innovation is necessary to address these challenges and promote sustainable tourism. It focuses on sustainable tourism development, reducing threats to the environment and the socioeconomic well-being of the area, developing infrastructure according to planning, and waste control, reducing the impact on natural ecosystems and cultural and historical values, reducing social vices associated with tourism, and increasing the trust in the local community in tourists (Yu & *et al.* 2019; Zhang & Zhu 2019; Roman & Grudzie 2021). This study uses the analytical framework of the OECD to evaluate rural tourism innovation in Hanoi, identify the main obstacles to innovation, and develop strategies to promote sustainable rural tourism. The following research questions are posed in this study:

- (i) What theoretical framework is for sustainable rural tourism destination innovation?
- (ii) What is the potential and reality of sustainable rural tourism destination innovation in Hanoi?
- (iii) What obstacles exist to implementing sustainable rural tourism destination innovation in Hanoi?
- (iv) What strategies can be employed for sustainable rural tourism destination innovation in Hanoi?

1. Literature Review

1.1. Definition of Rural Tourism

Rural tourism first emerged in Europe and increased rapidly in the 19th century as urban dwellers sought to restore balance due to the stress and pressure of urbanization and industrialization. It has entered a period of comprehensive development in the 21st century (Darău *et al.* 2010; Hu & Wang 2017). Its popularity as a unique form of tourism is still increasing (Santeramo & Barbieri 2015). Scholars around the world have conducted numerous studies on rural tourism development. However, there is still no consensus on rural tourism, and there are differences between regions (Lane & Kastenholtz 2015). Rural tourism is defined simply as all activities in the sparsely populated countryside (OECD, 1994; Frochot 2005; Ghaderi & Henderson 2012; Bhattacharjee 2015). The concept of rural tourism is increasingly expanding. Lane (1994) argued that rural tourism refers to activities in both rural areas and areas that functionally exhibit rural characteristics. It is commonly described as a type of tourism that satisfies the visitors' desire for authenticity and individualism and their increasing interest in experiencing local heritage and establishing close connections with local communities (Hall, Mitchell, & Roberts, 2003). Tourists are motivated to visit rural regions by various desires, such as having fun, relaxation, and rejuvenation. Specifically, traveling to rural areas provides visitors with localized experiences that involve nature, environment, residents, traditional cuisine, regional specialties, authentic customs, slow pace, intimacy, tranquility, and reconnection with oneself (Kastenholtz *et al.* 2020).

1.2. Innovation, Innovation in Tourism and Rural Tourism toward Sustainable

The term "innovativeness" is derived from the Latin word *innovare*, which means "introducing something new" (Rogers 2007). Schumpeter (2008) introduced the term to economic theory in 1912, where innovative activity referred to the practical application and use of new ideas in products and processes (supply, manufacture, and production). OECD defines innovation as "the implementation of a new or significantly improved product (good or service), process, a new marketing method, or a new organizational method in business practices, workplace

organization or external relations" (OECD & Statistical Office of the European Communities, 2005). Product, process, organizational, and marketing innovations are the four types of innovations identified by the OECD. The concept of innovation has been further refined by OECD (2018) as "a new or improved product or process (or a combination thereof) that differs significantly from the unit's previous products or processes and that has been made available to potential users (product) or brought into use by the unit (process)."

In the tourism industry, innovations can take various forms, including introducing new or improved services based on product innovations, new or upgraded customer service processes, or organizational and institutional changes (Ziółkowska-Weiss 2012). Hjalager (2010) identifies five types of tourism innovations, including management, marketing, institutional, process, and product innovations.

In rural tourism, innovation plays a vital role in promoting sustainable development. However, research and practice on innovation in this field have only received attention and implementation recently (Michał *et al.* 2020). Studies on innovation in rural tourism are diverse in terms of potential, business relationships with rural tourism innovation (Ronningen 2010), innovation maturity of tourism service providers (Raffai 2013), subjects in rural tourism innovation, and gaps in rural tourism innovation (Hjalager *et al.* 2017).

From a literature review, we agree that innovation in rural tourism includes innovative activities in products, processes, management, and marketing (Hjalager 2010; Izabela & Barbara 2017). Sustainable rural tourism innovation involves innovative tourism activities that generate economic benefits based on environmental and social friendliness. It eliminates tourism-related disadvantages, amplifies and enhances community values, and increases the ability to regenerate values for the local community, including:

(i) Sustainable product innovation can introduce a new tourism product based on existing tourism resources suitable for the environment, community, and local culture or significantly improves the quality and service of existing tourism products to meet the needs of customers based on conserving tourism resources with the active participation of the local community.

(ii) Sustainable process innovation can be innovating procedures and processes of providing tourism products and services to enhance the efficiency of tourism infrastructure and reduce negative impacts on the environment and society.

