
Tourism education: policy versus practice

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Discusses the current human resources environment in tourism at a strategic policy level, especially in the area of management level education. Describes a framework which is being used to study consultation between the makers of tourism and education policy at a national level. The framework advocates the development and implementation of a specific tourism education policy, to bring tourism education closer in line with national tourism policies. Concludes by outlining further research strategies.

Introduction

At a national and, frequently, international level, tourism education has evolved in a heterogeneous and *ad hoc* manner, with limited linkages to the real or perceived needs of the tourism industry[1,2].

This article explores the development of a conceptual framework which attempts to remedy the *ad hoc* formulation and implementation of management level tourism education (higher education in the UK, but less clearly defined elsewhere in Europe), through the formulation of strategies whose main purpose is to bridge not only the industry-education divide but also, in a greater way, the gap between the wider tourism environment and the world of education, in a national context. The objective of the framework is to ensure that tourism education implementation develops in a manner that is consistent with both the dynamic tourism and educational environment, in order to reduce sensitivity to change, and create a stable environment in which to attract and maintain a good quality workforce. Examples from Canada and Ireland are included to illustrate how the framework can operate.

The problem

The tourism industry is a labour-intensive service industry, dependent for survival (and at best, competitive advantage) on the availability of good quality personnel to deliver, operate, and manage the tourist product. The interaction between the tourist and tourism industry personnel is an integral part of the total tourist experience.

Human resource issues in tourism are multi-dimensional. A 1992 survey of national tourist organizations revealed that chief among people-related concerns worldwide was the poor image of the tourism industry as an employer. Other areas for concern were the quality and availability of skilled staff, rewards and benefits, labour turnover, working hours and conditions, use of expatriate labour, barriers to employment in tourism, and education[3]. Many of these problems are directly linked to, and may be rectified

through, education provision and, where possible, accurate careers information and guidance.

Education programmes have emerged in response to the following needs for human resource development in a challenging environment:

- 1 Keeping the industry abreast with the latest technology and trends.
- 2 The availability of qualified replacement staff at all times.
- 3 Raising the image of careers in tourism.
- 4 Staffing new and growing tourist industries.
- 5 Employment regulation.
- 6 Reduction of foreign labour.
- 7 Responding to increasingly demanding service and communications requirements of customers.

These are all implicit components of what Baum calls sustainable human resource policies and practices in tourism[2]. The first step towards policy formulation is the identification of priorities on a national, regional, or local scale. As such, Baum's integrated human resource development framework[1] identifies the linkages which tourism education has with the wider economic, social and political environment, and highlights its importance. Education features prominently in the following "key elements or considerations which should be evaluated by those responsible for policy formulation and the identification of priorities":

- 1 the tourism environment;
- 2 tourism and the labour market;
- 3 tourism in the community;
- 4 tourism and education; and
- 5 human resource development in the tourism industry[1].

Education, backed by clear and sound policies, can improve the prospects for tourism's human resources, thus making education highly significant to the overall human resource climate within tourism.

Tourism education

The study of tourism is relatively new, as is its widespread recognition as a vital and

growing industry. Diverse definitions exist for tourism, for the tourist, and the tourist (or tourism) industry, to name a few technical terms. This miscellany exists owing to the fact that there are many different sectors and professionals involved in tourism, all using definitions for different purposes[4]. There are also different types of tourist activity, according to tourist motivation: leisure, business, visiting friends and relatives, etc. This aggravates efforts at reaching a common definition. Thus, some would even debate whether tourism can yet be classed as a discipline, believing that, "while Tourism rightly constitutes a domain of study, at the moment it lacks the level of theoretical underpinning which would allow it to become a discipline" [5]. There is also debate as to whether tourism can be seen as an industry in its own right, rather than an area of economic activity linking sectors through the common objectives of its consumers.

