THE RECOVERY AND RESILIENCE PLAN
University of Maribor
REPUBLIC OF SLOVENIA
MINISTRY OF HIGHER EDUCATION, SCIENCE AND INNOVATION
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International Scientific Conference

TEDU25

Transforming Tourism and Hospitality through Education

Organised by: University of Maribor, Faculty of Tourism

Terme Čatež – Hotel Terme Conference Center

May 14 – 16, 2025

BOOK OF ABSTRACTS

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CONFERENCE PROGRAMME

Wednesday, May 14, 2025	
12:00–16:00	**Registration**
16:00	**Welcome address** Assoc. Prof. Dr Marjetka Rangus, Dean of the Faculty of Tourism **Conference Hall: Termopolis**
16:45	**Coach transfer from Terme Čatež to Brežice**
17:15	**Welcome to the Faculty of Tourism, University of Maribor**
17:45	**Walk to Brežice Castle (10 min)**
18:30	**Evening event and dinner at Brežice Castle**
	Alenka Černelič Krošelj, Director of Posavje Museum Brežice
	Keynote: John Tribe, Professor of Tourism at the York St John University (UK) and Professor Emeritus at the University of Surrey (UK)
	Night tour of the castle (optional)
22:30	**Coach transfer to Terme Čatež**

Thursday, May 15, 2025	
8:30	**Registration**
9:00	**Keynote: Hazel Tucker**, Professor of Tourism at the University of Otago (New Zealand) **Conference Hall: Termopolis**
09:45–11:15	**Panel 1 – ETHICS, SOCIAL INCLUSION, AND CULTURAL HERITAGE IN TOURISM EDUCATION** **Chair: Jasna Potočnik Topler** **Conference Hall: Termopolis** 1. **The Role of Family and the Media in Preserving Cultural Heritage Through Traditional Sports and Games** Jasenka Kranjcevic, Izidora Markovic Vukadin, and Luka Valozic 2. **The Role of Primary Schools in Developing Green Tourism Competencies** Urška Šuštaršič 3. **Developing Innovative Teaching Methods in Tourism Studies** Jasna Potočnik Topler and Vita Petek 4. **Challenges of Tourism in the Blue Regional Context: Education, Scientific Research and Models of Tourism Development** Klodiana Gorica

	5. **The tyranny of caste-based discrimination in homestay tourism: A study of Dalit homestay hosts in India through an ethnographic lens** Prabhat Kumar and Dr. Jitender Kumar 6. **From Social Capital to Destination Travel Narratives in a Knowledge Ecosystem** Jasna Potočnik Topler and Charles Mansfield
09:45–11:15	**Panel 2 – FUTURE TRENDS AND EMERGING TOPICS IN TOURISM AND HOSPITALITY EDUCATION** **Chair: Mitja Gorenak** **Conference Hall: Riviera** 1. **The Future of Tourism Education: Navigating Technological Innovation and Ethical Responsibility** Mohammadreza Salehi and Sajad Ferdowsi 2. **Enhancing Tourism and Hospitality Education: Investigating congruence between Students' and Educators' Approaches to Design-Based Learning Approaches** Hanneke Assen, Ate de Groot and Mandy Wen 3. **How personality traits drive residents' support for sustainable tourism development? The evidence from Generation Z** Ivana Šagovnović, Sanja Kovačić, Tamara Surla, and Tatjana Pivac 4. **Training for the future and the future of training: Matching competency development and competency expectations in tourism and hospitality** Agnes Dr Raffay-Danyi and Krisztina Dabrónaki-Priszinger 5. **Another Brick in the Wall – Hey! Teacher! Leave them kids alone!: What Slovenian students of tourism think about their teachers?** Eva Podovšovnik 6. **Do tourism students need textbooks?** Barbara Pavlakovič Farrell
09:45–11:15	**Panel 3 – SYSTEM DYNAMICS AND THE FUTURE OF TOURISM EDUCATION** **Chair: Maja Turnšek** **Conference Hall: Vrelec** 1. **Integrating system dynamics and multi-criteria decision analysis for sustainable event evaluation - a framework for Tourism Education** Maja Borlinič Gačnik, Boris Prevolšek, Črtomir Rozman, and Martina Senekovič 2. **Serious Gaming in Tourism Platformisation Research: Development of a System Dynamics Model** Blaž Rodič, Maja Turnšek, Maja Breznik, and Jerneja Šavrič 3. **A Systems Thinking Approach to Climate Action in Tourism Destinations** Kyriaki Glyptou, Elisa Burrai, Jane Turner, and Chris Cooper

	4. How to address the difficult questions of climate change mitigation in tourism higher education? Maja Turnšek
11:15–11:45	**Coffee break**
11:45–13:15	**Workshop:** System Dynamics Modelling for Sustainable Tourism led by **Paul Peeters**, Emeritus Professor Sustainable Transport and Tourism, Breda University and Guest Scholar, Wageningen University & Research. **Conference Hall: Vrelec**
11:45–13:15	**Panel 4 – INNOVATION, BUSINESS, AND DIGITAL TOOLS IN TOURISM EDUCATION** **Chair: Tina Šegota** **Conference Hall: Termopolis** **1. Utilizing knowledge through case study competitions** Branka Novčić Korać **2. How A Systematic Literature Review of Gastro-Tourism Research Educates Stakeholders** Leila Klila and Helena Williams **3. The Impact of Verbal and Nonverbal Immediacy Practices on Academic Achievements of Online Students** Saqib Hussain, Zaheer Ahmad, Rashid Mehmood, Sara Kremsar and Suzana Grobelšek **4. Let's get Digital: Self-evaluation of digital knowledge of Slovenian students of tourism** Eva Podovšovnik **5. Mapping spa innovation ecosystems – comparative case study of Balaruc-les-Bains, Dax, Ciechocinek and Busko-Zdrój** Paweł Stelmach, Paweł Rąpała, Sylwia Nejman, Daria Turaczyk and Bartosz Adamik **6. Preparing Future Professionals: Evaluating Sustainability Integration in Tourism Education** Denis Prevolšek, Hermina Maras Benassi and Tea Golja **7. A critical analysis of Sustainable Tourism Management Framework in maritime areas within the WB Region. The impact on education.** Ermelinda Kordha and Klodiana Gorica **8. The Role of ESP and Digital Tools in Developing Business Communication Skills for Future Tourism Specialists** Maja Rončević and Gordana Dobrijević

11:45–13:15	**Panel 5 – TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING AND COMPETENCIES FOR THE FUTURE** **Chair: Anja Mlakar** **Conference Hall: Riviera** 1. **Creating meaningful and purposeful learning experiences – empowering tourism students to behave as Global citizens** Ziene Mottiar 2. **The future of careers in tourism: a shift from service delivery to experience creation** Mitja Gorenak 3. **Exploring the role of perceived safety and hygiene in consumer's intention to use robot-delivered hospitality services** Kayode Kolawole Eluwole, Taiwo Temitope Lasisi, and Omar Parvez 4. **Transformative Experiences: from an Educational Learning Origin to Tourism Offerings** Mo Khogali 5. **Sustainable Tourism Development in Mountain Huts: Educational strategies to tackle challenges and finding opportunities** Tomi Špindler and Nejc Pozvek 6. **Fractal Drawing in Sustainable Tourism Education: Promoting Future Competencies** Mihaela Kežman
13:30–15:00	**Lunch break**
15:00–17:00	**Round Table: The Future of Tourism Education** **Moderated by: Stu Hayes**, University of Otago **Dubravka Kalin**, Ministry of the Economy, Tourism and Sport **Maja Modic**, University of Maribor **Marjetka Rangus**, University of Maribor, Faculty of Tourism **John Tribe**, University of Surrey, UK **Hazel Tucker**, University of Otago, New Zealand **Conference Hall: Termopolis**
17:00–17:30	**Coffee break**
18:00	**Coach transfer from Terme Čatež to Mokrice Castle**
19:30	**Evening event and gala dinner at Mokrice Castle**
	Best Paper award
	Best Young Researcher award
22:30	**Coach transfer back to Terme Čatež**

Friday, May 16, 2025	
10:30–11:00	**Registration, gathering and coffee**
11:00–13:00	**Panel 6 – SUSTAINABILITY AND GREEN TOURISM EDUCATION** **Chair: Katja Kokot** **Conference Hall: Riviera** 1. **Sustainable Values to Embed in Sustainable Business Model and Curriculum Competences** Nevenka Maher 2. **Student Education in Tourism through Visits to Prestigious Eco-Green Tourist Centers: The Role of Experiential Learning** Ivana Maric 3. **Slow Tourism: An Innovative Approach to Sustainable Development** Sayeh Davoodi Ilkhechi and Sajad Ferdowsi 4. **Rethinking Tourism and Hospitality Education: Integrating Green Competencies and Microcredentials for a Sustainable Future** Sajad Ferdowsi and Mohammadreza Salehi 5. **Enhancing Fairness, Accountability, and Collaborative Learning in Tourism Education** Kyriaki Glyptou 6. **Role of AR in developing the willingness to visit museums: An application of flow theory** Obaidullah Amin, Rohitkumar Trivedi, and Tina Šegota 7. **Towards Sustainable Wellness Tourism Education: Development of a New Educational Programme for Spa Centres in Slovenia** Katja Kokot and Milica Rančić Demir
11:00–13:00	**Panel 7 – TOURISM EDUCATION IN DIFFERENT REGIONAL CONTEXTS** **Chair: Marko Koščak** **Conference Hall: Vrelec** 1. **Tourism Education in Serbia - A Comparative Study** Aleksandra Terzić, Sanja Pavlović, and Nevena Ćurčić 2. **The Development and Challenges of Tourism Education in Albania** Petrit Dollani 3. **The role of local residents in the development of slow tourism: Attitudes, challenges, and opportunities in Western Serbia** Tamara Surla, Tatjana Pivac, Marko D. Petrović, and Ivana Šagovnović 4. **Sustainability and Academia: A Croatian Perspective** Verica Budimir, Mirjana Jeleč Raguž and Svjetlana Letinić

	5. **Reporting Sustainability Implementation in Tourism Higher Education: Challenges, Assessment Tools - the case of Greece** Maria Xenaki and Irini Dimou 6. **Accessing green finance awareness for sustainable tourism in Uzbekistan embedding green values in tourism competencies** Allah Ditta, Sitora Mustafakulova and Nilufar Rahimova 7. **Sustainable Education in Tourism in Ukraine: Mapping of Informal Initiatives and Actors** Mariia Rastvorova and Viktoriia Kiptenko
11:00–13:00	**Panel 8 – MICRO-CREDENTIALS, AI, AND DIGITALIZATION IN TOURISM EDUCATION** **Chair: Tjaša Alegro** **Conference Hall: Kapljica** 1. **Competencies and Skills for Digital Education in Tourism: A View from Chatbots' Perspectives** Andjela Babic 2. **Transforming Education: Integrating XR Technologies into Teaching** Malcolm Burt and Tjaša Alegro 3. **AI disruptions effects on education of communications in tourism** Dušan Vrban 4. **AI, CLIL, and English for Tourism: Transforming Language Learning for a Sustainable Future** Biljana Božinovski 5. **The importance of AI in the development of health tourism destinations** Paweł Stelmach, Paweł Rąpała, Sylwia Nejman, Daria Turaczyk, Bartosz Adamik and Emilia Mazur 6. **Higher Education and AI: Enhancing Digital Competence and Critical Thinking** Andrea Holešinská 7. **Using Microcredit in Tourism Education: Practices, Experiences, and Critical Considerations to Improve Quality and Employability** Alireza Alinezhadi and Zahra Saki
11:00–13:00	**Panel 9 – THE FUTURE OF TOURISM AND HOSPITALITY EDUCATION** **Chair: Vita Petek** **Conference Hall: Termopolis** 1. **Local Languages Based Online / Offline Micro-Credentials in Pakistan's Tourism Industry will be the key to Accelerate Employment Generation** Kamran Khan (online)

	2. **The Role of Environmental Education in Sustainable Tourism Development** Hamide Mahmoodi (online) 3. **Sustainable Entrepreneurship Education-A Multidisciplinary Approach for Business Schools to Cultivate Sustainable Hospitality Startups** Dhruv Kishore Bole (online) 4. **New Technologies and Skills in Tourism and Hospitality Education** Hamideh Saderi Osguie 5. **Revolutionizing Sustainable Education in Tourism: Bridging the Social, Economic, and Ecological Gaps** Helia Shokripour 6. **Purposeful Education in Tourism: Adapting Curricula for the Future Demands** Helia Shokripour 7. **Meaningful Tourism and Hospitality Education: The Role of Tourism Education in Today's World and the Evolution of Curricula for the Future** Alireza Alinezhadi and Zahra Saki 8. **Future Competencies and Green Tourism: Skills and Educational Approaches for Sustainable Tourism Development** Alireza Alinezhadi and Zahra Saki 9. **Preparing the Next Generation: Hospitality Education in the Age of Digital Innovation and AI** Tashfeen Ahmad 10. **Education through Tourism Businesses in the Alta Valley** Kari Jæger
13:00	**TEDU25 Conference Wrap-up** **Conference Hall: Termopolis**
13:30–15:00	**Lunch**
15:30–22:00	**Chocolate-making workshop and fine dining experience at Rajhenburg Castle (optional)** *** Coach transfer from Terme Čatež to Rajhenburg Castle and back**

*Please note that changes to the programme are still possible.

