

# Innovation Practices and Techniques for Nature-Based Health Tourism Competitiveness



Mirjana Nenad and Elena Pessot 

**Abstract** Innovation is considered essential to the growth and long-term sustainability of health tourism companies and destinations. Continuous innovation takes place to improve the industry competitiveness, but especially the tourists' experience and wellness with new product offerings. This Chapter collects and describes the innovation practices proposed and developed in some pilot regions of the HEALPS2 project consortium. The innovation practices identified in the project can be subdivided into three types, i.e., innovation techniques, innovation supporting tools, and innovative product offerings. All the practices were designed to target several operators of the Nature-based Health Tourism (NHT) industry, from tourism facilities and companies (especially small- and medium-sized enterprises) to regional councils and municipalities in charge of policy-making and tourism strategy development. HEALPS 2 innovation practices and techniques can be purposefully integrated at the regional and local level for a more innovation-driven industry strategy and business development, as well as facilitation of transnational cooperation among key actors, also beyond Alpine regions and NHT destinations.

**Keywords** Health tourism · Innovation · Techniques · Tools

## 1 Introduction

### 1.1 *The Pursuit of Innovation in Health Tourism*

Despite the crisis initiated by the Covid-19 pandemic, tourism is still one of the most important and fastest-growing economic sectors at an international level. The lack of

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M. Nenad (✉)  
Scientific Research Centre Bistra Ptuj, Ptuj, Slovenia  
e-mail: [mirjana.nenad@bistra.si](mailto:mirjana.nenad@bistra.si)

E. Pessot  
Institute of Intelligent Industrial Systems and Technologies for Advanced Manufacturing,  
National Research Council of Italy, Lecco, Italy

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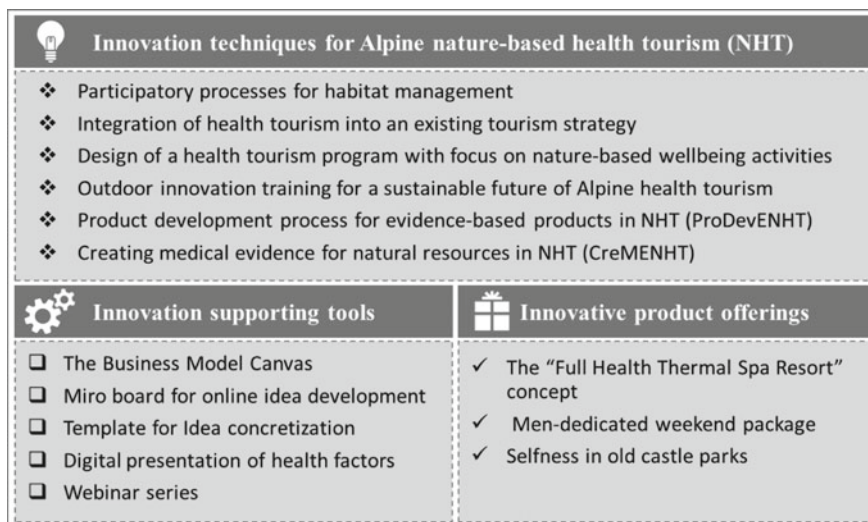
tourists travelling had huge consequences on the overall tourism economy, including health tourism enterprises. Nevertheless, the relationship of these enterprises with the healthcare system provided some opportunities to continue operations, with the need to further promote innovation in this industry [1]. Health policies and tourism market trends are addressing the health tourism industry as one of the main pillars in the development of many regions and countries, as it promotes growth, creates jobs, attracts investment, and boosts exports [2].

Innovation is considered essential to the growth and long-term sustainability of tourism companies and destinations, with continuous innovation taking place to improve competitiveness, but especially the tourists' experience and safety with new product offerings. Industry stakeholders are under pressure to continuously deliver new offerings and provide more, faster, and bigger experiences to remain competitive. Yet, some stakeholders are still reluctant towards innovating their value offers, often due to the financial burden or the fear of possibly losing some authenticity in the healing treatments or activities, e.g. by radically changing the participant experience in a negative way [3].

