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MAPPING THE INNOVATION PROCESS AND RELEVANT SKILLS FOR INNOVATION IN TOURISM IN LEAST DEVELOPED POST-CONFLICT COUNTRIES

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ABSTRACT

As more countries are turning to the tourism sector for economic, social, and environmental development, related firms must improve their competitiveness with innovative products and services meeting customer and market demands. By interacting with customers, employees can identify innovative ideas, requiring employees to develop relevant skills and to understand innovation's potential. This paper develops the 6×3 Innovation Process Framework, considering specific contextual factors for innovation in tourism in least developed post-conflict countries (LDPCCs) while emphasizing innovation activation as the first phase. The findings advance existing research in tourism development, tourism's potential in post-conflict contexts, and innovation in tourism in general and the innovation process in particular. The developed framework also allocates relevant skills for innovation ('innovation skills') to the stages of each process phase, enabling the developed framework to clarify the innovation process for tourism firms. Therefore, the developed framework constitutes a practical assessment and planning tool for improving employees' innovative behavior and establishing a comprehensive plan for innovation skills training across tourism firms aiming to improve their innovative behavior.

Keywords: competitiveness, innovation process, innovation skills, least developed countries, tourism development

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AZ INNOVÁCIÓS FOLYAMAT ÉS AZ INNOVÁCIÓHOZ SZÜKSÉGES RELEVÁNS KÉSZSÉGEK FELTÉRKÉPEZÉSE A LEGKEVÉSBÉ FEJLETT KONFLIKTUS UTÁNI ORSZÁGOK TURIZMUSÁBAN

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ABSZTRAKT

Mivel egyre több ország fordul a turizmus szektor felé a gazdasági, társadalmi és környezeti fejlődés érdekében, a kapcsolódó cégeknek a fogyasztói és piaci igényeknek megfelelő innovatív termékekkel és szolgáltatásokkal kell javítaniuk versenyképességüket. Az ügyfelekkel való interakció révén a munkavállalók innovatív ötleteket szerezhetnek, ami megköveteli, hogy a munkavállalók fejlesszék a vonatkozó készségeket és megértsék az innovációban rejlő lehetőségeket. Jelen tanulmány a 6×3-as Innovációs Folyamat Keretrendszerét dolgozza ki, figyelembe véve a legkevésbé fejlett, konfliktus utáni országokban a turizmusban történő innováció sajátos kontextuális tényezőit, miközben első sorban az innováció ösztönzését hangsúlyozza. Az eredmények előmozdítják a turizmus fejlesztésére, a turizmus konfliktus utáni helyzetekben rejlő lehetőségeire, valamint általában a turizmusban, különösen az innovációs folyamatban megvalósuló innovációra vonatkozó már meglévő kutatásokat. A kidolgozott keretrendszer az innováció szempontjából releváns készségeket (innovációs készségek) is hozzárendeli az egyes folyamatfázisok szakaszaihoz, lehetővé téve, hogy a kidolgozott keretrendszer egy átláthatóbb képet nyújtson az innovációs folyamatról a turisztikai vállalkozások számára. Ennélfogva a kidolgozott keretrendszer gyakorlati értékelési és tervezési eszközt jelent az alkalmazottak innovatív magatartásának javításához, valamint az innovációs készségek fejlesztésének átfogó tervének kidolgozásához az olyan idegenforgalmi cégek körében, amelyek célja az innovatív magatartásuk javítása.

Kulcsszavak: versenyképesség, innovációs folyamat, innovációs készségek, legkevésbé fejlett országok, turizmusfejlesztés

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1. Introduction

Many countries worldwide are beginning to transition from the secondary to the tertiary sector, particularly developing countries. Often still highly characterized by value creation in the secondary sector, the service industry is becoming increasingly important, opening up new opportunities. In fact, tourism has become an important driver globally for economic, social, and environmental development, representing one of the fastest growing and most dynamic sectors and exceeding overall gross domestic product (GDP) growth of the global economy while creating one in four new jobs worldwide. Before COVID-19, international tourist arrivals reached 1.5 billion in 2019, and the total international visitor spending reached US$1.8 trillion. Especially least developed countries (LDCs) are turning more and more toward tourism for development (Regional United Nations Group for Europe and Central Asia on Digital Transformation, UNDTG4ECA, 2021; Rutty et al., 2015; United Nations Development Programme, UNDP, 2020; United Nations World Tourism Organization, UNWTO, 2021; World Travel & Tourism Council, WTTC, 2020; Zadeh Bazargani & Kiliç, 2021).