(iii) Sustainable organizational innovation can be changing the management system, and development model, strengthening the cooperation and linkage of relevant parties in rural tourism organizations; increasing the participation of the local community, reducing the impact on the community's tourism resources.

(iv) Sustainable marketing innovation is creating a professional marketing environment and implementing green marketing methods for promoting and distributing products based on sustainable values of natural and cultural resources of the community. It also builds the image of rural destinations to reduce negative environmental and local community impacts.

2. Methodology

For this study, in order to obtain research data, we used a combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods. Semi-structured interviews and individual interviews were selected to collect evaluative information on innovation activities in rural tourism in Hanoi. We used interviews as a research tool prior to quantitative research because they are suitable for social sciences (Jennings 2005). This method profoundly explains respondents' opinions, emotions, and experiences (Legard *et al.* 2003). In interviews, exchanges can deviate from the order of questions in the instructions to better understand their attitudes toward the researched issues. Changing the order of questions and the respondents makes conversations more natural without reducing the quality of the interview results. From October to December 2022, ten semi-structured interviews (each lasting about 30 minutes) were conducted with stakeholders in rural tourism activities in Hanoi. Table 1 shows the list of interviewees. The interview content focused on aspects such as the origins and motivation of innovation in rural tourism, which types of innovation have been implemented, barriers to implementing rural tourism innovation, and suggestions for promoting sustainable rural tourism. The selected interview information was analyzed by research topic.

Quantitative research data is collected through a questionnaire survey for rural tourism implementation locations in Hanoi. The measure items were adapted from previous studies, and a five-point Likert scale ranging from (1) "strongly disagree" to (5) "strongly agree" was used. The questionnaire was divided into three parts. The first part aimed to provide an overview of innovation in rural tourism in Hanoi to help respondents understand it. The second part consisted of the major scale items related to organizational, marketing, process, and product innovations. The final part gathered demographic information such as age, gender, organizational working hours, and education of the participants.

Table 1. List of interviewees of the study

Type of Stakeholders	Interviewee No.	Description
Members of Hanoi Department of Tourism	N01	Deputy Director
	N02	Manager
	N03	Manager
Personal business operators	N04	Operator of travel enterprise
	N05	Operator of accomodation enterprise
Local residents	N06	Residents providing rural tourism services
	N07	
	N08	
Tourists	N09	Tourists in the rural
	N10	

Tourism experts pre-tested the draft survey to ensure accuracy and validate the final version of the questionnaire. Following their feedback, minor adjustments were made to some questions. The study focused on innovation in rural tourism in Hanoi, and data was collected through an online questionnaire administered between November 10 and December 10, 2022. A total of 127 surveys were completed, and Table 2 provides a summary of the respondents' demographics.

Table 2. Description of the respondents ($n = 127$)

Variables	Frequency	Percent	Variables	Frequency	Percent
Gender			Work time		
- Male	85	66,9	- Under 1 year	2	1,6
- Female	42	31,1	- 1 - 3 year	38	29,9
Age			- 3 - 5 year	57	44,9
- Under 25	23	18,1	- Over 5 year	30	23,6
- 26 - 40	31	24,4	Education		
- 41 - 50	46	36,2	- High school degree or below	5	3,9
- Over 50	27	21,3	- Undergraduate degree	72	56,7
			- Graduate degree	12	9,4

Data inconsistencies in related questions were checked using SPSS Statistics software. The results of the scale analysis using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Results of the analysis of the scale using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient

No	Factor	No variables	Cronbach's Alpha
1	Product innovation	10	0,846
2	Marketing innovations	08	0,868
3	Organizational innovation	10	0,847
4	Process innovation	08	0,831
Total		36	

The results of the quality assessment of the scale in the table above show that the intercorrelation coefficient of the total variables is more significant than 0.8. Therefore, the five-level constructed scale system ensures quality and reliability with 36 characteristic variables. Based on this reliability analysis, all variables in the 4-factor groups meet the condition for exploratory factor analysis (EFA).

The results of the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) test and Bartlett's test of sphericity indicate that the KMO coefficient is 0.962, which satisfies the condition of $0.5 < \text{KMO} < 1$, confirming that EFA is suitable for the actual data. Bartlett's test of sphericity has a significant level of $\text{sig} = 0.00 < 0.05$, indicating that the null hypothesis of zero correlation between the observed variables in the population is rejected, *i.e.*, the observed variables are correlated with each other in the population. The total extracted variance is 85.54% ($> 50\%$), meeting the requirement and indicating that the 4-factor groups explain 85.54% of the data variability. This result confirms the appropriateness of the EFA analysis. After rotating the factors with a loading factor of 0.5, no variable is removed from the scale.