Different means could be exploited to innovate the promotion of the true value and potentialities of natural resources in health tourism destinations [4]. At the same time, it is fundamental that tourism experiences remain "meaningful" to produce desired innovation potential. The notion of 'meaningful tourism experiences' here-with incorporates the values of the three generations of experience economy (i.e., staged experiences, co-creative experiences, transformative experiences) in fostering: (a) pleasurable and enjoyable experiences designed for many tourists; (b) personalized and extended interactions with the tourists and other tourist stakeholders; and (c) life-changing transformation for a few individuals [5]. In this sense, innovation initiatives in Nature-Based Health Tourism (NHT) destinations should integrate the engagement of all relevant stakeholders, and be addressed to implement holistic offerings that produce meaningful experiences of health, wellness and tourism.

## ***1.2 Development of Innovation Practices in the HEALPS2 Project***

This Chapter collects and describes the innovation practices developed by the HEALPS2 consortium, aimed at enhancing the attractiveness of health tourism opportunities in Alpine regions. All the practices were designed to target several operators of the NHT industry, i.e., tourism facilities and companies (especially small- and medium-sized enterprises); sectoral and specialized agencies such as destination management organizations, business support organizations, tourism organizations; regional councils and municipalities in charge of policy-making and tourism strategy development; but also universities and research centres. They reflect the requirements and needs of the specific areas, but they were formulated to be easily transferable into



**Fig. 1** Types of innovation practices identified in the HEALPS2 project to foster the competitiveness of the NHT industry

other regions and NHT destinations. In this case, a proper adaptation to local conditions should be considered in terms of existing infrastructure, level of engagement of local and regional stakeholders, needs and factors of tourists.

The innovation practices identified in the project can be subdivided into three types, i.e., innovation techniques, innovation supporting tools, and innovative product offerings (see Fig. 1). The three types, and in general the innovation practices presented, can be purposefully integrated at the regional and local level, according to the aims in terms of innovativeness and competitiveness of each NHT destination.

The three types of practices are described in the following sections.

## 2 Innovation Techniques for the Alpine NHT

### 2.1 *Participatory Processes in Health Tourism Destinations: Cooperation Between Destinations and Municipalities in Habitat Management*

This technique is developed starting from the awareness that NHT destinations are living spaces, where the relationship between guests and locals should be redefined. Decision-making processes of the actors directly involved in the tourism sector (hoteliers, tourism professionals, providers of tourism products such as hiking guides,

producers of regional products, farmers, foresters, etc.) do not often include municipalities in the destination, which bring in the viewpoint of the population. As multipliers for the existing offers, the locals can contribute to ensuring that health tourism products are accepted and properly supported.

To this aim, it is necessary that they also benefit from the existing offers, and are involved in the development of tourism strategies with their policy representatives. Other important factors are transparency, which has to be ensured with effective communication means, and the presentation of results in a timely manner. Thus, the participatory process for Habitat management foresees to identify possible user groups, providers, local/regional stakeholders, and other interest groups or people, as follows:

- Possible user groups: Agriculture, handcraft, trade, clinics, nature conservation and alpine association.
- Possible providers: Mountain railway companies, hiking guides, trail owners, partner businesses, tourism information centres, and product partners of other destinations.
- Possible stakeholders: Municipalities (at administrative and political level), provincial governments, and civilian population (interested locals).

These groups can work effectively by discussing possible developments and joint actions in working groups and exchanging information several times in joint events. To this end, it is important ensuring that all possible stakeholders are invited to participate in the working groups. Moreover, cooperation with municipalities requires considering the laws, ordinances, and guidelines that bound their operations, thus proper municipal committees should be elected, and share decision-making with the mayor.

## ***2.2 Integration of Health Tourism into an Existing Tourism Strategy***

The regions that aim to develop NHT offers should firstly consider and include the existing tourism strategy, without disregarding it. The integration extends also to the existing natural resources, their current use and the tourism offers.

This innovation technique was applied in the Bregenzerwald region (Austria), where local tourism stakeholders were invited to a meeting to discuss all existing offers (without specifying the provider). These were properly clustered, and gaps in the potential health tourism offer were also defined. The latter included the availability of specific natural resources and facilities suitable for health tourism aims. For example, it emerged that the resources “forest” and “water” could be easily exploited for healing treatments, with many Kneipp facilities located in the forest or near a forest no longer used. In the next period, the team of Bregenzerwald Tourism is planning to develop and implement measures for the valorization of all Kneipp

facilities, with their integration into existing offers and packages, without developing a completely new offer.