As the sector has mostly recovered from COVID-19, fierce competition between destinations is pressuring countries, with only competitive destinations attracting tourists. As small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in LDCs were hit particularly hard by COVID-19, only competitive businesses meeting customer demands with innovative offers will sell their services and receive bookings. In fact, tourism has evolved into a "highly experiential and complex product" (Racherla et al., 2008, p. 424), necessitating attractive and innovative products and services along the entire customer journey to meet tourists' increasing expectations. Understanding market trends and developments, along with customer needs and expectations in detail, is crucial to innovation, with customer interaction representing a promising information source for generating innovative, customer-centric products and services. Frontline tourism employees thus play a vital role in innovation due to their direct contact with customers, necessitating relevant skills for innovative behavior. Skilled employees play a crucial role for innovation in tourism businesses based on the information gained through interactions with customers, colleagues, and other stakeholders, including suppliers.

Innovative behavior therefore represents a central firm-level prerequisite for innovation, requiring relevant employee-level knowledge and skills. As knowledge and skills effect innovative behavior, the more knowledgeable and skilled a company, the greater its innovative behavior; simultaneously, an unknowledgeable and unskilled workforce presents a key obstacle to innovation. Consequently, a firm's innovative behavior is influenced by each employee's innovative behavior and skills. Further, Tang (1998) identifies the factors affecting innovation, including information and communication, knowledge and skills, behavior and integration, brainstorming and completing projects, guidance and support, and the external environment, with human resources playing a primary role in firm innovative behavior.

Unfortunately, because the scientific discourse on innovation is focused on developed countries (Cirera & Maloney, 2017), research on the innovation process in LDCs is scarce, as are studies on the role of SMEs in LDCs (Fahad et al., 2022), regarding both the extent and type of innovation (Cirera & Maloney, 2017; Lema et al., 2021).

In response, this paper aims to advance existing research to develop an innovation process framework that considers the specific contextual factors of LDCs, particularly LDPCCs, and that allocates relevant skills for innovation to the different stages of each process phase. For this purpose, a thorough literature review has been conducted on three major research streams: (1) tourism for development, (2) the potential of tourism in a post-conflict context, and (3) innovation in tourism in general and the innovation process in particular. Within the third research stream, this paper introduces two innovation modes as a theoretical framework, along with different related frameworks and models. After comparing and discussing each, a custom innovation process framework is developed. Thereafter, relevant innovation skills are allocated to distinct framework phases for a comprehensive overview of the relevant innovation skills of each. The conclusion presents managerial implications of applying the developed innovation process framework, highlights research limitations, and presents an outlook for future research.

2. Literature review

2.1. Tourism for development: Economic, social, and environmental dimensions

2.1.1. Economic dimension

Tourism can drive sustainable economic development by creating jobs, stimulating GDP growth, increasing international trade and foreign direct investment, driving infrastructure development, and supporting development among low-income countries. For countries with limited economic activity in other sectors, tourism can be a promising avenue for economic specialization. And with infrastructure often shared between tourists and the local population, investment therein for tourism development can also benefit the latter (Rutty et al., 2015; World Bank & International Finance Corporation, IFC, 2017).

Tourism benefits, such as job creation and revenue generation, can be observed not only within the tourism sector itself, but also along the entire tourism value chain, spanning additional sectors (UNWTO & UNDP, 2017). Therefore, the direct demand for tourism products and services can indirectly stimulate the development of additional sectors, e.g., agriculture (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, UNCTAD, 2018). With its interrelationships, economic development and investment in tourism thus affect multiple sectors, such that tourism can be considered a relevant multiplier in the development of and investment in other sectors, exceeding the multiplier effects of other sectors (Wall & Mathieson, 2006; World Bank & IFC, 2017).

2.1.2. Social dimension

Tourism can also drive social inclusiveness and poverty reduction by promoting inclusive growth, improving income access through digitalization, empowering and benefitting women, supporting artisans, revitalizing urban areas, strengthening rural communities, and cultivating intercultural understanding. Through its extensive value chain, tourism can reach and benefit a considerable number of people for employment. The tourism sector also holds enormous potential to empower women, regardless of background; compared to other sectors, tourism offers a competitive advantage in women's participation, empowerment, and social advancement (Gössling & Hall, 2019; World Bank & IFC, 2017). With a lower gender wage gap and higher proportion of women in leadership than other sectors, tourism is a gender equality leader (UNWTO, 2023).

