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# Call for Papers Fall Issue 2024

## Journal of Environmental Management and Tourism

**Journal of Environmental Management and Tourism** is an open access, peer-reviewed interdisciplinary research journal, aimed to publish articles and original research papers that contribute to the development of both experimental and theoretical nature in the field of Environmental Management and Tourism Sciences. The Journal publishes original research and seeks to cover a wide range of topics regarding environmental management and engineering, environmental management and health, environmental chemistry, environmental protection technologies (water, air, soil), pollution reduction at source and waste minimization, energy and environment, modelling, simulation and optimization for environmental protection; environmental biotechnology, environmental education and sustainable development, environmental strategies and policies.

Authors are encouraged to submit high quality, original works that discuss the latest developments in environmental management research and application with the certain scope to share experiences and research findings and to stimulate more ideas and useful insights regarding current best-practices and future directions in Environmental Management.

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## Entrepreneurs' Innovative Behaviour Response in Rural Tourism Development. A Case Study of Local Service Providers in Dong Van Karst Plateau Geopark, Northern Vietnam

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**Abstract:** Tourism industry becomes the spearhead economy in the Vietnamese government's development strategies that compete with regional countries like Thailand, Taiwan, Singapore, Philippines, Malaysia. Especially tourism in rural areas has been focused on and integrated into regional and national development programs in terms of creating a driving force for socio-economic development, high quality, diversified, and branded tourism products. Innovative efforts are necessary to further promote this industry so as to reap the full benefits and potential of this sector. Creativity and innovative approaches are essential for success.

The objective of this study is to examine the impact of innovation on the effectiveness of entrepreneurs in the tourism industry and propose that strategic and behavioural innovativeness enhances performance of entrepreneurs. Based on semi-structure interviews with 15 local service providers, the existing business challenges facing the service providers were identified and innovation activities that they adopted in responding to the challenges for the development strategies of rural tourism in Dong Van Karst Plateau Geopark. This research contributes to the understanding of innovative behaviour of participants and also some practical benefits as responses to their business challenges. However, the sample size of the study is quite small, new avenues for further research is highly recommended.

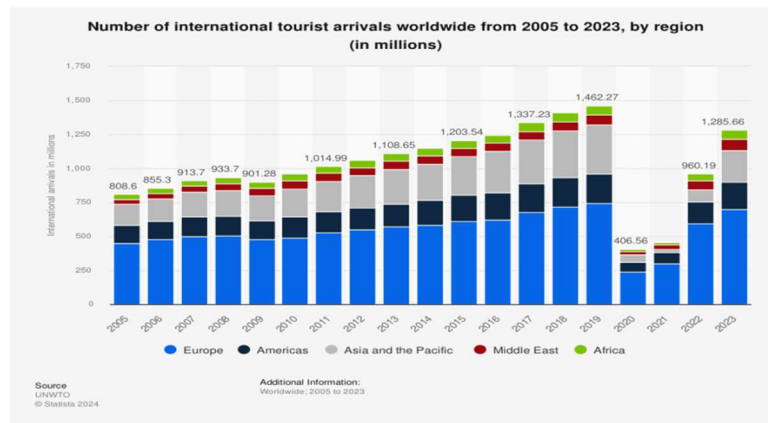
**Keywords:** innovative behaviour, innovativeness, entrepreneur, service providers, rural tourism, Vietnam tourism.

**JEL Classification:** O30; L10; L20; L22; L26; R31; R11; Z32.

### Introduction

According to the data provided by the World Travel and Tourism Council, travel and tourism are among the leading industries worldwide in terms of all economic parameters (Theobald 2012). The majority of nations regard tourism as one of their core economic sectors and assign it a prominent role in their economic development objectives (Sharpley 2000). It contributes significantly to the stage budget and other sectors of the gross economy, such as transportation, construction, industry, and various service sectors (UNWTO, 2017). The tourism industry has grown dramatically over the past few decades, with more than 1,5 billion annual international arrivals in 2019 (UNWTO, 2020) before the COVID-19. The number of international tourist arrivals worldwide increased across all regions in 2023 about 1,5 billion compared to the previous years in 2020 and 2021, which Impact of COVID-19 on travel and tourism worldwide as countries worldwide introduced lockdowns and travel bans to curb the number of infections (UNWTO, 2024). Moreover, an increasing interest in rural tourism has spread to nearly every part of the globe (Kumar 2020).