Also in this technique, the involvement of different stakeholders allows for creating a complete overview of the existing resources, services and infrastructure. Participative efforts are also required in the development of product offerings, and the integration into existing services, also to guarantee their acceptance in the existing strategies.

### ***2.3 Design of a Health Tourism Program with a Focus on Nature-Based Wellbeing Activities***

This innovation technique addresses regions where there is still no functional destination management, and a strategic approach for exploiting existing natural resources is missing. Specifically, it entails the creation of health and tourism programs focused on spending time in nature to enhance wellbeing, and on outdoor activities such as biking and hiking. The development of these programs includes a series of steps that are based on the existence of few initiatives, or even the lack of a strategic approach. Indeed, the steps to implement such a technique are:

- Analysis and evaluation of the quality and integration possibilities of the existing offer.
- Modelling of potential program content with suitability analysis.
- Preparation of basic material with a description of the program (content, logistics, integration).
- Examination of technical, logistical and organizational capacities in the region for the implementation of the program.
- Coordination between stakeholders and partners involved in the program.
- Preparation of information materials and communication content.
- Development of sustainable program management and marketing plan.

This innovation technique was applied in the region of Pomurje (Slovenia), where a functional destination management organization is missing. During the first step of the analysis, it emerged that the most important stakeholders to be involved in the program were the SMEs, such as incoming agencies, tourism and accommodation organizations, and tour guides. These were involved in all the subsequent steps, together with the public (visitors), sectoral agencies and local/regional authorities, and some prototypes of developed programs were evaluated for possible integration into existing offers of the destination.

## ***2.4 Outdoor Innovation Training for a Sustainable Future of Alpine Health Tourism***

This innovation technique foresees a two-day outdoor innovation workshop for health tourism stakeholders based in the Alpine region. The workshop was designed with the aim of training participants in entrepreneurial patterns and fostering idea generation and networking between different actors in the health tourism sector while spending time in nature. The idea is that experimenting with methods and exercises outdoors can be a catalyst for creativity, development of new ideas and innovative concepts for the development of the same region where the outdoor training takes place.

The training follows the principle of effectuation, based on entrepreneurial research that focuses on learning entrepreneurial thinking and acting through practical principles and an action-guiding process, thus overcoming the classic management approach of analysis-planning-goal setting-executing. It addresses the dynamic environments where a new logic for entrepreneurial behaviour is needed, by stimulating emergent responses that business actors are not able to plan.

This innovation technique was developed in the National Park Schwarzwald. Here participants practised the “ethics of reticence”, with nature left to itself without human beings “planning” in which way nature should have developed. By letting nature develop on its own, participants could observe how new unforeseen things can happen that human beings would have been unable to plan. With the principle of effectuation, the actors from different European regions promoting NHT were able to reflect on the opportunity for a sustainable future for the overall health tourism industry. They firstly exchanged their experiences about the changes characterizing health tourism, i.e. the increasing awareness and consciousness of their health, lifestyle and new (mental) diseases (e.g. burn out); the demographic changes driving new needs of tourists travelling for wellbeing; the changes in service providers, with new networks, platforms and cooperation opportunities (e.g. hospitals cooperate with tourism boards); the new frame conditions, with changes in the health care system, less support by health insurance, and more private/self-paid patients. Afterwards, they conceptualized new ideas for new offers as well as cooperation opportunities for potential joint future projects.

The workshop revealed to be particularly helpful to identify means to promote health tourism in the regions with the use of digital technologies, considering that during the first steps of a (digital) disruptive innovation the planning and analysis tools are not always adequate to take the next entrepreneurial steps.

The main features and outcomes of the innovation technique can be summarized as follows:

- Exchange of experiences between actors from the health tourism sector, by thinking and learning in nature and with heterogeneous groups of actors.
- Developing a common understanding of sustainable health tourism and joint criteria for sustainable health tourism, with the emergence and integration of different perspectives.

- Identifying new ideas and offers for the NHT sector that will be potentially implemented afterwards in cross-border consortia, and especially driving the adoption of digital technologies.
- Design and test an innovation workshop format that exclusively takes place in an outdoor environment where participants are (almost) continuously moving (e.g., hiking), with an enhancing effect on participants' creativity.

