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Tourism, Value Creation and Territorial Change: Contemporary Challenges for Management, Innovation and Sustainability

Turismo, Criação de Valor e Mudança Territorial: Desafios Contemporâneos para Gestão, Inovação e Sustentabilidade

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ASBSTRACT

Tourism is developing amid changing visitor expectations, business models and relationships between destinations and the communities that host them. Digitalisation creates new possibilities for promotion, interpretation and management, but it also raises questions about value creation, the distribution of benefits and the capacity of territories to respond to competing pressures. This editorial examines four related dimensions of contemporary tourism: tourism experiences and heritage valorisation; sustainable destinations, territorial governance and tourism development; tourism business management, marketing and competitiveness; and digital innovation and educational approaches. Drawing on recent research and previous contributions published in *e³*, it considers why tourism should be understood in terms broader than demand growth or the adoption of new technologies. Value creation also depends on the quality of experiences, organisational capabilities, community participation and the institutional conditions in which tourism takes place. The editorial places these issues within the wider debate on sustainable destination development and discusses the contribution of the present volume to that debate.

Keywords: Tourism management; Value creation; Innovation; Sustainability; Territorial governance; Digital transformation.

RESUMO

O turismo desenvolve-se num contexto de transformação das expectativas dos visitantes, dos modelos de negócio e das relações entre os destinos e as comunidades que os acolhem. A digitalização abre novas possibilidades de promoção, interpretação e gestão, mas também coloca questões sobre a criação de valor, a distribuição dos benefícios e a capacidade dos territórios para responder a diferentes pressões. Este editorial aborda quatro dimensões relacionadas do turismo contemporâneo: experiências turísticas e valorização do património; destinos sustentáveis, governança territorial e desenvolvimento turístico; gestão empresarial, marketing e competitividade; e inovação digital e abordagens educativas. Partindo de investigação recente e de contributos anteriormente publicados na *e³*, discute-se a importância de compreender o turismo para além do crescimento da procura ou da adoção de novas tecnologias. A criação de valor depende também da qualidade das experiências, das capacidades das organizações, da participação das comunidades e das condições institucionais em que a atividade se desenvolve. O editorial enquadra estas questões no debate sobre o desenvolvimento sustentável dos destinos e apresenta o contributo do presente volume para a discussão.

Palavras-chave: Gestão do turismo; Criação de valor; Inovação; Sustentabilidade; Governança territorial; Transformação digital.

1. Introduction

Tourism is often discussed in terms of visitor numbers, expenditure, competitiveness and the contribution of the sector to economic growth. These indicators are important, but they do not explain on their own why some destinations develop successfully while others struggle to translate their resources into lasting benefits. Nor do they tell us whether the value generated by tourism is shared across the organisations, communities and territories involved.

The development of tourism depends on several processes that are closely connected. Visitors seek experiences that meet their expectations; businesses need to attract customers and operate within financial constraints; public institutions make decisions about planning, infrastructure and investment; and residents live with the economic, social and environmental consequences of tourism activity. These perspectives do not always coincide. A strategy that benefits one group may create costs for another, and a successful tourism product may still raise questions about its long-term contribution to the destination.

Digitalisation has added new possibilities to this landscape. Digital platforms, data analysis and interactive technologies have changed how tourism products are promoted, how visitors make choices and how destinations communicate with their audiences. Yet the value of these tools depends on their application. Technology can improve access to information, support decision-making or enrich the interpretation of heritage, but its presence does not guarantee a better experience or more effective management.

Previous editorials published in *e³* have addressed these connections from different perspectives. *Tourism, Innovation and Territorial Development: Contemporary Dynamics and Sustainability Challenges* examined the links between technological change, competitiveness and territorial development (Abreu et al., 2026). The subsequent editorial, *Reconfiguring Tourism Systems: Digital Intelligence, Territorial Governance and Organizational Transformation*, further explored the interaction between digital technologies, governance and organisational change (Vidal Carvalho et al., 2026). The present volume continues this discussion, with particular attention to the conditions under which tourism can create value for businesses and destinations without losing sight of the places and people that sustain it.