3. Results

3.1. Hanoi City - The Potential and Current Status of Rural Tourism Development

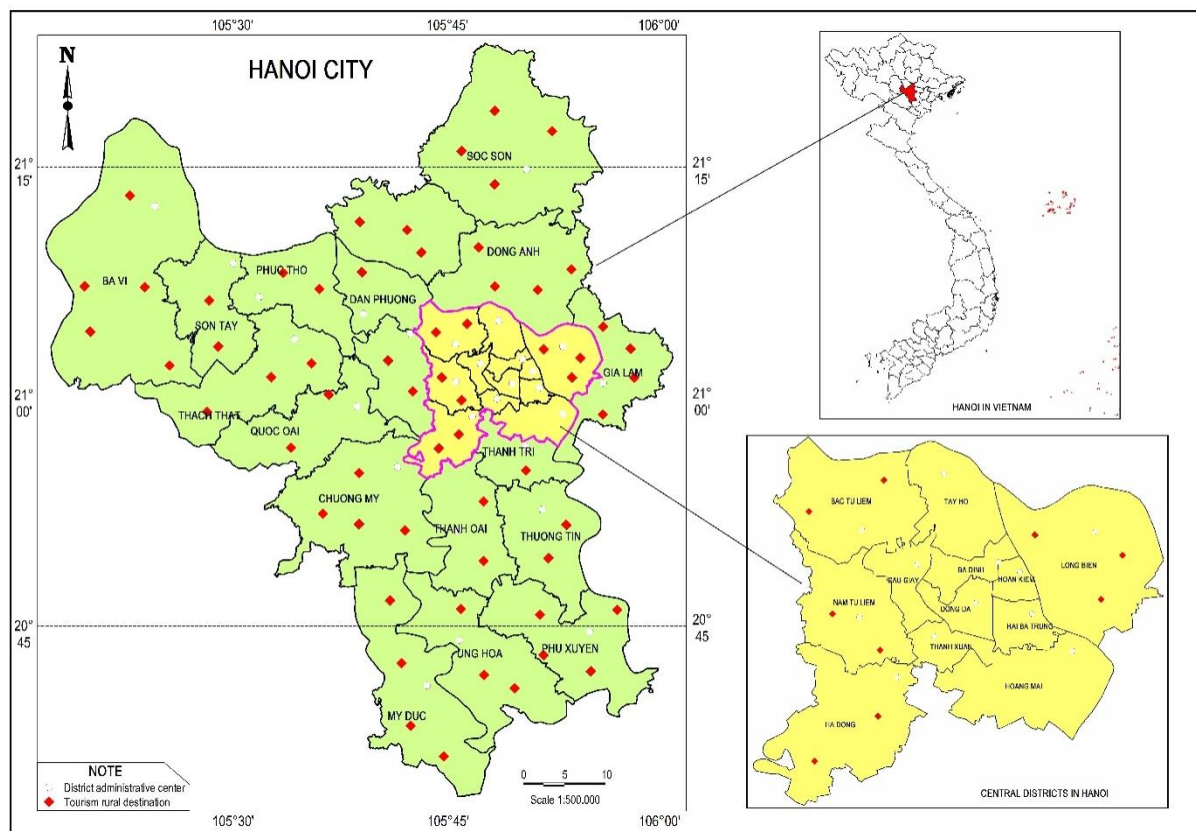
Hanoi is located in the north of Vietnam, with a beautiful position and geography, in the coordinate system: 21°05' north latitude, 105°87' east longitude, belonging to the Red River delta region (Thong *et al.* 2006). The city has 12

districts, one town, and 17 suburban districts (GSO, 2021) (see Figure 1). Hanoi has a long-standing agricultural ecological foundation known as the "Land of Hundred Trades" in Vietnam. Therefore, the city has many advantages in developing agrotourism and rural tourism.

Hanoi has natural advantages with a rich system of natural tourism resources (Thong *et al.* 2006). From the distinguished four seasons climate, abundant surface and groundwater sources all year round, to various terrain types, including rich deltas in Hanoi's inner city, rice fields in suburban districts of Thuong Tin, Phu Xuyen, Ung Hoa or winding mountain ranges in Soc Son, Ba Vi area. In addition, there are ecological landscape systems with Ba Vi National Park, Huong Son scenic area, Vien Nam mountainous landscape and some agricultural spaces such as specialized crop belts in Thanh Tri, Gia Lam, Dong Anh, Hoai Duc districts; flower and ornamental tree belts in Bac Tu Liem, Dong Anh, Me Linh which have long-standing traditions, both producing agricultural products serving the urban areas, and natural and cultural landscapes serving the development of rural tourism and farm tourism.

Parallel to the natural tourism resource system, Hanoi also possesses a unique system of human tourism resources. Hanoi currently has 5,922 historical and cultural relics (Hanoi Tourism Department, 2022). In addition, the system of trades and craft villages in Hanoi is also very diverse and abundant, providing a foundation for developing attractive rural tourism destinations. Each craft village destination here contains unique cultural features and many characteristic products. According to statistics, Hanoi currently has 47/52 traditional trades of the country; 1,350 villages with trades and crafts, including 305 traditional craft villages in 23 districts, towns, and cities, have been recognized (Hanoi Tourism Department, 2022). In addition, Hanoi also has many unforgettable and distinctive dishes, such as Thanh Tri rolled cake, pho, La Vong grilled fish paste, West Lake shrimp cake, and Vong green rice flakes, with high attractiveness to tourists.