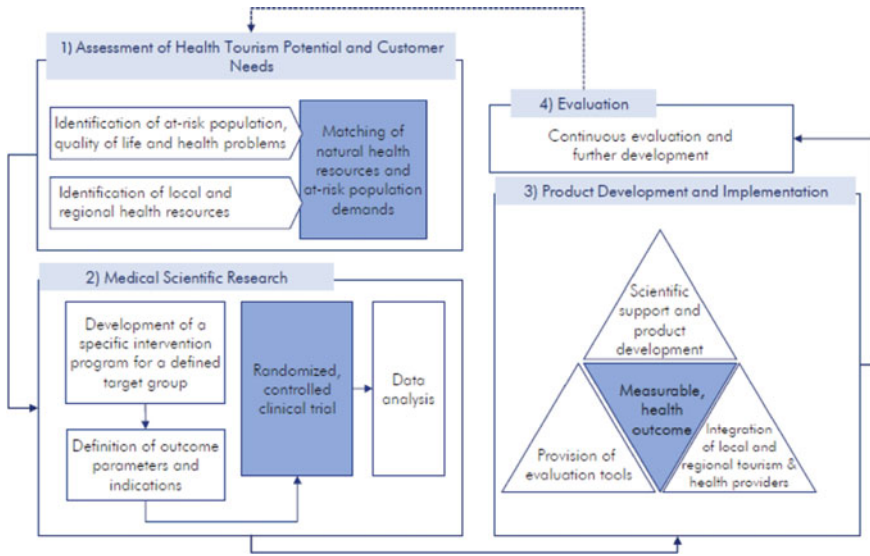
## ***2.5 Product Development Process for Evidence-Based Products in NHT (ProDevENHT)***

This innovation technique entails the basic path from the existence of a natural resource to the creation and use of medical evidence for the touristic valorization of the resource. So far, most health tourism offers lack a real link between tourism and medicine, with many offers in NHT that are not evidence-based. To develop high-quality and effective health tourism based on natural resources, the step to creating evidence is indispensable. In addition, both a regional and operational analysis of the framework conditions as well as the implementation potentials are necessary. In the proposed path, there is the possibility of integrating cross-sectoral services and offers into the tourism offer, especially in medical or health-oriented services, and establishing topics such as good nutrition and good sleep with local partners as a direct part of the tourism value chain. At the same time, this increases the potential of a broad regional anchoring and thus also acceptance of this type of tourism in the region.

The innovation technique entails a process of four structured steps that support interested stakeholders in creating medical evidence and subsequently using it for touristic valorization. The four steps are identified as (1) Assessment of Health tourism Potential and Customer Needs, (2) Medical Scientific Research, (3) Product Development and Implementation, and (4) Evaluation. As shown in Fig. 2, they should be realized in sequence with a continuous improvement approach, with the Evaluation phase providing inputs for the subsequent cycle.

The first phase foresees the identification and matching of the natural health resources and the at-risk population demands of a specific region. According to the content of the evidence gathered, results could differ from region to region. The second phase for the creation of medical evidence of alpine healing resources, with data analysis, requires the involvement and close cooperation of different stakeholders. Adequate resources should be planned for the search for and availability of suitable external partners (e.g. service providers or research institutes) that perform the clinical studies needed for the creation of the medical evidence.

The product development and implementation phase should leverage the knowledge from the analysis of existing case studies and consideration of potential market expectations; the definition of challenges in product development; the definition of requirements for education and training in health tourism; and the exploitation of adequate supporting technologies. Possible solutions are the cooperation of several



**Fig. 2** Structural approach for the creation of medical evidence for natural resources

partners as well as a (co-) financing via subsidies, e.g., in the form of practice-oriented research projects such as the HEALPS2 project, where this innovation technique was first tested. However, if the process is completed and appropriate products are offered on the market at the end, the chance of creating a high-quality and regionally anchored product is very high. This type of NHT product development can therefore be properly evaluated to contribute to the overall sustainable development of a region.

## 2.6 *Creating Medical Evidence for Natural Resources in NHT (CreMENHT)*

This innovation technique extends Phase 2 of the Product development process for evidence-based products in NHT (ProDevENHT) described above with the basic path from the existence of a natural resource to the creation of medical evidence for its use within a nature-based and health-promoting tourism.

It is necessary to verify the effectiveness of the natural resources according to medical standards, to properly valorize them in NHT. The interaction between tourism and medicine considers the following elements:

- **Health Tourism:** location change and leisure setting are consecutive elements to distinguish health tourism from the use of local healthcare infrastructure and medical tourism.



