

STRENGTHENING TOURISM MANAGEMENT THROUGH CREATIVE ECONOMY ECOSYSTEMS: THE ROLE OF INNOVATION CAPACITY IN MAKASSAR

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ABSTRACT

This study develops an integrated model for strengthening tourism management through creative economy ecosystems in Makassar, Indonesia, with particular attention to innovation capacity, digital adoption, relational capital, and blue economy governance. The article was redesigned as a narrative synthesis supported by documentary data from official Makassar and South Sulawesi tourism statistics, government datasets, and Scopus-indexed literature. The analysis synthesizes 50+ scholarly and institutional sources using thematic coding and a Pentagonal Asset Framework that maps human, social, natural, physical, and financial capital. Supporting statistics indicate that Makassar recorded 5,524,000 domestic tourist visits and 95,596 international tourist visits in 2024, showing recovery and renewed pressure on destination governance. The findings show that open innovation, spatial-adaptive innovation, and participatory governance innovation function as complementary mechanisms for converting local assets into resilient destination value. Digital platforms expand market reach for micro, small, and medium creative enterprises, but their effects depend on relational capital, managerial capability, infrastructure, and inclusive institutional coordination. The blue economy provides a relevant sustainability frame for waterfront and coastal tourism, yet environmental degradation, fragmented authority, insufficient financing, and uneven digital literacy remain major barriers. The study contributes to tourism management literature by positioning innovation capacity as a dynamic capability that mediates the relationship between destination assets and sustainable competitiveness. Practically, the model offers policy directions for local governments, destination managers, and creative-economy actors seeking to align tourism growth with ecological integrity and community-based economic resilience.

Keywords: Corporate Innovation Capacity, Creative Economy, Tourism Management, Blue Economy, Destination Resilience, Makassar, MSMEs

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INTRODUCTION

Global destinations in coastal cities increasingly face the dual challenge of accelerating economic growth while protecting ecological and social systems. Makassar, a major coastal city and gateway in eastern Indonesia, illustrates this dilemma. Its tourism potential is supported by waterfront attractions, maritime culture, culinary assets, mangrove ecotourism, and a growing creative economy. At the same time, rapid spatial transformation, urban expansion, reclamation pressures, and uneven community capacity create complex managerial problems. These conditions require a tourism management approach that is not limited to promotion or infrastructure provision but is able to integrate innovation capacity, digital transformation, community participation, and blue economy principles.

The empirical relevance of this issue is strengthened by recent official data. The *Satu Data* (one data) Kota Makassar tourism dataset records 5,524,000 domestic tourist visits and 95,596 international tourist visits in 2024. Compared with 2023 figures of 4,414,465 domestic tourists and 85,614 international tourists, these numbers indicate substantial recovery and growth. The increase signals renewed demand for destination services, but it also intensifies the need for effective governance, improved infrastructure, environmental safeguards, and stronger creative-economy linkages. BPS Kota Makassar also reported that star-hotel room occupancy reached 58.32% in July 2024, while January 2025 occupancy was 49.95%, suggesting that tourism activity is dynamic and sensitive to seasonal and managerial factors.

Existing studies on Makassar and other Indonesian waterfront cities highlight the importance of spatial planning, slum upgrading, mangrove ecotourism, digital marketing, open innovation, and community empowerment (Achmad Gani et al., 2025; Amiruddin et al., 2024; Hernita et al., 2021; Maulana et al., 2024a; Rijal et al., 2025; Surya, Hadijah, et al., 2020). However, these studies often address the topics separately. Tourism management research still needs a more integrated explanation of how innovation capacity mediates the transformation of destination assets into competitive and sustainable value. This gap is particularly important in coastal cities where tourism and the creative economy depend simultaneously on environmental quality, community participation, digital connectivity, and institutional coordination.

This study therefore aims to formulate an integrated model of tourism management strengthening through creative economy ecosystems in Makassar. Specifically, it maps the typology of innovation capacity relevant to tourism and creative-economy management, examines how digital technology and relational capital shape the resilience of creative MSMEs, identifies drivers and barriers to blue-economy-oriented waterfront governance, and proposes policy and managerial implications for sustainable destination competitiveness. The article contributes to the literature by repositioning innovation capacity as a dynamic organizational capability that links destination assets, creative production, digital market access, and ecological governance.