Figure 1. Map of the study area



Source: Author

The above factors have contributed to Hanoi's solid foundation for developing and innovating rural tourism in recent years. In the past period, rural tourism activities in Hanoi have been exploited. The number of accommodation facilities in suburban districts has been invested in construction and expansion. The number of tourists visiting rural areas is increasing, including families and groups of friends during holidays, weekends, and summer holidays. The primary source of rural tourism guests comes from Ho Chi Minh City, neighboring provinces such as Hai Phong, Thai Binh, Nam Dinh, Hung Yen, Hai Duong, and people in Hanoi. The number of

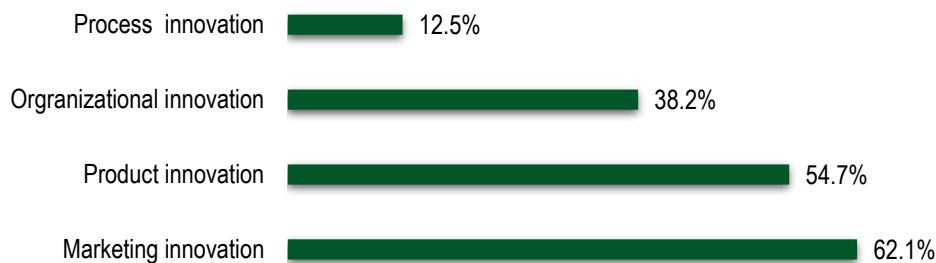
international tourists coming to rural areas is still limited, mainly from European countries (mainly France), North America, and Northeast Asia (Japan, South Korea). International tourists usually visit during the day.

The agricultural tourism products in Hanoi mainly exploit the cultural element of rice civilization in the Northern Delta region, combining agricultural tourism with cultural heritage sightseeing and craft villages. They also utilize the model of rural farmsteads to serve school trips and weekend tourism in Hanoi and neighboring provinces. For example, tours to visit the ripe rice season in Duong Lam; agricultural tourism combined with visiting the ancient village of Duong Lam; farm tours; organic vegetable tourism, tea, and natural forest vegetables and biodiversity tours; tours to learn about herbal medicine and the healing culture of Dao and Muong ethnic groups in Ba Vi region at Ba Vi Rural Tourism Farm.

3.2. Types of Innovation

The interviews and feedback from respondents (n=127) from rural tourism destinations in Hanoi indicate that marketing innovation and product innovation are the two most common types, with approximately 62.1% and 54.7% of rural tourism destinations, respectively, recording these two types of innovation. Organizational innovation is the third most common type, and process innovation has the lowest level of innovation (see Figure 2).

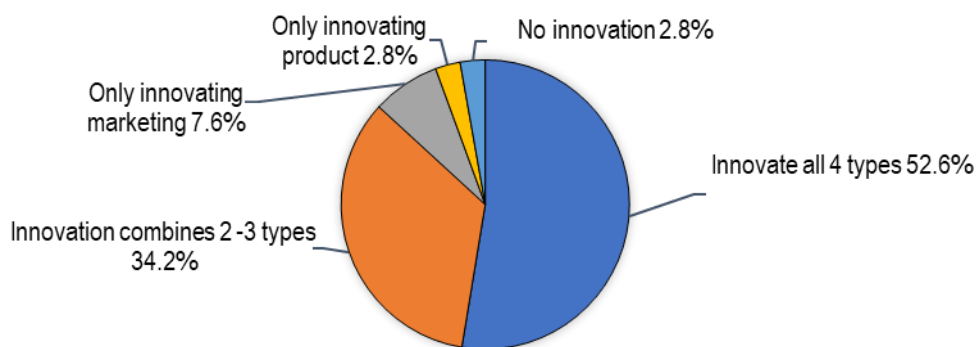
Figure 2. Frequency of innovation in rural tourism destinations in Hanoi (n=127)



Source: Author

The number of rural tourism destinations in Hanoi that only implement one type of innovation is low, with only 7.6% of destinations having only marketing innovation and less than 3% having only product innovation. Most destinations report more than one type of innovation. In particular, up to 52.6% of rural tourism destinations in Hanoi have all four types of innovation (see Figure 3).