Figure 1. Number of International tourist arrivals worldwide from 2005 to 2023, by region (in millions)



Source: Statista UNWTO (2024).

Rural tourism is a substantial source of revenue for the rural populace and a real and lasting solution to the social and economic problems in rural areas (Tchetchik *et al.* 2008). Particularly in developing countries, rural tourism is viewed as a way to diversify the rural economy (Sharpley and Vass, 2006) in order to create new jobs, increase the incomes of rural residents, and bring about a variety of positive effects including foreign exchange, employment, higher government revenues, and the modernization of agriculture (Ju, 2011) and popular tourism destinations include mostly rural national parks, lakes, cultural landmarks, and wilderness areas (Okech *et al.* 2012).

Despite great potential, rural tourism development remains hindered by numerous issues such as destination image, infrastructure development, workforce training and education, quality management, and sustainable management (Andrades and Dimanche, 2017). The research of Zawislak and Marins (2007) has mentioned the lack of research studies on innovation focusing on the firms in developing countries so that there is needed for a research study working on the innovativeness of rural tourism related to the enterprises in the developing countries.

In 2018, the World Tourism Organization ranked Vietnam third among the top 10 destinations with the fastest growth in international visitors. It presently contributes 8.96 percent to the growth of the gross domestic product and has substantially more opportunity for future expansion (Vietnam News, 2018). More than 80 percent of Vietnam's rural land consists of natural areas and a long history of agricultural production, Vietnam's rural tourism business has not yet reached its full potential growth. Rural tourism in Vietnam is essentially unplanned; no specific planning is done for any location. Products for the tourism business are in short supply and unattractive to visitors (VietnamNews, 2016).

On that account, this paper aims to investigate innovation of entrepreneurs in the rural tourism industry. It brings a case study conducted the challenges faced to local service providers in Dong Van Karst Plateau Geopark, a rural village in the North of Vietnam and proposes the innovation activities to the service providers in responding the challenges for the rural tourism development. Following the introduction, section two provides context for the research paper through a review of the literature and a broad framework for the innovation of rural tourism development. The third section introduces the objectives and methodology of the investigation. Following that, the findings and discussions of the research are proposed. The obstacles and inventive solutions are discussed in the last section of the paper.

## 1. Literature Review

The study innovation and innovative behaviour in relation to entrepreneurship in rural tourism development as one of the tools to improve the service in this industry. Its efficiency is of paramount importance for tourism development in Dong Van Karst Plateau Geopark and requires deep theoretical research, comprehensive analysis and development of the recommendations based on them. Various aspects of innovation and innovative behaviour in tourism, rural tourism service development related to entrepreneurship have been considered in the works of many scientists.

### 1.1. An Overview of Rural Tourism, Rural Tourism Service Provider

According to Lane (1994), rural tourism is defined as tourism that should be located in rural areas, be rural in scale, character, and function, and represent the diverse and complex patterns of rural environment, economy,

and history. Gannon (1994) defined rural tourism as a range of activities, services, and amenities provided by farmers and rural people to attract tourists to their area in order to generate additional income for their businesses. In addition, rural tourism can be characterized as the "country experience," which comprises a variety of attractions and activities that occur in agricultural or non-urban locations (Mili 2012).

Rural tourism encompasses eco-tourism, farm-based tourism, agri-tourism, rural tourism, farm household tourism, tourism on family farm, eco-rural tourism, and other forms (Jelinčić 2007). In a research of Irshad (2010), rural tourism encompasses farm-based vacations as well as ecotourism, walking, climbing, and riding vacations, adventure, sport, and health tourism, hunting and angling, educational travel, arts and heritage tourism, and, in some places, ethnic tourism.

World Travel and Tourism Council defines rural tourism service provider as a person or company who ultimately provides the service to the customers who seeks the services of rural tourism industry (Travel and Impact, 2012). Hence, for this research researcher considered above said person, enterprise or company as rural tourism service provider. In further part of the research service provider means rural tourism service provider.

