



## EDITORIAL

**Citation:** Dávid, L. D., & El Archi, Y. (2024). Beyond boundaries: Navigating smart economy through the lens of tourism. *Oeconomia Copernicana*, 15(1), 13–25. <https://doi.org/10.24136/oc.2978>

Contact to corresponding author: Lóránt Dénes Dávid, [david.lorant.denes@uni-neumann.hu](mailto:david.lorant.denes@uni-neumann.hu)


Article history: Received: 26.02.2024; Accepted: 15.03.2024; Published online: 30.03.2024

### Lóránt Dénes Dávid

*John von Neumann University, Hungary*

*Hungarian University of Agriculture and Life Sciences (MATE), Hungary*

*Eötvös Loránd University, Hungary*


 [orcid.org/0000-0000-0001-7880-9860](https://orcid.org/0000-0000-0001-7880-9860)

### Youssef El Archi

*Abdelmalek Essaâdi University, Morocco*

*Hungarian University of Agriculture and Life Sciences (MATE), Hungary*

*Centre for Tourism Research, Development, and Innovation (CiTUR), Portugal*

 [orcid.org/0000-0002-8595-0026](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8595-0026)

## Beyond boundaries: Navigating smart economy through the lens of tourism

The advent of information technology, advancement of the global economies has led to the emergence of a smart economy on the ever changing terrain of the present world (Matyushok *et al.*, 2021; Głodowska *et al.*, 2024). This convergence of innovation, connectivity and data-driven decision that not only revolutionized industries, but also brought an interesting angle through which the changing friction between technology and one of the most durable market — tourism has been studied (Troisi *et al.*, 2023). This editorial opens the doors for us to connect in the very delicate interdepend-

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ence of smart solutions and tourism (Dávid & Dadkhah, 2023). With this in mind, we embark on the journey into the inner workings of a smart economy that is understatedly multi-perceptive in nature and its connection to tourism.

The world economic landscape will be re-written by the smart and green economy, which is an amalgam of technological leaps and bounds with economic architecture (Lazaroiu *et al.*, 2022; Alreahi *et al.*, 2023). The smart economy in itself refers mostly to the efficient use of new technologies like artificial intelligence, internet of things, blockchain and so on for effectiveness, connectivity and innovation (Kristoffersen *et al.*, 2020; Kudełko *et al.*, 2022; Roshchuk *et al.*, 2022). This digital shift which then makes data the very life of real-time insights and timely decisions based on insight like never before seen before (Black, 2023; Lazaroiu & Rogalska, 2023). The smart economy can transform the world into a better place, and understanding how it functions is fundamental in dealing with this (Lewandowska *et al.*, 2023). This includes understanding the nature of smart cities across the world.

The emerging technological innovation in the modern world has witnessed the globalization that challenges the tourism industry by transforming it in ways (Song *et al.*, 2018). From the linear planning, performing and reflecting on vey journey, the planning route has become dynamic process intrinsically linked with digital systems (Almeida-Santana *et al.*, 2020). Destinations are interacted with by travelers in a completely different way today as they navigate through a virtual world full of ratings, reviews and immersive content suggested by an algorithm (Prandi *et al.*, 2023; Tonietto & Barasch, 2021). Therefore, instead of serving as a channel or intermediary in travel logistics, digital forms more interacting and personalized tourism (Pencarelli, 2020). Technology is the inseparable parts of last-day tourism and it accompanies from virtual tours to increased exploration via augmented reality (Cranmer *et al.*, 2020; Florek & Lewicki, 2022; El-Said & Aziz, 2022).

The changed way in which visitors engage with the destinations has far-reaching implications on the industry's stakeholders (Sigala, 2020). Businesses, service providers, and tourism boards are operating in an environment rather not described as 'choice of adaptation to digital trends' but a strategic need (Santos *et al.*, 2016; Keller *et al.*, 2023). The implications, on the other hand, are not just convenience; they cut deeper into the heart of how tourism is viewed seen and operationalized in a smart solutions era.

## **Smart solutions in tourism management**

The very foundation of a successful industry is efficient management and tourism is also not an exception to this rule (Strielkowski *et al.*, 2020; Bilan *et al.*, 2023). This part discusses the place of smart solutions in tourism management with a special emphasis on the fact that technology does not only enable but disrupts facilitating operations. For instance, predictive analytics is a powerful tool for demand forecasting and works as a mechanism to help businesses and destinations respond to issues proactively (Li *et al.*, 2020; Seyedan & Mafakheri, 2020).

