

# Book review: Digital and strategic innovation for Alpine health tourism: natural resources, digital tools and innovation practices from HEALPS2 project

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Tourism is pivotal to a country's economic growth (Anwar *et al.*, 2023; Hung and Khoa, 2023; Rusanti *et al.*, 2023). Health tourism has emerged as a relatively new sector in the international tourism market in recent years and is expected to continue growing (Shabankareh *et al.*, 2023). Health tourism is a tourism domain that offers eco-friendly tourism products and health recreation (Wang, 2022). The COVID-19 pandemic has prompted a shift in societal behavior toward ecotourism and nature-based experiences, partly driven by concerns about excessive pollution and overcrowding (Wang, 2022). Nature-based health tourism (NHT) holds potential and opportunities as a future preventive health measure by exploring natural resources. However, the exploration of natural resources also raises concerns about environmental sustainability. Therefore, the success model of NHT in the Alpine region can inspire sustainable NHT stakeholders.

While this book may seem localized, it can serve as a beacon for the global development of NHT in various parts of the world. This is due to the shift in human civilization toward nature, bringing health closer to natural resources. Therefore, this book is intriguing to present in the form of a review so that it can be accessible to interested parties. The book is presented engagingly through eight chapters. In the first three chapters of this book, the authors provide insights to scientists with expertise and interest in health tourism and also aim to provide information to tourism destination managers and governments regarding the development of NHT, expanding marketing areas and enriching NHT products by involving local natural resources.



Moving on to Chapter 1, the author does not allow readers to fail to understand the concepts of NHT. After all, concepts are the starting point for the implementation and development of NHT. Chapter 1 serves as the author's initial emphasis on the potential of natural resources to improve human health, highlighting the need for health tourism development. In this chapter, the Alps are presented as one of the regions with NHT potential. Interestingly, while this chapter stimulates readers with the concept of NHT, the author underscores the importance of dialogue and studies involving researchers and medical professionals regarding the effects of natural resources on health. Furthermore, to ensure that the implementation of NHT is not merely a slogan and is sustainable, the book proposes the integration of cultural uniqueness, service quality, regional culinary availability and facility availability in NHT development. This aligns with the research findings of [Tiwari and Hashmi \(2022\)](#).

After providing the initial concept of NHT, accompanied by sustainability ideas, NHT will face the challenge of climate change, so it must refrain from allowing the exploration of natural resources to turn into exploitation. In Chapter 2, readers are presented with medical evidence so that health tourism development becomes human centered with a key performance indicator (KPI) approach. This approach is depicted in Chapter 2, detailing the regional situation and supra-regional trends and providing a framework that can be identified and assessed. This chapter also emphasizes the need for KPIs to ensure that NHT development adheres to natural resource protection. Therefore, development should not abandon sustainability principles. The KPI approach will encourage the development of NHT that can be analyzed, examined and adapted. The author also stresses that KPIs for each region within a country or among different countries should be adjusted to their natural conditions. Hence, a holistic strategy is needed to consider future tourism trends.

NHT development is experiencing a resurgence in the Alpine region. It goes beyond just providing measurements and also conducts assessments from the demand and supply sides, making this book very intriguing and informative. Chapter 3 emphasizes how development strategies are used to determine the potential of NHT in the future through representative and exploratory surveys. This chapter reflects on the fact that health tourism cannot be separated from the existence of a public healthcare system. In other words, the bargaining position of NHT is determined by the public healthcare service system. Interestingly, this book successfully provides a strategy for positioning NHT as a preventive measure and the public healthcare system as a medical intervention. Therefore, it is necessary to measure the cost-efficiency of prevention through NHT compared with the cost of traditional medical intervention. This chapter has effectively reinforced the NHT positioning strategy, emphasizing that if the community engages in NHT travel, it will improve public health and reduce future medical intervention costs.

Preventive health campaigns targeting the public are crucial in enhancing the appeal of NHT. One way to achieve this is by creating value co-creation through interactive marketing strategies and a comprehensive policy framework ([Carrillo-Hidalgo et al., 2023](#); [Rusanti et al., 2023](#)). The following two chapters in this book further enhance the significance of its content for readers. The lack of knowledge and the absence of stakeholder networks require technology-based innovation efforts. These two chapters are essential for developers and researchers interested in technology development in the NHT domain to enhance its appeal. Therefore, Chapter 4 illustrates the collaborative design approach used in HEALPS2. This collaborative design approach models the relationships between available natural resources, added value and NHT market segmentation. It goes beyond that, emphasizing NHT destinations and considering the perspective of stakeholder networks and current and potential tourists. This integration will undoubtedly empower NHT development. This chapter truly serves the noble purpose of the author by explaining in detail the HEALPS2 development ontology, making it adoptable by NHT destinations in other regions.