PANEL 1

ETHICS, SOCIAL INCLUSION, AND CULTURAL HERITAGE IN TOURISM EDUCATION

THE ROLE OF FAMILY AND THE MEDIA IN PRESERVING CULTURAL HERITAGE THROUGH TRADITIONAL SPORTS AND GAMES

Jasenka Kranjcevic (Institute for tourism), Izidora Markovic Vukadin (Institute for tourism) and Luka Valozic (Institute for tourism)

Abstract. Traditional sports and games are an essential part of intangible cultural heritage, yet their practice and relevance are fading among younger generations. This study investigates the roles of family traditions, cultural heritage appreciation, and the media influence, in encouraging children's engagement with traditional sports and games. Our research aims to highlight the potential of these activities for promoting cultural sustainability and preserving heritage. The study is based on working hypotheses that explore: the impact of intergenerational knowledge transfer within families, the influence of the media on heritage appreciation, and the challenges posed by digital entertainment to traditional practices. A mixed-methods approach was employed, incorporating both qualitative and quantitative data collection through surveys distributed to a student population in Croatia. Preliminary findings reveal that family traditions, particularly intergenerational storytelling and the active appreciation of cultural heritage, play a crucial role in fostering children's interest in traditional sports and games. Students from families that emphasise cultural heritage demonstrated significantly higher engagement with traditional practices than their peers who lack such familial influences. Conversely, the media appears to have a limited impact on promoting cultural appreciation. Instead, the prevalence of online games and digital media emerges as a dominant competitor, diverting attention away from traditional activities. These findings underline the pivotal role of family in sustaining intangible cultural heritage, emphasizing that the home environment is a key context for the transmission of culture. Despite the challenges posed by modern digital entertainment, cultivating cultural awareness within families proves to be an effective strategy for preserving heritage. The implications of this research extend to tourism and hospitality education by aligning with the goals of fostering cultural sustainability and meaningful engagement with heritage. By integrating insights from this study into educational strategies, institutions can more effectively address the challenges of preserving intangible cultural heritage while promoting its relevance in contemporary contexts.

Keywords: intangible cultural heritage, traditional sports and games, cultural sustainability, family, digital media, tourism education

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THE ROLE OF PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN DEVELOPING GREEN TOURISM COMPETENCIES

Urška Šuštaršič (Osnovona šola Danile Kumar)

Abstract. As tourism becomes more focused on sustainability, it is important to teach young students about green skills, ethical travel, and caring for the environment from an early age. Schools play a key role in building these values by including sustainability topics in their lessons. This paper looks at how primary schools can help develop green tourism skills by reviewing current school programs, finding gaps, and suggesting improvements. Through an analysis of school curricula, interviews with teachers and case studies of successful eco-friendly school projects, the study explores both the challenges and opportunities in teaching sustainable tourism. Some difficulties, like a lack of teacher training, limited resources, and strict school programs, will be discussed, along with creative solutions such as partnerships with local businesses, hands-on learning, and interactive teaching methods.
The goal of this paper is to provide practical ideas on how primary schools can better prepare students to be responsible travelers and future professionals in a more sustainable tourism industry.

Keywords: primary school, sustainability education, green tourism, curriculum recomendations

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DEVELOPING INNOVATIVE TEACHING METHODS IN TOURISM STUDIES

Jasna Potočnik Topler (University of Maribor, Faculty of Tourism) and Vita Petek (University of Maribor, Faculty of Tourism)

Abstract. This article explores innovative teaching methods in tourism studies, focusing on encouraging creativity, flexibility, and adaptability among students and teachers. By integrating key concepts such as travel writing, movement, sustainability, well-being, and literacy, these methods aim to enrich curricula and align them with the evolving demands of the tourism industry. The Erasmus+ IN-COMM GUIDE and Erasmus+ EDU-FIT projects serve as foundational frameworks for this development, providing valuable insights into interdisciplinary and interactive approaches. The integration of these projects emphasises the importance of digitalization, not only as a tool for enhancing learning experiences but also for preparing students for a rapidly digitizing tourism sector. Through the creative use of technology and hands-on activities like travel writing and digital storytelling, students engage more deeply with sustainability and well-being principles, encouraging both personal and professional growth. Flexibility and creativity among teachers play a crucial role in adapting curricula to meet diverse students' needs. By creating a dynamic learning environment, teachers motivate students to perform well, learn actively, and think critically. Practical experiences, supported by innovative teaching tools, inspire students to address real-world challenges in tourism with innovative solutions. This article concludes by highlighting the potential of such methods to improve student outcomes, prepare future tourism professionals for sustainable practices, and advance literacy in the broadest sense—cultural, digital, and professional. It calls for further collaboration between teachers, researchers, and policymakers to ensure these practices are widely implemented in tourism studies.

Keywords: travel writing, movement, sustainability, well-being, literacy, digitalization, Erasmus+, curricula, flexibility, creativity

CHALLENGES OF TOURISM IN THE REGIONAL CONTEXT: EDUCATION, SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH AND MODELS OF TOURISM SUSTAINABLE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT

Klodiana Gorica (University of Tirana/Institute for Sustainable Development, Environment and Tourism)

Abstract. Sustainability is the keyword of all these decades. It is not a new way of development, or management or thinking ahead, is a challenge and a philosophy. We cannot define a good development if we are based only on figures and economic data, but especially if we achieve social welfare and environment protection. So, nations have to find ways to achieve sustainability and for this they have to base on those industries that can realize three dimensions of sustainability in the same time.
From one side, education is a strong strategy which lead on that way, agriculture, farming, etc, but we are not used to hear sustainable education, or sustainable agriculture and so on, but of course Sustainable Tourism, so from the other side tourism is the best long-term strategy to achieve sustainable development
Related to education and tourism there is still a huge gap which need to fill out with skills and competences. As the Universities in the region countries are working individually to increase the competences, skills, knowledge of young people in their countries through the application in numerous international projects, it would be more efficient to join efforts to create such an initiative between Universities, preceded by a regional agreement between the respective ministries of education, followed by another agreement between the relevant Universities that are directly affected and that can support this initiative.
There are several challenges in developing good and sustainable curricula in tourism, as well as it is difficult to update them time to time, or to create a value chain-based education in tourism. So, discussing on main challenges that faces in developing the curricula or tourism education is one of the main priorities as well as developing the right models for tourism in order to achieve sustainability.

Keywords: sustainable tourism, education, critical approach, models, principles, region

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THE TYRANNY OF CASTE-BASED DISCRIMINATION IN HOMESTAY TOURISM: A STUDY OF DALIT HOMESTAY HOSTS IN INDIA THROUGH AN ETHNOGRAPHIC LENS

Prabhat Kumar (Indian Institute of Technology Kanpur) and Dr. Jitender Kumar (Indian Institue of Technology Kanpur)

Abstract. Marketplace discrimination is a well-laid research stream in consumer behaviour where discrimination can stem from identities based on race, religion, class, gender, etc. Such social identity-based discrimination makes the inclusivity and equitability promised by market offerings like sharing economy (SE), elusive and so do the byproducts of SE, such as homestays or P2P accommodation. Homestay tourism is often hailed as a tool for socio-economic upliftment, especially for marginalized communities, because homestays have the potential to empower socially backward groups by offering socio-economic growth and cultural exchanges. However, discrimination can pose a threat to this promise for homestay hosts belonging to the lower strata of the social class hierarchy in India. It stems from the caste-based identity of hosts (CBI) and compromises homestay tourism potential due to their so-called stigmatized identities. Research on social identity's role in marketplace discrimination is accumulating, e.g., race/religion-based discrimination in homestay tourism in the West, and its adverse effects on tourist footfall and hosts' well-being are documented. Despite widespread evidence of caste-based discrimination in Indian society and the business environment, its investigation remains silent, being a sensitive and emotive issue, unlike the West. This study sets out to capture caste-based identity's role in homestay businesses among hosts through an exploratory investigation; to reaffirm our proposition, we study the causal effect of hosts' CBI on homestay selection among tourists. While global organizations like the World Economic Forum advocate for social inclusion in tourism, caste-based discrimination remains a critical yet overlooked issue in India. Homestay tourism is a focal point in policies for inclusive growth, highlighting the urgent need to address this challenge. The exclusion of Dalits from homestay tourism has been documented in the literature (Thapaliya et al., 2012; Sood et al., 2017), citing barriers such as rigid caste hierarchies, geographic isolation, inadequate infrastructure, and deep-rooted economic disparities. These challenges make Dalits one of the most vulnerable social groups in India.

This study investigates the manifestation of caste-based discrimination in Dalit homestays through the lens of Social Identity Theory. Additionally, the study proposes policy measures to promote a more inclusive and equitable homestay tourism model for Dalit hosts. A constructivist approach will be adopted to understand the lived experiences of Dalit hosts at the intersection of homestay tourism and caste discrimination. We will be employing semi-structured interviews and ethnographic observations to comprehensively understand the phenomenon in question. Thematic analysis will be utilized to uncover distinct patterns that reveal the roots of identity-based discrimination in homestays.

Caste-based discrimination in homestays reflects broader exclusion in the sharing economy. Biases like gender dominance in community tourism and racial or economic prejudices in accommodation hinder equitable development and progress toward Sustainable Development Goal 10, which seeks to reduce inequalities. To address these challenges, the study adopts a participatory planning approach, engaging Dalit homestay hosts and key stakeholders in co-developing strategies to mitigate systemic caste biases. By foregrounding these critical issues, the research aims to inform policy interventions that enhance the accessibility, legitimacy, and sustainability of Dalit-led homestay enterprises in India.

Keywords: Homestay tourism, Caste-based discrimination, Ethnography, Dalit hosts

FROM SOCIAL CAPITAL TO DESTINATION TRAVEL NARRATIVES IN A KNOWLEDGE ECOSYSTEM

Jasna Potočnik Topler (University of Maribor, Faculty of Tourism) and Charles Mansfield (HE Consultancy)

Abstract. The cultural heritage of a town often remains hidden from potential visitors. This paper shows how the theory of knowledge ecosystems can build networks for eliciting and sharing place-making narratives. It applies these theories in a case study where a new feature in the WhatsApp smartphone app is used to develop slow tourism for a destination in Normandy, France. For the tourism development team, the theories of story, plot and novelistic discourse are explored through an illustrative and re-usable example for other place-making creatives.Deliberately created knowledge ecosystems provide a way forward for eliciting, creating and formulating knowledge into a transferrable then usable form (Järvi, Almpanopoulou & Ritala 2018). Kati Järvi et al. (2018) reach two key conclusions to consider when establishing and managing a knowledge ecosystem, these are

1. [Using] instruments that link a diverse range of actors or that enable actors to participate in the formulation of a common goal should be prioritized over pure R&D funding instruments, as they are likely to have a bigger impact in facilitating goal-setting
2. Secondly, as a related issue, our findings suggest that managers and policy makers should ensure the development of capabilities for knowledge and innovation ecosystem governance. […] it can be challenging to sustain collaboration between industry and academic institutions once funding ends. (Järvi, Almpanopoulou & Ritala 2018, 1535).

References

Järvi, K., Almpanopoulou, A., & Ritala, P. (2018). Organization of knowledge ecosystems: Prefigurative and partial forms. Research policy, 47(8), 1523-1537.

Mansfield, C., Séraphin, H., Wassler, P., & Potočnik Topler, J. (2024). Travel Writing as a Tool for Sustainable Initiatives: Proposing a Dialogue Journaling Process Model. Journal of Travel Research. https://doi.org/10.1177/00472875241269902

Mansfield, C. & Potočnik Topler, J. (2023). Travel Writing for Tourism and City Branding Urban Place Writing Methodologies. Abingdon: Routledge. http://dx.doi.org/10.4324/9781003178781

Keywords: social capital, destination branding, travel narratives, storytelling, education

PANEL 2

FUTURE TRENDS AND EMERGING TOPICS IN TOURISM AND HOSPITALITY EDUCATION

THE FUTURE OF TOURISM EDUCATION: NAVIGATING TECHNOLOGICAL INNOVATION AND ETHICAL RESPONSIBILITY

Mohammadreza Salehi (M.A. in Tourism Management, Faculty of Tourism, University of Tehran, Tehran, Iran) and Sajad Ferdowsi (Assistant Professor, Faculty of Tourism, University of Tehran, Tehran, Iran.)

Abstract. This study examines the transformative potential of integrating technological innovation, ethical responsibility, and microcredentials in tourism education to address industry demands for agile, future-ready professionals. Through qualitative desk research analyzing peer-reviewed literature, industry reports, and global case studies, the research investigates: (1) how immersive technologies like VR and AI enhance learning outcomes while facing adoption barriers; (2) effective models for embedding sustainability and ethics into curricula; and (3) the role of microcredentials in bridging skill gaps. Key findings reveal that VR and AI significantly improve engagement and personalization (aligned with Constructivist Learning Theory), yet their implementation is hindered by costs and faculty resistance (per Rogers' Innovation Adoption Theory). Case studies from institutions like the University of Stavanger demonstrate how experiential ethics education, tied to frameworks like the UN SDGs, cultivates graduates capable of addressing real-world dilemmas. Microcredentials such as the UNWTO's AI in Hospitality program emerge as vital tools to resolve the "adaptation lag" in traditional education, offering industry-aligned, scalable upskilling. However, limitations include gaps in longitudinal microcredential impact data and regional disparities in technology access. The study concludes by advocating for a tripartite education model that harmonizes technological tools, ethical frameworks, and flexible credentials, proposing future research directions: faculty training in tech-ethics integration, equity-focused adoption frameworks, and standardized microcredential accreditation. These insights contribute a roadmap for tourism education to balance innovation with accountability in an era of digital and ecological disruption.

Keywords: Technological Innovation, Sustainable Tourism, Ethical Responsibility, Microcredentials, Digital Transformation

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ENHANCING TOURISM AND HOSPITALITY EDUCATION: INVESTIGATING CONGRUENCE BETWEEN STUDENTS' AND EDUCATORS' APPROACHES TO DESIGN-BASED LEARNING APPROACHES

Hanneke Assen (Hotel Management School Leeuwarden NHL Stenden University of Applied Sciences), Ate de Groot (Hotel Management School Leeuwarden NHL Stenden University of Applied Sciences) and Mandy Wen (Hotel Management School Leeuwarden NHL Stenden University of Applied Sciences)

Abstract. The hospitality and tourism industry faces growing disruptions, requiring professionals with strong problem-solving skills and adaptability. To prepare future professionals, the Hotel Management School Leeuwarden (HMSL) at NHL Stenden University of Applied Sciences implemented Design-Based Education (DBE), a learner-oriented approach fostering collaboration among students, educators, and industry practitioners. This study focuses on the role of educators in DBE. Observations showed that they often struggle to facilitate learning in alignment with DBE underlying principles. To address this, Design-Based Learning Study (DBLS) was introduced as a professional development initiative, aligning lecturers' learning experiences with DBE.