## 1.2. An Overview of Innovation, Innovation in Tourism and Rural Tourism Research

There are numerous definitions of the term "innovation", which generally refers to the introduction of something new (Keller 2006). The variety of definitions stems from the varied reasons for researching the phenomenon (Johannessen *et al.* 2001). Schumpeter (1934) was the first researcher who offered a comprehensive definition of innovation. He described innovation as "new combinations" of existing resources and classified innovation according to "type", distinguishing between new products, new methods of production, new sources of supply, the exploitation of new markets and new ways of organizing business (Schumpeter 1934). Another approach based on Schumpeter's research has classified innovations according to how they compared the existing setup (Freeman *et al.* 1987). In addition, innovativeness has been defined as an organizational overall innovative capability to introduce new product to the market, or open up new markets through the innovative behaviour and process (Wang and Ahmed 2004). However, the majority of innovation research has focused on products or production systems (Fagerberg *et al.* 2005).

The classic work of Schmookler (1966) on "Invention and Economic Growth" argued that the distinction between product technology and production technology was critical for the understanding of this phenomenon. According to him, innovation relies on technical change. He defined the former type as knowledge how to create or improve products and later as the knowledge about how to produce them (Schmookler 1966). Moreover, the term of product innovation and process innovation have been used to characterize the occurrence of new or improve goods or services and also improvement in the way to produce these (Gadrey *et al.* 1995). However, Edquist *et al.* (2001) argued that the distinction between product and process innovation is frequently based on the premise of the economic and social impact difference. He suggested dividing the category of process innovation into technological and organizational process innovation, which related to the new types of machinery and the latter to new ways of organizing work (Edquist *et al.* 2001). However, the organizational innovation which is used by Schumpeter (1934), also included arrangements across firms such as reorganization of entire industries. Camisón and Monfort-Mir (2012) has listed the limitations of a strict Schumpeterian approach to tourism innovation.

The focus on the topic of innovation in tourism increased over the past decade (Cosma *et al.* 2014). Service innovation has attracted considerable scholarly interest in both the hospitality and tourism management literature (Shin *et al.* 2019, Witell *et al.* 2016). Innovation and tourism has been inquired from the various perspectives and the correlation between tourism growth and degree of innovation has been confirmed (Nordin 2003). Hjalager is one of the emergent researchers presented example of innovations in tourism. In 2009, a case study on cultural tourism event which focuses on innovation systems was published (Hjalager 2009b). She emphasized that the concept of innovation systems allows for a better understanding of the complex driving forces and mechanisms that mediate the conditions, the extent and the outcomes of innovative behavior. Another of her research to explore the relationship between innovation and development in Medicines on tourism was also published in (2009a) by providing the three narratives cases of the interconnections. The first case describes developments in drugs for malaria and relations with tourism, the second one addresses recreational drugs and the third one investigates the concept of wilderness medicine and the pharmaceuticals and medical gears that facilitate this category of tourism. Through these examples, this paper demonstrated that the innovations in the medical fields and institutionalization of the medicine using may affect to way tourism and tourism economics development.

The most recent study conducted by de Larrea *et al.* (2021) provided comprehensive reviews of innovation research between multiple disciplines including hospitality and tourism under three perspectives: economic, market, and organizational perspectives. Considering the increasing significance of service innovation as a focus of Hospitality and tourism management (Martín-Rios and Ciobanu, 2019), it is necessary to conduct a thorough examination of the latest research on innovation in both Hospitality and tourism and broader service management. Pikkemaat *et al.* (2019) observed that tourist innovation research is largely concerned with the organizational, network-cooperative, and socioenvironmental contexts. An important contribution of this analysis is to offer current suggestions for future research on developing subjects including innovation in micro and family-owned businesses, as well as a holistic strategy for sustainable innovation. There is also the constant renewal of knowledge bases and their pioneering role in the definition of new uses in tourism projects (Aldebert *et al.* 2011). Jolly and Dimanche (2009) examined a number of technological advancements, particularly those associated with the diffusion of information technologies in tourism industries.

### 1.3. Research on Entrepreneurship and Innovation in Tourism/Rural Tourism Development

The emphasis for the study of innovation process results from a Schumpeterian perspective has been focused more intensively on empirical research applied to tourism enterprises (Camisón and Monfort-Mir 2012). Innovation might be provided by the demand for a new market or be developed by entrepreneurs (Hjalager 2010). The research of Hjalager (2002) and Martínez-Ros and Orfila-Sintes (2009) have explored the influence of market and tourism enterprise characteristics on incremental and radical innovations, also on the decision to innovate in products or processes based on López-Fernández *et al.* (2009). There is also a significant relationship between 'service innovation' and 'operating age' so the improvements in the production process are so important in the survival of travel agencies of the small and medium-sized enterprises in tourism industry (Yüzbaşıoğlu *et al.* 2014). The research of the innovative activity of micro, small and medium-sized tourist enterprises (MSMTEs) has confirmed the key innovation barriers, which are the organizational, environmental and innovation-process to be closely and mutually interrelated (Najda-Janoszka and Kopera 2014). Knowing the factors of innovation potential of tourism firms, destinations and the tourism clusters will entitle the firms to predict the future areas of change in tourism products development as well as marketing (Weiermair 2006). Combine thinking for the tourism research as well as the main reason and being the most things be difference for the main of rural tourism development.

