

Tourism Education Trends and Challenges in 21st Century

People are clearly fundamental to the efficient operation and further development of the tourism industry. Many tourism products include people as a primary part of the proficiency offered, whether as performers or as members of the cultural environment. There is a growing realisation that labour should not be treated simply as variable costs, but as human capital. A high-quality skilled workforce will ensure greater competitiveness and innovation, improve job prospects and ease the process of adjustment in changing markets.



There is the commonly acknowledged proposition that economic prosperity depends on an educated workforce. It is also agreed that the increasing recognition of the economic importance of tourism itself has lent further prominence to the necessity for an expansion of tourism education. The competitive advantage of countries in a global economy increasingly depends on the availability of skilled labour. This is also true for the tourism-related industries. Therefore, the structure of and focus on (public and private) educational and vocational provisions are important issues.

A primary concern is that a lack of suitable staff will challenge the industry's capacity to meet the expectations of service quality that tourism promotions have created. The demand for tourism services to meet international standards has led to an increasing trend to employ a highly skilled labour force and although human resources are the most valuable asset of these industries, paradoxically, the will to invest in education and training in some of the major sectors is comparatively low compared with other industries.

However, upgrading human resources and techniques, as well as improving management skills, are essential requirements for the further development of the industry. Too often, human resource planning is based on short-term thinking, as opposed to regarding HR as a strategic asset.

Generally dialogues by educators and developers of tourism curricula tend to centre on a balance between a vocational and an academic focus. The discussion is often merely about efficient and effective transferability of school curricula to daily operations, overlooking the value of learning as a function of professional development.

It is clear that a focus on employability is in conflict with the goal of producing graduates capable of critical thinking. Taking the pragmatic stance, educators should be preparing students to be employable, while the theoretic perspective would require educators to equip students with higher order competencies, facilitate planning as well as self-reflection skills and more generally with the realisation that their management of knowledge will ultimately have an impact on the future of the tourism and hospitality industry.



The unique nature of the Swiss education model offers a potential solution; it combines practical instruction and vocational orientation with high-quality academic studies. A survey conducted in 2010 by Taylor Nelson Sofres established the relative 'ranking' of international hospitality management schools providing university-level degree programs from which employers are likely to recruit staff for international 5-star hotel companies. This global survey clearly demonstrated that Swiss schools were ranked as the best in the world. On this basis the curriculum could be delivered with this underpinning in mind so that there is improved synergy between the operational and pedagogical elements.

The internationalization of the tourism student body and the unique characteristics of the this generation that has become known as generation Y creates new challenges for educators with regard to the management of and use of technology.

The increasingly diverse student body and societal changes arguably create pressure for educators to put in place new systems for academic and student support. Alpine Center experienced this trend as it successfully integrated over 40 different nationalities into its student body last academic year.

With the growing recognition of the importance of responding to contemporary tourism and hospitality students' needs there is a growing body of education-focused literature documenting the development and implementation of innovative pedagogical approaches for students studying in tourism and hospitality.



Empirical research highlights the commitment of educators to develop sound, academically rigorous, innovative and perhaps even entertaining lectures, and case studies. Moreover, a key feature of the tourism industry is that of extent and pace of change. Patterns of consumption, technological change and supply innovation in tourism as elsewhere are in a constant state of change, which means education must evolve with industry changes by incorporating a life-long learning approach to tourism education.

With tourism now established as one of the principal global industries the need for an effective and industry relevant tourism education framework that captures and utilizes latest pedagogical as well as business trends to underpin the industry's development is of paramount importance.

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