This study explored how congruence between student and educator learning approaches supports lecturers in facilitating DBE. Sixteen lecturers participated in four DBLS sessions, engaging in inquisitive dialogues to collaboratively design, implement, and refine pedagogical approaches. Findings indicate that experiencing DBE from the students' perspective enhanced educators' empathy towards challenges faced by students, such as self-directed learning and group dynamics. Additionally, diversity in lecturers' learning preferences highlighted the need for tailored facilitation strategies.

DBLS provided experiential learning that fostered reflection and pedagogical adaptation. The study underscores the importance of professional development in embedding DBE and emphasizes ongoing support for long-term integration. Strengthening the alignment between student and educator learning experiences enhances DBE implementation, contributing to sustainable educational innovation in hospitality education.

Keywords: Design-Based Education, Learner-oriented approach to teaching and learning, Professional learning initiative, Congruence between students' and educators' learning

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HOW PERSONALITY TRAITS DRIVE RESIDENTS' SUPPORT FOR SUSTAINABLE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT? THE EVIDENCE FROM GENERATION Z

Ivana Šagovnović (Department of Geography, Tourism and Hotel Management, Faculty of Sciences, University of Novi Sad), Sanja Kovačić (Department of Geography, Tourism and Hotel Management, Faculty of Sciences, University of Novi Sad), Tamara Surla (Department of Geography, Tourism and Hotel Management, Faculty of Sciences, University of Novi Sad) and Tatjana Pivac (Department of Geography, Tourism and Hotel Management, Faculty of Sciences, University of Novi Sad)

Abstract. Given their forward-thinking mindset, sense of responsibility, and technological proficiency, Generation Z residents hold considerable potential to drive sustainable tourism development in their cities. While existing tourism research predominantly focuses on Generation Z as tourists, studies on their role as residents remain limited, particularly in the context of destination brand ambassadorship behavior and support for sustainable tourism development. Thus, this study aimed to examine the influence of Generation Z residents' personality traits on their support for sustainable tourism development, considering the effects of Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Neuroticism, Openness to experience, and Honesty/Humility. It also explored the mediating role of destination brand ambassadorship behavior and the moderating effect of gender in this relationship. Survey data were collected from 428 Generation Z participants in Novi Sad, Serbia, and Tampa, FL, USA. All analyses were conducted using SPSS (version 23) to test the proposed hypotheses. The results revealed that Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, and Honesty/Humility positively influence Generation Z residents' support for sustainable tourism development. Besides, destination brand ambassadorship behavior mediates the relationship between most personality traits and support for sustainable tourism development, except for Neuroticism. Gender was also found to moderate the relationship between Honesty/Humility and support for sustainable tourism development. These findings suggest that tailoring tourism initiatives to Generation Z residents' personality traits, by involving them in event organization and assigning them responsibilities related to destination promotion and sustainability, can enhance their support for sustainable tourism development. Further theoretical and practical implications will be discussed in the paper.

Keywords: Generation Z, residents, support, sustainable tourism development, personality

TRAINING FOR THE FUTURE AND THE FUTURE OF TRAINING: MATCHING COMPETENCY DEVELOPMENT AND COMPETENCY EXPECTATIONS IN TOURISM AND HOSPITALITY

Agnes Dr Raffay-Danyi (University of Pannonia) and Krisztina Dabrónaki-Priszinger (University of Pannonia)

Abstract. Introduction
The pace of technological development in the 21st century has far exceeded anything previously experienced, which had significant impacts on jobs and the way jobs are performed in the tourism and hospitality industry. Adapting to the sophistication of consumer demands has also brought changes, with new jobs emerging that would have been unheard of even ten years ago (e.g. social media content creator). The situation has been further exacerbated by the pandemic in 2020, with the COVID-19 pandemic bringing about a particularly sudden change in working conditions. As a result of all these processes, the competency requirements in the tourism and hospitality sector have changed in recent years. The question arises whether or how tourism higher education can reflect these changes in their training programmes. The current research aims to map the competencies developed in tourism higher education in Hungary, and to compare these with the expectations of the labour market. The present study focuses on the competencies expected of graduates of the tourism and hospitality bachelor's degree, and uses the OECD competency definition: „A competency is defined as the ability to successfully meet complex demands in a particular context through the mobilization of knowledge, skills, attitudes and values" (Taguma (OECD) & Rychen, 2016, p. 3).
Method
The research used mixed methods. Desk research included content analysis of the training and outcome requirements and job advertisements of the two most important Hungarian tourism portals, turizmusonline.hu and turizmus.com. Furthermore, focus group interviews were conducted with professionals in the field of tourism and hospitality. The competencies identified during desk research and focus groups formed the basis for Q-methodology research into ranking the importance of the identified competencies.
Findings
The preliminary findings reveal that there is a much stronger emphasis on digital skills, with new IT solutions, software and applications appearing at an almost unprecedented pace. In addition, the increased and changing consumer demands have led to stronger emphasis on soft skills such as problem solving, empathy and stress management.
Conclusion
Results indicate that there are overlaps between labour market expectations and the competencies tourism higher education aims to develop, although the degree of overlap varies for the different types of competencies. Significant difference can be detected in the case of knowledge type competencies: while the training outcome requirements expect students to acquire a wide range of knowledge, the labour market has far fewer expectations. However, there are overlaps regarding skills and abilities type competencies, such as teamwork, problem solving, conflict resolution, digital skills and communication skills.
The results can inform higher education policies in Hungary to reform training and educational outcomes to ensure a better match of competencies developed by higher education institutions and the expectations of the labour market.

Keywords: competencies, higher education, tourism and hospitality, job market

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ANOTHER BRICK IN THE WALL – HEY! TEACHER! LEAVE THEM KIDS ALONE!: WHAT SLOVENIAN STUDENTS OF TOURISM THINK ABOUT THEIR TEACHERS?

Eva Podovšovnik (University of Primorska, Faculty for Tourism Studies)

Abstract.
Introduction:
In modern society, education is becoming increasingly important, as it enables individuals to compete and prosper in the labor market and in the economic sphere, which (may) lead to a change in quality of life. Education can thus be defined by national goals - as a "contribution to national economic development" (Gray, 1999: 419).
Learning is a process that presupposes the involvement of teacher and student, requires active creation of meaning and is based on understanding the student and the learning process, takes place in an interesting and stimulating environment, builds on learning partnerships in different situations and shapes social and cultural context (Gray, 1999).
Method:
We conducted a web survey among students of tourism in Slovenia. The survey was accessible for students in June 2022. 136 students completed the questionnaire. 81 % of them were females, and 19 % of them were males. Their average age was 25 years. 39 % of them were enrolled in the university program, 34,6 % of them were postgraduate students, and 26,5 % of them were enrolled in the college program.
Findings:
Students were asked to evaluate their agreement with statements about the role of teachers. On a scale from 1 to 7, on average, students somewhat agreed that teachers act as facilitators of useful knowledge for their professional training, show teaching skills that affect their professional development, promote in them the development of professional competencies, use appropriate methods to assess their professional development, are up to date on the topics of the context that influence their training, have professional experience in the field of their study that strengthens their training, use real cases to show their usefulness in the professional field, and inspire them to be a better professional in their field of study.
Statistically significant differences were found among opinions of undergraduate and postgraduate respondents. More college students, in comparison to university and postgraduate students, agree that teachers use real cases to show their usefulness in the professional field. In all other cases, no statistically significant differences were found in the opinion of respondents by their age, gender or level of study.
Conclusions:
Education plays an important role for society. Tourism is also affected by fast-growing and challenging professional skills. Students present the future of tourism. As such, we were interested to discover their experience with the formal educational system in Slovenia.
Students still think that teachers are necessary to provide them with appropriate professional skills, to be competitive in today's demanding tourism sector. Their role is seen as important by respondents. As such, we cannot conclude that teachers need to leave kids to study alone. Teachers are seen as anchors for students of tourism.

Keywords: students of tourism, teachers, learning, education, professional skills

DO TOURISM STUDENTS NEED TEXTBOOKS?

Barbara Pavlakovič Farrell (University of Maribor, Faculty of Tourism)

Abstract. A textbook is regarded as a well-established pedagogic-didactic tool. It contains relevant, topic-specific information, which is primarily used by students. Its contents are scientific but, at the same time, adapted to the level of students understanding. Textbooks can have different roles in the classroom. Olsher & Cooper (2021) propose the following roles: curricular role, class arrangement role, technology usage role, and acceptable explanation of reasoning role. Researchers have studied the textbook's formative influence on individual development (thinking operations and intellectual activities) and the textbook's role in the cultural reproduction of society (socially created techniques and strategies of functioning and behaviour) (Plut & Pesic, 2003). However, in the digital world, where information about nearly everything is just a click away, the question of whether we still need textbooks arises. As we can see from the classrooms, students prefer online sources, short summaries, video material and similar. Therefore, this contribution will examine the usage of textbooks among tourism students. At the Faculty of Tourism, University of Maribor, we have lately published two textbooks titled "Introducing Public Participation Methods into the Pedagogical Process" and "Benchmarking – Comparative Analysis in Tourism". Our first goal is to compare two textbooks, their characteristics and roles. We will focus especially on the formative influence of textbooks on tourism students. Furthermore, we will examine the students' responses to the textbooks and their usage and consider possible improvements in order to present guidelines for these pedagogic-didactic tools in future education in the field of tourism.

Olsher, S. & Cooper, J. (2021). Expressing the Voice of the Textbook—Insights Gained from Tagging Didactic Metadata. International Journal of Science and Mathematics Education, 19, pp. 1635–1653. DOI:10.1007/s10763-020-10124-3.

Plut, D. & Pesic, J. (2003). Toward a Vygotskian theory of textbook. Psihologija, 36(4), pp. 501-515, DOI: 10.2298/PSI0304501P.

Keywords: education, didactic tool, textbook, tourism students

PANEL 3

SYSTEM DYNAMICS AND THE FUTURE OF TOURISM EDUCATION

INTEGRATING SYSTEM DYNAMICS AND MULTI-CRITERIA DECISION ANALYSIS FOR SUSTAINABLE EVENT EVALUATION - A FRAMEWORK FOR TOURISM EDUCATION

Maja Borlinič Gačnik (Faculty of Tourism, University of Maribor), Boris Prevolšek (Faculty of Tourism, University of Maribor), Črtomir Rozman (Faculty of Agriculture and Life Sciences, University of Maribor) and Martina Senekovič (Faculty of Agriculture and Life Sciences, University of Maribor)

Abstract. Sustainability is a crucial component in modern event management and tourism education. Higher education institutions must prepare future professionals to assess and enhance the sustainability of events by integrating systemic thinking and structured decision-making tools. This paper introduces a methodological framework that combines Causal Loop Diagrams (CLD) from System Dynamics (SD) with DEXI-based Multi-Criteria Decision Analysis (MCDA) to offer a comprehensive evaluation of event sustainability.

The CLD model serves as a qualitative tool to analyze the interrelationships between environmental, socio-cultural, and economic sustainability factors. It identifies key feedback loops that influence event outcomes, including:

- The positive effect of sustainable waste management and energy efficiency on environmental sustainability, where higher recycling rates and the use of renewable energy lead to reduced environmental impact.
- The reinforcing loop between community involvement and socio-cultural sustainability, where increased participation of local providers strengthens cultural heritage and social cohesion, thereby improving the event's overall acceptance and success.
- The balancing loop in economic sustainability, where greater local business support enhances financial viability but may also increase operational costs, requiring efficient cost-effectiveness strategies.

Building on the insights from CLD, the DEXI model structures sustainability indicators into a multi-criteria decision framework. The model uses expert-defined decision rules to qualitatively assess key attributes such as:

- Waste reduction (e.g., levels of plastic use and recycling programs),
- Accessibility (e.g., affordability and inclusivity for physically challenged attendees),
- Local business integration (e.g., share of local suppliers and employment generation),
- Cost-effectiveness (e.g., budget efficiency and optimal resource allocation).

By integrating CLD and DEXI, this framework bridges the gap between systemic complexity and decision support, allowing for a transparent, holistic, and adaptable sustainability evaluation of events. This approach supports both qualitative reasoning and structured assessment, providing a decision-making tool that balances long-term sustainability goals with practical event management considerations.

From an educational perspective, this methodology fosters the development of future-ready tourism competencies. By embedding systems thinking and decision analysis into tourism curricula, students gain the skills to critically evaluate and optimize event sustainability. Furthermore, the framework aligns with the green transition goals of tourism education, addressing industry demands for professionals who can navigate environmental, economic, and social sustainability challenges.
This paper presents preliminary insights from an application of the CLD-DEXI framework to real-world event evaluations, showcasing its effectiveness in improving sustainability decision-making. By encouraging interdisciplinary methodologies in tourism education, this research contributes to the discourse on purposeful, meaningful, and competency-driven education in tourism and hospitality management.