The tourism industry is unique, in that it demands products (and regulation) from other sectors of the economy. According to Lickorish, tourism is essentially a demand force – a market and not an industry[6]. Edgell refers to it as the "most wide-ranging industry", saying, "There is no other industry in the economy that is linked to so many diverse and different kinds of products and services..." [7]. This then gives rise to the problem of a weak operating framework:

One problem lies in the weak operating framework for the sector. As seen, responsibility for tourism involves many organizations, among whom co-operation is essential. There is the difficulty not only in co-ordinating their different activities, but perhaps more importantly in implementing policies, probably attributable to differences in interest[8].

This problem extends to the human resource agenda, where "the most significant single deficiency in the human resource environment within international tourism... is one of the ownership and co-ordination of the area" [9].

Typically, the responsibility may lie with a diversity of bodies, accountable to different national or regional government departments; transnational agencies; as well as private sector companies and associations[9].

Furthermore, tourism is often not recognized by governments and universities as an important, legitimate field of study which merits the level of funding accorded to other professional schools and faculties[10].

At the macro level, government has ultimate responsibility for the allocation of funds and resources for specific sectors[11]. Within

government, though, there are many agencies which impact on the tourism industry (including tourism, education, labour, agriculture, home affairs). An amalgam of private and public sector interests (including national tourist organizations) frustrates the co-ordination of policy implementation, particularly in the absence of a single umbrella organization, where the ministries of tourism or national tourist organizations generally fall short of achieving this umbrella role.

The problem of non-uniformity also can be traced back to the educational providers themselves. Jenkins points out that, "in practice, the tourism syllabus taught by any institution will reflect its tradition, staff experience, and interests"[12]. Programme specialization is on the increase, especially in higher education, resulting in a lack of homogeneity in provision. To some, the solution lies in the adoption of core curricula[13], but it must be noted that to impose uniformity would be to stifle creativity within tourism education.

Creativity *per se* is favourable, but its worth becomes questionable when coupled with the lesser researched trend of "filling the seats" in some educational institutions, where teaching staff try to justify their remuneration with course take-up. Here it is not the quality of the teaching, but the quantity of those taught, that matters.

There appears to be a considerable gap between what providers offer as management level tourism education, and the needs as expressed by the tourism industry. For example, higher education in the UK has been accused by industry of providing broad-based, generic knowledge intertwined with the learning of other disciplines, e.g. business studies and economics, while the industry seeks personal skills such as communication, adaptability, leadership and numeracy. It has even been said that small-firm employers especially tend to prefer job experience to qualifications in recruitment[14]. Also, diversity of the industry makes focus beyond very specific training, (ticketing agents, hotel chefs, etc.) very difficult.

When the main features of tourism education arise through initiatives by the tourism environment on the one hand and the world of education on the other, with no consensus between the two, problems arise for those on the receiving end of tourism education.

One anomaly arising from this disharmony is the trend in some countries such as the UK, for employers to recruit non-tourism graduates, because, according to them, tourism graduates may not have the right qualifications. The tourism industry is plagued with high levels of drop-out or movement to other career areas within relatively short periods

after graduation. This brings into dispute the relevance of the actual education provided, not to mention the industry conditions and rewards. Barron and Maxwell discovered a difference between student perception and experience of the industry[15]:

It appears that, broadly, most school-leavers regard the hospitality industry in one of two ways: either wholly negatively, in which case they select another career direction altogether, or in an “illusory” manner influenced by the glamour images of the hotel projected by popular media[15].

The solution may be to forge a partnership between industry and education. For example, the problems of graduate recruitment and retention can be tackled:

In order to increase the rate of graduate recruitment and retention, a two-pronged attack could be mounted. Both educators and employers of hospitality managers should be involved. Educators’ responsibility lies, first, in effective student recruitment, and, second, in inculcating students with the motivation to contribute to an improvement in industry working conditions[15].

Another means of building bridges between industry and education is by integrating work experience with the academic component of education[16]. In the Georgian College of Applied Arts and Technology, in Ontario, Canada, programmes are overseen by tourism advisory boards that comprise successful business persons in the industry. This model is also common within many UK institutions. The development of Turkey’s new higher technician Hospitality Management Curriculum featured the views of an “internal” validation committee comprising the relevant education bodies, and an “external” validation committee, whose membership stemmed largely from the tourism industry[17].