- Indications: basis or rationale to use a certain NHT product.
- Evidence: evidence-based medicine means that decision-making on diagnosis and treatment is based on the best available current research, the physician's clinical expertise and the needs and preferences of the patient. Health-related interventions are based on the best available scientific research and integrate the clientele's interests, values and needs.

The innovation technique presented here shows stakeholders step-by-step how to create medical evidence for natural resources. The preparations up to the decision for a clinical study are very important since high costs are always associated and professional medical support is needed. The exact design of the clinical study is always individual and depends on the natural potentials as well as the objective to be defined and the budget. Anyway, the CreMENHT technique includes a list of general steps to create the evidence that can be easily and promptly applicable for NHT regions, i.e.:

1. Identify and evaluate existing natural resources for potential use in NHT
2. The decision for a clinical study
3. Definition of the objective of the study, with the formulation of the hypotheses to be investigated
4. Analyze existing case studies and consideration of potential market expectations
5. Definition of potential subjects, inclusion and exclusion criteria
6. Definition of the study procedure, determination of the measurement methods according to the defined objectives
7. Submission to an ethics committee application to conduct the study
8. Contracting trial insurance for the study
9. Implementation of the study on site
10. Evaluation of the study

This innovation practice extends the already existing studies that have demonstrated the effectiveness of natural resources, but that need to be integrated with further evidence. For example, positive health effects of green space are demonstrated for longevity, cardiovascular diseases, and mental health (see Chap. 1 [6]).

### **3 Innovation Supporting Tools for the Alpine NHT**

#### ***3.1 The Business Model Canvas to Devise an Effective Business Model for New Local Wellness and Health Tourism Products***

The Business Model Canvas is a visual framework adopted for the description, assessment, design, or improvement of business models. It can provide valid support for the development of new value offers—or extending the current offers—by including



**Fig. 3** The business model canvas template [7]

innovative wellness and health tourism products for the Alpine areas and positioning them as a relevant destination for wellness tourists.

The analysis takes into consideration nine blocks, grouped into the following four areas:

- infrastructure: including key partners, key activities, key resources
- offering: including value proposition
- customers: including customer relations, channels, customer segments
- finances: including cost structure, and revenue streams.

The template (Fig. 3) is filled in with concise qualitative information, aimed to facilitate brainstorming while not considering a quantitative assessment.

Usually, the business model canvas can be regarded as a preliminary step to the drafting of a business plan. It allows to schematically outline, in a way that is easy to understand even for non-experts, how businesses or other economic entities, create, deliver, and capture value. This tool can, thus, support the collective design of innovative business models of NHT within a participatory approach. The template can be printed out on a large surface so that groups of people can jointly start sketching and discussing business model elements with post-it notes or board markers. Thus, it represents a hands-on tool that fosters understanding, discussion, creativity, and analysis.

This technique was developed in a one-day workshop in the pilot area region of Ossola. This area is rich in resources which can effectively support the creation of a tourism offer focusing on wellness and health. At the same time, it has been observed that this offer is currently very limited. The main aim of this innovation technique was to involve the actors who could play a crucial role in the creation of new wellness

and health tourism products in the thematic area, and a preliminary assessment of the viability of these initiatives. The target groups included local tourism businesses and professionals (and, in some specific cases, NGOs), together with local public administrations and institutions, which could support the development of the new products through their activities, projects and funding.

This technique can be very effective in comparing the different business models which can support the development of a specific new tourism product (e.g., visitors could be offered a program of guided hiking thanks to the financial support of the local government or hoteliers, or individual participants could be charged for each hike). The adoption of a participatory approach should consider the selection of stakeholders to be involved in the discussion: the group should not be too big so that each participant can effectively contribute, but at the same time not too small, to include different relevant points of view. Participants don't need to have specific economic skills but should have knowledge of the wellness and health tourism market and provide different perspectives. If this is not the case within the group of local stakeholders (as it happens when such an offer is still not developed in the area), such competencies should be guaranteed through the engagement of external experts.