It needs to be ensured that benefits derived from tourism are shared among all stakeholders involved. The hospitality of the local people, which often represents a major touristic asset, should not be overstressed. Once the local population realizes after initial enthusiasm that benefits are not properly distributed and only a few benefit from tourism development, the support for tourism activity in general and for further development in particular might gradually start to decline (Wall & Mathieson, 2006).

2.1.3. Environmental dimension

Tourism can promote environmental stewardship, motivate and facilitate conservation efforts, raise climate change awareness, and advance the blue economy, with tourism revenue helping fund nature and wildlife conservation. In addition, nature-based tourism can contribute to economic diversification rurally by motivating locals to engage in conservation efforts (UNESCO, 2016; World Bank & IFC, 2017).

Tourism can also raise climate change awareness, aiding the sector in developing greater resilience. At the same time, the tourism sector must recognize the importance of reducing greenhouse gas emissions and transition toward a low-carbon tourism system. As natural disasters can pause or terminate tourism development projects, it is important to adopt a strategic long-term perspective in the planning process. Overall, to fully embrace sustainable development, more attention needs to be paid to environmental sustainable development goals (SDGs). Protecting both terrestrial and marine ecosystems not only benefits economic development, stability, and tourism activity but also reduces vulnerability of those living in areas affected by climate change (Gössling, 2013; Gössling & Hall, 2017; Gössling & Hall, 2019; World Bank & IFC, 2017).

2.2. Tourism's potential for post-conflict development

Tourism is central to post-conflict countries overcoming challenges and revitalizing socio-economic foundations, and can transform, enable, and facilitate reconciliation in post-conflict contexts by influencing and transforming these regions' economic, social, and political structures. In fact, people can be motivated to collaborate to create touristic

offerings and support initiatives by women, minorities, and vulnerable groups (Alluri, 2009; Farmaki, 2017).

Tourism development also aids in (re)constructing both the general and tourism-specific infrastructure, and its benefits, such as job creation, income generation, and infrastructure and service expansion, along with a destination or entire country's overall development, can motivate post-conflict cross-border collaboration. Previously warring neighboring countries might recognize tourism activities' economic potential and thus be more willing to collaborate and jointly enable tourism development, e.g., in the area of safety (Alamineh, 2022; Kollias & Papadamou, 2019).

Compared to non-conflict countries, tourism development in LDPCCs faces additional challenges depending on the nature, scope, intensity, and length of the conflict, whose effects could last up to five years or longer (Kothari, 2019). Particularly, in such areas as education or health, conflict effects can impact a whole generation and even the generations that follow. Therefore, finding skilled labor in LDPCCs challenges (re)building, as reduced education leads to poor knowledge and skills—much needed for tourism development—across the labor force.

2.3. Tourism innovation

According to the *Oslo Manual* (OECD/Eurostat, 2018), innovation can refer to both an activity itself and its outcome, making it critical to a company's competitiveness. Innovation is defined as "a new or improved product or process (or combination thereof) that differs significantly from the unit's previous products or processes and that has been made available to potential users (product) or brought into use by the unit (process)" (OECD/Eurostat, 2018, p. 20). Here, 'unit' refers to the actor responsible for innovation, whether an institution, organization, household, or individual, and innovation activities "include all developmental, financial, and commercial activities undertaken by a firm that are intended to result in an innovation for the firm" (OECD/Eurostat, 2018, p. 20).

As in other economic sectors, innovation is important to tourism, in that it increases individual firm competitiveness while promoting destinations' overall competitiveness. In addition, innovative firms also respond to market environment changes more flexibly and agilely (Durán-Sánchez et al., 2019; Heng, 2019). Without relevant knowledge and skills, a firm's innovative behavior remains minimal, and innovation does not occur (Fahad et al., 2022).

As innovative behavior is affected and enabled by a firm's knowledge and skills (Shaw & Williams, 2009; Weidenfeld et al., 2010): the more knowledge and skills a company possesses, the more innovative the company will be (Martínez-Pérez et al., 2015). Because companies employ individuals, innovative behavior is determined by each, so to develop innovative behavior, companies must disseminate knowledge and skills training at the frontline employee level, and it is crucial to know what skills are most relevant to innovation. Clearly, innovative behavior bolsters company performance (Palacios-Marqués et al., 2015), and because companies' innovative behavior depends primarily on knowledge

and skills possessed by their employees, ignorance, limited knowledge, and minimal skills represent central obstacles to innovative behavior (Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, ECLAC, 2021).