Keywords: sustainable event evaluation, system dynamics, Causal Loop Diagrams (CLD), Multi-Criteria Decision Analysis (MCDA), DEXI, tourism education, decision support, green competencies

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SERIOUS GAMING IN TOURISM PLATFORMISATION RESEARCH: DEVELOPMENT OF A SYSTEM DYNAMICS MODEL

Blaž Rodič (University of Maribor, Faculty of Tourism), Maja Turnšek (University of Maribor, Faculty of Tourism), Maja Breznik (Peace Institute) and Jerneja Šavrič (University of Maribor, Faculty of Tourism)

Abstract. This conference contribution focuses on the development process of a system Dynamics model intended to be used for serious gaming in the context of a tourism platformisation research project. The project is focused on platformisation in tourism for which there is accessible data for Slovenia and the EU 27 countries. Our preliminary findings related to the development of the model point to the need for inclusion of several domain experts in the identification of relevant variables and other elements in the modelled systems and the inconsistent availability of statistical data necessary for model calibration, while the findings regarding model results indicate that given the current conditions in the labour market, the process of platformisation is likely to expand. Methods used in the model development include search and analysis of secondary data sources (statistical data, industry reports), brainstorming, causal influence diagram development, and System Dynamics modelling methodology. In conclusion, the developed model can be used to inform further project development and be adapted for serious gaming with inclusion of stakeholders or in the context of related university courses.

Keywords: tourism industry, labour relations, platformisation, simulation modelling, System Dynamics

A SYSTEMS THINKING APPROACH TO CLIMATE ACTION IN TOURISM DESTINATIONS

Kyriaki Glyptou (Senior Lecturer, Leeds Beckett University), Elisa Burrai (Senior Lecturer, Leeds Beckett University), Jane Turner (Research Associate, Leeds Trinity University) and Chris Cooper (Professor, Leeds Beckett University)

Abstract. This study employs a systems thinking perspective to critically examine the effectiveness of climate action planning in tourism destinations. Specifically, it investigates how the five Glasgow Pathways—Measure, Decarbonise, Regenerate, Collaborate, and Finance—are reflected in destination-level climate action plans (CAPs), and seeks to identify the systemic enablers and barriers influencing their development and implementation.

By adopting a flexible understanding of the term "action plans," the research intentionally moves beyond rigid, top-down institutional frameworks. This approach allows for the inclusion of both formal strategies and informal, bottom-up practices, enabling a broader and more nuanced examination of how climate action is conceptualised and enacted at the destination level.

Grounded in Systems Theory, this study positions systems thinking as a valuable paradigm for addressing the complexity of climate change—a quintessential "wicked problem." Systems thinking offers a holistic lens to integrate biophysical, social, and economic dimensions of destination climate responses. It also highlights the importance of understanding adaptation and mitigation efforts within the broader context of system transitions, where unintended consequences, feedback loops, and limits to adaptation must be considered.

A mixed-method qualitative methodology was employed. Primary data were collected between March 2022 and June 2023. The empirical phase included 17 one-on-one online interviews with representatives from a diverse sample of destination management organisations (DMOs), spanning national, regional, and local scales. To foster dialogue across different contexts, seven additional group interviews were held with 12 participants. A final focus group was conducted in June 2023 with 12 participants from eight destinations, all of whom had taken part in earlier stages of the research, to discuss and reflect on the preliminary findings.

The findings reveal a series of recurring systemic barriers. These include the absence of clear and context-relevant climate policy and regulation; limited funding and technical resources; lack of clarity regarding the roles and mandates of DMOs; low climate literacy; and fragmented data systems and measurement tools. These challenges collectively hinder the capacity of destinations to design, implement, and evaluate meaningful climate actions.

Conversely, several enabling factors were identified. These include a clearly defined mandate and dedicated funding for climate action; supportive governance structures that integrate climate priorities into broader planning frameworks; effective partnerships and communication mechanisms across stakeholders; and investment in capacity building and climate education. Together, these elements support a more cohesive, informed, and inclusive approach to climate planning.

The study concludes by identifying key areas where destination-level climate action can be strengthened. These include the provision of clear guidance for CAP development, improved communication and terminology around climate goals, mechanisms for knowledge exchange and peer learning, and clarification of stakeholder responsibilities. By applying systems thinking, the research contributes to a deeper understanding of the structural and relational dimensions that shape climate action in tourism, offering insights for both policymakers and practitioners seeking to accelerate progress in this critical area.

Reference:
Glyptou, K., Burrai, E., Turner, J. and Cooper, C. (2023) Tourism Destination

Climate Action: the Enabling Environment. Leeds Beckett University and Travel Foundation Project Report.

Keywords: climate change, systems thinking, climate action planning, enablers, barriers

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HOW TO ADDRESS THE DIFFICULT QUESTIONS OF CLIMATE CHANGE MITIGATION IN TOURISM HIGHER EDUCATION?

Maja Turnšek (University of Maribor, Faculty of Tourism)

Abstract. This is first a discussion paper on purposeful and meaningful tourism and hospitality education in the world of climate change. Specifically, we ask ourselves how to teach future travel professionals on the interrelation between climate change, tourism and geopolitics? In a nutshell, we argue that envisioning "good travel" is an essential element of teaching on climate change in tourism, but it cannot be done in isolation from the broader social dilemmas and with only technical enumerations of possible mitigation measures. The issues are complex and include critical thinking and value-led teaching. It is not enough to help the students grasp the technical knowledge on carbon footprint of various tourist activities and appropriate technical measures of carbon footprint mitigation (e.g. Turnšek et al. 2024, Turnšek & Pogačar, 2024). We need to find ways to tackle head on the essential dilemmas that grow out of awareness that avoidance to carbon footprint in tourism strictly speaking means no travelling or travelling less. Is teaching about the pragmatic middle options, such as "avoid more trips and instead replace them with one longer and in this way avoiding the carbon footprint of several transports to travel destinations" a good enough solution? Is it ethical to teach about climate change and tourism without addressing climate justice and geopolitical grievances of the current affairs? How to address the issue of climate anxiety of our students on the one hand and their (and ours) correlated need to avoid thinking about the problem altogether? And most importantly, how to think about tourism and climate change in a non-isolated way: for example, as Soper (2023) argues, envisioning changes in the way we travel cannot be isolated from envisioning changes in the way we consume and work: have time for slow, low-carbon travel, including decent work in tourism (e.g. (Bianchi and de Man 2021). In other words, tourism climate mitigation cannot be rethought without considering the societal structuring, which asks a lot from the tourism students and their educators. Finally, the paper is also a tourism educators' practical paper: we conclude with a practical exercise on building a curriculum on climate change mitigation and tourism at a masters' level, following the presented dilemmas and the GreenComp - The European sustainability competence framework (G. Bianchi, Pisiotis, and Cabrera Giraldez 2022).

Keywords: higher education, tourism, climate change mitigation

PANEL 4

INNOVATION, BUSINESS, AND DIGITAL TOOLS IN TOURISM EDUCATION

UTILISING KNOWLEDGE THROUGH CASE STUDY COMPETITIONS

Branka Novčić Korać (Faculty of Organizational Sciences, University of Belgrade)

Abstract. The aim of this paper is to present how case study competitions can serve as intensive learning playground for students. By examining students' experiences from three global case study competition this paper brings new insights into learning process. Through qualitative inquiry of team leaders and students' mentors case study methodology is explored in-depth. The participants outlined the most important outcomes from learning through case study competitions: intensive learning, acquiring knowledge more effectively, critical thinking, problem solving, analytical, presentational and team work skills. The most important finding suggests that students who went through case study competitions were gaining a deeper understanding of business fields such as consulting, oil and gas, social entrepreneurship, etc. These findings suggest case study competitions are a viable tool for higher education educators as a tool for students in preparing them for competitive work environments.

Keywords: case study competitions, case study methodology, students, intensive learning, higher education

HOW A SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW OF GASTRO-TOURISM RESEARCH EDUCATES STAKEHOLDERS

Leila Klila (School of Hospitality and Business Management- UM6P) and Helena Williams (School of Hospitality and Business Management- UM6P)

Abstract.
This systematic literature review delves into the many-sided landscape of gastro-tourism research, aiming to comprehensively understand its current state and future directions to benefit academic and practical stakeholders. By analyzing 85 peer-reviewed articles through the lens of an integrated framework for tourism, this review reveals the predominant themes, theoretical foundations, methodological approaches, and significant gaps in the existing research.
The findings cast light on the fact that gastro-tourism research is primarily guided by theories centered on the Experience Economy, Cultural Identity, Stakeholders, Memorable Tourism Experiences (MTE), Authenticity, Co-creation, and Sustainable Tourism Development. The review identifies key predictors of gastro-tourism, such as tourists' characteristics and Practices, including cultural interests and their perceived quality of local cuisine. Additionally, it highlights the outcomes of gastro-tourism, including the economic and quality of life benefits it brings to local communities and the important role it plays in cultural preservation.
Importantly, the review emphasizes the need for further research in this field, particularly highlighting the criticality of conducting geographically diverse studies, longitudinal research as well as comparative studies. These future research directions would allow for a deeper understanding of the long-term impacts of gastro-tourism and provide valuable insights for stakeholders involved in transforming Tourism and Hospitality development and promotion.

Keywords: Gastro-tourism, Sustainable tourism development, Memorable tourism experiences (MTE), Co-creation, Cultural preservation, Stakeholder dynamics, Tourism research gaps, Tourism Education

THE IMPACT OF VERBAL AND NONVERBAL IMMEDIACY PRACTICES ON ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENTS OF ONLINE STUDENTS

Saqib Hussain (The university of Ljubljana, Ljubljana, Slovenia), Zaheer Ahmad (Allama Iqbal Open University, Islamabad), Rashid Mehmood (Beaconhouse School Systems, Islamabad, Pakistan), Sara Kremsar and Suzana Grobelšek

Abstract. This study investigated the various aspects of verbal and nonverbal teacher immediacy and its impact on academic achievement of students in the evolving online learning environment during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study employed a quasi-experimental, non-equivalent control group post-test quantitative methodology with students enrolled in a master of education program. A random sample of 150 students was drawn from a total population of 40,500, using a cluster random sampling. Students were divided into two groups, experimental and control, each with 75 participants. The control group received regular online education, while the experimental group was exposed to a variety of verbal and nonverbal immediacy strategies. Nonverbal immediacy included employing video conferencing equipment to create gestures, facial expressions, and eye contact, whereas verbal immediacy involved offering students individualized comments, mentioning their names, and enhancing their involvement. Academic achievement of students was determined by using independent sample t- test using SPSS version 20 on results of subjective questions which were administered to both groups. The data revealed significant differences in learning outcomes, with the experimental group performing better. The findings indicated how teacher immediacy techniques can help students learn and interact in online learning environments. The study's findings suggest that combining immediacy methods into online training may significantly enhance student performance. Future research should investigate how immediacy influences students' knowledge retention over the long term in various educational environments.

Keywords: Teacher immediacy, online education, student learning outcomes

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LET'S GET DIGITAL: SELF-EVALUATION OF DIGITAL KNOWLEDGE OF SLOVENIAN STUDENTS OF TOURISM

Eva Podovšovnik (University of Primorska, Faculty for Tourism Studies)

Abstract. Introduction:
At the beginning of the 21st century, we are seeing an extremely great practical importance of new technologies, which are also changing people's traditional ideas about the necessary knowledge and competencies for survival, for work and for life in general.
Individuals must be able to transfer the knowledge and skills they have acquired in the course of education to their home (personal) and professional spheres and to the community in which they live. These environments are constantly changing. Students thus need to be equipped with skills that will enable them to transfer knowledge from the learning situation to the life situation. Some of the knowledge and skills acquired during the course of education may not have clear and understandable effects for the individual, especially in the work sphere.
Digital knowledge can be seen as a »set of skills for professional and personal development in the digital economy« (Ilomäki et al., 2016, Cahen, Borini, 2019, Ferrari et al., 2012).
Method:
We conducted a web survey among students of tourism in Slovenia. The survey was accessible for students in June 2022. 136 students completed the questionnaire. 81 % of them were females, and 19 % of them were males. Their average age was 25 years. 39 % of them were enrolled in the university program, 34,6 % of them were postgraduate students, and 26,5 % of them were enrolled in the college program.
Findings:
Respondents were asked to evaluate their digital knowledge, on a scale from 1 (completely disagree) to 7 (completely agree), the following statements:
- I have enough knowledge to manage the digital resources.
- I quickly understand the environments or usage logics used by the different digital media.
- I develop reflective thinking through digital media.
- I use my knowledge about digital resources to facilitate my activities, tasks or academic work, work, family, social, among others.
- I constantly evaluate my knowledge about the use of digital media.

The median value was 6 (they agree) in all cases, except for the agreement with the statement that they constantly evaluate their knowledge about the use of digital media, where the median value was 5 (somewhat agree). However, no statistically significant differences were found in regarding to respondents' age, gender, and their level of study.
Conclusions:
Digital knowledge plays an important role in the education of future workers in tourism. As such, students of tourism express their expertise in the domain. They are aware of the role of digital media and use them carefully, with reflective thinking. They also see them as facilitators in their everyday life. They are self-confident regarding their digital knowledge.

