



# TOURISM STUDENTS' ENTREPRENEURIAL INTENTIONS

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**Abstract:** This study aims to investigate the relationship between entrepreneurial traits, socio-cultural background and entrepreneurial intention of university students in the UK and Turkey. 409 tourism students were surveyed to measure entrepreneurial intention, entrepreneurial traits including risk-taking propensity, innovativeness, tolerance of ambiguity and locus of control and socio-cultural factors. The findings indicate that there is a statistically significant relationship between innovation, propensity to take risks, entrepreneurial family and entrepreneurial intention. Education does not seem to play an important role in fostering entrepreneurial traits and intentions of university students. **Keywords:** socio-cultural background, entrepreneurial traits, intention. © 2010 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

## INTRODUCTION

Entrepreneurship contributes to a country's economy by promoting innovation, engendering competition, creating employment and thus contributes to economic wealth and spending power (Guasch, Kuznetsov, & Sanchez, 2002; Holmgren & From, 2005). In particular, in developed and developing countries both, tourism entrepreneurship is vital to tourists' experiences and satisfaction and to destination and community development (Bardolet & Sheldon, 2008; Blake, Sinclair, & Soria, 2006; Cawley & Gillmor, 2008; Getz & Carlsen, 2005). Countries therefore are examining how best to cultivate tourism entrepreneurship.

Previous research suggests that individuals' traits influence their intentions to start a business (Koh, 1996; Mueller & Thomas, 2001; Robinson, Stimpson, Huefner, & Hunt, 1991). Individuals with traits such as high propensity for risk taking, tolerance for ambiguity and internal locus of control are more likely to start a new business. However, while investigating the interface between the traits of

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individuals and their intentions, these studies do not consider socio-cultural elements, namely, education, entrepreneurial family background and national culture.

Previous studies claim that education influences individuals' cultural values and thus their level of entrepreneurship (Hayton, Zahra, & Zahra, 2002; Morrison, 2000). For example, the manner in which people are educated from an early age and the transferable skills which they develop during higher education play a significant role in establishing characteristics generally associated with entrepreneurial behaviour (Casson, 1991; Ronstadt, 1985). Tourism and hospitality education is still considered very much vocational and action oriented, and many have doubts about the extent to which it prepares students for thinking critically and working outside existing practices and paradigms (Airey & Tribe, 2000; Echtner, 1995), essential features for fostering entrepreneurship (Kirby, 2005). Although tourism and hospitality management education has come a long way from its origins in on-the-job training to a broad-based liberal curriculum in schools, it is still considered very much vocational and action oriented.

Scholars such as Airey and Tribe (2000) and Ayikoru, Tribe, and Airey (2009) question the extent to which traditional tourism and hospitality management education prepares students to think critically outside existing practices and paradigms. Especially in developing countries, Echtner (1995) proposes a 'three-pronged' approach to tourism education, which cultivates three types of skills: professional, vocational and entrepreneurial. Echtner points out that the existing types of tourism education programs can be grouped into two basic categories: professional education and vocational skills, and she emphasises the third, largely overlooked component in tourism education: entrepreneurial development.

The main objective of professional education is to develop students' ability to interpret, evaluate and analyse by providing theoretical concepts. The main objective of vocational education, on the other hand, is to teach skills; such content is highly practical. Although the debate on the content and approach to tourism education programs has centred on professional education versus vocational skills, they both are mainly concerned with creating human resources to *work for others*. However, according to Echtner, the third component creates human resources to *work for oneself* by developing entrepreneurs. Such an education can tap into an important portion of human resource potential in developing countries by encouraging and cultivating local entrepreneurial tourism development. In fact, one of the most important critical needs of developing countries is to foster not only an environment within which entrepreneurship can flourish, but also entrepreneurs (Echtner, 1995).

A family business tradition also influences the entrepreneurial behaviours of individuals (Basu & Goswami, 1999; Duchesneau & Gartner, 1990). Through working in a family business, people can acquire certain business ideas and skills to start their own or continue their families' businesses. The tourism industry is dominated by family businesses (Getz & Carlsen, 2005), parents being a potential influential

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