Poorly skilled tourism employees represent a primary obstacle to improving service quality and innovative behavior across firms (World Bank, 2017). Increasing each employee's innovative behavior would improve firms' innovative behavior, and in addition to the skills needed to complete tasks, employees must possess general skills, including creativity, solution-oriented thinking, communication, teamwork, adaptability, and personal initiative (Heng, 2019; Pirun et al., 2021; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, UNESCO, 2018). Thus, building innovative behavior is a continuous learning curve necessitating ongoing training and optimization (Hansen et al., 2019).

2.4. Innovation modes

Two learning and innovation modes are identified: the science, technology, and innovation (STI) mode and the doing, using, and interacting (DUI) mode (Jensen et al., 2007).

2.4.1. Science, technology, and innovation

The STI mode plays a significant role in high-technology sectors (Joseph et al., 2021), involving collaboration with such actors as universities, research institutes, business associations, competence centers, regional associations, etc. (Wixe et al., 2023). Based on codification (Parrilli & Radicic, 2021), knowledge within the STI mode is documented and organized (Joseph et al., 2021), and research and development, understood as "creative and systematic work" (OECD, 2015, p. 44), plays a central role, highlighting this mode's systematic approach to innovation. Despite being necessary to advancing LDCs and relevant to addressing development challenges, scientific research in LDCs remains limited (IMF, 2021; Lema et al., 2021; UNCTAD, 2021).

2.4.2. Doing, using, and interacting

The DUI mode dominates the low-technology and practically-oriented sectors, including tourism (Camisón & Monfort-Mir, 2012; Joseph et al., 2021; Nordin & Hjalager, 2017), relying on informal learning processes and experience-based know-how (Parrilli & Radicic, 2021). Knowledge can also be acquired through observation, imitation, employee mobility, and exchange with other companies (Weidenfeld et al., 2010), and it is thus primarily implicit rather than documented and organized (Joseph et al., 2021). The DUI mode involves collaboration along a company's value chain, e.g., with suppliers, customers, dealers, etc. (Wixe et al., 2023), or targeted collaboration within a firm, e.g., through project teams, problem-solving groups, or job rotation (Jensen et al., 2007).

The DUI mode's contributions to innovation are often overlooked (Lundvall, 2007), despite being central to innovation, especially as many questions addressed and solved scientifically (STI) come from practice (DUI). Therefore, interaction between the two

modes can produce higher competitiveness, but both modes must be coordinated through appropriate knowledge management (Jensen et al., 2007).

In the developing world, informal learning processes are assumed to play a greater role than in developed countries, as the former often lack the structures necessary to foster learning and innovation through the STI mode, rendering the DUI mode especially relevant in that context.

2.5. Interaction for innovation

Based on the DUI mode, it is assumed that interacting can yield ideas that produce innovations and improve the competitiveness of tourism firms and destinations. In some studies, collaboration and interaction among different actors is considered a prerequisite for innovation (Lupova-Henry et al., 2021), where interacting with different stakeholders can offer relevant information, knowledge, and other resources important to innovation (Bagiran Ozseker, 2018).

Understanding customer needs and expectations in detail is also crucial to product development, meaning that customer interaction is a promising information source for generating innovative, customer-centric products and services. Information gained from customer interactions must be transferred to product and service development. Interacting successfully with others necessitates proper skills, the most necessary of which are often lacking among employees in LDCs. Thus, to increase employees' innovative behavior, it is crucial to understand which skills are relevant to the innovation process and, more specifically, which are necessary to interacting successfully.

2.6. Innovation process

The innovation process comprises distinct phases and, depending on the framework or model, is depicted as long or short. While the innovation process is often depicted as structured and linear, the actual process is neither simple nor linear but rather complex and dynamic, with a series of interdependencies and iterations along the way. As such, the innovation process might involve false starts, overlapping of separate phases, jumps between phases, and dead ends (Camisón & Monfort-Mir, 2012; Nelles et al., 2023; Tidd & Bessant, 2021).

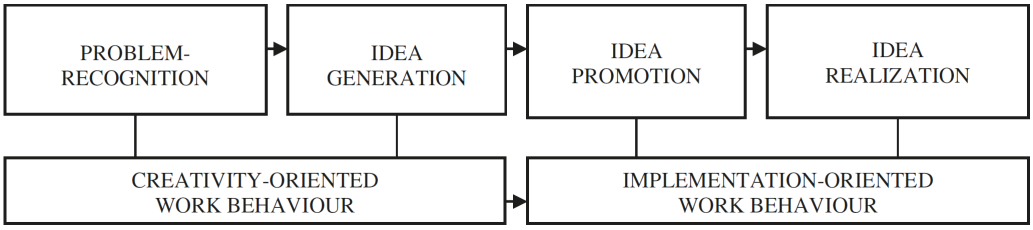
Innovation must be managed effectively, which is a learned capability (Tidd & Bessant, 2021); especially in organizations in which innovation is a new concept, innovation management skills are extremely relevant when beginning the innovation process, for proper context setting and to motivate innovative behavior. Firms must be open to and understand the benefits, as otherwise, there is neither interest nor motivation to engage in innovative behavior.