A single case study of a small destination management company and qualitative methods has been used to understand how the environment and existing resources can be reconfigured to create innovative products that will ensure the company's success in the tourism industry (Paget *et al.* 2010). On the other hand, the entrepreneurial response to environmental issues is different. Entrepreneurs are only responding to demand others that only include the efficient management resources to minimize the environmental impact of their business (Ferrari *et al.* 2010). There is a confirmation that good governance combined with galvanized human resources is critical to successful rural tourism and engaged innovation. All of the successful businesses are led by engaged entrepreneurs, involved in implementing incremental improvements and liminal innovation (Joppe *et al.* 2014). An analytical framework and rationale for service innovation policies implementation has been proposed that specific service characteristics and specific service innovation needs may require specific solutions (Rubalcaba 2006).

The role of entrepreneurship is one of 10 gaps to approach in tourism innovation research (Bukhari *et al.* 2012). The support and development of entrepreneurship in rural tourism is possible mainly because of the tourism potential of rural areas and with increased training of human resources, fostering public-private partnerships, public awareness about the effects and needs of this activity development in the local and region (Surugiu, 2009). A numerous research have been carried out the contribution of the rural tourism sector through entrepreneurship (Komppula 2014). Entrepreneurship in rural tourism is considered a central force of economic development, as it generates growth and brings innovation and change (Lordkipanidze *et al.* 2005). In many developing countries, the entrepreneurs in tourism sector are increasing with the government support to build the strength of the small and mediums industries which indirectly reduce the unemployment rate among local communities and the alleviation of poverty (Ashe 2005) by offering services or selling local products to local and foreign tourists (Othman and Rosli 2011). The rural tourism enterprises' innovative capacity is associated with their involvement in cooperation, market-information systems using, and increasing the employees' competence actions (Rønningen 2010). Entrepreneurs in rural tourism are highly motivated to provide their visitors with the best possible combination of experiences, they often lack a sufficiently high level of knowledge and competencies to perform successfully (Jurdana *et al.* 2015). Rosário (2023) assessed the challenges and opportunities of innovation sustainability in tourism entrepreneurship, so establishing a distinct understanding of the necessary

actions to overcome the barriers and enhance recognition of the importance of sustainable tourism. The results of Dias *et al.* (2023) indicated that there is a direct impact of value co-creation and entrepreneurial reactivity on social innovation. Additionally, there is evidence of a mediating effect between enterprises' market orientation and social innovation practices.

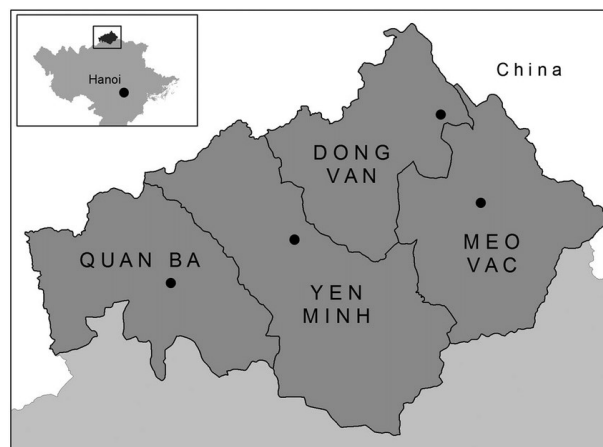
These findings provide fresh insights into the factors that influence the social innovation of entrepreneurs in the tourism lifestyle. This has practical consequences for local governments and destination authorities in their efforts to support the sustainability of destinations (Dias *et al.* 2023).

