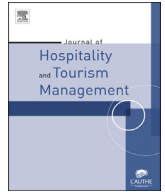




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Tourism Education: What about entrepreneurial skills?

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ABSTRACT

Tourism is generally acknowledged as one of the economic sectors with higher growth prospects worldwide. As a consequence, the number of tourism education courses has grown significantly in the last decades in order to meet the demands of the qualified workforce. Nevertheless, students who enter this sector will need different skills to face the challenges of this highly competitive and demanding industry. In this case, entrepreneurial skills are of paramount importance. The aim of this paper was to understand the perspective of tourism students on the relevance of entrepreneurship education within their courses.

This study aims at describing an innovative teaching program called 'Learning to be', focused on fostering entrepreneurial attitudes and skills, through a project based learning methodology inspired in the Design Thinking process (Daniel et al., 2016). In this program, tourism students are challenged to develop viable solutions to real-case problems proposed by private and public organizations.

A feedback questionnaire was developed to verify the impact of the entrepreneurship education program on students. It allowed to conclude that from the tourism students' perspective the embeddedness of entrepreneurship education within their courses was considered very relevant to assess future employment prospects, being the students both employees or self-employed. Students had also acquired and enhanced non-cognitive skills which are most valued by the tourism industry. This case study was also pertinent to identify best practices and propose guidelines for creating curricular spaces for the development of entrepreneurial skills.

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1. Introduction

Over the course of time, tourism has become one of the largest and fastest-growing economic sectors in the world. Currently, tourism directly contributes to about 4.1% to GDP, 5.9% of employment and 21.3% of service exports of the OCDE economies (OECD., 2016). This sector has grown steadily since 2009, reaching in 2015 a total earnings in the destinations of US\$ 1260 billion worldwide (euro 1136 billion) (UNWTO, 2016). According to the UNWTO's long-term forecast report Tourism Towards 2030, it is expected that International tourist arrivals worldwide will increase by 3.3% a year between 2010 and 2030, to eventually reach 1.8 billion by 2030 (UNWTO, 2011).

The continuing growth of this sector has a significant impact on labour markets, since tourism is a significant source of employment, due to its high labour intensive nature. Although the tourism

workforce is often associated with low levels of education and limited entrepreneurial and managerial skills, this scenario has been changing. One the one hand, there has been a massive increase in the number of educational programs offered by schools and higher education institutions in this field (Airey, 2005; Walmsley, 2012). Furthermore, due to the multi-faceted character of tourism industry, there is nowadays a broad range of courses to meet the demands of diverse functional areas. Thus, additionally to the traditional areas of lodging, food and beverage, there has been the development of courses in events management and cruise management, among others. On the other hand, tourism education as a research field has raised considerable interest over the last decades. Since the 1988 International Conference for Tourism Educators hosted by the University of Surrey, several research events were organised in the years that followed, and which had fostered the research on this field. The establishment of the Tourism Education Future Initiative (TEFI), in 2006, has also provided valuable inputs to curricular design (Dredge et al., 2015).

The majority of those studies focused on the curriculum-related matters (Tribe, 2005), which aimed at identifying key areas of

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knowledge that should be addressed in the curriculum (e.g. Fidgeon (2010), Holloway (1995), Koh (1995), McIntosh (1983)). Due to the wide variety of programs taught at different academic levels, as well as its sector-specific focus, an agreement about core tourism curriculum is far from having been reached. Moreover, as mentioned by Zehrer & Mössenlechner (2008, p. 73) “ (...) there appears to be a considerable gap between what educational institutions offer as management level tourism education and the needs that are expressed by the tourism industry”. An interesting aspect is that soft competences, such as communication skills, problem solving abilities, reasoning, etc. are often considered more essential than hard ones by companies (Okeiyi, Finley, & Postel, 1994; Sisson & Adams, 2013; Tas, LaBrecque, & Clayton, 1996). Entrepreneurial skills are usually not considered in these studies, with only a few and very recent exceptions (see Deale, 2016; Muñoz-Fernández, Rodríguez-Gutiérrez, & Santos-Roldán, 2016; Okriono, 2015).

Nevertheless, due to the highly competitive environment of the tourism industry, entrepreneurship and innovation are crucial for dealing with current consumer, technological and environmental trends. The growing demand of customers for unusual and unique tourism experiences are contributing to the development of new business opportunities. Sharing economy platforms, for instance, is changing tourism marketplace and giving tourists new options for where to stay, what to do and how to get around (OECD., 2016). The rapid growth of the sharing economy is putting pressure on conventional tourism businesses, which need to innovate to maintain its competitiveness.

