

Article

## WHAT ARE THE ISSUES TEACHERS ENCOUNTER IN EUROPE, WHEN TEACHING TOURISM AND HOSPITALITY RELATED SUBJECTS?

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### ABSTRACT

The aim of this research paper is to provide evidence of what issues teachers in Europe encounter when teaching tourism and hospitality subjects. This paper is a qualitative research and was conducted as a focus group in a Eurhodip conference. The results showed fourteen common problems that educators and trainers are faced with. The most common three issues were 1: The negative image of hospitality in societies, 2: Knowing the skills and learning required by the industry for the future; and, 3: Students want to be managers as soon as they graduate. Recommendations for what can be a remedy for these issues are outlined.

**Keywords:** Tourism Education, Sector Skills, Education Issues, Teachers.

### Introduction

Eurhodip is an international tourism and hospitality association that supports educational institutions in developing knowledge, skills, motivation through hosting competitions and awards, accreditations, conferences, workshops and diplomas. It has over 40,000 students in its context and over 4,500 teachers that remain abreast to developments in the tourism and hospitality, industry and education institutions. It is also the network, which has some of the best reputation and award winning schools, colleges and universities such as VATEL (Established in France), Escolas do Turismo de Portugal (in Portugal) and Stenden (in The Netherlands). The graduate students of these schools are often offered guaranteed jobs, which serve as great importance for the human resources of the tourism industry in Europe (Eurhoqual report, 2022).

Tourism industry is considered as the second largest employer amongst other significant sectors contributing to economic growth and employment (Baum, 2006; Baum, 2008; Honeck, 2013). It is among the world's top creators of employment requiring varying degrees of skills and allows for quick entry into the workforce for graduates, especially, in countries where unemployment is high. It creates many employment opportunities in different sub-sectors within the tourism and hospitality industries, to include, accommodations, transportation, food and beverage and attractions and entertainment. In many countries, the contribution of tourism to employment is indispensable. Therefore, the availability of skilled and trained work force is a crucial element in the success of any tourism and hospitality development.

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Europe is known as the hub of the tourism and hospitality sector with three of the top five arrival destinations being based in Europe (France, Spain and Italy) (United Nations World Tourism Organisation, 2023). According to UNWTO (2020) tourism is a key sector in many advanced and emerging economies which generates millions of direct and indirect jobs, with a high share of women and young people which make up 54% of the tourism workforce (as compared to 39% in the overall economy). This suggests the level of importance for developing human resources that can meet the continued growth in demand and consequently maintain the quality of service. However, though this continent hosts a high number of tourists and is recognised for its high quality provision of facilities, infrastructure and services in tourism and hospitality, it is not alien to issues in manpower. Human resources are the most important asset in an organization (Dwesini, 2019; Pandta & Ray 2018; Radenovic et al., 2016) which very often can be the main source of competitive advantage (Nel et al., 2014).

There has been a large research in the past twenty years on what human resources the sector requires (Karatepe, 2015; Baum, 2002 and 2018; Felps et al., 2009; Shaw, 2011; Gursoy et al., 2008; Cooper, 2006), but limited evidence of what difficulties and issues educators and trainers are faced with when teaching and training the human resource the sector requires.

### **Tourism and Hospitality Education and Perceptions of the Students**

Higher education in tourism and hospitality related courses are offered by various institutions around the world, in English-speaking public and private universities and colleges – at certificate, diploma, bachelor and master levels (Higher Education in Europe, [education.ec.europa.eu](http://education.ec.europa.eu), 2023). The Bachelor degree is normally four years (eight semesters) in duration. The European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) is implemented by public and private universities with at least 240 ECTS necessary for students to graduate (one credit unit equivalent to 25–30 working hours per semester). This is the general picture for the education provision in Europe. Industry is quite promising for graduates from this discipline since the hospitality sector provides 11 million jobs in 27 European countries and highly contributes to the EU economy according to EU reports. Nevertheless, the sector is now facing labour shortages to an unprecedented extent according to international reports (UNWTO Report, 2022; EU Report, 2022).

