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# Part 1

## Technology and Value (Co-)creation

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# 2

## Absorptive capacity, co-creation and tourism: A mixed analysis method

*Michelle Moraes, Áurea Rodrigues,  
Antónia Correia and Metin Kozak*

### The objectives of this chapter are to:

- Elaborate a quantitative and qualitative analysis of the literature that combines absorptive capacity, co-creation and tourism.
- Identify research trends.
- Underline similarities and singularities that make it possible to converge research streams.

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**Keywords:** absorptive capacity, co-creation, innovation

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## Introduction

Absorptive capacity is considered as an important innovation enabler since it can reduce risks and costs associated with innovations developed entirely by the companies themselves (Apriliyanti & Alon, 2007). Absorptive capacity can be understood as the ability to recognize the value of new external information and its application (Cohen & Levinthal, 1990). The number of publications about absorptive capacity have increased in recent years and, amongst the main streams studied in this field, there exist inter-organizational learning and knowledge transfer dynamics (Apriliyanti & Alon, 2007). In this context, the level of new external information availability was considered to be one of the main absorptive capacity enablers (Zahra & George, 2002). However, this availability is not only related to the amount of external information, but also to how this information is transferred (Markovic & Bagherzadeh, 2018). Consequently, co-creation has been highlighted as an important way to enhance knowledge sharing and to facilitate the absorption of new external information (Markovic & Bagherzadeh, 2018).

Concerning co-creation, it can be considered as a “new paradigm in the management literature” (Galvagno & Dalli, 2014: 643) and can be defined as a process that “involves the participation in the creation of the core offering itself. It can occur ... with customers and any other partners in the value network” (Lusch & Vargo, 2006: 284). Thus, it can be understood as a relationship between stakeholders (Azevedo, 2009) that emerged from active, creative and collaborative experiences (Campos et al., 2018; Kazadi, Lievens & Mahr, 2016) through which value is created (Haahti, 2006). Therefore, co-creation results in developing new products and services in a faster, more relevant and innovative way than traditional processes. It is a process that brings the opportunity to continue interaction between the firm and customers in which the firm is willing to work with external stakeholders and obtain more value through this collaboration with customers (Hamidi, Gharneh & Khajeheian, 2020). On the other hand, one of the ways to synthesize knowledge effectively is by developing the capacity for innovation, which has the virtue of establishing processes that take advantage of absorbed knowledge to incorporate new functions or create new products, and also to mitigate the impact of negative externalities, identify new sources of raw materials, access new services that add value, enter new underserved markets, improve operational processes, or adopt new activities for commercialization and business management (Rodríguez, Barón & Guaita, 2020).

In the tourism literature, co-creation has been approached through different perspectives, such as organization, destination and tourists (Campos et al., 2018). In the organizational context, competitive performance has been highlighted as a co-creation output; however, co-creation processes should be more focused (Campos et al., 2018). Absorptive capacity and co-creation are especially relevant to the tourism industry given its high dependence on external knowledge as an innovation source (Thomas & Wood, 2014) and its low performance profile in terms of:

- i) all kind of innovation outputs – product, process, organizational and marketing (Camison & Monfort-Mir, 2012);
- ii) level of cooperation (Pinto, Cruz & Combe, 2015) – including companies of the same group, customers and universities – in order to develop innovations (Camison & Monfort-Mir, 2012);
- iii) non-academic impact – low absorption by organizations – of academic outputs (Thomas & Ormerod, 2017).

Tussyadiah and Zach (2014) suggest that the capacity to work together with stakeholders in order to innovate depends on the capacity to acquire knowledge, transform knowledge within their organizations and explore it for new service/product development. Thus, more studies are necessary to analyze and create a better understanding of these two constructs: absorptive capacity and co-creation in tourism innovation. With this in mind, the main objective of this chapter is to indicate, through a comparison with the configuration presented by absorptive capacity general literature, the boundaries of the research that also contemplated tourism and co-creation, and consequently, new paths to tourism research in this context.

## Methodology

To elaborate a bibliometric analysis, we considered the WoS Core Collection management publications that had topics as ‘absorptive capacity’ and ‘tourism’ (30 studies), as well as those that included ‘absorptive capacity’ and ‘co-creat\*’ or ‘cocreat\*’ or ‘co creat\*’ (55 works). The delimitation of WoS as a database is the fact that most cited bibliographic reviews about absorptive capacity contemplated only this collection. In order to obtain a more focused and a deeper analysis within this frame, it was decided to use ‘management’ as the field category of WoS Core Collection.

To analyze these studies, we focused on a mixed analysis method:

- i) a bibliometric analysis of the terms of the publications that had ‘absorptive capacity’ as well as ‘absorptive capacity’ and ‘tourism’ or ‘co-creation’ as topics; and