



 Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union

Fostering Innovation and Entrepreneurship in Ecotourism to support sustainable development in Vietnam and the Philippines

Innovation in Ecotourism Experiences through Design Thinking

Prof. Medéia Veríssimo, University Portucalense

July 17th 2025

ONLINE PREPARATION SESSIONS



Nha Trang University
Project Coordinator



Can Tho
University



Thai Nguyen
University of Sciences



University of
San Carlos



Polytechnic University
of the Philippines



Lyceum of the Philippines
University - Batangas



Department of
Tourism of Khanh Hoa



Bojo Aloguinsan
Ecotourism Association



Universidade
Portucalense



FH JOANNEUM
Gesellschaft mbH



Universidad de Alicante

AGENDA

- 1 Principles of Innovation in Tourism
- 2 Design thinking concept
- 3 Design thinking process
- 4 Ecotourism examples

You don't have to invent the wheel to innovate

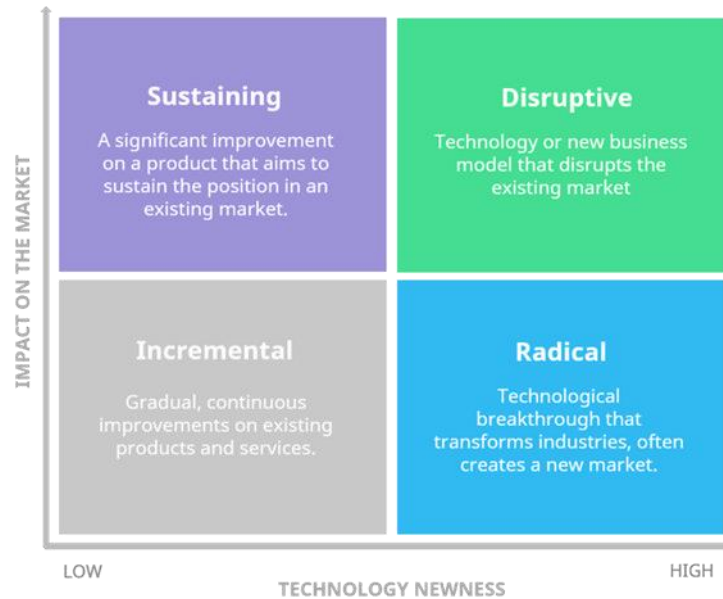


About **90%** of tourism innovations are incremental

According to the Oslo Manual, innovation refers to the implementation of a new or significantly improved product (good or service) or process, a new marketing method, or a new organizational method in business practices, workplace organization or external relations.'

Most service innovations are incremental, involving gradual improvements to existing products, processes or methods. These improvements can result in greater efficiency, quality or customer satisfaction in hospitality.

Disruptive vs. Incremental Innovation



Current innovation management literature and research statically differentiates between incremental and disruptive innovation. Incremental innovation is generally comprehended as improvement of technology performance or product feature enhancement, whereas disruptive innovation is defined as based on technologies previously new to the world, combined with their effects on markets. (Hacklin et al, 2004)

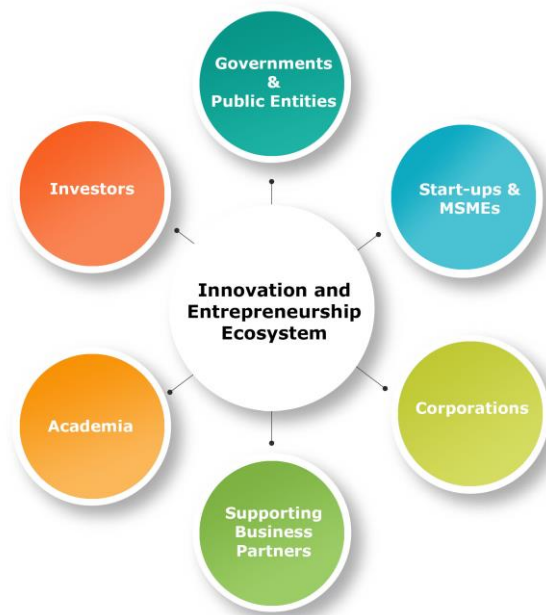
Taxonomies of innovation



According to the Oslo Manual there are 4 classification of innovation

- Product innovations – new or significantly improved goods or services with respect to its characteristics or intended uses. E.g. Low cost airlines
- Process innovations – new or significantly improved production or delivery methods, including significant changes in techniques, equipment and/or software. E.g. automatic check-ins in airports
- Organisational innovations – new or significantly improved methods in a firm’s business practices, workplace organisation or external relations. E.g. online travel agencies
- Marketing innovations – new or significantly improved marketing methods involving significant changes in product design or packaging, product placement, product promotion or pricing. E.g. digital influencers

The Innovation Ecosystem in Tourism



Source: [UNWTO](#) (2023)

Tourism and hospitality is a service-based industry formed mostly by Small and medium companies.