In the following, select innovation process frameworks and models are presented and described to identify relevant phases.

2.6.1. Innovative work behavior

Innovative work behavior (IWB) is defined as "the intentional creation, introduction and application of new ideas within a work role, group or organization, in order to benefit role performance, the group, or the organization" (West & Farr, 1989 and West, 1989, as cited in Janssen, 2000, p. 288). Initially conceptualized as complex behavior in the workplace, IWB contains three phases: idea generation, idea promotion, and idea realization (Scott & Bruce, 1994, as cited in Janssen, 2000). This was later complemented by a fourth phase: "problem recognition" (Dorenbosch et al., 2005, p. 130), and all can be allocated to two behavioral sets: creativity-oriented and implementation-oriented behavior (Dorenbosch et al., 2005), depicted in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Four stages of innovative work behavior



Source: Janssen et al. (1997) as cited in Dorenbosch et al. (2005)

2.6.2. Innovative behavior and innovation support

This approach provides a more integrative model of innovative employee behavior and support, considering the innovation process more granularly. The Innovative Behavior Inventory (IBI) categorizes innovative behavior (IB) into six aspects: (1) idea generation, (2) idea search, (3) idea communication, (4) activity implementation, (5) involving others, and (6) overcoming obstacles. The Innovative Support Inventory (ISI) defines relevant contextual influences for innovation support (IS) as (1) managerial support, (2) organizational support, and (3) cultural support (Lukes & Stephan, 2017).

2.6.3. Innovation process model

Despite varying across organizations, a constant underlying pattern can be identified across the innovation process phases. The innovation process model proposed by Tidd and Bessant (2021) names five common core innovation process phases: (1) searching, (2) selecting, (3) implementing, (4) capturing value, and (5) learning. The first phase, searching, involves scanning the internal and external environments to identify potential opportunities and threats. The second phase, selecting, concerns deciding which previously identified opportunities and threats to address based on the firm's overall strategic direction. In the third phase, implementing, the potential from the previous phases is realized and translated into an innovation on the internal or external market. Of note, this phase is not a single event but rather various events in sequence, such as accessing relevant knowledge sources, handling uncertainty while executing the project,

and launching the innovation on the respective market. The fourth phase, capturing value from the innovation, concerns adopting and diffusing the innovation for a sustainable and growing market, meaning the firm as innovator can capture the innovation value. Finally, the fifth phase, learning, concerns building a knowledge base while progressing through the innovation cycle to manage the process better (Tidd & Bessant, 2021).

2.6.4. Innovate UK Framework

Another framework depicts the innovation process in four phases: (1) prospecting, (2) ideating, (3) selecting, and (4) implementing. The first phase, prospecting, involves understanding the domain, its problems, and relevant contextual factors both internally, including organizational needs, and externally, including market/customer needs. The second phase, ideating, describes finding potential solutions to the recognized problems and needs. In the third phase, selecting, potential solutions are assessed and evaluated against such aspects as feasibility, practicality, market acceptance, and available internal resources and capabilities. The final phase, implementing, involves putting the ideas into practice (Nelles et al., 2023).

3. Methodology

As this paper aims to develop a customized innovation process framework that considers the contextual factors of LDPCCs, the methodological approach was to conduct a thorough literature review first based on three major research streams: (1) tourism for development, (2) tourism's potential in LDPCCs, and (3) tourism innovation in general and the innovation process in particular. Whereas for topics (1) and (2) a regular literature review was conducted, topic (3) involved additional methodological considerations: the contrasted frameworks and models were carefully selected, ensuring they include the main concepts, i.e., IWB, and its extensions IB and IS, as well as both shorter and longer depictions of the innovation process.

Analyses of existing innovation process frameworks and models and the effect of combining research streams on tourism innovation and the potential of tourism in LDPCCs then served as the basis for developing a custom innovation process framework that considers the specificities of LDPCCs, especially to get innovation started.

The developed 6×3 Innovation Process Framework consists of six innovation phases, each divided into three stages, totaling 18 stages. After developing the framework, innovation skills were thoroughly researched using as the primary source, among others, the Innovation Skills Framework Summary of the Innovation Caucus, an academic initiative funded and co-developed by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) of the UK and Innovate UK, part of UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) (Nelles et al., 2023).