### ***3.2 Miro Board for Online Idea Development on NHT Products***

The online collaborative whiteboard platform Miro (<https://miro.com/>) represents a valuable tool to foster innovation and development of health tourism product ideas based on the natural resources found in the Alpine regions. The Miro Board is initially designed to contain different categories of themes to be discussed. Stakeholders are provided with an example for each category and then asked to fill out the template with ideas on possible NHT products containing local natural resources, by writing them on digital post-its before allocating the ideas to one of the five categories. In the following steps, other stakeholders can further develop existing ideas by adding to the post-its and also bundle ideas. The main factor for developing the technique is that different stakeholders in every region would be interested in developing and offering NHT products but there is a lack of time and resources to come up with ideas on their own. Moreover, not all are aware of the local resources in the region and their level of evidence.

This innovation technique was employed in a workshop dedicated to the development of new NHT products for Val Müstair in Switzerland. The workshop consisted of three parts:

- Part 1: Generation of ideas for tourism products based on natural health resources
- Part 2: Concretization of the idea
- Part 3: Presentation of the results in the plenum.

In Part 1, all participants are asked to place their ideas for NHT in the region based on local resources. With this aim, the Miro Board consists of a template containing the five broad categories of food, water, agriculture, sports, and open categories. In the following step, participants were asked to vote on the best ideas generated and to prioritize and select 3 ideas for the next round. Specifically, these were: Trail running, the healing power of water & power sports, Detox-week (Fig. 4).

In the second part, the three ideas with the most votes received were presented again. After that, the participants were allowed to assign themselves to the idea they wanted to work on further. For this task, they had to answer the following questions: What is the idea concretely? Who would be the target group here? What is the need? What is the benefit of the idea for guests? Who could be the key players in this idea and what could the cooperation look like? A moderator from the project group made notes on a new Miro board.

In the last Part 3, one person per group had to present the idea shortly to the others. The workshop ended by asking the participants to join one of three action groups to further develop and implement the idea. In the following step, the ideas were defined in more detail. In effect, only one of the three ideas was developed into a product, while further brainstorming resulted in a separate idea, which had not been generated during the online workshop.

Miro is a tool that is easy to understand and adopt and does not require many resources. Once the Miro Board is created, it can be easily copied and applied to other regions, etc. Moreover, it represents a valuable technique to be used in the

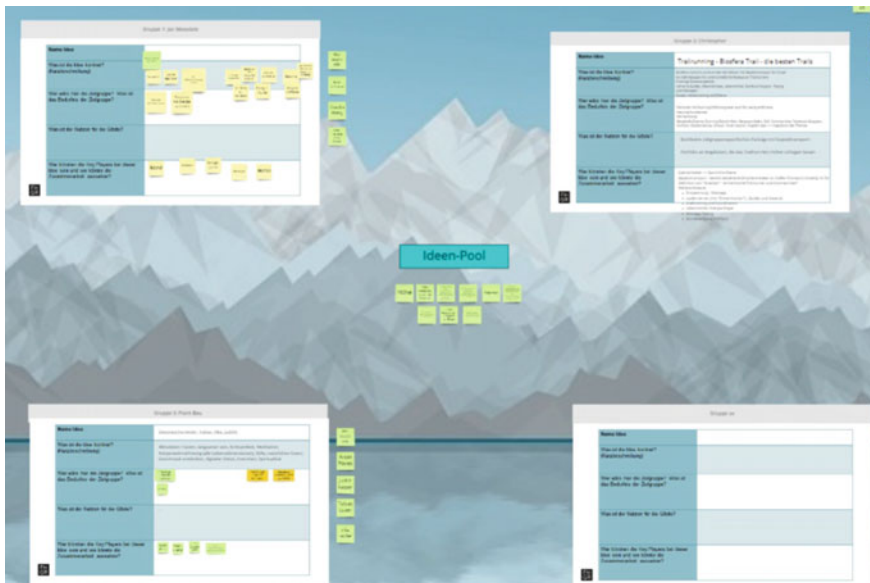


Fig. 4 Print screen of miro board with 3 developed ideas

context where physical interaction is not possible, as it was during the Covid-19 pandemic that prevented on-site workshops.