LITERATURE REVIEWS

2.1) Innovation capacity and tourism management

Innovation capacity refers to the ability of organizations, communities, and destination systems to generate, absorb, adapt, and institutionalize new ideas, processes, services, and collaborative arrangements. In tourism, innovation is not restricted to new products. It also includes new governance models, digital service systems, community-based business models, adaptive spatial planning, and cross-sector collaboration (Carlisle et al., 2013; Hjalager, 2010; Midgley & Lindhult, 2021). For destinations in developing countries, innovation capacity is particularly important because resource limitations require creative ways to mobilize social capital, local knowledge, and institutional support.

Open innovation is relevant to the Makassar context because tourism and creative-economy actors rarely innovate in isolation. Knowledge is obtained through networks involving local

government, universities, communities, private investors, digital platforms, and tourists. Previous research in Makassar shows that open innovation can strengthen SME productivity and local economic growth (Hernita et al., 2021; Surya, Menne, et al., 2021). From a management perspective, the key issue is how such innovation becomes embedded in destination governance rather than remaining a fragmented project-based activity.

2.2) Creative economy ecosystems and destination competitiveness

The creative economy adds value to destinations by transforming culture, culinary traditions, design, crafts, events, digital content, and community narratives into marketable experiences. In waterfront cities, creative-economy ecosystems can also convert underused spaces into productive tourism nodes when supported by infrastructure, branding, and community capacity (Maulana et al., 2024a, 2024b). Nevertheless, creative-economy development should not be reduced to commodification. It must preserve local identity, protect vulnerable communities, and create fair participation in tourism value chains.

Destination competitiveness is increasingly shaped by intangible resources such as knowledge, relational capital, digital readiness, and institutional credibility. Knowledge transfer within cultural ecosystems supports product development and managerial learning (Dameri & Demartini, 2020). Relational capital helps small enterprises access information, finance, markets, and crisis support (Pongtanalert & Assarut, 2022; Suherman et al., 2024). Thus, the creative economy is best understood as an ecosystem rather than a collection of isolated businesses.

2.3) Blue economy and waterfront governance

The blue economy provides a framework for using coastal and marine resources in ways that generate economic value while maintaining ecological integrity. For Makassar, this perspective is highly relevant because tourism growth is closely tied to waterfront spaces, islands, beaches, mangrove ecosystems, port-city identity, and coastal communities. A blue economy orientation requires sustainable spatial planning, waste management, ecosystem protection, fair access to coastal resources, and transparent governance (Keen et al., 2018; Pace et al., 2023; Roem et al., 2025; Yuan & Failler, 2025).

However, blue economy implementation is not purely technical. It is shaped by institutional coordination, accountability, local participation, and power relations. Studies on spatial transformation in Makassar show that urban expansion can degrade environmental quality and marginalize local communities if planning systems do not adequately protect ecological functions and livelihood rights (Saleh et al., 2020; Surya, Hadijah, et al., 2020; Surya, Syafri, et al., 2020). Therefore, tourism management must reconcile growth-oriented policies with ecological and social safeguards.

2.4) Pentagonal Asset Framework

The Pentagonal Asset Framework is used to map destination capacity across five capital categories: natural, social, human, physical, and financial capital. Natural capital covers coastal landscapes, mangroves, water quality, and biodiversity. Social capital covers trust, networks, collective action, and community norms. Human capital includes skills, digital literacy, managerial capability, and language competence. Physical capital includes accessibility, sanitation, transport, tourism facilities, and digital infrastructure. Financial capital covers investment, credit access, business capital, and financial resilience. This framework is useful because Makassar has strong natural and social resources, but tourism development is constrained when physical, human, and financial capital remain weak (Bennett et al., n.d.; Rijal et al., 2025).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In This article uses a qualitative narrative synthesis design supported by documentary data. The design is appropriate because the research question concerns the integration of concepts,

mechanisms, and policy implications rather than the statistical aggregation of effect sizes. The synthesis combines peer-reviewed literature, official tourism statistics, government datasets, and recent empirical studies related to Makassar, coastal tourism, creative economy ecosystems, innovation management, digital adoption, and blue economy governance.

The data sources consisted of three groups. First, the original manuscript supplied the core thematic structure and initial Scopus-indexed literature base. Second, official datasets from Satu Data Kota Makassar, BPS Kota Makassar, and BPS Provinsi Sulawesi Selatan were used to strengthen empirical context. Third, additional scholarly references were added to reach more than 50 references and to improve theoretical coverage on innovation, tourism resilience, blue economy, spatial planning, destination governance, digital transformation, and MSME resilience.