Four areas provide the structure for this reflection. The first concerns tourism experiences, the development of distinctive products and the interpretation of cultural and natural resources. The second focuses on sustainable destinations and the institutional arrangements that shape territorial development. The third examines business management, marketing and competitiveness. The fourth considers digital innovation and educational approaches, including the importance of assessing new tools in relation to the needs they are intended to address.

These areas are not independent. Heritage interpretation influences the visitor experience; governance affects the management of tourism resources; marketing choices depend on the quality and viability of the products being promoted; and technology can support each of these processes, provided it is integrated with an understanding of the context. The central issue is how these relationships can be managed, rather than how each can be improved in isolation.

2. Tourism Experiences, Products and Heritage Valorisation

A tourism experience is shaped by more than the attraction itself. Visitors arrive with interests, expectations and previous knowledge, and they interpret places through their own

circumstances. The same resource may appeal to different audiences for different reasons. Understanding these differences is important when destinations and businesses decide which experiences to develop and how to communicate them.

Research on visitor behaviour illustrates the limits of treating the market as a single group. (Rodríguez et al., 2025) examining the choice of urban tourist attractions through Plog's theory, consider how sociodemographic characteristics relate to the places visitors choose. The study draws attention to the role of visitor profiles in tourism management and suggests that destination strategies should take differences in demand into account. Segmentation can help organisations understand their audiences, although it should not be reduced to a simple exercise in matching demographic categories with products. Visitors' decisions also reflect the purpose of their trip, their expectations and the circumstances in which they encounter the destination.

The development of tourism products raises a related question: what makes a place or activity distinctive? Natural and cultural resources provide a starting point, but they do not automatically constitute a coherent tourism offer. Their value depends partly on how they are presented, connected to other experiences and made accessible to visitors. Barreth et al. (2025) in their work on cultural tourism product development in General Villamil Playas, Ecuador, address the relationship between local customs, traditions and the design of a tourism offer. This type of work illustrates the potential of local cultural resources, while also raising the practical question of how traditions can be interpreted and shared without being detached from the communities and circumstances that give them meaning.

Heritage presents a particular challenge. Its significance is not confined to the physical characteristics of buildings, landscapes or objects; it also involves memory, identity, historical interpretation and the meanings attributed to a place. Tourism can help make heritage accessible to wider audiences and provide resources for its preservation, but commercial use may also change the ways in which it is understood. The question is not simply how many visitors a site can attract. It is also how the experience can communicate its significance and remain respectful of the resource.

Digital technologies create new opportunities for interpretation, including augmented reality, interactive media and immersive experiences. Their contribution, however, depends on how they are integrated into the visit. Ballina (2026), studying digitally supported heritage visits, found that the relationship between technology and the guided experience was more important than technological intensity alone. Adding digital features without considering usability and narrative coherence may weaken rather than improve the experience.

Other work on heritage interpretation reaches the question from a different direction. Chen et al. (2026) examine how humorous and serious interpretative styles affect memorable tourism experiences, considering the role of perceived playfulness, awe and the use of human or AI interpreters. Liu et al. (2026), studying a technology-enhanced cultural heritage site, examine how perceived authenticity and place satisfaction mediate the relationship between the experience and visitors' intention to return. These studies point to a distinction that is easily overlooked: providing information and creating an engaging experience are related aims, but they are not the same thing.

The development of health and wellness tourism offers another example of the need to understand demand in context. Rosalina and Teoh (2026) examine wellness tourism products through the perspectives of local stakeholders and identify different ways of connecting visitor well-being with local development. Their work suggests that product

design should consider not only market competitiveness but also the interests of the people and businesses involved in delivering the experience.

This is particularly relevant to products based on natural resources, local practices or specialised forms of tourism. Visitor interest may be important, but an offer also depends on accessibility, complementary services, communication and the ability to deliver a consistent experience. A proposal that generates favourable initial responses still needs to be assessed in terms of operational capacity and financial viability. The distinction between an attractive concept and a sustainable tourism product is especially important for small enterprises and communities working with limited resources.

Community participation matters throughout this process. Local people should not be viewed solely as providers of services or as part of the cultural identity being promoted. Their knowledge, priorities and involvement influence how resources are used and whether the benefits of tourism contribute to the continuity of local practices. In this sense, heritage valorisation is not simply a question of presenting the past to visitors. It also involves decisions about how places are represented, who participates in those decisions and what remains for the community after the visitor has left.