Although, it is universally agreed that tourism contribution to employment creation is significant, previous research has found that tertiary students, seen as the next cohort of management level employees for tourism and hospitality industries, tend to share the perception of some negative characteristics of tourism careers. Such negative characteristics are, low wage (Roney & Oztin, 2007), low job satisfaction (Jenkins, 2001) seasonal working and low status (Riley et al., 2002). It is important to understand the student's perceptions of tourism as a career since they are the future human resources for the industry. Research has found that having inadequate wages, long working hours, which are not at par with pay (Chellen & Nunkoo, 2010; Aksu & Koksul, 2005) result in graduates not wanting to work in this industry. Baum (2002) found that although students tend to be fairly realistic before graduation, their turnover seem to be high while a later research (2018) discovered that in general newly admitted students have positive perceptions of the tourism industry whereas the students who are experienced through internship were much less positive about tourism jobs. Furthermore, evidence shows that tourism and hospitality students have little or no intention of entering the industry upon graduation in some geographies such as Australia and Hong Kong (King, McKerracher, & Waryszak, 2003). The reason may be that students pursuing tourism enter the industry without an accurate understanding of the industry (Teerti & Chaipat, 2016) or are internship stress related (Mensah et al., 2020).

## The Tourism and Hospitality Industry

The tourism and hospitality industry is evolving at an unprecedented level. Developments in the actual product, consumer behaviour and the mass contribution of ICT (Law, Buhalis & Cobanoglu, 2014; Sigala, 2002) not only in the industry but to education curriculums and the future of careers in the tourism and hospitality industry is very evident. Employers are consequently in search of superheroes for such a climate! The provision of quality service in the tourism and hospitality industry depends largely on the employment of well-educated, interested, dedicated, and enthusiastic people (Thetsane, 2010).

## Methodology

This research aims to find out and present the ongoing challenges and reasons behind the lack of skills in the tourism industry according to the teachers and lecturers who teach and train potential employees as well as solutions that can be developed at European level. Two focus groups were hosted with the first being in the form of a brainstorm session that narrowed down the ‘issue’s in teaching tourism and hospitality’. The second focus group sought to find solutions and recommendations to improve those issues that were voiced most frequently. The sample of participants were selected from European destinations as a purposeful sampling, and were 20 lecturers and teachers from Portugal, Germany, Holland, France, Greece, Spain, Italy, Slovenia and Cyprus, the data were analysed with thematic analysis method. The moderator of the focus groups were the authors.

## Results and Analysis

The first focus group outlined a pool of issues that teachers and lecturers witnessed in teaching students in the tourism and hospitality departments. These were outlined in a brainstorming activity that were noted in common themes as outlined in table 1.

Table 1: Issues encountered from tourism and hospitality students

<b>The negative image of hospitality in societies</b>	Lack of industry mentoring for intern students
Background and skills of students that register on the programs are not consistent	Lack of vision for new teaching methods by authorities
Lack of instructors from skill-based backgrounds	<b>Knowing the skills and learning required by the industry for the future</b>
Lack of students commitment to industry upon graduating	Lack of flexibility to customising curriculums in accordance with sector needs
Lack of teacher’s that motivate students	Lack of support for alumni tourism and hospitality graduates
<b>Students want to be managers as soon as they graduate</b>	Lack of change in human resources in industry
Students dependency on internet and online has resulted in a lack of responsible culture	Sustainable methods and theories taught in classes are not practiced in industry

The results from the first focus group were quite consistent to those researches outlined in the literature of this article with ‘*the negative image of the hospitality industry being the most common*’. Many authors have written about the poor working conditions in the tourism industry (Roney & Oztin, 2007; Riley at al., 2002; Chellen & Nunkoo, 2010; Aksu & Koksall, 2005) it not a surprise therefore that potential employees are not pursuing their careers in the tourism industry upon graduation. Further reason for

graduates opting not resume a career the tourism and hospitality industry was also confirmed by Baum's (2018) and Teerti and Chaipat (2016) points on the impact of internships that can be a result of internship stress related (Mensah et al., 2020), since there appears to be a '*lack of industry mentoring for intern students*' as well as the possible lack of motivation to remain in the industry can also be related to '*sustainable methods and theory's taught in classes are not practiced in industry*'. The teacher's suggestion that '*student's dependency on the internet and online activity has resulted in a lack of responsible culture*' may indicate that teaching resources should be in more accordance with Z-generation. As several authors have found that developments in the actual product, consumer behaviour and the mass contribution of ICT (Law, Buhalis & Cobanoglu, 2014; Sigala, 2002) is an important component that must be included in the contemporary tourism and hospitality education curriculums. However, this can be a further issue for public institutions that have limited funds and a '*lack of vision for new teaching method* (by authorities)'. This can often be a question of available funds at large, since labs, ICT, smart equipment with software that is relevant to the requirements of the industry is expensive. One of the most common issues outlined was '*knowing the skills and learning required by the industry for the future*'. Issues such as knowing the use of ICT and to date artificial intelligence suggests that not only the curriculums but also the teachers themselves may be lacking skills and knowledge, which is directly related to the theme outlined as '*lack of instructors from skill based backgrounds*'.