### ***3.3 Template for Idea Concretization Within Alpine Health Tourism***

This tool supports all the tools proposed in previous sections and adopted in workshops. The results and the ideas that emerged in these workshops should be further developed and concretized through a situation analysis. For example, an additional Part 4 of the workshop with the Miro Board (Sect. 3.2) should take place after the workshop, (asynchronous, or even individually). It should be dedicated to concretizing ideas by the researchers and interested parties and sharing them with the service provider. This concretization should include (desk) research to find out what offers are already available, who the competitors are in this area, what similar or identical offers already exist on the market and what the guests' needs are. A template with guiding questions to concretize the idea is thus designed as a key innovation technique of the HEALPS2 project, as follows.

Positioning/market potential (density of supply/demand trends).

- Are there intact natural and cultural landscapes?
- Are there special qualities or experience potential?
- What are the authentic/unique strengths of the region (experience potentials)?
- Which offers already exist, which do not?
- Is there already a thematic positioning locally or regionally?
- Gaps in the offer? What is missing?
- Comparable or exemplary offers in the region or abroad?
- Current trends and market developments at the domestic and international level?
- What is the local/regional tourism destination like? Which target groups are already being targeted?

Target group/needs

- What are the lifestyle and information habits of the target group to be addressed?
- Who should be addressed?
- What are the characteristics of this target group?

Offer description (draft)/service modules

- What should the offer look like and what should it contain?
- Who (service provider of the region) should play a part in the offer?

All these questions can help to grasp the idea in more detail and concretely develop it in a task force with the service provider. To concretize the idea, a collaboration platform can be used to work on the concept simultaneously, but this can also be done in a Word template and sent by email to other partners (research partners, service providers) for further comments on the concept.

### ***3.4 Digital Presentation of Health Factors***

The use of digital tools represents a valuable innovation for customers who are looking for NHT products and want to see how the product is working on them. Specifically, digitalization could enable visitors to visualize the effects of locations such as many Alpine regions, which are important energetic areas with healing effects, and make them “feel” their unique value. Specific tools can project an image or data of individuals’ health components before and after the use of certain health products and offer an interactive insight into historical buildings or natural areas.

This issue allows health tourism destinations to tackle issues such as the fact that some historical remnants and natural areas are not approachable due to preservation demands.

### ***3.5 Webinar Series to Foster Interest and Involvement of Local Stakeholders***

This innovation supporting tool entails the organization of a series of webinars to stimulate a reflection on wellness and health tourism among local stakeholders and get in contact with local businesses and professionals which could potentially contribute to the development of the regional offer. The webinars should have a common thread, while a specific focus for each webinar should be identified. To guarantee broad participation of local stakeholders at multiple events, maximum flexibility should be ensured in the access to the contents. Thus, webinars are live-streamed, and the respective recordings remain available on various channels, to allow interested stakeholders who were unable to attend live to benefit from the content. In addition, it is important to limit the duration of each event. After the last webinar, all registered participants are asked to fill in a questionnaire, in which they could express their opinion on the different events and, most importantly, provide proposals or requests for further information related to the development of NHT. Further events could be organized in the following for a more extensive discussion of each specific topic, based on the feedback obtained through the final questionnaire or during the webinars (e.g. with a few minutes after the presentations given by the main speakers, to be reserved for questions and remarks from the attendees).

The use of webinars grew especially with COVID-related restrictions and precautions and the limited number of participants in the organization of live events. The use of this innovation technique in the HEALPS2 project was promoted by the Ossola area. A series of five seminars, to identify and discuss proposals and requests for NHT development with a common thread on mountains, was organized as follows:

- “TOURISM, MOUNTAINS and... HEALTH. Focus on: REGENERATIVE TOURISM”
- “TOURISM, MOUNTAINS and... THE WINE AND FOOD SECTOR”

- “TOURISM, MOUNTAINS and... WELLNESS. Focus on: MOUNTAIN-THERAPY”
- “TOURISM, MOUNTAINS and... ACCESSIBILITY. Focus on: MOUNTAIN TOURISM FOR ALL”
- “TOURISM, MOUNTAINS and... SPORT”

The main aim was to arouse curiosity and initiate contact with local stakeholders who could potentially be relevant to the development of the local offer in the field of NHT. To provide participants with a broad range of information coming from experts with a hands-on experience in the wellness tourism field, the potential of this type of tourism has been explored during the webinars thanks to the involvement of some stakeholders (e.g. restaurateurs and experts involved in the creation of a local supply chain for game meat), as well as academics and professionals who have studied and developed interesting experiences in other Italian mountain areas. The main target group was represented by local tourism businesses, professionals, and NGOs, which would play a key role in the creation of a local NHT offer, followed by local public administrations and institutions to support these offers, and university students who could dedicate research or professional activity to contribute to the establishment of Ossola as an NHT destination. The presented technique, together with the choice of online events, makes it easier to adapt it to different contexts and contents.