3. Sustainable Destinations, Territorial Governance and Tourism Development

A destination is not an isolated tourism product. It is a territory with existing communities, economic activities, institutions and environmental conditions. Tourism interacts with these elements, sometimes creating opportunities and sometimes adding pressure to resources that are already limited. Sustainable destination development therefore requires decisions that extend beyond promotion and visitor management.

Planning is one part of this process, but the existence of a plan does not guarantee that its objectives will be achieved. Plans need to be connected to investment, responsibilities, implementation and evaluation. They also need to reflect the conditions of the territory in which they are applied. Valencia-Arias et al. (2026), in their systematic review of tourism development planning, identify the diversity of approaches, models and applications used in the literature. Their review reinforces the need to understand planning as a context-dependent process involving territorial governance and the participation of relevant actors.

The relationship between planning and local participation is also evident in research on Zamora, Ecuador, which considers tourism potential, land use and the development of tourism initiatives (Suasnavas Rodríguez, 2026). The involvement of local actors is important because the development of a destination affects more than the tourism sector itself. Decisions about where activities take place, which resources are prioritised and how tourism routes are organised may influence access, economic opportunities and the use of natural and cultural assets.

Territorial governance becomes particularly relevant when tourism resources are spread across several municipalities or depend on the cooperation of multiple organisations. A route, for example, may connect places with different identities, services and levels of readiness to receive visitors. Its development requires more than a common brand or promotional campaign. It depends on the quality of the individual experiences, the connections between them and the capacity of stakeholders to work towards shared objectives. Pedrosa et al. (2026), examining tourism routes across five European cases, show that differences in route characteristics are important to understanding the factors associated with their success.

The same principle applies to sustainability monitoring. Destinations may adopt indicators and frameworks to assess environmental, social and economic performance, but these tools need to reflect local conditions if they are to support decisions. Mandić and Pivčević (2026), studying Living Labs across six European destinations, examine how collaborative arrangements can support knowledge exchange and the development of sustainability monitoring frameworks. Their findings also highlight the difficulties of applying standardised approaches across destinations with different institutional and territorial characteristics.

This raises a practical question: how can destinations compare progress without overlooking the differences that shape local outcomes? Common indicators may help identify broad trends, yet the issues facing a rural destination, protected landscape and large metropolitan area are unlikely to be identical. Measurement should provide a basis for action, not become an administrative exercise detached from local priorities.

Residents are central to this discussion. Tourism development can create employment, support services and provide reasons to preserve local resources, but its effects are not distributed equally. The willingness of residents to participate may depend on whether they perceive tangible benefits, feel represented in decisions and trust the institutions involved. Zhang and McCartney (2026), examining resident participation in sustainable tourism in a rural Chinese destination, identify relationships between perceived benefits, positive empathy and participation. Their findings underline the value of considering the social and psychological dimensions of community involvement alongside economic outcomes.

Governance is therefore more than a formal arrangement between institutions. It concerns how decisions are made, whose perspectives are considered and whether there is sufficient capacity to implement and adjust those decisions. Collaboration may help connect public authorities, businesses and local communities, but it requires clear responsibilities and a willingness to address competing interests. The existence of a partnership does not ensure that cooperation will be effective.

Sustainability should be understood in the same practical terms. It is not a label that can be attached to a destination once a strategy has been published. It involves choices about investment, resource use, infrastructure, conservation and the distribution of benefits. These choices often entail trade-offs, and they need to be revisited as conditions change. The long-term contribution of tourism depends on whether destinations can recognise these tensions and make decisions that are appropriate to their own social, economic and environmental circumstances.

4. Tourism Business Management, Marketing and Competitiveness

Tourism businesses operate in markets where customer expectations change, competition is intense and demand may fluctuate. Marketing plays an important role in attracting visitors and communicating the value of a product, but business performance also depends on the organisation's ability to deliver what it promises. A strong promotional strategy cannot compensate indefinitely for weak service delivery, poorly understood costs or an offer that does not meet customer expectations.