Distinguishing between process, product and service innovation in service industries can be difficult because new services are often combined with new distribution patterns, customer interaction, quality control and assurance, etc.

What is design thinking?

Harvard Business Review 
www.hbr.org

Thinking like a designer can transform the way you develop products, services, processes—and even strategy.

Design Thinking

by Tim Brown

Source: [Harvard Business Review](#)

“ Design Thinking is a human centred approach to innovation that draws from the designer’s toolkit to integrate the **needs of people**, the **possibilities of technology**, and the **requirements for business success**. ”



Tim Brown

What is design thinking?

Design thinking can help strategic and system innovators make the new worlds they've imagined come to pass. In fact, with very complex artifacts, the design of their “intervention” — their introduction and integration into the status quo — is even more critical to success than the design of the artifacts themselves.



[VIDEO HBR](#)

Popularized by David M. Kelley and Tim Brown of IDEO and Roger Martin of the Rotman School, design thinking has three major stages.

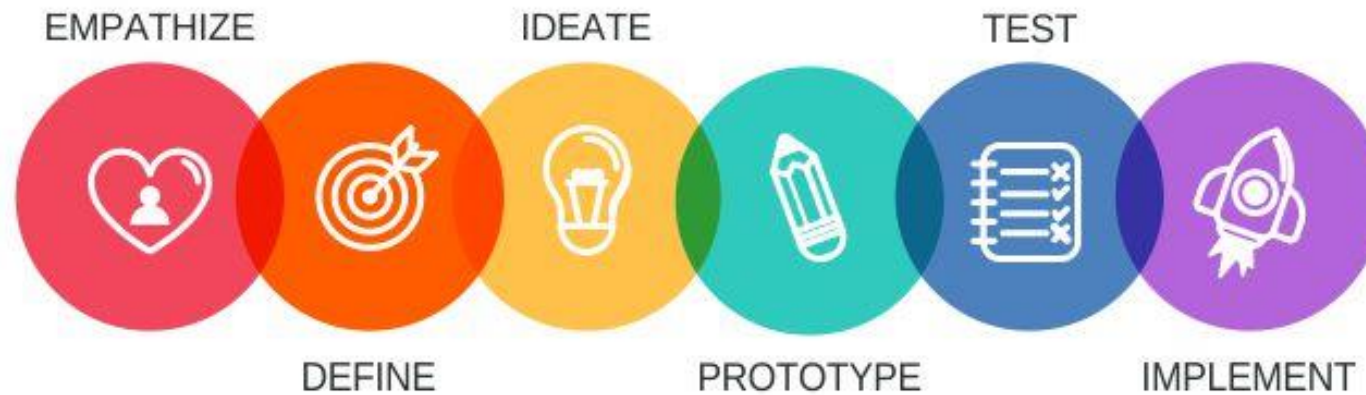
Stage 1: Invent The Future - Find out and **observe what customers really want.**

Stage 2: **Test Your Idea** - Use prototyping and experiment based on the market's respond, then adjust it.

Stage 3: **Bring It To Life** - Identify the activities, capabilities, and resources to mass produce it.

Design Thinking process

Design Thinking: Process and Principles



UNDERSTAND

EXPLORE

MATERIALIZE

Why Design Thinking works?



Design thinking is a mindset, a process and a tool for problem-solving, and evolves around framing questions and collaborating to find solutions. In this process, putting ourselves in other people's shoes and empathising with them enables us to find new ways to enhance their experiences. This method requires gathering as many perspectives as possible, sharing knowledge and insights and prototyping solutions that can truly drive change in the ecosystem.

Design Thinking and Tourism



Dianne Dredge

Jul 19, 2020 · 10 min read · Member-only · Listen



PLACE AND PEOPLE-LED INNOVATION

Why we should embrace design thinking tools in tourism...

and design tourism and visitor economies from the bottom up!