The resonance of this book becomes an echo that can inspire the development of NHT in other regions and countries. Following Chapter 4's elaboration on the collaborative design of HEALPS2, Chapter 5 provides an overview for its primary readers, developers and destination managers that the development of NHT in the Alps presents challenges, techniques and methodologies that can be adapted to each destination in the region. Technology has played a role in the decision support system (DSS). This chapter introduces HTAB as a tool for identifying natural resources, which destination managers and other stakeholders can use to predict opportunities and the potential for natural resource exploration for NHT development. This is intriguing because it can provide insights into rationalizing decisions on selecting NHT development locations. Thus, the decisions made can drive sustainable NHT.

Not only does it present itself at the theoretical level but this book also thoroughly provides strategies and practices for implementing NHT while considering the responsible exploitation of natural resources and the adoption of digital technology. Involving stakeholders in the participatory process will result in better strategies, and transparent and collaborative planning processes are crucial to accelerating NHT development (Blau and Panagopoulos, 2022; Haukeland *et al.*, 2023). This then underlies Chapter 6, which mentions that the development of NHT needs to align stakeholders' views, starting with city governments, institutions, companies, civil society organizations and the community itself as the closest unit in NHT. In this chapter, an analysis is also provided based on the concept of the quadruple helix. It emphasizes that in the process of stakeholder integration and endorsement, three main steps need to be taken: the identification of critical points and issues to be addressed, the development of stakeholders at the regional level and finally, the need for transnational collaboration extending to networks throughout the European Union. In this chapter, it is clear that the author profoundly interprets the structuring of more organized and efficient collaborations so that problems related to the slow decision-making process due to unstructured communication flows and feedback can be addressed.

Not only focusing on harmonizing stakeholders but the development of NHT also needs to be driven by innovation, both in digital adoption, as seen in chapters 4 and 5. Furthermore, the creation of prototypes based on empirical evidence regarding HEALPS2 practices should also be pursued from the regional to international levels (see Chapter 6). Therefore, Chapter 7 serves as a summary of the innovations explored by the previous authors. However, to enrich the literature on NHT, the authors provide evidence of successful innovations in building NHT in the Alpine mountains. Simple things like building a business model canvas, using online media to promote NHT products, conducting digital presentations and hosting webinar series are often overlooked innovations that significantly impact NHT development. In this chapter, the authors invite reflection on effective NHT development strategies that can be practically implemented for creating products or expanding the target market.

In Chapter 8, the final chapter of this book, the importance of communication is again emphasized, especially in transnational projects such as the Interreg Alpine Space HEALPS2 project. Communication is critical for facilitating effective collaboration at various levels, up to the decision-making stakeholders (Lee and Jeong, 2023). The authors divide communication for stakeholders into two pathways: primary internal stakeholders encompass public authorities at all levels (local, regional and national), while secondary stakeholders consist of local and regional media. At the primary level, the authors emphasize the need for a strategic and straightforward, comprehensive approach to support NHT innovation. In contrast, as secondary stakeholders, the media need to engage in massive promotion to raise public awareness of the importance of NHT. In this chapter, readers will realize the importance of the roles of each stakeholder and how they communicate their tasks so that HNT development can be effectively carried out. This is especially crucial in building HNT projects on a transnational scale, where collaboration and coordination need to be

aligned, considering differences in authority and potential barriers related to information access when executing strategies.

The development of NHT must be connected to the growing global attention to the planet's sustainability. Therefore, this book provides insights for stakeholders to develop sustainable NHT. The book has successfully revealed the keys to the success of NHT, in terms of concept, innovation and practices manifested in the HEALPS2 project. Each chapter in this book has been organized to showcase the excellence of the NHT industry in the Alpine region. It illustrates how they explore and determine the natural resources to be developed and utilize digital technology to support strategic decision-making, as well as innovative practices and communication strategies that effectively engage stakeholders in the NHT industry. This book is intriguing and holistic, capturing the reader's interest in NHT. However, through this book review, it needs to be emphasized that the exploration of natural resources poses environmental challenges. Therefore, future research should focus on the sustainable exploration of natural resources.

Overall, this book has become a beacon that can inspire and open up opportunities for the sustainable development of NHT in various countries worldwide that have the potential for natural resource-based health tourism. This book is essential reading for destination managers, developers, NGOs, government officials, researchers and the general public. Destination managers of health tourism worldwide can enhance their potential and opportunities at the conceptual, strategic and practical levels through the lessons learned from HEALPS2 in the Alps, thereby gaining the keys to successful NHT implementation in the Alps. Next, NGOs are crucial stakeholders in dissecting this book because they are interested in developing NHT without overexploiting natural resources. Equally important, developers can gain insights into technological innovations from HEALPS2 for technology development in other countries and facilitate adoption and collaboration for NHT development. One of the most important external factors is the presence of government involvement in NHT development. In line with [Shabankareh et al. \(2023\)](#), as a policymaker, the government plays a crucial role in realizing the development of NHT while ensuring sustainability and preservation. Researchers have the responsibility to provide studies on NHT in the future. Furthermore, the public should read this book as the market for NHT, encouraging an interest in health tourism that will drive increased offerings and income for destinations. Once again, this book is worth reading for stakeholders in terms of the development and growth of NHT, sustainable NHT implementation and preservation of natural resources. Considering that the Earth is aging, the next generation will take its turn to inhabit this planet.

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