Digital marketing has expanded the number of channels available to tourism organisations. Social media and online platforms allow businesses to reach audiences, promote seasonal activities and communicate directly with potential customers. Yet access to these channels does not guarantee that they are used effectively. Esteves et al. (2025), examining digital marketing among tourism enterprises in Terras de Trás-os-Montes, found that businesses recognised its importance but often used social media in a limited way. Their findings draw

attention to the gap between recognising the value of digital marketing and having the knowledge and resources required to use it strategically.

The choice of marketing tools is only one part of the decision. Organisations also need to understand what they are trying to achieve, which audiences they wish to reach and how they will assess the results. Chang et al. (2026), developing a framework for selecting key opinion leaders in hospitality marketing, examine the criteria that can support this process. Their work illustrates how structured decision tools may help businesses compare alternatives, although their usefulness depends on the quality of the criteria and how well these reflect the organisation's objectives.

Customer relationships present another challenge. Visitors can now compare offers, access reviews and communicate with businesses throughout the customer journey. These interactions may influence trust, perceptions of quality and the intention to return. Peco-Peco-Torres et al. (2026), studying value co-creation through hotel online media and travel websites, examine how customer engagement and brand equity relate to these interactions, including the influence of cultural context. Sofi et al. (2026) similarly examine digital marketing capabilities, customer relationship management and trust in relation to hotel revisit intentions.

These studies suggest that digital communication is not simply a matter of increasing visibility. It can form part of a broader relationship with the customer, but that relationship depends on the quality of the experience and the organisation's capacity to respond. Moreover, engagement, satisfaction, intention to return and actual repeat behaviour should not be treated as interchangeable indicators. Each captures a different aspect of the relationship between a business and its customers.

The structure of the market also matters. Napierała and Tomczyk (2026), examining hotels, motels and guesthouses in Poland, investigate the adoption of platform-led loyalty and marketing tools. Their findings point to differences between businesses in their likelihood of adopting such tools, including differences associated with location, price positioning and digital capabilities. The growing role of large platforms may give individual businesses access to marketing tools and customer networks, but it can also raise questions about dependence, control over customer relationships and the unequal capacity of businesses to benefit from platform-based systems.

These questions are particularly relevant to smaller enterprises and destinations outside the main tourism centres. Digital tools may provide access to new markets, yet they require time, knowledge and resources. Businesses also need to decide which activities they can manage themselves and which depend on external platforms or intermediaries. Adoption should therefore be considered in relation to both the potential advantages and the conditions under which those advantages can be realised.

The internal side of management deserves equal attention. Costing and management control help organisations understand the resources consumed by their activities, compare services and assess the consequences of decisions about prices and investment. These questions become particularly important when demand is seasonal or when operating costs cannot be adjusted quickly. Financial performance is not separate from the tourism experience: it affects the ability of a business to maintain service quality, invest in facilities and respond to changing customer needs.

Earlier research published in *e³* on local accommodation in Madeira examined the profile of investors and the geographical distribution of the activity, illustrating the importance of understanding the people and business structures behind tourism supply (Sardinha et al., 2019). Such work remains relevant to the wider question of how tourism markets develop across territories and how investment decisions relate to local economic conditions.

Competitiveness, then, should not be understood solely as the ability to attract more visitors or to adopt the latest marketing tools. It also involves making informed decisions about customer relationships, pricing, costs, investment and the organisation's position within a changing market. Sustainable business performance depends on the relationship between the value promised to customers and the resources available to deliver it.

5. Digital Innovation and Educational Approaches

Innovation is often associated with the adoption of new technologies, but a new tool is not necessarily an improvement. Its value depends on the problem it addresses, the people who use it and the way it fits into existing practices. This applies to tourism organisations, public institutions and educational settings alike.

In tourism, digital platforms and data-based systems may support promotion, planning, the interpretation of heritage and communication with visitors. Their usefulness depends on whether they improve decisions or experiences in ways that matter. The same caution applies in education, where digital tools can provide access to content and feedback, but cannot guarantee understanding or meaningful engagement on their own.

Earlier work published in *e³* on academic intelligence and educational tourism explored the use of data and analytical tools to support decision-making in higher education, including the management of study programmes and the identification of patterns associated with academic performance (Coelho & Lima, 2025). This work illustrates how data can inform institutional decisions, while also raising questions about the interpretation and use of information in educational contexts.