Figure 3. Structure of innovation in rural tourism destinations in Hanoi by type (n=127)



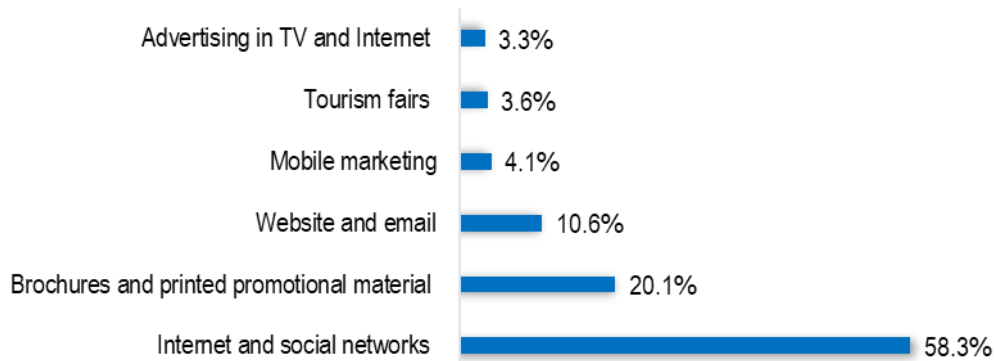
Source: Author

(i) Marketing innovations

Marketing innovations in rural tourism in Hanoi focus on marketing, sales, and after-sales support. Activities related to advertising and promotional techniques for rural tourism products are actively deployed on new sales channels. Survey results show that 80.3% of destinations have shifted from traditional marketing methods to digital marketing tools. Digital marketing tools have a high proportion of promoting rural tourism in Hanoi (see Figure 4). The frequency of social media usage for promotion is the highest, with 43.2% of destinations using it often (several times a week), 32.1% using it moderately (several times a month), 10.3% using it rarely (several times a year), and 14.4% not using it at all. "Currently, social media (specifically Facebook

and TikTok) is widely used to connect with potential customers" (Interviewee N07). "The deployment of marketing tools on social media has helped us reduce costs while reaching out to many different types of tourist customers, thereby attracting more tourists to the local community" (Interviewee 06).

Figure 4. Percent of using marketing tools in Hanoi's tourism rural (n =127)



Source: Author

The survey results showed that the overall average evaluation of marketing innovations in rural tourism destinations in Hanoi was relatively high, at 4.03, with a standard deviation of 0.757. The highest evaluated indicator was "Our destination has used many digital marketing tools to promote tourism products," with an average value of 4.28, followed by "Our marketing team regularly shares information and learns from other rural destinations," with an average value of 4.26. The scale "Our destination always cares about taking care of tourists during and after the tourism program" and "Our destination can develop many ideas for promoting sustainable green tourism products with reduced impact on the environment and society" both received the lowest ratings, with an average value of 4.02. Thus, customer care at rural tourism destinations in Hanoi needs to be given adequate attention, and sustainable green marketing ideas must be created. It will reduce the effectiveness of sustainable marketing innovations at the destinations.

(ii) Product innovations

Innovation products are content that most rural tourism destinations carry out. "In the past time, the city government of Hanoi has issued many policies to support rural tourism destinations to exploit resources, develop new or innovative tourism service products to meet the increasingly diverse requirements of tourists" (Interviewee N01). The results of the actual survey show that up to 78.3% of the destinations introduce new tourism products/services to the market. In addition to traditional tourism products associated with agriculture, tourism products associated with craft villages, cuisine, and cultural festivals of the countryside are actively developed. The yearly rate of regularly improving existing tourism products/services also reaches 68.7%. "At the rural tourism destinations in Hanoi, we have actively innovated, improved agricultural tourism products, diversified services in the tourism program such as "a day as a farmer," processing local cuisine, creating products associated with craft villages to maximize the advantages of the locality" (Interviewee N01). "This is my second time participating in the local tourism program. Compared to the previous one, this program has added many new tourism activities such as experiencing candy-making, shaping toy figurines, participating in folk games, and traditional performance art is exciting and attractive" (Interviewee N09).

The survey results show that the average value of the scale for renewing rural tourism products is about 3.91 points with a standard deviation of 0.761. The value of the component scales ranges from 3.77 to 3.97 points. Among them, the highest in the scale, "Our destination has introduced many new tourism products/services," with an average value of 3.97 points; second is the scale, "Our destination regularly seeks new tourism products/services," with an average value of 3.95 points; third is the scale "Our destination regularly improves existing tourism products/services" with an average value of 3.82 points; and the lowest is the scale "We introduce many new tourism products/services towards sustainable and environmentally friendly tourism" with an average value of 3.77 points. Therefore, the innovation of rural tourism products in Hanoi is relatively high. However, it is rated low in terms of developing sustainable tourism products and eco-friendly tourism products. The lack of attention to innovation tourism products will negatively affect the sustainability of the innovation of rural tourism products in Hanoi.