#### 1.4. Vietnam Tourism Development and Dong Van Karst Plateau Geopark Case Study Purposes

According to the World Tourism Organization, in 2018 Vietnam was ranked third among the ten destinations with the fastest growth of international visitors. Its contribution to GDP expansion is approximately 8.39 percent (Vietnam News 2018) Vietnam's tourism business grew fast, attracting 15,6 million international tourists, serving over 80 million local tourists, and generating a total of 28 based on Vietnamese tourist report in 2018. In addition, the General Department of Tourism acknowledged the tourism business as a significant economic activity in 2018, particularly in rural areas.

Although rural tourism is a relatively new concept in Vietnam, entrepreneurship in this sector is considered a key driver of economic development due to its ability to stimulate growth and bring about innovation and changes (Vuong *et al.* 2011). It greatly affects the tourism communities such as in Hanoi, Lao Cai, Son La, Ha Giang, Hoi An, Ho Chi Minh, Vinh Long, Can Tho, etc. The town offers several sorts of tourism to both domestic and foreign visitors, including tourism focused on exploring the local area, environmentally-friendly tourism, food-related tourism, tourism entered around agriculture, tourism centred around festivals, and tourism entered around handicrafts (Jansen-Verbeke and Go 1995).

Figure 2. Dong Van Karst Plateau Geopark, Districts



Source: Powell *et al.* (2018).

Dong Van Karst Plateau Geopark is located in the North eastern province of Ha Giang, a mountainous province located in far north of Vietnam which is along the border with China and encompasses four districts of Ha Giang: Yen Minh, Quan Ba, Meo Vac and Dong Van (Ha *et al.* 2013), around 300 km from Hanoi Capital (Figure 1) and a member of the UNESCO Global Geoparks Network and Asia Pacific Geoparks Network from 2010. About 80% of the area of the geopark is covered by limestone which limits arable land surface and makes it vulnerable to unpredictable natural disasters (Turner and Pham 2015, Powell *et al.* 2018). This topography also contributes to the poverty with estimate more than half of the population living below the poverty line.

There are also more than 27 different ethnic groups living in this area. With its earth heritage and unique culture of ethnic minority groups, the Dong Van Karst Plateau in Ha Giang Province is one of the most spectacular destinations in Viet Nam (Vietnam National Authority of Tourism, 2019). The products and cultural activities of each ethnic group pique the interest of domestic and international tourists. Richness and uniqueness of natural tourism resources and humanities are extremely favourable conditions for the growth of tourism products in general and rural tourism in particular. However, ethnic minority groups have higher levels of poverty than the national average (Bank, 2009). Because of this poverty and the diversity in the region, creating alternative livelihoods through tourism has become a priority of the government (Turner and Pham 2015).

The influence of tourism on the residents of the village is the decisive element for the development of rural tourism. Most local residents remain perplexed regarding the procurement, assimilation and conversion of tourism



services. Prior to implementing tourism products, it is essential to offer individuals a brief training session to familiarize them, enhance their skills and make them aware of the advantages (Tien *et al.* 2019). Local people have a deficiency in self-motivation and expertise in production management, preservation, brand creation, and production marketing. Additionally, they possess limited awareness and willingness to participate in tourism activities (Hau and Tuan 2017) and it requires an upgrade. Particularly in the northern mountainous heartland of Vietnam, the lack of sustainable interventions in the rural tourism development is the greatest obstacle (Jamieson *et al.* 1998).

The development strategy of the Vietnamese government for the tourism industry is to be the spearhead economy of the country. To achieve the 2020 - 2030 target from the Annual Year reports, the focus will be on increasing international and domestic tourists, creating a driving force for socio-economics development, high quality, diversified and branded tourism products, compete with regional countries and belongs to the group of Southeast countries with the leading development tourism industry. The strategies to achieve the targets as follows:

1. Innovating awareness and thinking about tourism development.
2. Restructuring tourism to ensure professionalism, modernity and sustainable development in accordance with the rules of market economy and international integration.
3. Adjusting, supplementing and completing policies directly related to tourism development.
4. Investing and developing infrastructure, technical facilities of tourism industry.
5. Improving tourism promotion.
6. Creating a favourable environment for business and community in tourism development.
7. Developing tourism human resources, strengthening the capacity and efficiency of state management on tourism.