To allocate the relevant skills to each innovation process stage, the individual innovation process tasks were analyzed based on their descriptions, provided by Nelles et al. (2023). As each innovation process stage requires different tasks, skills were allocated

accordingly. The focus was on innovation execution skills at the (frontline) employee level, rather than on innovation management skills at the managerial level. The framework serves as an actionable planning tool to assess employees' innovative behavior based on their current skill level and plan targeted skills training interventions.

4. Research results

4.1. Discussion of innovation process frameworks and models

Most of the analyzed innovation process frameworks and models involve four to five phases, with up to six phases (*Table 1*):

Table 1: Overview of innovation process models

	IWB *Dorenbosch et al., 2005*	**IB and IS** *Lukes & Stephan, 2017*	**Innovation process model** *Tidd & Bessant, 2020*	**Innovate UK Framework** *Nelles et al., 2023*
I	Problem recognition	Idea generation	Searching	Prospecting
II	Idea generation	Idea search	Selecting	Ideating
III	Idea promotion	Idea communication	Implementing	Selecting
IV	Idea realization	Implementation starting activities	Capturing value	Implementing
V		Involving others	Learning	
VI		Overcoming obstacles		

Source: based on Dorenbosch et al., 2005; Lukes & Stephan, 2017; Nelles et al., 2023; Tidd & Bessant, 2020

The first phase is often defined as 'problem recognition' or 'idea generation'/'idea search' (Dorenbosch et al., 2005; Lukes & Stephan, 2017; Nelles et al., 2023; Ottosson, 2019; Tidd & Bessant, 2020); however, with that, the *pre-innovation phase* is neglected, and for innovation to happen, innovative behavior must first be fostered and awareness raised, and management must understand the benefits of engaging in innovative behavior to create a supportive organizational culture and to onboard employees. Even frameworks and models with more than six phases define 'opportunities and challenges' as the beginning of the innovation process and focus more on its outcome, which is to grow and scale innovations and change systems, rather than on establishing the foundation for the innovation process through a proper pre-innovation phase (Nesta, 2019).

Especially in an LDPCC context, it might be more relevant to begin the innovation process earlier than suggested by most existing frameworks and models, as LDPCCs are heavily impacted by the long-term effects of conflict (Kothari, 2019). Especially concerning such areas as education and health, the effects of conflict are more severe and only become visible after many years, making it a challenging context for innovation to emerge.

Adding Granovetter's (1985) embeddedness theory to this line of thought can also provide valuable insights and a concrete starting point for designing an innovation process

framework suitable for post-conflict contexts. Education suffers during conflict, and skilled labor becomes a critical resource for building, rebuilding, or reviving tourism post-conflict. However, innovation fails in post-conflict contexts without an explicit innovation mindset. In his central work, Granovetter analyses the extent to which economic behavior in modern industrial society is embedded in social relations and how they affect behavior and institutions. To understand how existing institutions arrived at their present state, Granovetter argues that analyzing social structure is key. Social relations are considered in economic behaviors and necessary for economic activity in that they yield trust, a necessity in economic life. Social relations can thus be considered a necessary precondition for trust in economic activities (Granovetter, 1985).

Applied to tourism innovation across LDPCCs, this means economic activity must be understood within its social context, with social relations influencing economic and innovative behavior. As economic activity is not free from the influences of such social relations, innovative behavior is impacted by post-conflict consequences; thus, mapping the innovation process and relevant innovation skills in LDPCCs requires a post-conflict-conscious approach considering specific contextual factors, including no or poor-quality education, meaning the workforce is very often missing the skills necessary for innovation.

This paper therefore argues the innovation process must begin much earlier with 'innovation activation,' where an innovation mindset is created, and innovative behavior is triggered and motivated by the recognition of the situational context and (new) opportunities (Kanter, 1988).

4.2. The 6×3 Innovation Process Framework

The initial challenge of organizational innovation is developing a shared strategic vision and defining innovation, including its different types, how its process unfolds, and how it can be managed proactively. Once clarified, suitable strategic options for innovation can be identified and decision-making adapted accordingly (Gailly, 2018); this is considered the *pre-innovation phase*, which sets the tone for innovation.