Keywords: students of tourism, digital knowledge, education

MAPPING SPA INNOVATION ECOSYSTEMS – COMPARATIVE CASE STUDY OF BALARUC-LES-BAINS, DAX, CIECHOCINEK AND BUSKO-ZDRÓJ

Paweł Stelmach (University of Physical Culture in Krakow), Paweł Rąpała (University of Physical Culture in Krakow), Sylwia Nejman (University of Physical Culture in Krakow), Daria Turaczyk (University of Physical Culture in Krakow), Bartosz Adamik (University of Physical Culture in Krakow) and Emilia Mazur (Ignatianum University in Cracow)

Abstract. Aim. To identify and explain the scope of diversity of spa innovation ecosystems against the background of knowledge, entrepreneurship and business ecosystems.
Research questions. 1) What are the causes and effects of the scope of diversity of spa innovation ecosystems against the background of other strategic management ecosystems? 2) What are the opportunities and challenges related to knowledge exchange and co-creation of spa products in innovation ecosystems?
Introduction. A potential factor in the success of spas is the management of innovation ecosystems based on the development of network cooperation in the field of basic research in the area of natural cures and related implementation research leading to the development of therapeutical services. In order to increase the attendance of spa guests and thus the attendance of tourists, new forms of spa treatment are necessary. Internal and external entrepreneurship, referring to the co-creation of innovations in the area of spa treatment products, an element of which is the determination to find new applications of natural therapeutical raw materials, plays a greater role in the development of the spa network than the abundance of natural therapeutical raw materials and spa tradition.
Method. Comparative in-depth case study (benchmarking) of some of the most popular spas (over 30 thousand patients) in France (Balaruc-les-Bains and Dax) and Poland (Ciechocinek and Busko-Zdrój) using conceptual models compared with secondary sources.
Findings. Two global spa associations (FEMTEC, ISMH) and a foundation operating in the EU (FoRST) were examined, as well as the regional spa ecosystem in Auvergne, France, and it was found that they only fulfil the function of an innovation ecosystem for spas to a limited extent, being rather knowledge ecosystems. Only the first stage of the co-innovation process, i.e. co-discovery, was identified in them, while the stages of co-development, co-deployment, co-delivery and co-dissemination were not detected. In creating the cluster, the spa sector of Auvergne decided on incremental innovations (catching up), using a tool already tested by other regions and sectors of the economy. However, it was also decided to use radical (surpassing) innovations by promoting process and even social innovations in order to expand their markets and gain more customers.
Conclusion. Knowledge on how to develop innovation ecosystems and R&D networks and effective co-creation of innovations contributes to the contemporary development of spas. The mechanisms of accelerating interaction and information flow within network structures based on universities conducting research in the area of innovative spa products are crucial. It is necessary to integrate cooperation between all stakeholders in the development of spa innovation ecosystems, especially universities, industry associations, experts and managers of destinations and spa enterprises. The development of further stages of the co-innovation process determines the directions for the identification and development of spa innovation ecosystems. Universities, becoming part of the ecosystems of tourist destinations, take up the opportunities and challenges of knowledge exchange, which allows for the co-creation of curricula based on interactions with the industry in the process of co-production of innovation.

Keywords: spas, knowledge ecosystems, innovation ecosystems, co-innovation, co-creation

PREPARING FUTURE PROFESSIONALS: EVALUATING SUSTAINABILITY INTEGRATION IN TOURISM EDUCATION

Denis Prevolšek (University of Rijeka, Faculty of Tourism and Hospitality Management & Valamar Riviera Poreč), Hermina Maras Benassi (Univerza Primorska, Turistica) and Tea Golja (Juraj Dobrila University of Pula, Faculty of Economics and Tourism 'Dr. Mijo Mirković ")

Abstract. Sustainability has become a fundamental pillar in the tourism and hospitality industry, shaping policies, business practices, and educational curricula worldwide. As tourism professionals are increasingly expected to integrate sustainable practices into their work, tourism education must evolve to equip students with the necessary knowledge, skills, and competencies. This study explores students' perceptions of sustainability in tourism education, assessing their understanding of key sustainability concepts, the adequacy of their coursework in preparing them for sustainable tourism careers, and their views on the most emphasized and relevant aspects of sustainability in their academic programs.

Using a survey-based approach, this study collected data from undergraduate and graduate students enrolled in tourism and/or hospitality programs at a higher education institution. The survey was designed to measure students' self-reported understanding of sustainability, their exposure to sustainability-related topics in coursework, and their perceptions of how well their education aligns with the needs of a sustainable tourism industry. A combination of Likert scale, multiple-choice, and open-ended questions was used to provide both quantitative and qualitative insights into students' attitudes and experiences.

Preliminary findings suggest that while students recognize the importance of sustainability in tourism, their levels of understanding vary. A significant portion of respondents indicated familiarity with key sustainability concepts, such as environmental conservation, responsible tourism, and corporate social responsibility. However, many students expressed uncertainty about the practical application of sustainability principles in real-world tourism settings. This highlights a potential gap between theoretical knowledge and practical implementation in the curriculum.

In terms of coursework coverage, students reported that environmental sustainability—such as reducing carbon footprints, minimizing waste, and promoting eco-tourism—receives more emphasis than social and economic sustainability. Additionally, some respondents noted that sustainable business models, ethical tourism practices, and policy frameworks were not adequately addressed in their programs.

A key concern among students was the extent to which their education prepares them for careers in sustainable tourism. Many respondents expressed a desire for more hands-on experiences, case studies, and collaborations with industry professionals to bridge the gap between classroom learning and practical application. They also indicated interest in micro-credentials or certifications in sustainability that could enhance their employability in the evolving tourism sector.

The study's findings have significant implications for curriculum development in tourism education. As the industry moves toward more sustainable practices, higher education institutions must ensure their programs align with industry demands and equip students with the necessary competencies. This could involve integrating experiential learning opportunities, fostering partnerships with sustainable tourism organizations, and offering specialized courses or certifications in sustainability.

This research highlights the need for a more comprehensive and applied approach to sustainability education in tourism programs. By addressing the gaps identified by students, institutions can enhance their curricula to produce graduates who are not only knowledgeable about sustainability but also capable of implementing sustainable solutions in the tourism and hospitality industry. Future research should explore how specific pedagogical strategies, such as problem-based learning and industry collaborations, can further enhance students' preparedness for sustainable tourism careers.

Keywords: Sustainability, Tourism Education, Hospitality Industry, Curriculum Development, Student Perceptions

A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF SUSTAINABLE TOURISM MANAGEMENT FRAMEWORK IN MARITIME AREAS WITHIN THE WB REGION. THE IMPACT ON EDUCATION

Ermelinda Kordha (Associate Professor, Department of Marketing and Tourism, Faculty of Economy, University of Tirana) and Klodiana Gorica (Professor, Department of Marketing and Tourism, Faculty of Economy, University of Tirana)

Abstract. The competitiveness of the tourism sector in regional market depends on the quality of tourist destinations, including the quality of environment, and not only. Based in good planning and management, tourism can be a positive force, bringing wider benefits to all in destinations, but if poorly planned and managed, it caused degradation. It is a focus of tourism sector and in the interest of the communities, to maintain and sustain the basis for the prosperity and the sustainable development of destination itself.
The issue of tourism area and maritime management are seen as key factors for tourism development in Albania. Combining the term sustainable with tourism, the latter must take-on the environmental, economic and social considerations and principles that are inherent within the former. To achieve sustainable development, and especially in maritime regions, it is necessary, not only to identify the main causes of environmental degradation, to assess the damage scale, trying to find reasonable solutions to reduce its negative impacts on economic and social life of communities, but include those issues and cases in tourism education, for achieving better tourism management in the future.
The idea and concept of a sustainable alternative tourism form of development in maritime areas is not quite new around the world, but for sure is a huge potential for countries like Albania, which has an enormous potential in conditions that allow to develop and expand maritime sustainable tourism product. The analyses will be one with context of Western Balkan Countries using a qualitative approach in relation to research methods. 20 Interviews are managed through online meetings with stakeholders, in relation to maritime tourism management framework and education institutions within tourism management programs.
For realizing the desired effects of ST as an important type of tourism related to the rural area, effects related to the increase of tourists, regional economic growth and employment, there is need for an a detailed analyze for ensuring taking into consideration all the strength while the efforts will be orient to forces the weakness as well as taking into consideration the opportunities and having a carefully approach to weakness.
All the article will be a critical analysis that how maritime tourism as part of the blue economy need to be managed to brings sustainability in our region, and to impact the strengthening of tourism education, with further detailed analyses on sustainable tourism products within sustainable growth.

Keywords: Sustainable Tourism, Maritime Tourism, Tourism education, Tourism Management Framework, Western Balkans

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THE ROLE OF ESP AND DIGITAL TOOLS IN DEVELOPING BUSINESS COMMUNICATION SKILLS FOR FUTURE TOURISM SPECIALISTS

Maja Rončević (Singidunum University) and Gordana Dobrijević (Singidunum University)

Abstract. In an increasingly globalized world, tourism professionals require not only domain-specific knowledge but also advanced communication skills to navigate complex business environments. This paper explores the intersection of English for Specific Purposes (ESP), business communication, and digital tools to prepare future tourism specialists for the demands of the evolving industry.

The study highlights the importance of integrating ESP into tourism education as a means to enhance language proficiency and communication skills tailored to contemporary industry needs. The research also emphasizes the role of digital tools and technologies in enhancing both linguistic competence and digital literacy. By combining ESP instruction with technology, educators can create dynamic, learner-centered approaches that address the challenges of modern tourism and hospitality contexts. Additionally, the paper examines how business communication can be cultivated in tourism students through the use of scenario-based learning, simulations, and real-world case studies. The integration of these techniques not only strengthens students' language abilities but also prepares them to effectively engage with international clients, colleagues, and stakeholders in a professional capacity.

The research was conducted on a sample of students in higher education with the aim of analyzing students' overall perception of integrating ESP with digital tools to develop business communication skills in the context of tourism and hospitality. Thus, the study aimed to understand how digital tools enhance the learning experience, particularly in preparing students for the professional demands of the tourism and hospitality sectors. The findings indicate that the integration of ESP with digital tools has a significant impact on improving communication skills tailored to industry-specific needs. Students highlighted the advantages of using digital tools that provide realistic practice opportunities, enabling them to simulate professional communication scenarios. Furthermore, digital tools offered students access to a variety of materials, which helped them understand the practical applications of business communication in a real-world tourism setting.

The research findings are intended to provide educators and stakeholders with actionable insights on how to align tourism education with industry demands while leveraging the potential of emerging technologies. This approach supports the development of sustainable, globally relevant tourism competencies, ultimately contributing to the advancement of the field. The analysis identified both the advantages and challenges of incorporating digital tools into ESP for tourism education. Key benefits included fostering interactivity, enabling realistic practice through simulated business scenarios, and combining the development of technical proficiency with language acquisition. On the other hand, challenges such as unequal access to technology, varying levels of digital literacy among students, and the need to balance task complexity were also highlighted. These findings emphasize the importance of designing inclusive, adaptable learning activities aligned with educational objectives to ensure all students benefit from digital tools.

In response to these findings, the paper offers practical recommendations for enhancing the design and delivery of ESP courses in tourism education. In conclusion, the research demonstrates that integrating digital tools into ESP not only strengthens students' business communication skills but also equips them with the confidence and competencies needed to meet the demands of the tourism sector.

Keywords: Business Communication, ESP, Digital Tools, Tourism Education

PANEL 5

TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING AND COMPETENCIES FOR THE FUTURE

CREATING MEANINGFUL AND PURPOSEFUL LEARNING EXPERIENCES - EMPOWERING TOURISM STUDENTS TO BEHAVE AS GLOBAL CITIZENS

Ziene Mottiar (TU Dublin)

Abstract. Introduction. The world in which our graduates will live, work and play is very different to what has gone before. Many global challenges face the world and although the SDGs provide us with a vision of how to address these issues, it has been argued that we 'lack the inner capacity to deal with our increasingly complex environment and challenges' (https://www.innerdevelopmentgoals.org/). Furthermore, Hickman et al (2021) show that more than half of those aged 18-24 suffer from climate anxiety and feel distress and powerless. As educators of future generations these issues are a key concern: how do we have impact to effect change, and how do we empower students to identify and develop their knowledge, capabilities and passion to contribute to the transformation of tourism and the world around them. Global citizenship plays a fundamental role in achieving the SDGs and giving citizens power, this paper analyzes a teaching and learning strategy developed to incite global citizenship among tourism students.

Methods

This paper will firstly describe the approaches that were taken in the Global Citizenship and Tourism module, offered in TU Dublin, in terms of content, assessment and engagement strategies. The objective was for students to design experiences to help conscious and regenerative tourists to identify ways in which they could visit Dublin city and leave a positive impact. They learnt about global citizenship, global challenges, responsible and regenerative tourists and global values. We then co-created together as global citizens, using design thinking and teamwork, to develop innovative solutions to address the knowledge gap for these types of tourists. The data used for this paper comprises of 49 reflections of participants of the module in 2023/24 and 2024/25. This rich qualitative data is analyzed in depth providing insight into the learning experience, but also the future implications on perspectives and outlook.

Findings/Discussion

The students' reflections show that they feel more empowered and have identified how they can take action, for example one participant said: 'after talking about sustainability and regenerative approaches I also now understand that I can make a difference'. Another commented that 'it pushes me to think differently than I might have otherwise'. Insights from student reflections will be used in this paper to highlight the impact that this exercise has had on students' perspectives and sense of power and how they see it affecting them in the future.

Conclusion

Modules such as this are important as they provide the possibility of transformational change, both within the individual and tourism more broadly. Tourism education has to be purposeful and meaningful, and it needs to react to the world that we are in and the needs of future generations. At a time when so many feel powerless and anxious about the future, it is important that tourism programmes provide opportunities for students to behave as global citizens and have an impact. The learning from these experiences go beyond assessments and grades, they have the potential to create global citizens who will harness their knowledge and skills to effect change.

Keywords: Global citizenship, Tourism education, Design thinking, SDGs and tourism education

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THE FUTURE OF CAREERS IN TOURISM: A SHIFT FROM SERVICE DELIVERY TO EXPERIENCE CREATION

Mitja Gorenak (University of Maribor, Faculty of tourism)

Abstract. The tourism industry is experiencing a fundamental transformation of its core. The traditional approach of simply providing accommodation, food, and various services is rapidly giving way to a new paradigm focused on creating experience, that are memorable but not just that, they are also meaningful experiences. This shift represents more than just a change in service delivery style but rather a complete rethinking of how tourism professionals approach their work.

Modern travelers seek authentic experiences that connect them with local cultures, traditions, and environments. They want more than just a comfortable bed or a good meal; they want stories to tell, moments to remember, and experiences that transform them. This transformation requires tourism professionals to develop new skills and perspectives. Where once it was enough to master standard operating procedures and service protocols, tourism workers today must become experience designers, storytellers, and cultural interpreters.

The evolution from service delivery to experience creation demands a complete reimagining of workforce development strategies. Future tourism employees need training that goes beyond traditional hospitality skills. They must understand the principles of experience design, master the art of storytelling, and develop strong cultural awareness. Digital skills are becoming increasingly important as technology plays a larger role in enhancing and personalizing guest experiences.