Fragmentation at policy implementation interface

Policy is a process as well as a product. It is used to refer to a process of decision making and also to the product of that process. Policy is spoken of as what is and what ought to be: policy is averting our priorities, and policy should serve the public interest[18].

Tourism policy acts as a set of guidelines to determine which specific objectives and actions should be pursued to meet the needs of the particular destination area under consideration. Policies regulate the actions of not just the government, but also those in the private and non-profit sectors.

A criticism of many official tourism policy statements is that they acknowledge the importance of human resource concerns in a general sense but are somewhat limited in their focused and detailed development of the implications of these issues. Failure to address this area in a sensitive and co-ordinated manner threatens the effective growth and development of tourism worldwide[3,19]:

Within this complex environment, responsibilities and structures have evolved through history, tradition and bureaucratic convenience rather than in response to the needs of the tourism industry and its employees. It is not surprising, therefore, to find the lack of oversight and policy management that exists in most countries with respect to the area under discussion[9].

When human resource issues are not included in planning and policy making, fundamental changes in public policy and management thinking about human resources will be difficult for host countries to implement[20]. Wealthier nations are more likely to take an interest in human resource concerns than the poorer ones[19]. As Jenkins points out, “tourism in developed countries can be regarded as a mainly social activity with economic consequences: in developing countries it is largely an economic activity with social consequences[11]”. The investment required for education in tourism is more of a burden for developing countries.

Again, sustainable tourism development requires long-term planning. According to Baum, one of the main criticisms of the traditional human resource framework, within tourism and hospitality, is that human resource planning is based on contingency and the attainment of short-term objectives rather than foresight and anticipation[19].

All tourism jurisdictions seek to raise the quality of their tourism product and service in order to attract higher-spending, lower impact visitors. This objective has major human resource implications, which are not widely recognized. It is necessary not only to seek to increase employment, but also to extend the range of educational categories and increase the level of tourism instruction and, consequently improve the overall skills base and enhance the image of tourism. As stated above, the human factor is fundamental to development of the tourism sector, since it constitutes the very essence of quality in tourism supply.

The public sector has many roles to play in the co-ordination, planning, legislation and regulation, and financing of tourism, for the political, economic and social wellbeing of the nation as a whole. Applying decision making within the framework of adopted

policy is much more beneficial than taking *ad hoc* responses to opportunities and problems as they arise[21]. But the state's responsibility does not rest at policy making alone. Because of the fragmented and small business character of the tourism industry, it frequently rests with the state to take the initiative to offer incentives in order to realize the objectives set out in a country's tourism policy.

Collaboration on policy formulation between the public and private sectors is expected. The opposite will give rise to poor quality of the tourism product or the host community's environment and way of life[22]. Hence, sustainability itself is at risk.

National education policy generally focuses on legislation, co-ordination, planning and financing of all levels of education, and can also incorporate policies on which subjects or courses are taught, the issuing of certification guidelines, and so on.

Tourism education policies may well address the following: installation issues, community issues, and conceptual issues[23]. Installation issues concern the availability (quantity, skills base, time) of teachers for the design and implementation of tourism training and education, as well as costs, support framework and the school climate. Community issues deal with public perceptions (where often progress is thwarted by traditionalism or conservatism), and employment prospects. Lastly, conceptual issues refer, for example, to the following questions:

What are appropriate goals for tourism studies? What are significant content domains? What knowledge is of most worth? Where are the questions of enduring importance in tourism? What modes of enquiry are appropriate to tourism? These are some of the questions to which curriculum designers must attend if curricula in tourism are to serve the purposes of a general education. What cannot be countenanced is a curriculum based on a platform representing the views of only one sector of society, whether they be industry advocates, opponents or middle-of-the-roads[23].

Once tourism education policy is developed, it can then be translated from theory to practice. Tourism education policy may most effectively be developed through consultation between national tourism policy and education policy makers. An uneasy relationship between these two parties will lead to poor policy implementation, and misinterpretation.