“We need to design tourism operating systems that incorporate both good, purposeful design of tourism services and experiences and align to strategic long-term directions. Design and strategy go hand-in-hand, like yin and yang.”

Design Thinking and Tourism

Design thinking can place people and Nature at the centre, focusing attention on how problems and challenges are perceived and experienced.

By incorporating diverse interests into problem identification and diagnosis stages, Design Thinking builds empathy and shared an understanding of how the consequences and impacts arising from problems fall unevenly across different stakeholders.

Design Thinking places less emphasis on the expert and the technical problem-solving process and opens problem-solving up to wider participation.

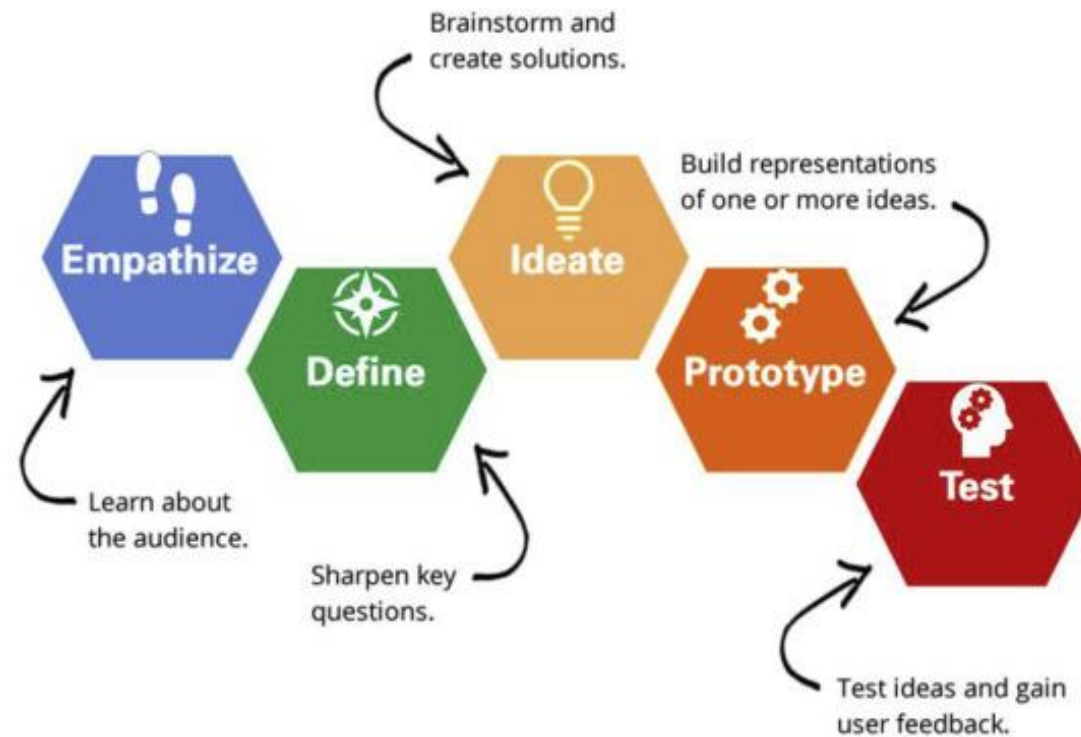
Design thinking recognises that different types of knowledge are needed to address complex issues and that this knowledge requires the inclusion of diverse actors who can represent humans and Nature.

Design thinking helps to democratise the diagnosis, helping to ideate appropriate and acceptable responses to complex problems.

Design thinking rejects linear scientific thinking and embraces complex thinking. It rejects the reduction of problems and issues into simple issues and cause and effect relationships and single actor solutions.