(iii) Organizational innovations

Organizational innovations are focused on rural tourism in Hanoi. Over 72.3% of survey results indicate that tourist destinations have implemented innovations in management and operation. These innovations are

reflected in increased coordination among relevant parties, including the local community, travel companies, and government. Travel companies have established connections with the local community, businesses, and government to support tourists' consumption of local handicrafts, agricultural products, and specialties. *"Our travel company, the process of developing tours, has proactively included stops at traditional craft villages and areas showcasing local handicraft products as mandatory destinations in the itinerary"* (Interviewee N04). In addition, these companies actively support local governments in training and improving the quality of service workers, conserving and promoting tourism resources, and improving rural infrastructure. *"Organizing rural tourism tours with a visit to a craft village has contributed to promoting the consumption of local products and preserving endangered craft villages. It is a meaningful job for the local community today"* (Interviewee 08). The formation of complementary clusters in rural tourism in Hanoi has begun to be implemented. Currently, 23.3% of survey respondents stated that rural tourism organizations in Hanoi have participated in industry clusters based on tourism products. *"The formation of rural tourism industry clusters in Hanoi has contributed to enhancing the linkages between tourism systems (accommodation, transportation, food and beverage, and entertainment providers), reducing marketing costs, and increasing the efficiency of exploiting rural tourism resources according to different regions."* (Interviewee N03).

The survey results show that the average overall rating for the organization's innovation in Hanoi's rural tourism destinations is relatively high at 3.85, with a standard deviation of 0.890. The evaluated indicators are pretty consistent, among which the highest rated indicator is "Tourism companies have linked up with local businesses, communities, and authorities to promote the consumption of local handicrafts and agricultural products," with an average value of 4.28, while the lowest rated indicator is "The cluster linkages among relevant parties in rural tourism organization are tight," with an average value of 3.64. Therefore, organizational innovation has been demonstrated through linkages among parties. However, rural tourism clusters have yet to be fully formed. Many conflicts still need to be resolved and adjusted in organizing rural tourism activities in Hanoi.

(iv) Processes Innovations

Innovations in procedures, processes, and techniques in rural tourism organizations are less frequently implemented than in other tourism types. Over 60% of survey results indicate that rural tourism organizations must implement process innovations. The remainder has started implementing process innovations for receiving and touring visitors locally. *"Our local lodging facilities have begun to apply new technologies and equipment such as solar panels, sensor-activated water and electricity systems, and waste sorting tools to save energy and protect the environment. In addition, we also extensively use natural materials to decorate our lodging facilities"* (Interviewee N05). Some facilities have digitized and automated some of these processes using information technology. Some tourist sites associated with rural cultural heritage in the Hanoi region have no staff, and experiences are provided through electronic devices to enable visitors to explore freely without issues. *"In the past three years, particularly after the COVID-19 pandemic, many rural tourism destinations in Hanoi have applied Industry 4.0 technology, introducing an automatic narration system based on integrated images and information via QR code. The narration and images are sent to visitors' smartphones or smart devices by scanning the QR code. Visitors only need to scan the code to listen to the automatic narration and view images"* (Interviewee N02). The lack of process innovation in rural tourism destinations in Hanoi is due to limited resources for implementation. *"Applying modern technologies such as VR and AR in organizing rural tourism to change the current operation and organization process is very difficult because these technologies require significant investment in modern equipment and specialized personnel. Therefore, the application of technologies in process innovation is currently only at the basic level of organization and operation"* (Interviewee N05).

The survey results indicate that the average overall rating for innovation in the processes of rural tourism destinations is 3.51, with a standard deviation of 0.735. The highest-rated criterion is "Positive application of technology to improve visitor service processes," with an average value of 3.70, followed by "We always explore and learn new operational and organizational processes in rural tourism organizations," with an average value of 3.61, and the lowest-rated criterion is "Faster improvement of processes compared to other forms of tourism" with an average value of 3.32. Therefore, rural tourism destinations are currently paying attention to process innovation. However, the innovation process has not been intense, and rural tourism destinations have yet to actively embrace process innovation as a critical activity in their strategies. It may stem from the perceptions of these destinations and limitations in resources such as machinery, equipment, and technology for innovation in rural tourism processes.

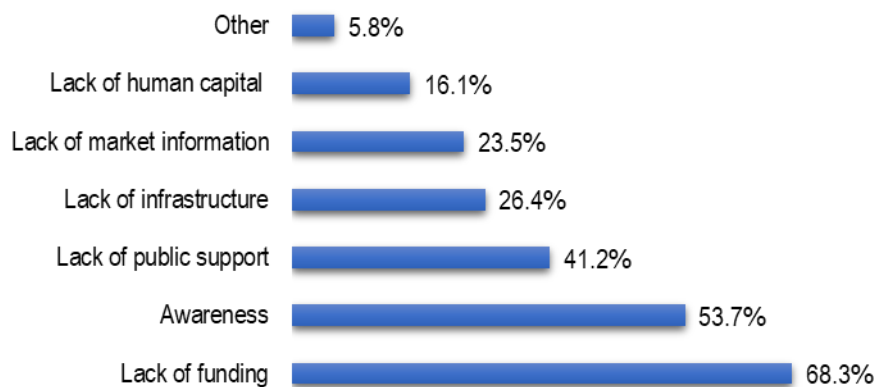
(v) Obstacles in implementing innovation in rural tourism destinations in Hanoi