A good attempt to foster consultation can be found in the National Liaison Group for Higher Education in Tourism in the UK

which was formed in December 1993, with the aim of bringing UK employers and academic institutions together. The active membership of this body is unfortunately higher-education-dominated, with limited industry involvement in debate, although there is generous industry funding. This is a common problem in the consultation debate – facilitating models which retain active industry involvement can be a major challenge.

Consultation does not come naturally; it has to be fostered:

The relationship between economic interests and governments is born of power dependence. Each possesses key resources through which to control each other. Governments possess regulatory and legislative competence; private interests possess expert information that governments need for policy formulation, key economic power, often through the contribution to national economies, and power, as actors in the implementation chain. Government is often dependent on the goodwill of interests if it is to achieve its goals[24].

In the absence of some form of control over tourism education policy and its implementation, the "invisible hand" syndrome will set in, reflecting an excess of "social interaction" over "intellectual cogitation"[18]. Government has a central planning and co-ordinating role in encouraging input from industry representatives, pressure groups, local and national bureaucracies, rival political parties, the general public, and intergovernmental organizations. Uniting the various players in tourism is no easy task, given the tourism environment's weak operating framework.

Consultation between tourism and education policy makers results in tourism education policies, which can then be translated into tourism education. It is important for policies and their objectives to be clearly specified, and to reflect the wishes of the electorate, which is why consultation should incorporate the various groups involved in both fields: tourism and education.

Another desired aspect of tourism education policy is that it helps to create an equilibrium between demand and supply for tourism education, where demand emanates from the dynamic tourism environment, and supply from the dynamic world of education. However, it is acknowledged that not all tourism graduates will seek employment in the tourism industry, and, that some of the industry demand for employees is met by other programmes of study. Indeed, the generic skills and competences fostered by many tourism education programmes are in wide demand within other service sectors and beyond.

The aim of policy makers should be to prevent problems of policy mismanagement for already overburdened bureaucracies, for as stated above, the tourism sector is very large and diverse, and control is in itself very difficult. Policy analysis, change and evaluation are not to be carried out for their own sake, but only when necessary. In addition to idea generation, policy analysis encompasses facilitating the application of these ideas. As Wildavsky pointed out, "The highest form of analysis is using intellect to aid interaction between people... Policy analysis, then, is about relationships between people" [18].

Wildavsky asks:

What is most characteristic of education in our times? The very act of changing objectives. The history of contemporary education can be written of as the search for objectives that would permit educators to legitimate their function by reconciling promise with performance [18].

The same author also identifies habitual change as one of the characteristics of educators. If this is true, it will further explain the existence of a wide variety of education programmes:

Not knowing what else to do, educators offer change for its own sake. Everyone, in a manner of speaking, gets what he wants. Everything anyone desires is being done somewhere. Innovation becomes obfuscation as the assertion of multiple objectives becomes an excuse for failing to achieve any one. No one can accuse educators of inertia; they are always in motion. Changing objectives becomes the object of change [18].

Conversely, Jafari and Ritchie discuss educational "rigidity", where change is resisted. This is expected to prevail where tourism educators come from purely academic backgrounds as against industrial backgrounds:

This rigidity derives from two sources: administrators who fear the creation of new components which threaten the "academic integrity" of the university, or alternatively risk becoming "white elephants", should student demand not be sustained over the long term; and faculty members themselves who frequently have little desire to venture outside the comfortable network of personal relationships, and scholarly journals with which they have become familiar and within which they have developed their careers [10].

Another problem may lie in the fact that education has different objectives: economic objectives (from producing job-related skills to minimizing costs); social objectives (from increasing respect for various subcultures to increasing interaction among social strata); ethical imperatives (equalize expenditures,

compensate for past defects), and even educational objectives [18].

Linking tourism with tourism education

The basis for tourism education is the formulation of tourism education policies (TEPs), which are derived from the convergence of tourism and education at a national or provincial level. This convergence should aim to eliminate the current *ad hoc* implementation of tourism education.

The tourism environment incorporates features and products of tourism; the tourism industry; tourism industry markets; and the impact of tourism on the locality or country [1]. The world of education consists of those bodies with responsibility for education at all levels from kindergarten to university.