From the strategies above, we have to note that the innovative activities in rural tourism industry related to entrepreneurship is underdeveloped in Vietnam and many other developing countries. Although there are number of studies that have been published, they are rather fragmentary or centre on limited case studies. In this context and with the important of innovation in tourism service, the objectives of this research are:

- To review research on innovation in rural tourism industry.
- To identify the existing challenges facing the developing countries' tourism enterprises. A case of service providers in Dong Van Karst Plateau Geopark.
- To propose the innovative activities to the service providers in responding the challenges for the rural tourism development in Dong Van Karst Plateau Geopark.

## 2. Research Methodology

### 2.1. Sampling and Data Collections

This study used semi-structured interviews and a case study research design. A case study of Dong Van Karst Plateau Geopark was used. Face to face interviews and group discussions were used to collect primary data whereby founder-owner, representatives and managers were asked to interview and discuss the challenges they had experienced in business management and operation. Each participant also explained their innovation responses to solve the challenges. A total of 15 services providers were interviewed from November to December 2018. They were selected from the databased the Tourism Department of Dong Van District - Ha Giang Province. Each interview was last between 1.5 to 2.5 hours and then was transcribed, coded, and analysed to discover the innovative behaviours of the service providers.

### 2.2. Data Analysis

Table 1. Summary characteristics of the participants

Participant	Gender	Educational level	Position	Type of Business
A	Male	Diploma	General Manager	Food and beverage
B	Female	Bachelor degree	General Manager	Accommodation
C	Female	Diploma	Founder	Food and beverage, multiple services
D	Female	Vocational training	Founder	Food and beverage
E	Female	Diploma	Founder	Accommodation
G	Female	Diploma	Founder	Accommodation
H	Male	Diploma	Founder	Accommodation

Participant	Gender	Educational level	Position	Type of Business
I	Male	Bachelor degree	Founder	Accommodation
K	Male	Bachelor degree	Founder	Food and beverage
L	Female	Diploma	Founder	Food and beverage
M	Male	Bachelor degree	Founder	Food and beverage, multiple services
N	Male	Vocational School	Founder	Accommodation
O	Male	Diploma	Founder	Food and beverage, multiple services
P	Male	Diploma	Founder	Accommodation
Q	Female	Vocational School	Founder	Food and beverage

Source: Processed by Researcher.

### 3. Research Results and Discussions

This research identifies the challenges and the responses to those challenges to discover the innovative behaviour of the service providers in Dong Van Karst Plateau Geopark. Categories, challenges as well as the challenges' responses are presented in table 2.

According to the responses, market and environmental understanding, communication with different stakeholders is one of the most significant obstacles for entrepreneurs in tourism development. Limited understanding of rural tourism and its benefits makes it difficult for local entrepreneurs to manage and operate their businesses. Communication is essential for rural tourism development and promotion initiatives' networks and partnerships. Some responders proposed holding a workshop, conference, or forum in order to share information and debate development plans and processes. In addition, the information demonstrates that some respondents are unwilling to share their ideas with others in their business. They are unaware of its significance for their business growth. The entrepreneurs B, E, and G have joined the Dong Van Hotel Association. They stated, *"Since we joined the Hotel association group in the District, we've had the opportunity to receive the most recent hotel industry regulations from the government, to meet and share our experience as well as our difficulties with others and also receive so many helpful suggestions on how to run our business and enhance our services."*

Table 2. Categories, challenges to the service providers

Categories	Challenges
Market knowledge, environment and communication	The lack of upgrading the latest items available in the market There is a lack of connectivity within the rural tourism service industry Insufficient linkage between the government and enterprises Lack of Government supporting for entrepreneurial activities and development strategies Insufficient government regulation of tourism operations
Competition	The market is saturated with business offering comparable product lines Strong competition from urban entrepreneurs Encountering difficulties in establishing and adhering to the set standards
Managing, operating business and marketing	Searching more global and domestic tourists Attract more tourists Lack of New products promotions, new advertisement strategies
Employee/ staffs	Low skill level of workers. Vietnamese prefer to work in a big city (salary, working environment, other supports ...) Negative attitude of the employees
Language	Difficulty of hiring workers, who have higher education and foreign language such as English, etc Non English speaking and other languages. Lack of signage and menu in English or other popular languages
Location and weather	Unexpected wet season Difficulty to get to the destination

Source: Processed by Researcher

Through tourism organizations, the government of Dong Van is the sole driver of tourism development associated to the project or program. The government is responsible for providing the local entrepreneurs with the informational workshop on rural tourism. Inadequate communication between the government and businesses is another obstacle for entrepreneurs. The majority of respondents claimed having almost no knowledge about the government's rural tourism development policies in order to prepare themselves for managing and operating their business or constructing their development plan. Government and industry work independently and do not

collaborate to enhance tourism operations. In addition, the government must also consider and plan for the rural tourism infrastructure development. The administration of Dong Van is responsible for developing tourist strategy and communicating them to tourism groups. The government is regarded as the head of the tourism forum, in which the majority of rural tourism entrepreneurs can participate and exchange ideas, knowledge, and data for the purpose of development.