The issue's that are bold in table 1 were the most common themes and were selected to be discussed in focus group 2. Focus group 2 sought to find remedies for the three most common issues outlined in table 2, that were:

Theme 1: '*The negative image of hospitality in societies*',

Theme 2: '*Knowing the skills and learning required by the industry for the future*',

Theme 3: '*Students want to be managers as soon as they graduate*'.

Table 2: The most common themes and issues

<b>THEME 1:</b>	<b>THE NEGATIVE IMAGE OF HOSPITALITY IN SOCIETIES</b>
PROBLEM:	Hospitality and tourism have been considered as a difficult and unattractive industry to work in with evidence in the media and research conducted.
DEFINITION OF PROBLEM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Anti-social profession</li> <li>• Low remuneration</li> <li>• Lack of fair working conditions</li> <li>• Lack of social status</li> <li>• Unattractive</li> </ul>
STAKEHOLDERS INVOLVED IN THIS PROBLEM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Governments</li> <li>• None Government Organisations (NGO's)</li> <li>• Tourism students</li> <li>• Media</li> <li>• School instructors</li> <li>• Private sector</li> </ul>
HOW CAN IT BE SOLVED? RECOMMENDATIONS/ PROJECTS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To create a "popular star" that can change the image of the industry and attract people to the industry. Use of the Media</li> <li>• Government support to the private sector for improved regulations and legislations</li> </ul>

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- Create a union for the tourism industry
  - School's must create awareness for the students to be aware of the industry and the importance of studying tourism and hospitality
  - Students must be "service minded" to be accepted on the program – this can be through direct related questions in the initial interview to check motivation for the industry
  - Real expectations must be set for students through a strong mentoring system in the school and sector – particularly during internship.
  - Case studies of positive careers in tourism must be demonstrated from all stakeholders

TIME SCALE 10 Years

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**THEME 2: KNOWING THE SKILLS AND LEARNING REQUIRED BY THE INDUSTRY FOR THE FUTURE**

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PROBLEM: Teaching behind reality – not knowing the requirements until they occur

- DEFINITION OF PROBLEM
- Lack of networking between industry and education
  - Lack of flexibility of authorities for schools to take consistent and quick actions for developing curriculums and structure of teaching
  - Technology is developing faster than industry and therefore education
  - Teachers can be quite rigid in their knowledge and willingness to develop their own skills

- STAKEHOLDERS INVOLVED IN THIS PROBLEM
- Industry
  - Education institutions
  - Governments
  - Society
  - Teachers

- HOW CAN IT BE SOLVED? RECOMMENDATIONS/ PROJECTS
- Consistent networking between curriculum developers and the industry
  - Research on an international context by all stakeholders
  - Creative teaching and learning through some project-based techniques and assessments
  - Governments to introduce more flexible climate for change and development
  - Industry to introduce mentors for the students

TIME SCALE Ongoing and continuous

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**THEME 3: STUDENTS WANT TO BE MANAGERS AS SOON AS THEY GRADUATE**

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PROBLEM: Lack of experience and previous knowledge about the industry

- DEFINITION OF PROBLEM
- Generation gap – the idea that studying the subject will guarantee a management position upon graduation. Since previous generation would work in the industry without qualification and skills learnt in education
  - General misunderstanding of the industry

- STAKEHOLDERS INVOLVED IN THIS PROBLEM
- Older generation and parents
  - School instructors
  - Employer's
  - Employee's
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Internship mentors</li> <li>• Education Ministry</li> <li>• Chamber of Arts and Craftsman</li> </ul>
HOW CAN IT BE SOLVED? RECOMMENDATIONS/ PROJECTS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work experience during high school in industry – particularly for those countries that have a high concentration on the tourism industry</li> <li>• Parents should be encouraged to teach their children the value of money</li> <li>• Instructors and teachers in education should create awareness of the realities of the industry – with particular notion that everyone starts at the bottom of the hierarchy</li> </ul>
TIME SCALE	Time scale depends on the country since cultures in different countries have different level of appreciation of the industry.
	Ongoing

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