Both the tourism environment and the world of education are highly dynamic, influenced by the wider political, economic, social and environmental climates. To have policies in force is to foster a stable and consistent environment for tourism education. As policies are directions to be observed *en route* to implementation, it is argued here that at a national level, tourism education policy must be developed, with consultation with parties from both the tourism environment and the world of education.

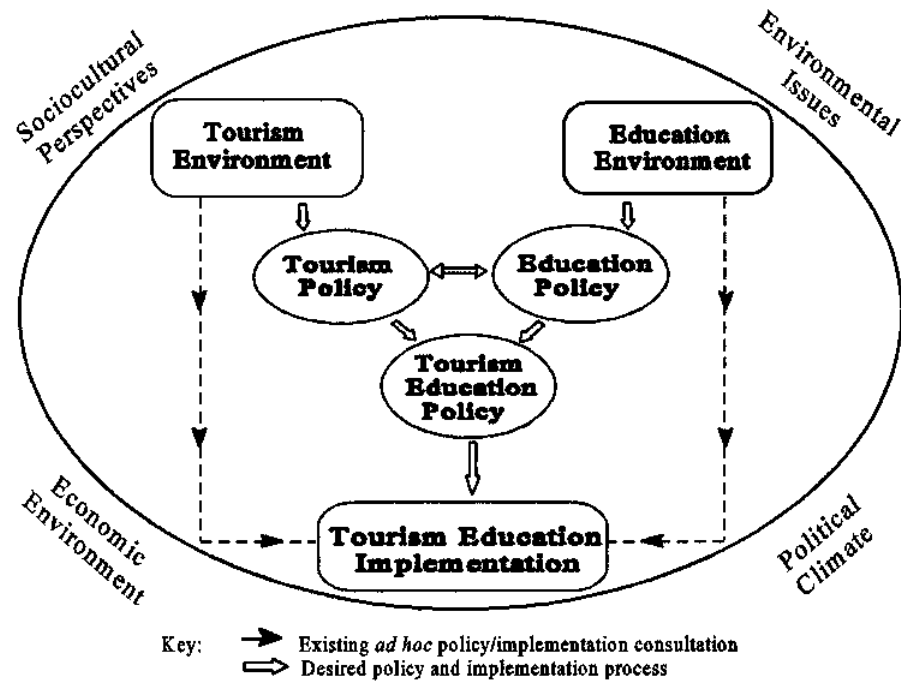
Regulatory bodies have a role in steering the relevant agencies towards policy formulation and implementation. According to the framework, consultation between tourism policy makers and education policy makers should result in a clear tourism education policy, which can then be actioned.

The dotted lines in Figure 1 denote the current human resource environment in tourism, characterized by the absence of clearly articulate and coherent policies. Here, it is the tourism environment and the world of education that together exert influence on tourism education. With no stabilizing elements in place, the likelihood is that tourism education will lean towards one side more than the other, depending on which is more influential at the time and also on the formal roles played by organizations, respectively, on the tourism or education side of the "divide".

Tourism education policy is intended to:

- establish a systematic process for delivering tourism education according to national tourism policy;
- prevent *ad hoc* formulation and implementation of tourism education, which leads to disparity, debate and discontentment;

Figure 1
 The TEP-TEI conceptual framework



- assist with planning for policy making: knowing the inputs, persons and organizations involved, likely problems, etc.

The above framework does not refer to any particular time frame. It must therefore be decided how often the process of policy formulation is to be undertaken, involving policy makers in the two partnership fields.

Canada and the Republic of Ireland provide models which are commendable working examples of how the TEP-TEI Framework can operate. Through a co-ordinating body known as the Canadian Tourism Human Resource Council (CTHRC), the planning and execution of training and development of human resources in Canada, as well as the setting of standards and certification, are all effected harmoniously at a national level. CTHRC also promotes careers in the industry, and carries out research, while acting as a clearing-house and a forum for sharing information. And on the international level, CTHRC acts as an advocate on tourism human resource development issues.

