

A regional analysis of tourism education scholarships



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ABSTRACT

Although Europe is the predominant player in funding for higher education, there is limited research on the region (and other regions') presence in the higher tourism education financing sector. As such, this paper reviews tourism scholarship grants, in order to identify the main providers and benefactors, marking preliminary enquiry at regional level. By using Google as the main research tool and both qualitative and quantitative techniques in analysis, this paper examined 262 tourism scholarships. The paper placed the Americas as the main provider and benefactor of tourism scholarships. The majority of these scholarships were provided for the business administration and management of tourism, an area indicative of growth. Another area poised for growth was study in the application of technology in tourism. In conclusion, this paper highlights the commensurate importance of tourism education financing and tourism's contribution to economic growth, especially for Africa.

1. Introduction

Tourism is evolving as a decipherable academic field of inquiry (notwithstanding the remarkable controversy, that exists in literature of whether tourism is a discipline or a field of study). Indicators such as the growth of specific programmes to study tourism are testament to such maturity (Echtner & Jamal, 1997) even at international level. Globally, opportunities for higher education in general, including international study have risen dramatically over the years (Altbach, Reisburg & Rumbley, 2009). Australian experts for instance predict an increase to 15 million students studying abroad by 2025 from 2 million (Altbach & Knight, 2007). International tourism students are included in these statistics.

The increased international flow of students, creates a market for most developed countries, especially the European countries which have dominated the international higher education field as providers and hosts; the 'receiving' countries being Asian and Latin American middle-income countries and other poorer countries in the developing world (Altbach & Knight, 2007). Despite the prominence of European countries in higher education, there is limited research on their (and other countries') dominance in the higher tourism education financing sector.

This paper discusses tourism education financing from an international perspective. In particular, the paper highlights the international prominence of tourism education scholarships, for undergraduate and graduate study. The paper provides insight on the main providers and benefactors of tourism education scholarships. By so doing the paper

answers key questions such as:

- Who are the main providers of tourism education scholarships at regional level?
- Who benefits from tourism education scholarships?
- Which areas of study are emphasised?

Answers to these questions raise pertinent implications for the growth of tourism as a field of study (and maybe as a discipline). For instance, the priority areas targeted by sponsors, are indicative of areas poised for growth and worth researchable. They are also indicative of potential areas of study that tourism could be bifurcated, these later evolving as special fields of study.

2. Literature review

Although tourism and travel are long-established attributes of society, the study of tourism as an academic 'discipline' or a field of study is a new phenomenon. The recognition or so, of tourism as an academic discipline only gained impetus from the 20th century (Echtner & Jamal 1997). Since then and even now, tourism has been housed under several other disciplines, creating a disciplinary dilemma that has been the topic of some tourism articles (e.g. Echtner & Jamal, 1997; Leiper, 1981; Lew, Hall & Williams, 2008).

There are two generally held views of contention to understanding the study of tourism. The first group which subsumes the majority of authors on the debate, decline to acknowledge tourism as an

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independent body of enquiry. Proponents of this view (e.g. Tribe, 1997) suggest the existence of a multidisciplinary approach to the study of tourism, arguing that tourism exists in a pre-paradigmatic state with other disciplines such as economics, business, marketing, psychology, anthropology and geography (Echtner & Jamal, 1997). Scholars in this line of thought argue that for an academic field of study to be recognised as a discipline it should satisfy at least three conditions: it must have social buy-in, it should have its own theories, and it should have an accepted definition (Esteban, Cetin & Antonovica, 2015; Taillon, 2014). Tourism meets neither of the three. Despite this view, there are other scholars like Echtner and Jamal (1997) and Leiper (1990) who advocate for the development of tourism as a distinct discipline. The best approach advanced by Echtner and Jamal (1997: 879) relates to the recognition of tourism using interdisciplinary approaches, where ‘theories, concepts and models with appropriate definitions of tourism and tourist’ are integrated to ‘guide and facilitate the accumulation of a cohesive body of knowledge in tourism’. Terms such as tourismology (Jovicic, 1988) and tourology (Leiper, 1981), have been previously proposed to identify the tourism discipline.

The debate on which approach would be best to advance knowledge of tourism is arid and still ensues (Coles, Hall & Duval, 2006). Despite such, this paper takes sentiments from Tribe (1997) who fails to accept disciplines as the sine qua non of knowledge production. Instead he argues that the ‘search for tourism as a discipline should be abandoned’ (Tribe, 1997: 656), encouraging the recognition of tourism as a field of study. A field of study is a concentration of particular phenomena, practical pursuits or knowledge with roots in several disciplines. A field of study uses several disciplines to explain its existence (Tribe, 1997). In this paper, tourism is also perceived as a field of study comprised of business and non-business areas.