Environmental impact of tourism as well is also increasingly important as the number of tourists increases, and their distribution is often concentrated in major tourism destinations in ecologically vulnerable areas. Thus, new business models need to be developed to mitigate the impact of tourism and enable long-term sustainability of destinations and businesses. In this case, academics and entrepreneurs are key players to introduce innovative managerial and planning approaches that will provide the industry with intelligence, knowledge and tools that may have an impact on public and private tourism organizations competitive advantages (Buhalis & Costa, 2005).

Thus, according to Dredge et al. (2015, p. 340) “students entering the tourism sector, with its high levels of volatility and rapid globalization, are going to need different skills and understanding in order to achieve meaningful and successful professional lives”. The development of entrepreneurial skills within tourism education represents a challenge since it stresses the focus on the pedagogy of teaching, which should include how best to balance vocational skills and liberal thinking in order to promote deep learning (Jamal, Taillon, & Dredge, 2011).

This paper aims at understanding the tourism students' perspective of the relevance of entrepreneurial education within their courses, as well as at identifying the best practices, and proposing guidelines for creating curricular spaces for the development of entrepreneurial skills.

The article highlights the growing need to prepare future graduates in the field of tourism for the exercise of various functions in multiple contexts. The paper proceeds by presenting concepts of both entrepreneurial education and skills, as well as the need to promote those skills with students of higher education level. Following this discussion, a case study of entrepreneurship education within tourism curriculum is presented, as are details on the basic curriculum, course structure, goals and objectives. The paper concludes with a consideration of the relevance of entrepreneurship education to tourism students.

2. The development of entrepreneurial skills

In the past decades entrepreneurship education programs have grown in number and today, those are run in most higher education institutions all over the world (Hannon, 2006; Katz, 2008). Their popularity is reinforced, on the one hand, by the acknowledged importance of new business creation for economic growth and innovation (Landström, Harirchi, & Åström, 2012), and, on the other hand, by the need to equip and empower young people with entrepreneurial capabilities needed for a successful professional life. As claimed by Gundry, Ofstein, and Kickul (2014), entrepreneurship programs and courses aim at providing the context to help students apply skills and behaviours intended to create value in entrepreneurial firms. Thus, entrepreneurship education programs seek to enhance individual characteristics, to promote a more entrepreneurial culture, preparing not only an entrepreneur, who may become self-employed and owner of an enterprise, but also someone who is able to chase entrepreneurship and innovation as an employee and become a person who displays enterprising behaviour (Gibb, 2002).

Several relevant political measures have highlighted the importance of promoting entrepreneurial skills, as well as enabling direct investment in the creation of structures to support entrepreneurship education. For instance, in 2006, the recommendation of the European Parliament and the Council on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning recognised “sense of initiative and entrepreneurship” as one of the eight key competences all individuals need for personal fulfilment and development, active citizenship, social inclusion and employment (European Council, 2006, p. 1). It refers to an individual's ability to turn ideas into actions, and includes creativity, innovation and risk-taking, as well as the ability to plan and manage projects in order to achieve objectives. Also, the European Commission has highlighted in the Entrepreneurship 2020 Action Plan (European Commission, 2013, pp. 1–33) and the Rethinking Education Communication (European Commission, 2012, p. 17) the need to embed entrepreneurial education in all sectors of education including non-formal learning, and to make it available to every pupil/student in every school and high education institution (HEI).

Despite this extraordinary proliferation of programs and courses, its content analysis reveal, at least, three different approaches to entrepreneurship named: ‘About’, ‘For’ and ‘Through’ (Gibb, 2002; Pittaway & Edwards, 2012). The ‘education about entrepreneurship’ approach tends to use more traditional and theoretical pedagogical forms of educational practice (Pittaway & Edwards, 2012), while the other approaches allow students, to some extent, to have contact with real entrepreneurial experiences. With the case of ‘education for entrepreneurship’s approach, it focuses on content and cognitive entrepreneurial skills, and the ‘education through entrepreneurship’ approach has a more pedagogical orientation and focuses on fostering non-cognitive entrepreneurial skills (Moberg, 2014). There is still much discussion regarding which form is most effective and provides better outcomes (Fayolle, 2013; Allan Gibb, 2002), but there is a growing consensus that the preferred entrepreneurial pedagogy is learner-centered, process-based, experiential and socially situated (Gibb, 1987; Kyrö, 2005; Mwasalwiba, 2010). Accordingly, several authors (see Allen, 1995; Draycott & Rae, 2011; Käre Moberg, 2014; Silberman, 1996) have highlighted the benefits of active or experimental learning methods, such as meeting students' needs, improving students retention capacity and interaction with information, increasing students responsibility towards their own learning process. Active learning is any teaching method that “involves students in doing things and thinking about what they are doing” (Bonwell & Eison, 1991, p. 2), such as cooperative learning, problem-solving

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