To bring together the education and the tourism environments, the board of directors on the CTHRC come from the worlds of business, labour, national associations, provincial/territorial associations, education and training, equity groups, and federal, provincial/territorial government.

Yet the various national regions maintain their own bodies, like the Tourism Industry

Association of Nova Scotia, Saskatchewan Tourism Education Council, Hospitality Newfoundland and Labrador, to name but a few. A unique collaboration between intranational regions is the Tourism Standards Consortium in Western Canada, which is a partnership of the Pacific Rim Institute of Tourism (PRIT), the Alberta Tourism Education Council (ATEC), the Saskatchewan Tourism Education Council (STEC), the Manitoba Tourism Education Council (MTEC), Western Economic Diversification Canada and the provincial governments of British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba. This project relies heavily on the volunteer commitment of tourism industry professions across western Canada.

In Ireland, CERT is the long-established (since 1963) state agency formally responsible for the recruitment, education and training of personnel at all levels for the hotel, catering and tourism industry in Ireland. As in the Canadian example above, this body is responsible for the formulation of tourism education policy, as well as overseeing its implementation. It too operates under the authority of a board representative of employers, trade unions, educational institutions, as well as government agencies and departments. Of CERT, Baum writes:

The Irish model is unique [in Europe] in that it provides by far the most comprehensive approach to co-ordinating the inputs of

education and the tourism industry into a unified system and, through CERT, operates through total co-ordination and the identification of training and development needs at both macro and micro levels[2].

CERT's role includes advice to government on all aspects of human resource development for the tourism industry and, specifically:

- Identification of manpower and training needs and development of national training structures and programmes.
- Recruitment, training and formal education of young school-leavers preparing for careers in the industry.
- Provision of on-the-job and specialist training services to existing industry personnel and proprietors (and co-ordinates their certification).
- Provision of advisory and business development services to the industry.
- Training for unemployed people to enhance their prospects of finding jobs in the hotel, catering and tourism industry[25].

Since CERT undertakes both the research into, and design and implementation of, curricula and programmes, there emerges a very close association between the interpretation and research findings and their translation into new educational and training initiatives within tourism. Manpower planning (e.g. Bi-annual CERT Tourism Manpower Surveys, 1988 Irish Hotel Management Study) leads to forecasting of management numbers, and then allocation of a defined number of funded college places[26-28].

Some would argue that this leads to a situation of rigidity, evidenced by the movement of Irish students to the UK to study tourism, because of a lack of places and/or lack of certain specialized programmes. However, what it does mean is that the Irish state is not funding management education to a level beyond the identified demand of the national tourism industry.

Conclusion: points of action

The matter under discussion is the way in which management level education in tourism is currently developed and implemented: the apparent neglect of policy making and implementation. A framework has been proposed: it is certainly not infallible, but advocates a planning process involving consultation between the various players in tourism and education, from policy setting to the implementation of tourism education. This is a process for integrating the dynamic

elements of tourism and education, so as to aid the formulation of effective policies.

If tourism education is implemented with little policy guidance, then there will be a constant tug-of-war between education providers and the tourism industry and environment, as each seek to satisfy their own aims. Policies can definitely help give a focus and direction to present and future tourism education.

The framework requires vigorous testing and evaluation in order to ascertain whether it really can contribute to the overall improvement of tourism education. This is already the subject of doctoral work in progress at the University of Buckingham, England, which focuses on the member states of the European Union, for reasons of relative comparability, proximity and ease of access to information. It investigates the interfaces between tourism and education policy, and also the attempts (if any) by policy makers and policy implementors – private and public sector alike – to harmonize tourism education on a national scale.

Key questions being addressed include the following:

- What is the nature and role of tourism education policy?
- What is the importance of national tourism policy to tourism education and training?
- What is the role of government in the implementation of policies?
- How does government facilitate consultation between the various bodies involved in and influencing the national tourism industry and the education environment?
- What is the role and responsibility of educators?
- What are the role and responsibility of the other bodies (including the European Union) involved in both tourism and education, on a national level?

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