## **4 Innovative Product Offerings for the Alpine NHT**

### ***4.1 The “Full Health Thermal Spa Resort” concept***

This innovative product was designed starting from the challenge of imagining the thermal spa resorts of tomorrow. Thermal spa resorts have two core activities: thermal medical care and leisure tourism. Some resort actors also established a new activity, coherent and specific, around Preventative Health, aimed at creating destinations that offer equipment, services and accommodation in a favourable thermal and touristic environment, with specifically designed preventative health products meeting customer expectations. This concept of “Full Health Thermal Resort” can enhance destination competitiveness as it has to differentiate factor the focus on preventative health in genuine life and holiday destination (town or village). To this end, the resort governance should prioritize the collaboration between all resort stakeholders, foster to fully share of the project’s ambition and collectively aim at creating, developing, and achieving the Full Health Thermal Resort.

The innovative technique was developed in the Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes region (France) as part of the smart specialization S3 strategy initiated by the European Commission in 2014. The concept was formalized in a shared document, followed by the creation in 2015 of a “Full Health Thermal Resort” Blueprint elaboration methodological guide. Thus, the innovative technique is being implemented in the pilot resorts of Châtel-Guyon and La Bourboule and is included in the 2016–2021

Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes Regional Thermal Plan, with other regional thermal spa resorts implementing the process to define their destination's specific strategy. Other European thermal resorts can adapt the "Full Health Thermal Spa Resort" concept to their specific features and offer preventative healthcare products adapted to their clients' expectations.

## ***4.2 Men-Dedicated Weekend Package***

This innovative product was designed starting from the idea that several touristic products are mainly dedicated to women, with a lot of offers to choose from. Conversely, male tourists usually receive eventful products. The product ideated in the Spodnje Podravje region (Slovenia) develops a three-day weekend package reserved for men, including slow homemade food, slow wine tasting, and spa relaxation. The concept integrates the principles of Mithraism, an ancient religion reserved only for men, and the slow tourism concept.

The innovation technique collocates in a tourist product niche, with a lack of stress-relief products for men in the region. The new health tourism product can also align with other touristic offers—wine tasting, homemade food, spas, experiences in nature (walking, hiking, cycling, water sports)—and provide a value-adding offering to regions aiming to reach new market segments.

## ***4.3 Selfness in Old Castle Parks***

Different studies demonstrate that finding inner peace is an important factor in a healthy life. Selfness has become very popular in the concept of slow tourism, and many people are now embracing it. Selfness can be performed in many ways—walks, yoga, reading etc.—in peaceful outdoor places—forests, parks, mountains.

This innovative product is based on the importance of selfness, and the low availability of natural areas in urban contexts. It proposes the use of historical parks, and specifically, old castle parks, to be used for individual treatments. These parks are bigger than normal urban parks, they are beautifully structured, and often have some very rare flora and fauna in them. They also offer some insights into the history of the place, and all these factors combined make them a suitable place for some individual séances and therapies.

This health tourism product could be developed in two different ways: (1) with some instruction throughout the park (for example boards or instructions on the app) for solely alone experience, or (2) with a guide for individual treatments or small groups treatments.



## 5 Conclusions

This Chapter presented a series of innovation practices proposed and developed in some pilot regions during the HEALPS2 project. The innovation practices identified in the project were subdivided into three types, i.e., innovation techniques, innovation supporting tools, and innovative product offerings.

All the practices were designed to enhance the attractiveness of NHT opportunities in Alpine regions, but they were formulated to be easily transferable to other regions and health tourism destinations. To this aim, health tourism regions (or tourism destinations willing to integrate an NHT offer) should pursue a proper adaptation to local conditions in terms of existing infrastructure, level of engagement of local and regional stakeholders, and needs and factors of tourists. Each practice can be purposefully integrated into other practices, aiming for a more innovation-driven industry strategy and business development, as well as facilitation of transnational cooperation among key actors of the NHT industry. To this aim, it is useful the decision support system developed within the HEALPS2 project and illustrated in Chaps. 4 [8] and 5 [9].

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