Source: [Dredge \(2019\)](#)

Design Thinking process



Source: [Sándorová et al \(2020\)](#)

Empathize



This is the first step in the design thinking process, which involves understanding the needs, wants, and motivations of the people who will be using the product or service being designed. Empathy is at the core of this process, as it involves putting yourself in the shoes of the users and gaining a deep understanding of their perspective

Tools to emphasize

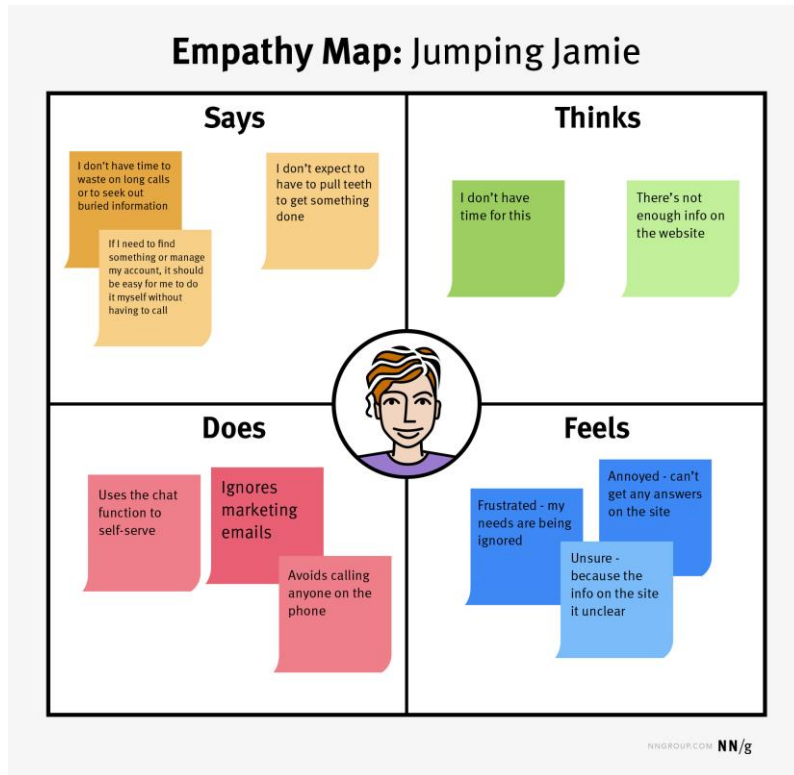
Research: This involves gathering information about the target users, such as their demographics, behaviors, preferences, and pain points. This can be done through various methods such as interviews, surveys and desk research.

Observation: This involves observing the target users in their natural environments to gain a deeper understanding of their needs, behaviors, and motivations. This can be done through techniques as ethnographic research.

Immersion: This involves immersing yourself in the users' experiences by trying the product or service yourself or engaging in activities that simulate the users' experiences. This can help you gain a more visceral understanding of their needs and pain points.

Empathy mapping: This involves creating a visual representation of the users' needs, wants, and pain points, which can help you gain a deeper understanding of their perspective and identify opportunities for design solutions.

The empathy map



Empathy maps are a powerful, flexible tool that can be used to plan for future research studies, capture insights during current user research, and communicate research insights from research that has already been conducted to others.

Define



The define process is the second step in the design thinking process, which involves synthesizing the insights gained during the empathize process and using them to define the problem or opportunity that the design solution will address. The define process is critical in ensuring that the design solution addresses the right problem, and not just a symptom of the problem..

Tips to define

Reframe the problem: Based on the insights gathered during the empathize process, reframe the initial problem statement in a way that captures the true needs and desires of the users. This may involve identifying underlying assumptions or biases and challenging them to arrive at a more accurate problem statement.

Prioritize needs: Identify the most important needs and desires of the users that the design solution should address. This can be done through techniques such as affinity mapping, which involves grouping similar needs and prioritizing them based on importance and feasibility.

Create a design brief: Based on the refined problem statement and prioritized needs, create a design brief that outlines the goals, objectives, and success criteria for the design solution. This should be a clear, concise document that provides guidance for the rest of the design process.

Tips to define

Based on the collected information of the previous stage, define the basic problem to be solved. You can use the W4 board:



Who? E.g. A 22 years-old-tourist from the Netherlands that speaks English but not Portuguese

What? She wants to know more about the history of Porto

Why? She is interested in local culture and gastronomy

Where? She searched online in sites such as Tripadvisor but there is few information about it in English

‘Tourists want information about local gastronomy in English because it is not easy to find it online.’

Ideate



The ideate process is the third step in the design thinking process, which involves generating as many creative ideas as possible to solve the problem or address the opportunity defined in the previous step. The ideate process is critical in ensuring that a wide range of potential solutions are considered before narrowing down to the most promising ones.

