

*Track Theme:* Science Parks and Incubators – European Experience

**Entrepreneurial Marketing for Sustainable Tourism by Networking:  
Findings from Travel Park, an Incubator in Finland**

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## **Abstract**

Previous studies have shown that one means of encouraging sustainable tourism in tourist destinations is through the effective engagement of local communities, particularly local entrepreneurs. The encouragement of entrepreneurship is often in the form of self-employment and/or small firm development. Local ownership and control of tourism businesses, facilities and services is of fundamental importance to sustainable tourism.

Since the 1970s, many countries have established science parks, technology districts and business incubators as part of a strategy to develop new engines of growth. Today, throughout Europe, there are a variety of different business incubator models and modalities which reflect local, regional and national circumstances and priorities. In Finland, the government has encouraged and funded the establishment of several incubators representing a viable means of accelerating economic growth, job creation and entrepreneurship in the regions. Small firms are the backbone of the local and national economy. Over 95 per cent of the business canvas in Finland is composed of small and medium sized enterprises. However, despite SME creation being strong, so is the failure rate, particularly within the first 5 years. Business incubators provide an ideal place to start and grow a small firm business whilst exposing entrepreneurial firms to seasoned management expertise. Additionally, the frequent interaction with other entrepreneurs who share similar problems allows for additional learning and business opportunities. Surprisingly, however, relatively little attention has been paid to the potentially pivotal role of incubator activity for sustainable tourism, particularly incubator marketing activity by networking

This paper presents the findings of a study of one incubator operating within the tourism industry in Finland. The study aims to identify the incubator marketing network for sustainable tourism. The concept and scope of Travel Park is first defined and attention is given to the role of marketing by networking in incubators, which has not received sufficient attention in the past. In doing so, the paper begins by reinforcing the differences between the incubator as a small firm, and large firms, with specific reference to marketing. Consideration is given to the unique characteristics of incubators and the unique nature of marketing within incubators, given that marketing is performed differently in small firms than in large firms. Further, this paper advocates that networking is an inherent tool of incubator marketing, which presents great potential for sustainable tourism.

The methodology chosen for this study is qualitative case study research using in-depth interviews with incubator managers to gain comprehensive data. Interviews with the participants were tape-recorded with their prior consent. The selection of the incubator was on the basis that it operates within the tourism industry. Within these criteria, one incubator, Travel Park, was selected. Initial findings have shown that networking is an inherent tool of incubator marketing. Incubator managers interact with various other business actors for marketing purposes. The analysis of the data collected led to the identification of several individual marketing networks, which identifies those business actors with whom incubator managers network for marketing purposes.

**Keywords:** tourism incubators, incubator marketing, networks, sustainable tourism, Finland