According to the interviewees, one of the most significant challenges rural entrepreneurs confront is competition on a crowded market with large organizations and metropolitan businesses offering comparable goods and services. Standardization issues and rivalry from major scale units in urban firms are the market's greatest challenges. Hall and Williams (2008) has also mentioned that "Competition is one of the driving forces of innovation generally as well as in tourism." The manager of the hotel, entrepreneur B said: *"my company respond to the competition by providing tourists with additional services. I stated that tourists can make online reservations and pay straight with credit cards. In addition, they can contact travel agents in other locations in order to book a whole tour that includes a stay at my hotel. I also promote the business to the group of tourists"*. Another founder of the food and beverage industry, interviewee M, stated that he offers food and drink delivery services to customers in addition to restaurant service, allowing him to reach more customers.

The majority of entrepreneurs are locals from an ethnic group that does not speak the official Vietnamese language, and the most of them are uneducated or have a very poor level of education. Due to their lack of IT understanding, obtaining information from the Internet or a website is quite difficult for them. Buhalis (2008) mentioned that the development of the internet has changed dramatically the market conditions for tourism organizations. Information and technologies (ICTs) evolve rapidly providing new tools for tourism marketing and management (Buhalis and Law 2008). There is a limitation of professional development for small tourism operation owner and ICT can increase professionalism and the innovation in the tourism industry through education (Holden *et al.* 2010). Many tourism firms do not take any effort to collaborate with other firms even though collaboration among individual entrepreneurs and organizations perform a crucial function in the innovation system (Mattsson *et al.* 2005). Thus, it is crucial to equip the local entrepreneurs with a training program so that they can gain business management and operation fundamentals as well as career motivation.

Rural entrepreneurs in Dong Van face a huge hurdle when it comes to marketing their products. There needs to be a significant amount of marketing, promotion, and advertising in order to attract tourists who don't know the market well enough yet. Respondents also offered marketing suggestions, such as establishing a company website, blog, or Facebook page, allowing customers to make reservations online 24 hours a day, seven days a week, via email, or through internet or television advertising.

Marketing techniques for a business, on the other hand, emphasize individuality. As a result, businesses, travel agencies, associations, and the government all need to work together to develop a picture of their offerings. I, the founder of a three-star hotel in Dong Van, stated that the hotel's strong relationships with major travel agencies in the capital city allow it to frequently host large groups of tourists on a weekly or monthly basis. Additionally, they purchased a social media package promotion, so they also have a number of tourists who book accommodations through Facebook.

A high-skilled workforce is difficult to come by for the majority of rural entrepreneurs. Entrepreneurs face a major challenge when it comes to sending their staff to work and providing them with language instruction, as both workers and entrepreneurs are largely uninformed. Moreover, the business environment is mainly inside the family, so it is not encouraged to urge rural people to take up their business as a career.

Rural areas tend to attract the most educated and young people. As a result, training is crucial for the growth of businesses, whether they are run by a private company or the government. Since the majority of their employees are from ethnic groups that do not even speak formal Vietnamese, 99 percent of the respondents do not know English. Neither do their employees. Thus, they opted to interact with the tourists through images or sign language. The businesses also notify the District government of the need to provide English and a popular foreign language to tourism sector players. Service provider N in the accommodation industry and service provider Q in the food and beverage industry face similar difficulties in concealing royal employees, as the majority of young residents with a high level of education prefer to work in a city with a higher income, while those with no education or less are willing to work for their businesses. However, N and Q must pay for their employees' training program and language improvement in order for them to become loyal employees. Additionally, one additional category of problems was retrieved from the interview, namely location and weather, however it is less prevalent based on the research analysis.