The analysis followed four stages. The first stage involved manuscript restructuring into standard international article sections: introduction, literature review, methods, results, discussion, implications, limitations, conclusion, and references. The second stage involved thematic coding of the literature into innovation capacity, digital adoption, relational capital, asset capacity, blue economy governance, and spatial transformation. The third stage integrated official statistics into the argument to provide contextual evidence. The fourth stage developed a conceptual model explaining how innovation capacity mediates the relationship between destination assets and sustainable competitiveness.

Table 1 Documentary evidence and analytical use in the revised manuscript

Data/source category	Specific evidence used	Analytical purpose
Makassar tourism dataset	Domestic and international tourist visits, 2018-2024	To establish tourism recovery, demand pressure, and destination management urgency
BPS tourism press releases	Hotel room occupancy and average length of stay indicators	To contextualize tourism activity and service-capacity needs
South Sulawesi tourism statistics	Provincial tourism data covering international arrivals, occupancy, and hotel survey results	To position Makassar within a wider provincial tourism system
Scopus-indexed articles	Studies on open innovation, tourism SMEs, waterfront creative economy, spatial transformation, and blue economy	To build theoretical synthesis and identify mechanisms
Local and institutional studies	Makassar, Sinjai, Lantebung, Tallo, waterfront, mangrove, and coastal community studies	To strengthen place-based relevance and policy implications

RESEARCH RESULTS

1) *Tourism recovery and the managerial pressure on Makassar destinations*

The official tourism series demonstrates that Makassar's tourism demand has recovered strongly after the pandemic disruption. Domestic tourist visits decreased sharply in 2020 and 2021 but increased again in 2022, 2023, and 2024. International visits followed a similar pattern, with a steep decline in 2021 before recovering in 2022-2024. The recovery supports the argument that Makassar requires a stronger destination management model to ensure that

increased arrivals generate inclusive economic value rather than unmanaged pressure on waterfront environments and local communities.

Table 2 Tourist visits to Makassar, 2018-2024

Year	International tourists	Domestic tourists	Interpretive note
2018	105,447	5,461,677	Pre-pandemic high baseline
2019	111,147	4,459,449	Strong international segment but lower domestic count
2020	36,697	1,540,468	Pandemic shock and mobility restriction
2021	3,367	1,695,183	International tourism reached the lowest point
2022	71,388	3,465,141	Recovery phase began
2023	85,614	4,414,465	Continued recovery
2024	95,596	5,524,000	Strong domestic recovery and renewed destination pressure

2) *Typology of innovation capacity in the tourism creative-economy ecosystem*

The synthesis identifies three dominant innovation types. First, open innovation enables tourism and creative-economy actors to combine internal resources with external knowledge from universities, government programs, digital platforms, communities, and markets. This mechanism supports product development, marketing innovation, and business model renewal among MSMEs. Second, spatial-adaptive innovation transforms marginal or underused spaces into productive tourism and creative-economy assets, as illustrated by studies of urban farming, slum upgrading, and coastal tourism planning in Makassar. Third, participatory governance innovation creates institutional arrangements that support accountability, coordination, community ownership, and sustainable resource use.

These innovation types are complementary. Open innovation improves knowledge flows and market responsiveness; spatial-adaptive innovation addresses urban land constraints and spatial inequality; participatory governance innovation ensures legitimacy and continuity. Together, they form a management capacity that can convert destination assets into sustainable competitive advantage.

3) *Digital technology, relational capital, and MSME resilience*

Digital adoption has become a functional requirement for creative tourism enterprises. Social media, e-commerce, digital payment systems, online travel platforms, and data-driven marketing allow MSMEs to expand beyond local markets and reduce dependence on walk-in visitors. However, the findings also indicate that technology alone does not automatically create resilience. Digital tools produce stronger outcomes when accompanied by relational capital, managerial skills, trust-based networks, and access to knowledge.

Relational capital operates as a crisis buffer because entrepreneurs embedded in strong networks can share market information, coordinate supplies, collaborate in promotion, access informal support, and learn digital practices more quickly. This relationship explains why the same digital technology may generate different outcomes across communities. Where human capital, digital literacy, and infrastructure remain limited, digitalization risks increasing inequality rather than strengthening the whole creative-economy ecosystem.