Tools to the ideation phase

- Brainstorming
- Brainwriting
- SWOT Analysis
- Mindmapping
- Worst possible idea

Source: [Interaction Design Foundation](#)



Prototype



The prototype is the fourth step in design thinking, which involves creating low-fidelity representations of the design solution to test and refine its functionality and usability. Prototyping allows designers to quickly and cheaply test different iterations of the design solution and get feedback from users before investing significant resources in building the final product.

The role of Service Design in Tourism and Hospitality

The main challenge for T&H businesses is to design the experiences which would create awareness and difference. An experience-based service design path built around various elements such as sensations, emotions, human relations, innovations, and values.



The experiential realm involve a set of emotions, creating meaning and relating to the moment, focusing on the experience-based service design is the way to push the customers in a dream world and make them loyal partners. ([Guzel, 2017](#))

The role of Service Design in Tourism and Hospitality

Service design is defined as a structured service development process that is shaped in accordance with the needs and expectations of the customer (Karadayi-Usta & SerdarAsan, 2020). It needs to take into account:

The people involved: Know who will be involved with each interaction that customers will have throughout their stay/visit, for instance residents, staff, other tourists/guests.

The environment: The service design must also consider what would be needed to create an outstanding service design.

The processes: Your design also needs to take into account how you plan to put all of these new designs to work. Consider each stage of the design and the people involved and how it will impact the customer. Remember that both the front end and the backend impact the customer experience. Do not neglect what happens behind-the-scenes just because a customer might not see it directly.

The role of Service Design in Tourism and Hospitality

Zomerdijk and Voss

79

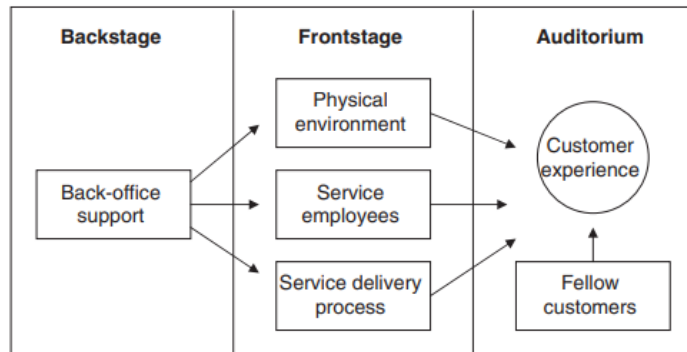


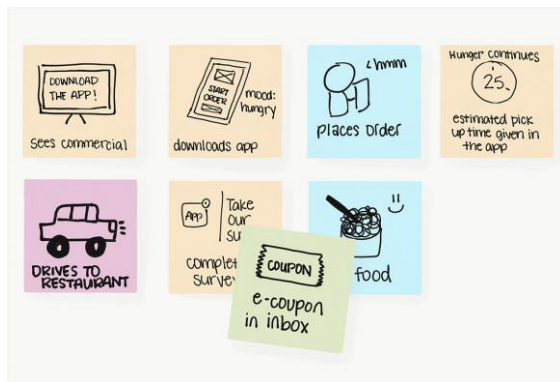
Figure 1. Five Experiential Design Areas

number of companies that are seeking to include some experiential aspects in their service design. The design principles include the following:

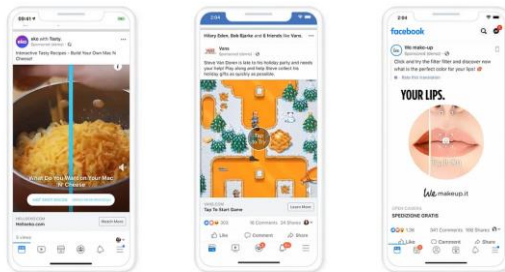
1. Design from the perspective of the customer journey and its associated touchpoints.
2. Conduct sensory design.
3. Require front-line employees to engage with customers.
4. Pay attention to the dramatic structure of events.
5. Manage the presence of fellow customers.
6. Closely couple backstage employees and frontstage experiences.

Zomerdijk& Voss (2010)

How to prototype a service/experience



Storyboard/Visual board are sketches/visualizations of a future usage scenarios depicted with illustrations and small texts.



Service advertisements are visualizations of the service concept or value proposition through posters, digital ads, landing pages, videos, etc

How to prototype a service/experience



Video prototyping are audio-visual representations of scenario that illustrate how people might interact with a service in real settings.



Digital mock-ups are representations of digital interfaces with their look, feel and properties but without the programming

Test



The test process in design thinking is a crucial step in ensuring that the design solution meets the needs and expectations of the end-users. This process involves creating prototypes of the proposed design solution, testing it with the target audience, and gathering feedback for iteration and refinement.

