

Inclusive Platformization in Island Tourism: A Case Study of the How to Porto Santo Digital Travel Platform

Dr. Prof. Svitlana Sousa Ostapenko

Professor, Nuno Ricardo Teixeira Rodrigues

Dr. Prof. Katsiaryna Myznikava

Professor, Nuno Ricardo Teixeira Rodrigues

Abstract:

Digital platformization has become a defining force in the travel industry, reshaping how destinations are discovered, booked, reviewed, and experienced. Yet the benefits of platform-based intermediation are unevenly distributed. Global online travel agencies and sharing-economy platforms can increase visibility and convenience, but they may also reinforce market concentration, extract margins, and marginalize small tourism providers with limited technical capacity. This paper examines platformization from the perspective of a peripheral island destination through the case of How to Porto Santo, a locally embedded digital travel platform that aggregates island information, gastronomy, transportation, activities, culture, events, services, and accommodation reviews. The study asks how a local platform can support inclusive participation, value co-creation, and equitable access for small tourism businesses and visitors in an island tourism ecosystem.

Using a qualitative case-study design, the research draws on semi-structured interviews with two stakeholder groups: visitors who used or encountered the platform during their trip and local tourism businesses with limited or uneven digital presence. The interview guide was developed from literature on digitalization, platform business models, community-based tourism, value co-creation, and inclusive innovation. Preliminary findings suggest that visitors value How to Porto Santo as an all-in-one, easy-to-navigate, visually appealing source of updated local information, especially where mainstream platforms provide scarce or fragmented activity guidance. Local businesses perceive the platform as a cost-efficient alternative to dominant intermediaries because it offers visibility, basic contact pathways, and a more culturally situated representation of local services without requiring high commissions or advanced digital skills. Both groups identify further opportunities for inclusive platform design, including richer visual content, interactive maps, community meetups, chat or messaging features, and structured feedback mechanisms.

The paper contributes to debates on tourism platformization by shifting attention from global platform dominance to locally governed, community-oriented platform models. It argues that inclusive platformization is not simply a matter of digital access, but of platform design, governance, trust, cultural representation, and the ability of small actors to participate without losing autonomy or value. The case of How to Porto Santo illustrates how local platforms can complement rather than merely imitate global platforms, acting as connectors between tourists, micro-entrepreneurs, and destination communities. The study offers implications for island destinations, destination

management organizations, and platform designers seeking to build sustainable digital tourism ecosystems that strengthen local value creation while improving visitor experience.

Keywords:

Platformization, island tourism, digital tourism platforms, inclusive innovation, value co-creation, small tourism businesses, Porto Santo, destination ecosystems.