The transition to higher education brings a different set of challenges. Carvalho et al. (2026) examine students' preparation and perceived aptitude in Portugal, drawing attention to the relationship between educational pathways and students' experiences as they enter higher education. These questions matter because the effectiveness of educational approaches depends partly on the starting points, needs and expectations of learners.

Research on flipped learning and feedback provides further insight into the relationship between technology and learning. Lee et al. (2026), examining GPTutor in higher education, found that AI-supported convergent feedback was associated with improvements in knowledge construction, motivation and engagement in their study setting. Wang et al. (2026) studied an AI chatbot-supported cooperative flipped classroom and reported differences in collaboration, self-regulated learning and academic performance between the experimental and control groups. Ates (2026), using a multisite experiment, found that the educational value of generative AI feedback depended on how feedback was designed and whether students retained an active role in evaluating and revising their work.

Taken together, these studies do not support the idea that technology has a uniform effect across educational settings. Rather, they suggest that its contribution depends on the design of the learning process and the way learners interact with the tool. Providing feedback is not the same as ensuring that students use it constructively. Access to an AI system does not remove the need for subject knowledge, evaluation or independent judgement.

The teaching of mathematics illustrates why this distinction matters. Kar et al. (2026), examining how teachers formulate geometry problems, found that the problems developed in their study tended to favour computational tasks over discovery- and verification-oriented approaches. The findings raise questions about the kinds of mathematical activity encouraged by classroom tasks and the opportunities students have to develop reasoning, formulate conjectures and test their ideas.

Educational innovation can therefore involve more than technology. It may also concern the design of an activity, the way a problem is presented or the balance between guidance and independent work. Practical methods can help students engage with abstract concepts, but their educational value depends on the clarity of the learning objective and the accuracy of the mathematical or conceptual claims involved.

This broader perspective is useful beyond education. Whether a new tool is introduced into a classroom, a tourism business or a destination management system, its value should be assessed against the purpose it is intended to serve. The relevant questions remain straightforward: what problem is being addressed, who benefits, what limitations remain and what evidence would show that the change has improved the situation?

6. Final Considerations

Tourism creates opportunities, but those opportunities do not develop in isolation from the places, organisations and communities involved. The ability to generate lasting value depends on the quality of experiences, the viability of businesses, the coordination of institutions and the way resources are managed. Digital innovation may contribute to these processes, but its role needs to be assessed in relation to practical needs rather than assumed in advance.

The four areas discussed in this editorial offer different perspectives on these questions. Tourism experiences and heritage valorisation raise issues about visitor expectations, interpretation and the participation of local communities. Sustainable destination development depends on planning, governance, investment and the ability to respond to local conditions. Business management brings attention to customer relationships, marketing, costs and financial viability. Educational approaches, in turn, illustrate the need to assess innovation according to its contribution to learning and decision-making.

The volume brings together research related to these four areas, using different geographical settings and methodological approaches. The tourism contributions address visitor behaviour, cultural and natural resources, tourism products, territorial development, marketing and business management. Two additional contributions consider educational technology and didactic practice, extending the collection beyond its principal focus on tourism.

These studies do not offer a single model for all destinations or organisations. Their value lies in addressing different questions and providing evidence that can inform further research and context-sensitive decisions. This is consistent with the direction taken by previous e3 editorials, which have examined tourism innovation, territorial development and the wider challenges of institutional and technological transformation (Abreu et al., 2026; Vidal Carvalho et al., 2026).

Tourism will continue to change as visitor expectations, business models, technologies and territorial conditions evolve. The challenge is not simply to adapt to every new development, but to determine which changes are useful, for whom and under what conditions. Research

can contribute by examining these questions carefully, distinguishing between promising ideas and demonstrated outcomes, and helping practitioners and decision-makers understand the consequences of their choices.

We thank the authors and reviewers for their contributions to this volume. We hope that the collection will encourage further discussion among researchers, tourism professionals, business managers and public decision-makers about the relationships between tourism management, innovation and sustainable territorial development.

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ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE DISCLOSURE

Generative artificial intelligence tools were used exclusively to assist in the translation and linguistic revision of this editorial. The authors reviewed and validated all content and remains fully responsible for its accuracy and integrity.