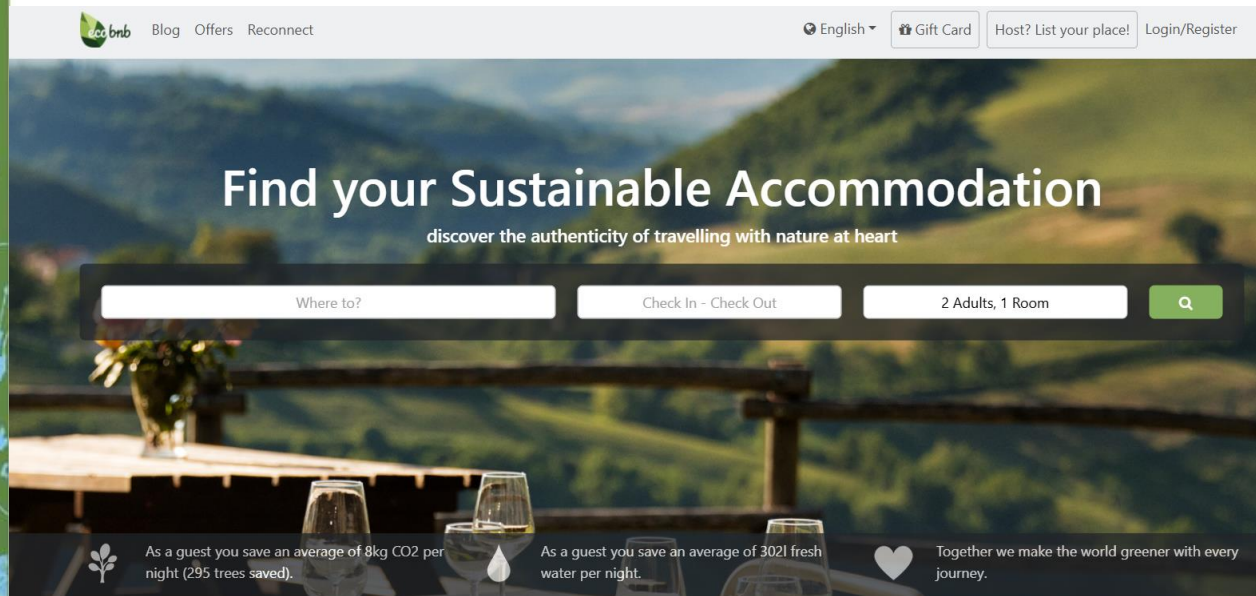
How to test the solution?

Test with Target Audience: The prototype is then tested with the target audience, which could be customers, stakeholders, or end-users. The test could be in the form of surveys, interviews, or user testing sessions, where users interact with the prototype to provide feedback.

Gather Feedback: The feedback gathered from the testing phase is then analyzed to identify areas of improvement and refine the design solution. The feedback can be used to tweak the design, add or remove features, or redesign the solution altogether.

Iterate and Refine: The final step in the test process is to iterate and refine the design solution based on the feedback received from the testing phase. This process continues until the final design solution meets the needs and expectations of the end-users.

Ecotourism examples



Ecobnb (AI platform):
Ecobnb uses AI to recommend eco-friendly accommodations, experiences, and transport, making sustainable travel choices easy and convenient for users.

Welcome to Ecobnb

Ecobnb is a journey undertaken to change the way we travel. To nurture a network that will thrive on the kind of tourism that respects nature, the economy and the local communities

[Are you a sustainable host? Get in touch!](#)



Ecotourism examples



Ribno Hotel, Slovenia (Zero Waste):

Ribno Hotel in Bled is Slovenia's first Zero Waste hotel, innovatively applying circular economy principles like greywater recycling and renewable energy to minimize environmental impact.

Ecotourism examples



Image: [New York times \(2024\)](#)

Community-Led Tourism in New Zealand:

indigenous groups like New Zealand's Ngāti Whātua lead eco-friendly tourism experiences that preserve their lands and share Māori culture, showcasing how community-led initiatives ensure sustainable, equitable tourism benefits.

What unique experience can you design to create value and innovate for both people and the planet?



Thank you!

Prof. Medéia Veríssimo

University Portucalense

medeia@upt.pt