Blockchain brought immutability and transparency to the tourism ecosystem, changing all of this (Treiblmaier, 2022). Transactions that are trustworthy and auditable help create trust among parties which further protects against cases of fraud that may harm the industry (Thees *et al.*, 2020). The inclusion of such smart solutions does not only facilitate the processes, but also helps to build a more robust and flexible tourism infrastructure (Aghaei *et al.*, 2021).

From a broader perspective, smart solutions contribute to the management of tourism sustainably and in that sense, they are helpful in saving natural resources and tackling some environmental risks (Zhou *et al.*, 2022; El Archi *et al.*, 2023a; Folgado-Fernández *et al.*, 2023). Technology induces ecological practices, such as resource optimization and waste reduction, making the merger of tourism with environmental protection (Erdoğan *et al.*, 2022; Puciato *et al.*, 2023). The smart technologies used in the provision of content improve community relations further as tourists have an easier and more favorable time interacting with the local population (Romão *et al.*, 2018; Tung & My, 2023; Saura *et al.*, 2023). In the world of smart solutions in tourism management, technology is not an end, but means that creates a revolution (Sigala, 2018).

## **Economic impacts of smart tourism economy**

Developing smart tourism is symbiotic relation with economy and the outcome with this relations is very broadly effects (Cavalheiro *et al.*, 2020; Ajide, 2022). However, the economic impact of smart tourism is massive beyond the short-term gains of multiplying profitability resulting from increased operational efficiencies and improved tourist satisfaction (Lasisi

*et al.*, 2023). With the take-up of these technologies by destinations, they not only enhance their own internally, but also set themselves up as focal points for innovation and economic development. Second, this impact is represented by way of economic diversification potential. It is typical for many smart tourism projects to provide a stimulus for the development of secondary industries originating from innovative tech startups specializing in solutions aimed at tourists to local businesses with services and inventions (Chen *et al.*, 2024). This diversification is also essential for building stable and resilient economies that are less susceptible to external shocks (Martin & Sunley, 2020; Dryglas & Salamaga, 2023).

It is also worth noting that the data generated by smart tourism initiatives can form a valuable resource for policy-makers and businesses alike (Cavalheiro *et al.*, 2020). The informed decision-making, which is based on live insights opens a wide array of opportunities for the destination management organizations as they can allocate the resources in the right direction, identify trends that are prevailing in the markets, and have individualized marketing strategies, directed to specific groups of people (Bethune *et al.*, 2022). The benefits for the economic growth are not limited to tourism and affect all facets of an area's economic plan (Calero & Turner, 2020). However, it is important to point out that the economic influence does not present a uniform distribution in all destinations (Šoltés *et al.*, 2023). This is because three main factors are infrastructure preparedness, technology penetration and socio-economic. If such gaps are bridged, it will bring about the need to ensure that the advantages associated with smart economy in tourism are inclusive and lead to sustainable development of different societies (Rodrigues *et al.*, 2023; Balcerzak *et al.*, 2023; Hoang *et al.*, 2023).

### **Challenges and ethical considerations**

As Chang (2021) explains, given the sophisticated nature of smart tourism, problems and ethical dilemmas are inevitable in this environment (Chang, 2021). Privacy concerns are significant when one considers that decision making through data has taken center stage (Saura *et al.*, 2021). On the other hand, it is the ability to gather pieces of information, keep it in one place, and process it in masse that not only brings us closer and closer to a solution but raises questions like 'where does convenience end and where does

individual privacy start'. In this regard, the necessity to ensure that technological developments do not ruin the confidence value at the heart of tourism becomes an ideal balance needed.

The other largest hurdle is digital divide (Carlisle *et al.*, 2021; Koplupaieva & Tiesheva, 2023). The suggested smart solutions for the enhancement of the overall experience of tourists are definitely not universally accessible and thus affordable (Dwivedi *et al.*, 2023). The fairness of smart tourism in terms of accessibility of people and groups itself becomes the moral responsibility to ensure equal access, since exclusivity may increase socio-economic gaps. The topics of the ethical problems do not concern only access technology (Balcerzak & MacGregor Pelikánová, 2020), but also smart tourism, which affects local cultures and environmental conditions.

### **Collaborative governance**

Success in the emergence of a unified future with smart tourism and the economy thriving is only possible through collaborative governance (Errichiello & Micera, 2021). There should be collaboration between governments, industry actors and local communities in which they should actively implement the systems that would strike a balance among innovation socio-economic development and environmental conservation (Stjepanovic *et al.*, 2022; Zheng *et al.*, 2023). The necessity for legal structures, which are aimed at responsible technological adoption and fair practices implementation becomes vital in showing the way to a future where smart solutions can be advantageous for tourism industry and economy as a whole (Gallardo Vázquez, 2023).