## Conclusions and Further Research

The research identified number of challenges that face local service providers and their innovation responses in managing and operating their business in Dong Van Karst Plateau Geopark, Vietnam namely: Market knowledge, environment and communication with difference stakeholders, competition, managing, operating and marketing business, employee/ staffs management, language training program, unexpected wet weather and difficulty of location. This study has contributed to the development strategies of rural tourism for difference stakeholders in Dong Van Karst Plateau Geopark. However, the sample size of the study is quite small so further research will be highly recommended. Moreover, further quantitative study can look at the relationship between the innovative behaviour and the reaction of the entrepreneurs and other stakeholders for rural tourism development.

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**Thi Hang Truong:** The author confirms sole responsibility for the conception of the article and its design, the data collection, analysis of the articles, interpretation of results and the final manuscript preparation.

## Declaration of Competing Interest

The author declares that he has no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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The authors declare that they have not used generative AI and AI-assisted technologies during the preparation of this work.

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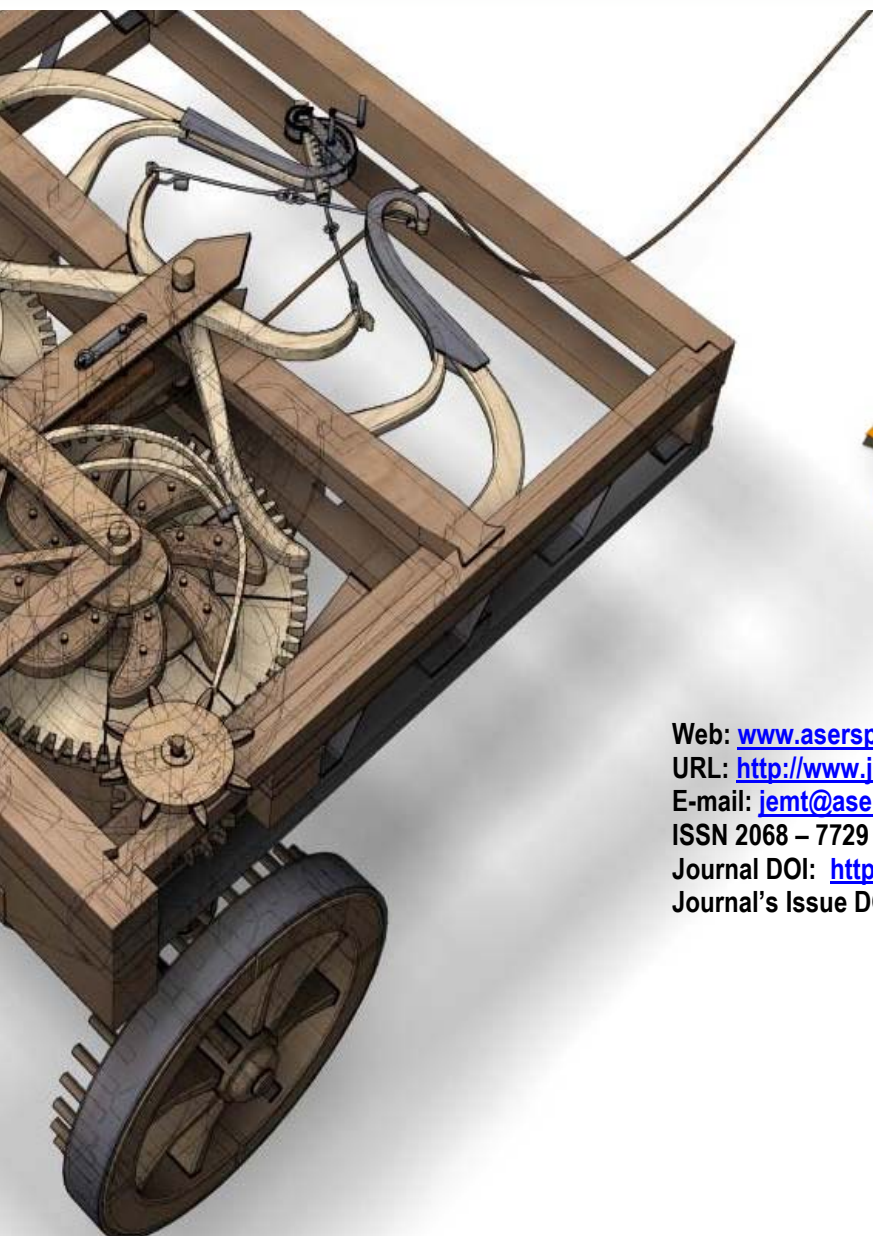
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