This shift is also creating new career opportunities within the industry. Roles such as experience designers, cultural mediators, and sustainability coordinators are becoming increasingly common. These positions require professionals who can think creatively, understand guest psychology, and craft experiences that resonate on an emotional level. Digital experience curators are needed to seamlessly blend technology with physical experiences, while environmental specialists ensure that tourism activities remain sustainable and responsible.

The incoming Generation Z workforce brings fresh perspectives to these evolving roles. Their natural understanding of digital technologies and authentic concern for sustainability align well with the industry's new direction. Tourism organizations must adapt to attract and retain this talent by creating meaningful work environments that encourage innovation and creativity while providing clear development paths.

By embracing this transition from service delivery to experience creation, the tourism industry can ensure its continued relevance and appeal to both travelers and career seekers. Success in future tourism careers will depend on the ability to understand and implement these new approaches while maintaining the human touch that remains at the heart of hospitality. The future belongs to those who can transform simple services into extraordinary experiences, creating value for both visitors and destinations alike.

Keywords: careers, tourism, Generation Z, experience design, experience creation

EXPLORING THE ROLE OF PERCEIVED SAFETY AND HYGIENE IN CONSUMER'S INTENTION TO USE ROBOT-DELIVERED HOSPITALITY SERVICES

Kayode Kolawole Eluwole (Masaryk University), Taiwo Temitope Lasisi (University of Hradec Králové) and Omar Parvez (Florida State University)

Abstract. The integration of robotic services in the hospitality industry has gained significant attention, particularly in the context of safety and hygiene, which have become paramount concerns for tourists in the wake of global health crises. This study investigates the factors influencing tourists' intentions to use hotel service robots, with a focus on perceived safety, health awareness, and service assurance. Drawing on the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), the research examines how these factors shape personal engagement and, ultimately, the intention to adopt robotic services in hospitality settings.

Using a purposive sampling technique, data were collected from 275 participants with prior experience in robotic services via the Prolific platform. Structural equation modeling (SEM) was employed to analyze the data, revealing that perceived robotic safety and service assurance significantly positively impact personal engagement. Specifically, guests who perceive robots as safe and reliable are more likely to engage with them, leading to a higher intention to use robotic services. However, health awareness did not show a significant effect on personal engagement, suggesting that while safety and reliability are critical, health-related information may not be a primary driver of engagement with robotic services.

The findings also highlight the mediating role of personal engagement in the relationship between perceived safety, service assurance, and the intention to use robotic services. This underscores the importance of fostering trust and confidence in robotic systems through consistent performance and effective communication of safety features. Notably, female guests exhibited a higher preference for robotic services, indicating potential gender differences in the acceptance of technology in hospitality settings.

This study offers several implications for hoteliers. First, enhancing perceived robotic safety is crucial for increasing guest acceptance. Hoteliers should prioritize clear communication of the security features and capabilities of robots, ensuring guests feel safe and secure during their interactions. Second, investing in high levels of service assurance—such as reliability, responsiveness, and consistent performance—can foster trust and confidence in robotic systems. Regular maintenance, software updates, and staff training are essential to maintaining these standards. Third, hoteliers should implement strategies to enhance personal engagement with robotic services, such as providing interactive features, personalized assistance, and opportunities for guests to learn about and interact with robots. Training staff to effectively assist guests in using these systems can further enhance guest satisfaction and confidence.

This study contributes to the growing body of literature on human-robot interaction by emphasizing the role of perceived safety and service assurance in shaping user attitudes and behaviors. It also offers practical implications for hoteliers, suggesting that investments in reliable and safe robotic systems, coupled with strategies to enhance guest interaction, can significantly improve the adoption of robotic services. Future research should explore these dynamics in diverse cultural contexts and examine the long-term effects of robotic service integration on customer satisfaction and loyalty.

Keywords: Customer experience, Personal engagement, Robotic safety and hygiene, Customers, Intentions

TRANSFORMATIVE EXPERIENCES: FROM AN EDUCATIONAL LEARNING ORIGIN TO TOURISM OFFERINGS

Mo Khogali (University of Eastern Finland (UEF), Tourism Business research group)

Abstract. Transformative Learning in Education:
All individuals have their place in the world and views about it that originate from various sources. These include life experiences, education knowledge, cultural beliefs, and social influences formed throughout developmental years (Harris et al.,2018).
John Mezirow described learning as the process of making a new or revised interpretation of an experience that guides subsequent comprehension, appreciation, and actions; France, 2018). This led him to develop a critical constructivist theory called the Transformative Learning Theory (TLT) that examines how we understand existing reference frames and alter our beliefs (Mezirow, 2000; Dutta,2021) and its phases are presented in Figure (1).
Further, Mezirow's theory developments yielded a simplified version containing four main phases: experience, critical Reflection, reflective discourse, and action (Kitchenham, 2006), which are explained below and represented in Figure (2).
A. Experience: this is where the process begins, and everyone goes through experiences they process and learn from.
B. Critical Reflection: processing of the experience which is a cognitive process to reflect and examine underlying beliefs and assumptions which affect how to make sense of the experience.
C. Reflective Discourse (dialogue): being open and objective to analyze the experience and internally categorize it.
D. Action: this can be immediately delayed or just confirmation of previously held beliefs
Transformative Experiences in Tourism:
Recently, tourism literature has started to examine the role of transformations in tourist decision-making processes (Teoh et al., 2021; Huang et al., 2024). Consumers leave their familiar 'bubble' and encounter profound discoveries through cognitive, emotional, and bodily processes (Pung et al., 2020). This desire for meaningful, reflective, and impactful travel experiences can drive individuals to embark on transformative journeys (Soulard et al., 2021).
Tourism contexts linkage to transformative expereices was examined by Pung et al. (2020) in an article that evaluated the transformative potential of various tourism contexts based on the findings of Reisinger (2013, pp.25-32) who stated that alternative tourism rather than mass or business tourism offers more profound transformative experiences potential. Examples include nature-based, ecotourism, backpacking, wellness, religious, educational, and volunteer tourism that all can trigger transformative outcomes.
Transformative experience outcomes (known as changes or gains) can be minor (such as physical body changes or skill development in endurance and transiency) or major (profound psychological shifts in attitudes, values, or beliefs) (Teoh et al., 2021). These changes can either be tangible (external bodily changes or skill gains) or intangible (psychological shifts) (Fu et al., 2015). They also can be recognized immediately (in situ cognition) or may demand post-experience cognition to identify impacts on consumers.
Objectives:
This conceptual study aims to evaluate the applicability of the Transformative Learning Theory, that originated in education, to tourism transformative experiences. It intends to compare similarities and differences during both the transformative process and outcomes between educational contexts and tourism contexts (with emphasis on those that have been shown to trigger transformation such as education tourism).

Keywords: Transformative Experiences, Transformative Learning Theory, Transformative Process, Transformative Outcomes, Education Tourism

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SUSTAINABLE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN MOUNTAIN HUTS: EDUCATIONAL STRATEGIES TO TACKLE CHALLENGES AND FINDING OPPORTUNITIES

Tomi Špindler (University of Maribor, Faculty of Tourism) and Nejc Pozvek (University of Maribor, Faculty of Tourism)

Abstract. Mountain huts are an essential part of tourism in mountainous regions, providing accommodation, food, and shelter for hikers while also contributing to local tourism economies. However, their operation presents a range of challenges, including workforce shortages, outdated infrastructure, high operational costs, and fluctuating visitor demand. Additionally, the evolving profile of visitors—shifting from traditional mountaineers to a broader group of tourists—has introduced new expectations for service quality and sustainability. In response to these challenges, there is a growing need for sustainable tourism product development, ensuring that mountain huts can adapt to market demands while preserving the natural and cultural heritage of mountain environments. This study aims to identify key operational challenges faced by mountain huts and, based on the results, develop an educational program to equip caretakers and members of mountaineering organisations with the necessary skills for sustainable management and tourism product innovation.

A structured questionnaire was distributed among mountain hut caretakers and mountaineering organizations to assess the current state of operations, primary challenges, and opportunities for improvement. The questionnaire responses covered multiple themes, including operational efficiency, sustainability, collaboration with stakeholders etc. Responses were analyzed to identify common trends and priority areas for intervention.

The findings indicate that while many huts are functioning adequately, there are significant operational difficulties that threaten their long-term sustainability. Key challenges include inefficient waste management, unreliable access to clean drinking water, rising energy costs, and logistical issues related to remote locations. Many caretakers also reported difficulties with foreign language communication, the implementation of digital tools for reservations and marketing, and the need for better collaboration with local tourism organizations. It was also identified that various needs arise from the diverse circumstances in which the huts are (geographical, managerial, etc.). While some huts already offer additional services such as guided tours, educational workshops, and events, many respondents expressed interest in further developing tourism products that align with sustainability principles. Specific training needs identified include environmental management, financial planning, hospitality, digital marketing, and compliance with legal and hygiene regulations.

Based on these insights, a targeted educational program was designed to support mountain hut caretakers in developing sustainable tourism products and improving overall management practices. The program emphasizes key competencies such as eco-friendly business models, optimizing operational efficiency, integrating local and traditional products into service offerings, and educating visitors on responsible behavior in mountain environments. Additionally, training in digital marketing aims to enhance the visibility and accessibility of mountain huts to international visitors. The program also encourages mountain huts to become active participants in regional tourism networks, creating diversified offerings that enhance visitor experiences while ensuring environmental sustainability.

The results of this study highlight the crucial role of continuous education in adapting mountain huts to contemporary tourism demands. By equipping caretakers with the skills and knowledge needed for sustainable tourism product development, the proposed educational program seeks to strengthen the resilience of mountain huts and ensure their long-term viability. This initiative not only benefits caretakers but also enhances the attractiveness and sustainability of mountain tourism destinations as a whole.

Keywords: Mountain hut, Sustainable Development, Mountain Tourism, Education

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FRACTAL DRAWING IN SUSTAINABLE TOURISM EDUCATION: PROMOTING FUTURE COMPETENCIES

Mihaela Kežman (Faculty of Tourism)

Abstract. Introduction: Sustainable tourism education does not focus solely on ecological aspects but also on competence development and the well-being of employees and tourists. The modern tourism industry faces challenges such as the need for soft skills, lifelong learning, and the adaptation of tourism services to an aging population. Fractal drawing, an artistic method that enhances cognitive abilities, reduces stress, and fosters creativity, offers an innovative solution for competence development in tourism. The aim of this paper is to explore how fractal drawing can contribute to the development of tourism professionals' competencies, improve the well-being of senior tourists, and promote sustainable education in the tourism industry.
Methods: The paper is based on a review of literature on sustainable tourism education, lifelong learning, and artistic methods for developing soft skills. Case studies of artistic techniques in competence development were analyzed, with a special focus on fractal drawing. Additionally, the psychological and cognitive benefits of fractal drawing and its applicability in educational processes for tourism employees and programs for senior tourists—who are becoming an increasingly important segment in the tourism industry—were examined.
Results: The literature review and case study analysis indicate that fractal drawing has several positive effects on participants in the tourism industry. For employees in tourism and hospitality, integrating fractal drawing into training contributes to the development of soft skills such as concentration, patience, creative problem-solving, and emotional resilience, which are key competencies for the future of the tourism industry. For senior tourists, it enhances cognitive abilities, reduces stress, promotes creativity and focus, and helps with relaxation, thereby improving the quality of their travel experiences. In the context of sustainable education, fractal drawing fosters a more holistic learning approach, combining art, well-being, and professional development in tourism. Furthermore, micro-credentials and digitalization provide opportunities for integrating fractal drawing into online courses and lifelong learning programs, which would enhance accessibility and promote the broader use of this method in the tourism industry.
Discussion: The analysis of results suggests that incorporating fractal drawing into tourism education could contribute to the development of sustainable competencies, improving the quality of work in tourism, and designing new tourism products for senior travelers. Despite its many advantages, certain challenges remain, such as the lack of formal integration of artistic techniques into tourism education, the need for further research on the long-term effects of fractal drawing, and the adaptation of digital learning formats to artistic methods.
Conclusion: Fractal drawing emerges as an innovative tool for sustainable tourism education, supporting soft skill development and enhancing the well-being of senior tourists. Its integration into tourism education programs and wellness tourism could lead to greater resilience among tourism employees, improved service quality, and the development of sustainable and inclusive tourism experiences. Further research and pilot programs are needed to systematically incorporate fractal drawing into tourism education curricula and tourism programs for seniors.

Keywords: fractal drawing, sustainable education, employees, senior tourists, competencies

PANEL 6

SUSTAINABILITY AND GREEN TOURISM EDUCATION

SUSTAINABLE VALUES TO EMBED IN SUSTAINABLE BUSINESS MODEL AND CURRICULUM COMPETENCES

Nevenka Maher (assoc. prof.)

Abstract. From 2025 enterprises are obliged to report about their business sustainability. The paper turns attention to economic, social and environmenal pillar of sustainable development as from the year 2025, enterprises are obliged to report about their business sustainability. That is why this paper turns attention to which values in their context to focus, to analyse their sustainable value not only for business but first of all for consumers. It is important these pillar values are understood and also agreed as all stakeholders together focus to businees goals. Also capacities are to be built for creation sustainable values, and their is increasing demand to focus entrepreneurial competences more in sustainable tourism context.
Within the tourism sector, the Social Development Goals should trace the way, that the civilisation aligns the nature. The XXI. century brings wars, after the financial crisis in 2008 the explosion of digitisation followed. As from COVID-19 crisis, all subjects (phisichal and juridical) are working in real and virtual world, answers to the following questions are important: In which way the concept of sustainability values has been realising? What are mostly identified charasteristics in three pillars' context?