The regulation model focuses on collaborative governance which is more than just regulation; it involves strategic partnerships. In the light of smart infrastructure development, public-private partnerships can play a vital role in the development and implementation of smart infrastructure strategies (Jayasena *et al.*, 2023). Governments can provide the infrastructure and policy tools, while enterprises should focus on new products development. Although smart tourism has emerged as an integrated approach of dealing with the challenges of tourism, the inclusion of community members in decision-making process ensures that the impacts meet what is required and desired among those directly affected.

## **Resilience in the face of disruptions**

Moreover, smart tourism and economy should be investigated regarding the future horizons, one of the determinants is resilience (Romão, 2020). The world is in an era of uncertainties, such as pandemics or geopolitical changes. Smart tourism, which is provided with data to help guide decision-making, can have a key role in the strengthening of agility and resiliency in the sector. For instance, the smart solutions enable the field to react to the consumer behavior shifts by incorporating marketing strategies or changing tourism infrastructure based on trends.

Moreover, it is not only a phenomenon of crisis management; resilient smart tourism. It involves adopting agile systems that will react to unpredicted threats converging in the development of resilient destinations (El Archi *et al.*, 2023b). Within the resilience principle, the emphasis is not limited only to economic factors, but also encompasses environmental and socio-cultural aspects in one integrated approach towards future issues.

## **Future directions in smart tourism economy**

One of the exciting possibilities is smart destinations development. It is not the areas where technology is applied to ensure operational efficiency, but thriving live ecosystems that employ data and connectivity to optimize life of citizens and guests. The concept does not stop with tourism, but it also incorporates aspects of urban design, environmental sustainability, and the quality of life. In addition, the future holds for the tourists not only more natural and memorable environment, but also one that will be more personalized to their needs. People are likely to gain control of the virtual and augmented reality technologies that would take exploration one step further by enabling people to move from the physical world into cyberspace without any difficulty. As the technologies discussed in this section are infused into tourism experience, the distinction between physical and virtual world will cease to exist as the interactions between travelers will be characterized as new and unique ones.

However, these innovations present challenges too. The desired equilibrium is the achievement of the balance between innovation and sustainability (Bagh *et al.*, 2023). The advances of science and technology should not have negative impacts on culture and environmental destruction. From the

perspective of smart tourism as a product, the future of smart tourism will be determined by values, such as responsible innovation that is ethically considered. The smart solutions and tourism economy convergence did not only signify the technological revolution, but also the paradigm shift. A continuous transgression of boundaries underlies the whole modern technological innovation, which rotates around economic needs and wants to enjoy durability and improvement. And in this light, the burden becomes a cooperative effort of all stakeholders who would contribute to a future where smart tourism leads to economic development while maintaining the diverse cultural.

## **Conclusions**

This editorial explores the smart economy and tourism interrelations, which offer novel perspectives on its transformative role and how it effects different ways. The tourism management, economic impacts, challenges, collaborative governance, and resilience travel guides us through the realms of smart solutions in tourism management with significant changes and opportunities that need to be considered. Smart economy is characterized by fusion of new technologies that redesign the globe's economies. Within tourism this transformation is reflected in the planning process, evolving digital interaction and individualization through the adventure. The editorial reinforces that technology is more than just technology — it is the means to re-engineer the organization of tourism so that it becomes more efficient, environmentally friendly and economically diverse.

The editorial, in its turn, recognizes the problems and ethical dimensions of the smart solutions use in tourism. Privacy issues, digital divides, and the culture and environment aspect of modern technologies demand a healthy balance between scientific innovations and ethical values. In turn, as a driving force along this treacherous path, collaborative governance emerges highlighting the necessity of partnership between governments as well as interests' players and local communities for responsible technology uptake. The key point is about resilience that shows the role of smart tourism in responding to uncertainties and crises, including pandemics and geopolitical changes. The editorial calls for agile systems, which address not only economic factors, as before, but also focus on environmental and socio-cultural elements in a holistic approach towards future challenges.

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Ministry of Education and Science  
Republic of Poland

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The journal is co-financed in the years 2022–2024 by the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Poland in the framework of the ministerial programme “Development of Scientific Journals” (RCN) on the basis of contract no. RCN/SN/0697/2021/1 concluded on 29 September 2022 and being in force until 28 September 2024.