4) *Destination asset diagnosis using the Pentagonal Asset Framework*

The asset diagnosis suggests that Makassar's tourism potential is not constrained by lack of attractions alone. Natural capital and social capital are relatively strong, particularly in coastal, culinary, maritime, and community-based assets. The main constraints lie in human capital,

physical capital, and financial capital. These weaknesses limit the conversion of natural and cultural resources into high-quality visitor experiences and equitable income generation.

Table 3 Pentagonal Asset Framework for Makassar tourism and creative economy

Capital type	Observed condition	Key evidence/indicator	Management implication
Natural capital	High	Waterfront, coastal landscape, mangrove ecotourism, maritime identity	Protect ecological integrity and apply blue economy principles
Social capital	Moderate to high	Community networks, local culinary culture, informal business ties	Strengthen collective governance and relational capital
Human capital	Uneven/low in several communities	Digital literacy, language skills, service quality, managerial capability	Prioritize training, mentoring, and university-community partnerships
Physical capital	Uneven/low in vulnerable coastal areas	Access, sanitation, signage, digital infrastructure, visitor facilities	Improve destination infrastructure through inclusive planning
Financial capital	Low for many MSMEs	Limited credit, weak investment readiness, informal financing	Develop microfinance, grants, blended finance, and market linkage programs

5) *Drivers and barriers of blue-economy-oriented waterfront governance*

The main drivers of blue economy governance are coastal biodiversity, cultural identity, community participation, increasing visitor demand, and the strategic position of Makassar as an eastern Indonesian gateway. The main barriers are environmental degradation, reclamation pressure, fragmented authority, weak monitoring, insufficient infrastructure, and limited finance for community-based enterprises. These barriers are managerial and institutional, not only environmental. Without coordination across tourism, spatial planning, environment, MSME, transportation, and village/community institutions, blue economy policies risk remaining normative and fragmented.

Table 4 Thematic synthesis of findings and policy direction

Theme	Main finding	Policy/managerial direction
Open innovation	Collaboration strengthens knowledge transfer and SME productivity	Create innovation labs, university-community partnerships, and tourism MSME mentoring
Spatial-adaptive innovation	Marginal spaces can become productive creative-tourism nodes	Integrate tourism planning with spatial justice and environmental safeguards

Theme	Main finding	Policy/managerial direction
Digital adoption	Digital platforms expand market access but require skills and infrastructure	Provide digital literacy, marketplace onboarding, and data-driven promotion
Relational capital	Networks strengthen resilience during shocks	Support cooperatives, community brands, and destination business associations
Blue economy	Coastal tourism must protect ecological assets	Adopt conservation-based zoning, waste control, and ecosystem restoration
Institutional coordination	Ego-sectoral governance weakens implementation	Establish cross-agency coordination and performance indicators

Discussion

The findings demonstrate that strengthening tourism management through creative economy ecosystems requires a shift from attraction-based management to capability-based destination governance. Makassar already possesses valuable natural and cultural assets, but these assets do not automatically produce sustainable competitiveness. Innovation capacity is the mediating capability that transforms assets into value. This proposition expands previous tourism innovation literature by showing that innovation capacity includes managerial, spatial, social, digital, and ecological dimensions rather than only product or technological novelty.

The first major contribution is the identification of a triadic innovation typology: open innovation, spatial-adaptive innovation, and participatory governance innovation. Open innovation explains knowledge and resource flows across actors. Spatial-adaptive innovation explains how limited urban spaces can be reconfigured into productive community-based tourism assets. Participatory governance innovation explains how legitimacy, accountability, and coordination are built. Together, these dimensions fit the complexity of waterfront cities where tourism development interacts with settlement issues, environmental degradation, creative entrepreneurship, and local identity.

The second contribution is the clarification of the relationship between digital technology and relational capital. Digital adoption improves market reach, but the effect is contingent on networks, trust, and skills. This finding supports resource-based and social-capital perspectives that treat resilience as a collective rather than individual capacity. For Makassar, digital tourism strategy should therefore move beyond promotion campaigns and include digital literacy, cooperative marketing, reliable payment systems, logistics support, and shared data use among MSMEs.