Keywords: sustainable development goals, business model, value

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STUDENT EDUCATION IN TOURISM THROUGH VISITS TO PRESTIGIOUS ECO-GREEN TOURIST CENTERS: THE ROLE OF EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

Ivana Maric (University Juraj Dobrile of Pula)

Abstract. In recent decades, tourism and hospitality have undergone significant transformations driven by technological advancements, climate change, health crises, political instability, and shifts in tourist behavior. These factors demand new educational approaches that balance vocational and liberal education, emphasizing ethics, environmental awareness, and sustainability. This paper explores experiential learning in tourism education through student visits to prestigious tourist centers, where students gain firsthand insight into industry operations, the technology used, types of personnel, and the services offered.
The aim of this research is to analyze how such visits enrich the educational process and shape future tourism leaders who can address sustainability challenges and ecological demands within the industry. Through an analysis of survey results from students who participated in this type of education, the paper will present students' attitudes and opinions on the importance of this approach, their perception of environmental education, and its impact on their professional aspirations. Additionally, it will discuss how this form of education can contribute to the development of sustainable business models in tourism and hospitality, and how higher education can enhance its role in training leaders who understand the complexity of the industry and its environmental and societal impacts.

Keywords: Environmental, education experiential, learning sustainability, new technology, tourism leaders

SLOW TOURISM: AN INNOVATIVE APPROACH TO SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Sayeh Davoodi Ilkhechi (M.A. in Tourism Management, Faculty of Tourism, University of Tehran, Tehran, Iran) and Sajad Ferdowsi (Assistant Professor, Faculty of Tourism, University of Tehran, Tehran, Iran)

Abstract. Slow tourism, as an innovative approach to sustainable tourism development, emphasizes the quality of travel experiences, meaningful interactions with local communities, and environmental preservation, serving as an alternative to mass and high-impact tourism. This study aims to explore the role of slow tourism in achieving sustainable development goals and its impacts on environmental, economic, and socio-cultural dimensions. The research adopts a library-based methodology, utilizing secondary data from scientific articles, specialized books, and credible reports. Findings indicate that slow tourism contributes to environmental sustainability by encouraging the use of sustainable transportation, reducing carbon footprints, and preserving natural resources. Economically, this approach supports local businesses, creates sustainable employment opportunities, and promotes equitable income distribution within host communities. In terms of socio-cultural sustainability, slow tourism fosters the preservation of local identity, strengthens community pride, and enhances cultural exchanges between tourists and hosts. The study concludes that slow tourism, as an alternative to mass tourism, plays a significant role in achieving sustainable development goals. By integrating economic, social, and environmental dimensions, this approach not only enhances the travel experience for tourists but also ensures the preservation of natural and cultural resources for future generations. The development of slow tourism can contribute to the creation of an ethical, inclusive, and sustainable global tourism industry.

Keywords: Slow Tourism, Sustainable Development, Economic, Social, Environmental

RETHINKING TOURISM AND HOSPITALITY EDUCATION: INTEGRATING GREEN COMPETENCIES AND MICROCREDENTIALS FOR A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

Sajad Ferdowsi (Assistant Professor, Faculty of Tourism, University of Tehran, Tehran, Iran.) and Mohammadreza Salehi (M.A. in Tourism Management, Faculty of Tourism, University of Tehran, Tehran, Iran)

Abstract. This study investigates the need to reform tourism and hospitality education by integrating green competencies and micro-credentials for a sustainable future. The research methodology involves a literature review of academic articles, industry reports, and policy documents related to sustainable tourism education. The findings indicate that while some educational institutions offer elective courses in sustainable tourism, these are often fragmented and not systematically integrated into core curricula. Micro-credentials focusing on practical skills such as sustainable event management and ecotourism development demonstrate significant potential in addressing this gap. However, several barriers hinder their widespread adoption, including institutional resistance, lack of standardization, and employer skepticism regarding the value of these credentials. To maximize the effectiveness of micro-credentials, three key measures are proposed: (1) establishing global quality standards, (2) strengthening collaboration between universities and industry, and (3) securing financial and policy support from governments. Given the accelerating pace of climate change and shifting consumer expectations, educational systems must rapidly move away from traditional approaches and embed sustainability skills at the core of their curricula. This transformation can play a decisive role in shaping a sustainable future for the tourism industry. By embracing both green competencies and innovative credentialing systems, tourism education can produce professionals equipped not only with technical expertise but also with the sustainability mindset needed to drive meaningful change. The time for incremental adjustments has passed—bold, systemic reforms are now imperative to prepare future leaders capable of reimagining the industry for greater sustainability and resilience.

Keywords: Sustainable Tourism, Green Competencies, Microcredentials, Tourism Education, Knowledge Ecosystems

ENHANCING FAIRNESS, ACCOUNTABILITY, AND COLLABORATIVE LEARNING IN TOURISM EDUCATION

Kyriaki Glyptou (Senior Lecturer, School of Events, Tourism & Hospitality Management)

Abstract. Peer Assessment (PA) plays a pivotal role in university group work, nurturing a culture of fairness, accountability, collaboration, and personal growth. By evaluating their owns' and each other's contributions, students develop critical skills in constructive feedback, self-reflection, and teamwork—capabilities that are highly valued in both the academic and professional environment.

The purpose of PA was to establish a multi-layered approach in students' performance monitoring, through promoting students' ownership and accountability within group projects (Double, McGrane & Hopfenbeck, 2020). PA goes beyond the obvious recognition of individual efforts, which addresses the common student concerns of unequal engagement and workload distribution. PA fosters critical thinking and the appreciation of interpersonal skills, preparing students for collaborative professional environments. Most importantly, by engaging in reflective evaluation, students gain insights into their strengths and areas for improvement through the eyes and experience of their peers, enhancing their personal and academic development (Thomas, 2016).

Students are invited to evaluate themselves and their peers in a 5-Linkert Scale along the following criteria:

• COOPERATION: worked with the group to reach a consensus view and then abided by that consensus; worked with others to finish the assignment; compromised; did your assigned tasks and did not intrude on others' tasks.

• ATTENDANCE: were punctual; were prepared; turned up at all scheduled events; stayed for the whole meeting.

• CONTRIBUTION: made sure you delivered to the assigned group work; brought work back to the group by the deadline the group had set; did your fair share of the roles (e.g. chairing, editing, etc.)

• COMMUNICATION: listened to others' ideas; were contactable (responded to emails / answered your phone); was open to new ideas; included others in the discussion.

• EFFICIENCY: had good time management skills; met deadlines; stayed focused in meetings.

• DIVERSITY: respected the diversity of the group; embraced the opportunity of the group's diversity; used the group's talents and skills to the full; treated others in the group with respect. (http://www.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/-/media/files/student-hub/dignity-and-respect-network/dignityrespectleaflet.pdf)

• QUALITY: delivered good quality of work in terms of academic integrity (non-plagiarised); properly cited and referenced in accordance to the Quote-Unquote guidelines; used reliable academic sources; proof-read and edited work in respect to the assignment expectations.

Students have the option to propose additional group-established peer assessment criteria. The application of identical criteria for self and peer evaluation enhances students' self-reflection and peer understanding process.

Student feedback:

Peer Assessment made the workload feel more balanced. It was good to know that if someone wasn't contributing, it would reflect in their mark.

Knowing my peers would evaluate my work motivated me to stay on track and give my best effort. I want to be part of that team again.

Giving feedback to my peers was challenging at first, but it taught me how to communicate constructively and diplomatically.

Peer Assessment Criteria are essential for ensuring fairness, accuracy, and effectiveness in evaluating the work of peers. I suggest one more criterion should be the enjoyment of students. This should align closely with the learning objectives of the task/project.

Keywords: peer-assessment, student accountability, student ownership, collaborative learning, soft skills tourism

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ROLE OF AR IN DEVELOPING THE WILLINGNESS TO VISIT MUSEUMS: AN APPLICATION OF FLOW THEORY

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Abstract. In recent times, museum tourism has become quite popular. The origins of museum tourism date back to the early 20th century and were reliant on culture and history as the core elements of attraction (Turnšek & Kokot, 2025). With the increase in cultural tourism, the number of museums has also increased worldwide from 22,000 in 1975 to 95,000 (UNESCO, 2025). The unique cultural and historical attributes of museums are one of the critical reasons why they are booming in the current era (Hashim et al., 2014). Therefore, the concern about delivering an optimum visitor experience has gained significant attention and is vital for managers (Baldeón et al., 2025; Serravalle et al., 2019; Sheng & Chen, 2012).

With the advent of digitalization, cultural establishments are focusing more on technological innovation to enhance the visitor experience (Annechini et al., 2020; Khalil et al., 2024). From this perspective, museums are more inclined to adopt technological advancement by employing Augmented Reality (AR) as one of the key emerging technologies used to craft experiences as it establishes more interaction between the virtual and physical world. Many scholars have explored the role of AR in cultural establishments to evaluate the acceptance of this technology by tourists (Bretos et al., 2024; Salama & AAnter, 2025; Wang et al., 2024). The emphasis of these studies was to understand ways to attract and engage visitors and offer enriched experiences.

Our study aims to explore the role of AR technology attributes that provide potential visitors with a stimulating and enriching cultural experience that increases the likelihood of visitation. Augmented reality technology is a tool that augments the real world by incorporating computer-generated content into users' surroundings (Cibilić et al., 2021; Serravalle et al., 2019). Thus, museums providing potential tourists with AR demonstrations can impact their visitation likelihood. Our study further dwells on the psychological drivers for this proposition and investigates whether the attributes provided in the AR demonstrations can promote involvement and engagement for potential tourists. To address this concern, the study utilizes flow theory in the context of AR demos available on museum websites and apps. Flow represents an individual's overall feelings when fully engaged in an activity (Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; da Silva de Matos et al., 2021). When individuals are in flow, they intensely focus on what they are doing and enjoy the process rather than achieving a specific goal (Liu & Song, 2021). The application of flow theory has been demonstrated in various contexts, for instance, gambling, online gaming, and online shopping (Alan et al., 2022; Hyun et al., 2022; Wang & Hsiao, 2012)

This study intends to develop a framework that would test the attributes of AR demos and can develop flow among potential tourists that leads to an intention to visit. The study intends to test the framework as an experiment that considers tourists' familiarity and knowledge of AR. At the same time, we will test how the familiarity and knowledge of this new technology affect museum workers and what roles in museum work require upskilling.

Keywords: Augmented Reality, Tourist Experience, Flow theory, Museum Tourism

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TOWARDS SUSTAINABLE WELLNESS TOURISM EDUCATION: DEVELOPMENT OF A NEW EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMME FOR SPA CENTRES IN SLOVENIA

Katja Kokot (University of Maribor) and Milica Rančić Demir (University of Maribor)

Abstract. As global interest in sustainable wellness tourism continues to grow, the need for comprehensive education programmes that address industry-specific sustainability challenges becomes increasingly evident. This paper presents the development of a new short educational programme designed to equip spa managers with the knowledge and skills required to integrate sustainability principles into management. While existing wellness education programs focus on general management and service excellence, they often fail to address the need for a green transition in spa and wellness operations. Inefficient resource use and environmental pollution remain key concerns, with many modern wellness centres heavily reliant on nonrenewable energy sources and excessive freshwater consumption. Recognising these challenges, we designed an educational program aimed at fostering sustainability-oriented competencies among spa managers. The program's development was guided by a survey and in-depth focus group discussion with experienced spa managers in Slovenia, ensuring its practical relevance. This paper describes the process of crafting a new short educational programme. The programme is designed to equip spa managers with the knowledge and skills required to infuse sustainability principles into spa management in a way that focuses on sustainable practices and energy efficiency. The programme curriculum extends beyond spa management by focusing on the fundamentals of sustainability and learning through case studies on integrating sustainable business practices in wellness tourism. It provides a structured overview of key sustainability topics, beginning with strategic planning for sustainability in wellness tourism and the development of sustainable organisational policies. Additionally, it outlines practical steps for implementing sustainable operations in wellness centres, ensuring that managers can effectively apply sustainability principles in their daily practices. Another component of the programme is corporate sustainability reporting, which introduces participants to the fundamentals of sustainability reporting and guides them through the process of designing and preparing sustainability reports. Furthermore, the programme covers Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) standards, equipping spa managers with the necessary knowledge to assess organisational sustainability performance and align their operations with broader sustainability goals. This paper is valuable for educators, policymakers, and industry stakeholders committed to contributing to sustainable wellness tourism's growth. It showcases a holistic approach to curriculum development rooted in practical insights from the field. Bridging the gap between theory and practice ensures that the future of wellness tourism aligns with environmental, social, and economic sustainability goals.

Keywords: wellness tourism, sustainability education, spa management, sustainable business practices

PANEL 7

TOURISM EDUCATION IN DIFFERENT REGIONAL CONTEXTS

TOURISM EDUCATION IN SERBIA - A COMPARATIVE STUDY

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Abstract. The sustainable growth and economic development of Serbia's dynamic tourism sector depends on a highly skilled workforce. Thus, the overall quality and relevance of tourism education programs are of great importance. This study aims to explore and compare various formal tourism education programs offered by different state-funded universities and vocational schools (Belgrade, Novi Sad, Niš, and Kragujevac - Vrnjačka Banja) and several accredited private universities (Singidunum and Business Academy) currently available in Serbia.

The study will employ a mixed-method approach, providing content analysis and comparative method applied, in combination with focus group of academic staff members and tourism industry professionals, to identify the strengths, weaknesses, and areas for improvement in tourism education programs. Results of such analyses should contribute to formulation of specific improvements that could potentially enhance graduate employability and foster sustainable tourism development in the future. Content analysis will be conducted on university curricula and course content, exploring the balance between theoretical and practical components, and the integration of emerging trends in the tourism industry (digital marketing, sustainable tourism practices, experiential tourism, ai tools, etc.). Understanding of the structure and content of tourism education programs, complemented by semi-structured interviews among academic staff involved in the design and delivery of these programs, should provide clear perspectives on future curriculum development, teaching methodologies, industry engagement, and the challenges and opportunities tourism education in Serbia now faces.