The innovation of rural tourism has been demonstrated to bring about high economic, social, and environmental effects. However, innovation in rural tourism destinations in Hanoi still needs to overcome many

obstacles. The interview results revealed many difficulties and challenges in the innovation of rural tourism destinations in Hanoi. Firstly, local authorities and tourism practitioners' perception of innovation still needs to improve. Secondly, there are difficulties in investment capital sources, implementing innovative ideas, and fierce competition among destinations. In addition, the uneven benefits from tourism of the local community also hinder the innovation of rural tourism in Hanoi. *"It is necessary to consult and raise awareness about rural tourism innovation for the local community. They are negatively affected by tourism. Tourism only benefits some parts, while the majority suffer negative impacts. Therefore, locals have not actively participated in rural tourism products and have not closely linked with tourism service providers associated with the locality"* (Interviewee N03).

The survey results from 127 respondents, as shown in Figure 5, indicated many causes of recent obstacles to the innovation of rural tourism in Hanoi.

Figure 5. The main obstacles to rural tourism innovation in Hanoi (n=127)



Source: Author

The main obstacles to innovation in rural tourism in Hanoi are insufficient funding (68.3% of destinations according to the survey results) and, notably, a lack of awareness about rural tourism innovation in Hanoi, with 53.7% of survey respondents stating that low awareness is a significant obstacle to innovation. Another obstacle is the lack of favorable policies, particularly regarding financial support and land use for developing rural tourism in the state. Difficulties arising from a lack of market information, skilled labor, and infrastructure were also mentioned with rural tourism innovation in Hanoi.

Through this statistical analysis, it can be inferred that the primary obstacles to innovation in rural tourism destinations in Hanoi stem from external factors. It may be due to the recent development of rural tourism activities, which has limited the level of interest from relevant parties. The obstacle requires management units for rural tourism to adopt appropriate strategies and solutions to overcome difficulties in rural tourism innovation in general and in Hanoi in particular.

Conclusion

Rural tourism is a new type that has developed recently in Vietnam (Ando & Sieu 2014). However, this type of tourism has proven to play an essential role in development. The development of rural tourism in general, and innovation in rural tourism in particular, has changed the face of rural areas and increased income for farmers and their families (Brscic 2006; Roman 2020). It also promotes the development of related activities such as services, commerce, food services, and traditional handicrafts (Ciolac *et al.* 2019).

The innovation of rural tourism destinations in Hanoi is analyzed according to the proposed framework of the OECD (2005, 2018) with four contents: product innovation, marketing innovation, organizational innovation, and process innovation. The analysis results indicate that marketing innovation is the most common type in rural tourism destinations in Hanoi. It is similar to Andrés López & Daniela Ramos's (2015) research findings on rural tourism in Argentina. The main innovations in rural tourism marketing include applying digital marketing tools (Google AdWords, tourism websites, social networks); participating in international tourism fairs to promote and sell rural tourism products. However, customer care after the tour program and creative marketing content at rural tourism destinations in Hanoi is still limited in marketing innovation here. Product innovation is the second most common type of innovation at these destinations. Product innovation here is reflected through upgrading the quality of sightseeing services and developing tourism activities closely related to the life and culture of the local community. In addition, new tourism products serving each specific group of tourists (cultural tourism program for

the elderly, experiential learning tourism program for students, community lifestyle experience tourism program for foreign tourists) are also built, developed, and exploited. Organizational innovation is the third type of innovation emphasized to be implemented. Expanding cooperation between parties in promoting rural tourism in Hanoi is the primary innovation trend in the organization. In addition, the formation of complementary clusters in tourism is evidence of the transformation of rural tourism organizations here. The less common type of innovation is process innovation. This result is similar to the research of Valentin Toader and colleagues (2014) when studying innovation in rural tourism in Cluj County, Romania. The limitations in process innovation in rural tourism in Hanoi arise from awareness, financial resources, technology, and human resources in the process of innovation implementation.

Although a leading region in Vietnam in implementing innovation in rural tourism, the innovation in rural tourism here still needs to improve due to many objective and subjective limitations. To promote sustainable innovation in rural tourism in Hanoi, we propose specific innovation strategies as follows:

(i) Product innovation strategy: Conduct comprehensive investigations and collect information and data on resources and rural tourism markets to analyze and evaluate the current situation and direction for future innovation in agricultural and rural tourism. Raise awareness of businesses and management levels about innovation, diversify competitive eco-friendly tourism products. Develop vital tourism and service models in key craft villages associated with tourism.