The analyzed innovation frameworks and models fall short of addressing this highly relevant *pre-innovation phase*, so following Kanter (1988), it is necessary to consider 'innovation activation' as the first step for innovation to happen. Based on the aforementioned analysis and considering the pre-innovation phase's relevance to activating innovation (Kanter, 1988), the following 6×3 Innovation Process Framework is developed with six innovation process phases and three stages each, starting with 'innovation activation' (*Table 2*):

Table 2: The 6×3 Innovation Process Framework

		Innovation process phase		Stages per innovation process phase
PRE-INNOV.	I	Innovation activation	1	Creating an innovative mindset
			2	Understanding the situational context
			3	Recognizing challenges and opportunities
DURING INNOVATION	II	Idea generation	4	Searching ideas
			5	Identifying ideas
			6	Evaluating and selecting ideas
	III	Idea pitching	7	Selecting the audience
			8	Framing the idea, creating the story
			9	Communicating and promoting the idea
	IV	Idea execution	10	Assessing resources and involving others
			11	Planning and implementing
			12	Overcoming obstacles, preventive action
POST-INNOVATION	V	Idea (dis)confirmation	13	Defining suitable KPIs
			14	Analyzing the market fit
			15	Identifying problems, corrective action
	VI	Innovation reflection	16	Analyzing and evaluating the innovation
			17	Formalizing and managing knowledge
			18	Sharing knowledge

Source: own editing

To increase employees' innovative behavior, understanding relevant skills for innovation is essential; however, innovation is primarily understood as a distinct concept and innovation skills another. Often, skills are organized by group (e.g., creativity, conceptual, evaluative), but not by innovation phase (Casano et al., 2021; Vladi et al., 2022; World Economic Forum WEF, 2020). Thus, based on the 6×3 Innovation Process Framework, relevant innovation skills are allocated to different innovation phases. This framework allows skill development for innovation to be organized more precisely and efficiently, enabling organizations to foster employees' relevant innovation skills.

The first phase is the *pre-innovation phase*, encompassing innovation activation; here, it is important to create an innovative mindset, understand the situational context, and recognize challenges and opportunities, and it is when strong leadership must introduce firm innovation and align employees to its shared vision (*Table 3*):

Table 3: Innovation skills by innovation process phase: phase I

	Innovation process phases incl. stages per innovation process phase		Relevant innovation skills per innovation process phase
PRE-INNOVATION	**I**	**Innovation activation**	
	1	Creating an innovative mindset*)	Abstract thinking; Communication; Creativity; Influencing; Negotiation
	2	Understanding the situational context	Environment scanning; Evidence gathering; Pattern recognition; Strategic thinking
	3	Recognizing challenges and opportunities	Abstract thinking; Active listening; Comparative reasoning; Critical analysis; Environment scanning; Interpretation; Mental agility; Pattern recognition; Strategic thinking; Systems thinking

*) *Besides the listed employee-level innovation skills, management intervention is crucial in this phase to provide the necessary direction for employees.*

Source: own editing

Phases two to four occur *during innovation*, the former involving idea generation along with searching ideas, identifying ideas, and evaluating and selecting ideas. The third phase involves idea pitching, selecting the audience, framing the idea and creating the story, and communicating and promoting the idea. In the fourth phase, idea execution and an assessment of available resources are conducted, along with involving others, planning and implementing the innovation, and overcoming obstacles as preventive action, necessitating the identification of potential challenges and risks (*Table 4*):

Table 4: Innovation skills by innovation process phase: phases II–IV

	Innovation process phases incl. stages per innovation process phase		Relevant skills per innovation process phase
DURING INNOVATION	**II**	**Idea generation**	
	4	Searching ideas	Creativity; Critical analysis; Environment scanning; Evidence gathering; Interpretation; Knowledge brokering; Pattern recognition; Strategic thinking
	5	Identifying ideas	Abstract thinking; Active listening; Comparative reasoning; Critical analysis; Environment scanning; Interpretation; Mental agility; Pattern recognition; Strategic thinking; Systems thinking
	6	Evaluating and selecting ideas	Active listening; Communication; Comparative reasoning; Critical analysis; Decision making; Delegation; Evidence gathering; External self-awareness; Feedback; Forecasting; Internal self-awareness; Interpretation; Knowledge brokering; Mental agility; Modelling; Organization; Pattern recognition; Problem-solving; Self-regulation; Synthesis
	III	**Idea pitching**	
	7	Selecting the audience	Abstract thinking; Communication; Creativity; Influencing; Negotiation; Strategic thinking