The third contribution concerns blue economy governance. The blue economy is often framed as a broad sustainability slogan. This study operationalizes it as a destination management requirement involving coastal zoning, ecosystem protection, community livelihoods, waste management, transparent monitoring, and institutionally integrated planning. The model is particularly relevant for Makassar because tourism growth is concentrated around coastal and waterfront assets where environmental degradation and social exclusion can undermine long-term competitiveness.

The analysis also shows that tourism recovery creates a policy window. The rise in domestic and international tourist visits in 2024 indicates growing demand, while hotel occupancy statistics reveal fluctuating service pressure. Without governance reform, increased tourism may intensify waste, congestion, coastal degradation, and displacement of vulnerable

communities. With innovation capacity, however, recovery can be used to redesign tourism as a creative, inclusive, and ecologically responsible sector.

Proposed Integrated Model

The proposed model positions destination assets as the input, innovation capacity as the mediating capability, creative economy ecosystem performance as the intermediate outcome, and sustainable destination competitiveness as the final outcome. Blue economy governance functions as the sustainability boundary condition. Digital technology and relational capital operate as enabling mechanisms, while institutional coordination and community participation moderate implementation success.

Destination asset base	Innovation capacity mechanisms	Ecosystem outcomes	Sustainable destination competitiveness
Natural, social, human, physical, and financial capital	Open innovation; spatial-adaptive innovation; participatory governance innovation	Resilient MSMEs; digital market reach; community-based value creation; improved service quality	Inclusive growth; ecological protection; stronger destination branding; blue-economy-oriented waterfront governance

Figure 1 Integrated model for tourism management strengthening in Makassar

Model interpretation: destination resources must be activated through innovation capacity. Where innovation capacity is weak, abundant natural capital may remain underutilized or be degraded by unmanaged tourism. Where innovation capacity is strong, tourism development can support MSME productivity, community empowerment, environmental protection, and destination competitiveness.

Implications

Theoretical implications

The study contributes to tourism management theory by integrating innovation capacity with the Pentagonal Asset Framework. It shows that destination assets are not static advantages; they require managerial capabilities to become competitive value. It also contributes to resilience literature by explaining how digital adoption and relational capital interact in creative-economy ecosystems. Finally, the study advances blue economy literature by linking marine-coastal sustainability to organizational capacity and destination governance.

Managerial implications

Destination managers should build innovation routines, including collaborative product development, digital capability upgrading, service-quality improvement, and community-based storytelling. Tourism MSMEs need structured mentoring in digital marketing, financial literacy, packaging, quality standards, and network development. Destination management organizations should function as knowledge brokers that connect government programs, universities, private platforms, communities, and investors.

Policy implications

Local government should integrate tourism, creative economy, coastal management, spatial planning, and MSME policy into a single destination governance framework. Priority programs should include coastal ecosystem protection, inclusive waterfront zoning, digital infrastructure, microfinance access, destination data systems, sanitation improvement, and community-based monitoring. Blue economy implementation should be measured through indicators such as waste reduction, community income, ecosystem condition, MSME digital adoption, visitor satisfaction, and institutional coordination.

Limitations and Future Research

This study is limited by its narrative synthesis design and reliance on secondary data. Although official statistics and Scopus-indexed literature strengthen credibility, field-based interviews, surveys, and longitudinal observation would provide deeper evidence on causal mechanisms. Future research should test the proposed model quantitatively using structural equation modelling or mixed methods. Comparative research with other Indonesian and Southeast Asian waterfront cities would also help evaluate whether the model applies beyond Makassar. Future studies should also examine institutional integrity, power dynamics, gender inclusion, environmental monitoring, and community benefit-sharing in tourism governance.

Conclusion

This revised study concludes that Makassar's tourism recovery and creative-economy potential require an integrated management model grounded in innovation capacity and blue economy governance. Official data show renewed tourism demand, with more than 5.5 million domestic tourist visits and 95,596 international tourist visits in 2024. This recovery creates opportunities for local economic development but also increases pressure on coastal ecosystems and public infrastructure. The synthesis shows that open innovation, spatial-adaptive innovation, and participatory governance innovation are key mechanisms for transforming destination assets into resilient and inclusive value. Digital technology strengthens market reach, but its effectiveness depends on relational capital, human capability, infrastructure, and institutional coordination. The blue economy provides a sustainability boundary for waterfront tourism, ensuring that growth does not compromise ecological integrity or community welfare. Overall, innovation capacity should be treated as the central managerial capability for building a competitive, creative, and sustainable tourism destination in Makassar.

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