(ii) Organizational innovation strategy: Raise stakeholders' awareness in linking industry clusters. Build models of agricultural and rural tourism value chains with the participation of Farmers - Cooperatives - Business households - Enterprises. Propose to improve, supplement, and issue mechanisms, policies, and regulations in rural tourism development management, such as infrastructure investment support, land use conversion, access to preferential loan sources, promotion, and cultural heritage preservation; Support training for rural residents in tourism.

(iii) Marketing Innovation Strategy: Focus on investing in promotion on digital media channels; integrate promotion and introduction of agricultural and rural tourism products into tourism advertising programs on international media channels, at travel agencies and tourism offices both domestically and abroad; Strengthen propaganda to enhance awareness of tourism innovation linked to agricultural and rural tourism and rural development associated with building new rural areas.

(iv) Process Innovation Strategy: Accelerate the digital transformation process, develop smart destinations, and form clusters for rural tourism development; Build software to serve management and promotion of rural tourism products.

Overall, our research provides an in-depth understanding of sustainable rural tourism innovation. Therefore, it contributes to a better understanding of sustainable rural tourism innovation, which has not been extensively studied by researchers. Furthermore, it provides a typical case study of rural tourism innovation in a central urban area of developing countries, contributing to a better understanding of innovation in rural tourism destinations in developing country urban areas. The research also provides managers and policy-makers with insights that can be considered when building and implementing future rural tourism destination innovation policies.

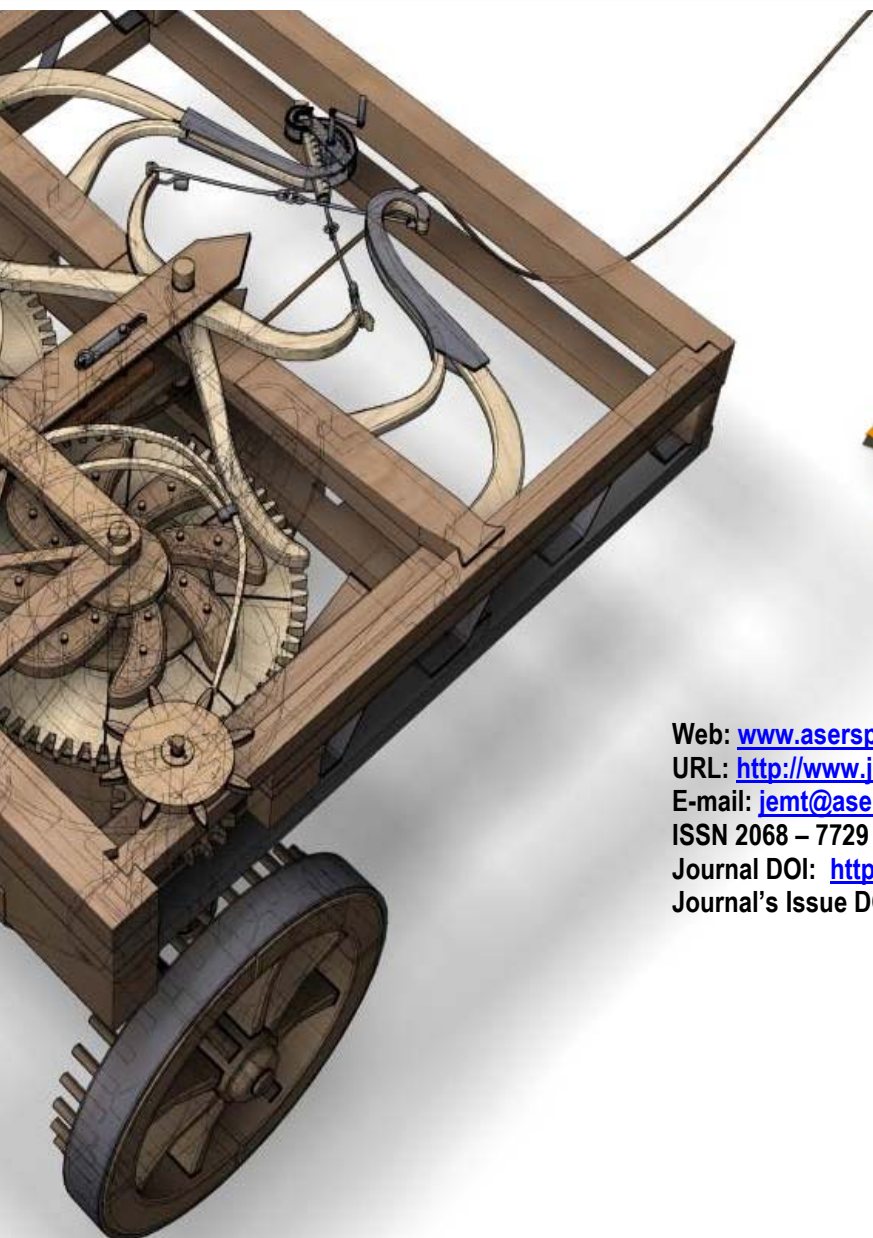
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