		8	Framing the idea, creating the story	Evidence gathering; Forecasting; Modelling
		9	Communicating and promoting the idea	Active listening; Communication; External self-awareness; Feedback; Internal self-awareness; Mental agility; Self-regulation
	IV	**Idea execution**		
		10	Assessing resources and involving others	Creativity; Decision making; Delegation; Feedback; Influencing; Negotiation; Organization; Resource evaluation
		11	Planning and implementing	Delegation; Feedback; Forecasting; Influencing; Organization; Prioritization
		12	Overcoming obstacles, preventive action	Abstract thinking; Active listening; Comparative reasoning; Critical analysis; Environment scanning; Interpretation; Mental agility; Pattern recognition; Strategic thinking; Systems thinking

Source: own editing

The final two innovation phases: five, idea (dis)confirmation, and six, innovation reflection, constitute the *post-innovation phase*, the former of which defines suitable key performance indicators (KPIs), analyzes innovation–market fit, and identifies problems to solve and countermeasures against unintended developments. This is also a phase in which strong leadership must define suitable KPIs to measure innovation success (confirmation) or decide when to cease (disconfirmation). Meanwhile, innovation reflection involves analyzing and evaluating at the meta-level to formalize and manage knowledge and track positive aspects and potential improvements for the next innovation. This phase also includes knowledge sharing (lessons learnt), e.g., through an innovation network (*Table 5*):

Table 5: Innovation skills by innovation process phase: phases V–VI

	Innovation process phases incl. stages per innovation process phase			**Relevant skills per innovation process phase**
POST-INNOVATION	**V**	**Idea (dis)confirmation**		
		13	Defining suitable KPIs*)	Evidence gathering; Forecasting; Modelling
		14	Analyzing the market fit	Active listening; Communication; Comparative reasoning; Critical analysis; Decision making; Evidence gathering; External self-awareness; Feedback; Forecasting; Internal self-awareness; Interpretation; Knowledge brokering; Mental agility; Modelling; Organization; Pattern recognition; Problem-solving; Synthesis
		15	Identifying problems, corrective action	Abstract thinking; Active listening; Comparative reasoning; Critical analysis; Environment scanning; Interpretation; Mental agility; Pattern recognition; Strategic thinking; Systems thinking
	VI	**Innovation reflection**		
		16	Analyzing and evaluating the innovation	Critical analysis; Environment scanning; Evidence gathering; Pattern recognition; Strategic thinking

17	Formalizing and managing knowledge	Abstract thinking; Active listening; Communication; Comparative reasoning; Creativity; Critical analysis; Decision making; Delegation; Environment scanning; Evidence gathering; Feedback; Forecasting; Interpretation; Mental agility; Modelling; Organization; Pattern recognition; Prioritization; Synthesis; Systems thinking
18	Sharing knowledge	Abstract thinking; Active listening; Communication; Creativity; External self-awareness; Feedback; Influencing; Internal self-awareness; Mental agility; Negotiation; Self-regulation

**) Besides the listed employee-level innovation skills, management intervention is crucial in this phase to provide the necessary direction for employees.*

Source: own editing

5. Conclusions

How might someone unfamiliar with the benefits of innovative behavior engage in such? Clearly, innovation requires activation before commencing, and thus this paper aims to advance existing research on innovation in tourism across LDPCCs. A customized innovation process framework was developed, the relevant skills for which were allocated to the respective innovation process phases. In addition, this paper comprehensively reviewed relevant innovation skills per phase, serving in the assessment of innovation skills and in planning skills training.

SMEs are central to the structure of the tourism sector, particularly in developing countries, representing an important economic factor that contributes to improving living conditions socially (Fahad et al., 2022; IMF, 2021). Limited SME resources, however, complicate ongoing training across companies, but based on the 6×3 Innovation Process Framework, SME managers can assess current employees' skill levels in conjunction with the suggested innovation process structure, based on the results of which targeted training and interventions can be planned to improve employees' innovative behavior. While the developed framework constitutes a practical assessment and planning tool, for smaller and less experienced firms, it can also aid in establishing a comprehensive innovation training plan for larger firms.

Applying the 6×3 Innovation Process Framework thoroughly and according to its distinct phases offers tourism firms an organized understanding of the innovation process, an approach that also improves the competitiveness of these tourism firms, which understand the value of innovative behavior and of translating ideas from (customer) interactions into innovative products and services.

Future research could analyze relevant contextual influences for innovation support, as identified by Lukes and Stephan (2017), i.e., managerial, organizational, and cultural, and determine their relevance across the different innovation process phases. In addition, leadership quality, employee capacity, and willingness to learn were not addressed, so future research could extend the developed framework this way, as well as by adding the innovation management skills to the respective innovation process phases. Finally, future

research could also assign scales to all the identified innovation skills for measurement of current skills levels and progress tracking of skills training interventions.

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