To achieve the goal, of developing and nurturing tourism as a field of study, scholarship at higher education should be targeted towards generating knowledge in tourism and understanding how tourism is (can) be studied. Governments or research institutes and other entities including traditional universities, with interests in tourism, are most likely prepared to promote the creation of knowledge in tourism, in part through financial support. Although there has been an increase in students studying tourism, the cost of education remains a significant barrier to an equitable access to higher education scholarship worldwide (Altbach, Reisburg & Rumbley, 2009). To ameliorate this challenge, most nations have engaged in student funding mechanisms some that are not devoid of controversy in literature and in policy. There is a view that higher education ought to be ‘free’ or at least highly subsidised by governments (Johnstone, 2006). On the other hand there is a growing trend towards shifting education financing from tax payers and governments to parental and/or student support (Johnstone & Marcucci, 2010). The choice of mechanism or mix selected by countries obviously depends on a number of variables. These could include differences in the historical development of national systems, different conceptions regarding the mission of higher education, economics, ways to achieve efficiency and conceptions regarding the relationship and roles of the state and individual institutions (Bonaccorsi & Daraio, 2007). Despite the presence of these factors, higher education financing for students in both developed and developing countries is amenable to three main mechanisms as depicted in Fig. 1: government allocation, private sector funding and household financing (student and/or parental support) (Barr, 1993; Bonaccorsi & Daraio, 2007).

General government allocations account for the largest share of funding in most countries; almost two-thirds in some European countries (Barr, 1993; Bonaccorsi & Daraio, 2007) and at least 40% of the national budget in some sub-Saharan countries (Pillay, 2010). Governments intervene in higher education financing because education is perceived as a public responsibility extremely important for the development of any country; improving the socio-cultural level of citizens and generating knowledge, an important production factor

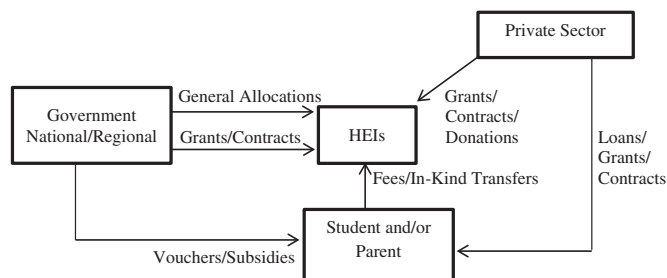


Fig. 1. Funding allocation mechanisms.

(Source: Adapted from Barr, 1993; Bonaccorsi & Daraio, 2007).

(Weber & Bergan, 2005). Using this responsibility, governments can influence demand for higher education by supplying it at a reduced, subsidised or ‘zero’ price (Weber & Bergan, 2005). Subsidies are usually awarded for living expenses such as accommodation, food and transport by the taxpayers or the institution (Bonaccorsi & Daraio, 2007).

However, from the 1990s there is a growing reform of viewing higher education in terms of a ‘private good’ responsive to market forces of supply and demand (Johnstone, Arora & Experton, 1998: 4). Johnstone et al. (1998: 4–5) argue that higher education exhibits conditions of ‘rivalness (limited supply), excludability (often available for a price), and, rejection (not demanded by all)’. In addition ‘consumers of higher education are reasonably well informed and the providers are often ill informed-conditions which are ideal for market forces to operate’ (Johnstone et al., 1998: 5). This orientation towards market forces makes it ideal for reform conditions favourable for the introduction of tuition fees, which shifts some of the costs of higher education from taxpayers to the private sector and household financing (Johnstone et al., 1998). For instance, students can finance their tuition with commercial or subsidised loans from the private sector (Barr, 1993). The student and/or their family can also subsidize living expenses such as accommodation, food or transport through transfers in the form of cash from parents and personal earnings or in-kind transfers from parents or relatives (Barr, 1993). As such the three, government, the private sector and the household, are essential stakeholders in financing tourism education.

The focus of this paper is however inclined towards government and private sector scholarships since most scholarships are public awarded by the state or managed largely by independent agencies such as the European Union (Bonaccorsi & Daraio, 2007) or UNESCO (Yusuf, 2007). A scholarship is defined as a grant, in the form of a cash amount paid or allowed to or for the benefit of a student to aid him or her in the pursuit of one or more courses of study or a reduction in the amount owed by the recipient for tuition, room and board or any other fee (Hopkins, Gross & Schenkelberg, 2011). In this paper, fellowships defined as amounts paid for the benefit of an individual to aid in the pursuit of study or research (United States Internal Revenue Service, 2003) were also considered.

Johnstone and Marcucci classify scholarships into three: restricted, unrestricted and price discounts. Restricted or designated scholarships are commonly known as endowments in the United States (Johnstone & Marcucci, 2010). These are funds or financial accounts provided to support a specified set of activities (Bryce, 2017) or assist students from designated geographic areas (Merrimack College, 2017). Unrestricted scholarships are scholarships for which no stipulation has been made by an external agency or donor as to the distribution of funds (Clotfelter, Ehrenberg, Getz & Siegfried, 2008). The main goal of such scholarships is to strengthen the institution's appearance and academic standing or profile (Johnstone & Marcucci, 2010). In general, scholarships are used for higher achieving students so as to boost an institution's academic profile, to support academic merit, for minority students so as to achieve racial or ethnic diversity or other values such as to harness talent, leadership or other specific skills. The third type of

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