This study will also tackle specific aspects of the curricula, including ratio between core tourism principles and theoretical approaches, specialized knowledge areas, and the integration of practical skills development (internships, fieldtrips, guiding) to tourism studies. By examining these elements across selected programs (case study), the research will identify best practices, areas of divergence, and potential gaps between them. Particular attention will be paid to alignment between educational programs and industry needs, exploring how well graduates are equipped with the specific skills and knowledge necessary to successfully engage in the competitive tourism market. The findings of this study will provide valuable insights for policymakers and administrators, academic staff dedicated to teaching and research, and tourism industry professionals seeking to recruit and develop highly skilled workforce. Ultimately, this research aims to contribute to the ongoing improvement of tourism education in Serbia, seeking new strategies in fostering a highly skilled tourism workforce that can drive innovation, competitiveness, and sustainable growth within this highly dynamic sector of national economy.

Keywords: tourism education, Serbia, comparative study, curriculum development, tourism professionals

THE DEVELOPMENT AND CHALLENGES OF TOURISM EDUCATION IN ALBANIA

Petrit Dollani (1. University of Tirana, 2. Warsaw School of Economics)

Abstract. This research paper explores the evolution, current state, challenges, and future prospects of tourism education in Albania. The paper highlights the importance of tourism education in fostering a skilled workforce essential for the country's growing tourism industry. Utilizing data from various academic sources, the paper underscores the role of universities, curriculum structures, and external factors in shaping tourism education in Albania. It concludes with recommendations for enhancing the quality and relevance of tourism education in the country.

Keywords: Tourism education, Albania, higher education, sustainable tourism, curriculum development

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THE ROLE OF LOCAL RESIDENTS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF SLOW TOURISM: ATTITUDES, CHALLENGES, AND OPPORTUNITIES IN WESTERN SERBIA

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Abstract. The local character and the sustainability of a destination represent essential components of the slow movement concept and the theory of slow tourism, which are gaining increasing significance in the modern tourism industry. A key factor in developing this concept is the collaboration between local residents and tourists, which simultaneously emphasizes the importance of social, economic, and environmental sustainability. Therefore, slow tourism is considered a promising direction for the future development of tourism. Although slow tourism is a relatively new concept, its presence in the literature is becoming increasingly prominent, and numerous studies have already been dedicated to this topic. However, there remains a noticeable gap when it comes to understanding local residents' attitudes and their willingness to engage in the development of slow tourism. The purpose of this research is to examine the attitudes of local residents in Western Serbia (n=845) regarding the ways they wish to participate in the development of slow tourism and how they can adapt their involvement to their own capacities. An additional goal of the research is to determine how local residents can be systematically educated on this important topic and how they could be encouraged to take a more active role. Given the limited existing literature, which has complicated the development of a universal measuring instrument for this topic, a new scale was created based on a detailed analysis of available research on the characteristics and dimensions of slow tourism in the context of the role of local residents. The use of exploratory factor analysis (EFA) enabled the identification of two key factors reflecting residents' attitudes toward the development of slow tourism in their community – the intention to participate in tourism development and their relationship with visitors. To determine the optimal approach to educating local residents about the benefits and opportunities of slow tourism development, the research investigated whether their attitudes differ based on socio-demographic characteristics and prior involvement in community tourism development. All analyses were conducted using SPSS (version 23) to test the proposed hypotheses. The research findings indicate significant differences regarding the intention of local residents to actively participate in the development of slow tourism. However, no differences were observed in their relationship with visitors. The results show that older individuals, those with lower levels of education, retirees, and people with high incomes are less willing and less likely to engage in tourism development in their community. On the other hand, residents who had previously been involved in tourism development demonstrate a greater interest in engaging at a higher level of community cooperation. The findings of this study can serve as a foundation for designing workshops, training sessions, and seminars that would sustainably involve local residents and present them with opportunities and ways to actively participate in the development of slow tourism. Further theoretical and practical implications will be discussed in the paper.

Keywords: Slow tourism, local residents, sustainability, community participation, tourism development, Western Serbia

SUSTAINABILITY AND ACADEMIA: A CROATIAN PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract. Growing global interest in sustainability requires research into its integration into higher education studies. The present study investigates the existence and structure of study programs in sustainability in Croatia during the past decade (2015–2024), with an emphasis on their thematic range, institutional pattern, and alignment with international platforms such as the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the European Green Deal.

Using a mixed-methods research design, we conduct a quantitative content analysis of university and polytechnic study programs in Croatia related to sustainability with keywords such as "sustainable development," "circular economy," "renewable energy," and "environmental protection," "sustainable tourism," "sustainable agrotourism," "organic agriculture," "ecological agriculture," "sustainable construction" and "eco-engineering." Examining the trend of sustainability education during the last decade, we strive to assess whether there has been development in expanding and enhancing the number of such programs. Specifically, we identify whether there has been an increase in the number of study programs related to sustainability and diversification of disciplines embracing sustainability principles.

We compare our findings to other research and literature conducted in different countries to position Croatia internationally regarding sustainability education. By comparing internationally, we can assess similarities and differences and areas where the inclusion of sustainability within higher education in Croatia can improve.

Our study indicates that sustainability-related programs are predominantly located in biotechnical and natural sciences, and integration rates are lower in social sciences and economics. There has been some progress, but integration remains lagging in business, social sciences, and policy studies. Based on our findings, set against international research trends, we provide recommendations for enhancing the interdisciplinary and application-focused sustainability curricula in Croatia.

The research offers empirical evidence and supports policymakers, teachers, and managers in enhancing higher education sustainability competencies. The findings contribute to the debate around the role of academia in advancing sustainability and empowering future professionals to respond to global challenges.

Keywords: sustainability education, higher education, Croatia, SDGs

REPORTING SUSTAINABILITY IMPLEMENTATION IN TOURISM HIGHER EDUCATION: CHALLENGES, ASSESSMENT TOOLS - THE CASE OF GREECE

Maria Xenaki (Hellenic Mediterranean University) and Irini Dimou (Hellenic Mediterranean University)

Abstract. Higher education plays a crucial role in successfully preparing future generations of professionals. Today's pressing environmental, social, and economic challenges underscore the need for sustainability practices. Given that tourism has the potential to become a vehicle of change, this study explores whether, how, and how well the process of sustainability implementation is evident in tourism higher education. In other words, are the principles of sustainability incorporated successfully so that future tourism professionals adopt sustainable corporate behaviour via higher education?

The methodology employed in this paper is mixed and consists of three phases in a progressing manner. First, a literature review investigates the importance of sustainability implementation in higher education and the associated challenges. Second, a systematic literature review of Sustainability Assessment Tools (SATs) aims to distinguish the most significant-by-repetition criteria and indicators available when reporting the process of sustainability implementation. Finally, based on the findings and content triangulation, a new SAT is developed to assess the status of Greek tourism higher education through desk research.

The first phase of the methodology revealed several key findings. There is difficulty in comprehending the actual words of 'sustainability implementation, which makes organisational change a complex task. Higher education institutes could facilitate sustainability implementation more effectively if approached as corporate organisations rather than academic institutions. The process of sustainability implementation could be perplexing, as it requires a holistic approach that extends beyond academic curricula. Additionally, the human factor, often underestimated, is a key driver of change. Acknowledging the significance of human capital within universities can enhance the successful implementation of sustainability in higher education.

Following this, a systematic literature review (SLR), according to PRISMA protocol, is conducted to a)perform a bibliometric analysis, aiming to assess the origin of SATs, and b) to identify the most widely used SATs in literature. The findings indicate that the Sustainability Tracking Assessment and Rating System (STARS), Assessment Instrument for Sustainability in Higher Education (AISHE) and Principles for Responsible Management Education (PRME) are the most frequently referenced frameworks. A detailed analysis of the components of those SATs, focusing on their assessment criteria and indicators, reveals that sustainability implementation in higher education can be implemented in six key domains: i. identity & institutional characteristics, ii. education & academic matters, iii. research, iv. campus operations & environment, v. campus operations & society and vi. public engagement.

Based on these insights, a tailor-made SAT is developed and adapted to Greece's unique characteristics, with specific criteria and indicators designed to evaluate sustainability implementation in tourism higher education in the country. The newly developed e-SAT consists of three criteria subdivided into fourteen indicators. The originality of this e-SAT is dual. Firstly, it is short and easy to use, maintaining high content quality, as it is based on the findings of SLR. Secondly, data collection is based on official university websites, enabling researchers to conduct assessments autonomously, efficiently and, if needed, repeatedly.

Keywords: Sustainability, tourism higher education, SAT, reporting, Greece

ACCESSING GREEN FINANCE AWARENESS FOR SUSTAINABLE TOURISM IN UZBEKISTAN EMBEDDING GREEN VALUES IN TOURISM COMPETENCIES

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Abstract. Globally, there is a growing need to address environmental degradation and advance sustainable growth, which has brought attention to the critical role that green finance plays in promoting ethical behavior across industries. Understanding how financial mechanisms can support eco-friendly and environmentally friendly tourism is crucial as sustainable tourism obtains global recognition. this study investigates how awareness of green finance supports the development of sustainable tourism in Uzbekistan, with the specific goal of incorporating green values into the tourism competencies of key stakeholders, including travelers, tourism businesses, travel associations, and policymakers. The role of green finance which consists of investment in renewable energy, sustainability of infrastructure, and financial support for sustainable projects toward reducing and offsetting the environmental impact for tourism, as well as ensuring long term economic benefit rather than quick profits.

Data of key variables like green finance awareness, government support and policy, tourists' willingness to pay for eco-friendly, local business interest in green finance, were taken by performing a structured survey through google form. The purpose of the survey is to collect data from a broad range of respondents in the tourism industry, including students pursuing tourism studies and professionals working in the industry. Measurement equations check the underlying constructions, while SEM techniques inspect the relationship between the above-mentioned variables and tourism development. This research use path analysis and fit indices (RMSEA, CFI and Chi-square) to validate the model. Without failing to take advantage of the novel methodologies, this framework will help to understand how sustainability concepts and overall green finance awareness can enhance sustainable tourism, whilst what green values can be internally transferred to be encompassed in the competencies of stakeholders to bolster the ethical and responsible development of tourism in Uzbekistan.

Preliminary findings indicate a significant shift in tourist preferences towards sustainable tourism solutions and a potential demand for environmentally friendly investment, market driven, and despite a moderate to low understanding of green finance. That said, there are still several major hurdles for the industry, including a lack of green financial products, lack of trust among investors, insufficient policy support, and insufficient incentives for companies to adopt sustainable practices. The tourism sector in Uzbekistan faces difficulties implementing green finance solutions due to such challenges. Nevertheless, the study concludes that there are significantly better opportunities to promote sustainable tourism by implementing proper financing policies and initiatives.

In the end to this literature, it is emphasized that for the development of green financing in the Republic of Uzbekistan, it is recommended to choose a comprehensive approach including the development of appropriate regulatory framework, new green financing instruments as well as a separate bank for financing green projects. These are the introduction of green bonds, tax incentive for eco-friendly companies, improved public-private partnerships (PPPs), and certification programs for sustainable tourism businesses. Comprehensive research reveals that by implementing these strategies, Uzbekistan's tourism can be more integrated into its tourism sector with global sustainability standards, attract responsible investors, and improve its international tourism appeal.

Keywords: Green Finance, Sustainable Tourism, SEM, Green Bonds, Eco-Friendly Businesses

SUSTAINABLE EDUCATION IN TOURISM IN UKRAINE: MAPPING OF INFORMAL INITIATIVES AND ACTORS

Mariia Rastvorova ("KROK" University, Department of Tourism) and Viktoriia Kiptenko (Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv, Department of Country Studies and Tourism)

Abstract. Introduction. The tourism sector is a significant contributor to the global GDP (9.1 % of the global GDP in 2023) and a provider of employment on the international level (10% of global employment in 2023 (World Travel & Tourism Council, 2024). Both the crises and impacts of tourism on destinations (i.e., Duan et al., 2021), social impacts such as gentrification (i.e., González-Pérez & Jesús M. 2020), environmental degradation (Liu et al., 2022) and many others as well as the contributions of tourism to sustainable development through various paths (Liburd, Duedahl & Heape, 2020; Corinto, 2023; etc.) are long term-consequences of the policies. However, these policies by themselves represent the tip of the iceberg of education in tourism.

In response to multiple global issues, during recent years internationally, the agenda of tourism education has been shaped by the sustainable development agenda (i.e., Bowan, D., & Dallam, G. 2020) and was rethought considering the challenges of COVID-19 post-pandemic tourism recovery (i.e. Mínguez et al., 2021).

Nowadays, in addition to the mentioned global problems and the need for post-pandemic recovery, the Ukrainian tourism sector faces the challenges of post-war tourism recovery, strengthened by the decrease of employees due to emigration and/or switch to other professional fields.

Considering the crucial urgency of implementing sustainability principles and post-war recovery, as well as global trends (i.e., digitalisation), the paper aims to explore the current landscape of informal education (NGOs' projects) and other initiatives contributing to sustainable education in tourism) in Ukraine, including their interconnection with EU and global networks.

Methods. The research methodology is based on the mapping of the informal initiatives focused on adult and life-long learning provided by various stakeholders (NGO's, businesses, public authorities, etc.) supported with the expert interviews with the representatives and trainers of these initiatives.

Findings and Discussions. Integration of sustainability focus both into formal (higher educational institutions) and informal (NGOs' and other initiatives) is caused and supported with various factors including (i) the global SDG2030 agenda, (ii) EU integration of Ukraine and engagement of Ukrainian stakeholders into the EU and global networks, (iii) the Russian military invasion of Ukraine and the focus on the post-war tourism recovery in a better, sustainable way. Sustainability courses are the important component of informal educational initiatives in tourism that are targeted on professionals from various fields of tourism: owners of rural green estates (Union of Rural Green Tourism of Ukraine), tourist guides (in the framework of "Academy of Hospitality 2025" initiated by the Tourism & Promotions Department of the Kyiv City State Administration), hoteliers (in the framework of business trainings). At the same time, the conducted mapping of the informal initiatives in the field of sustainability education in tourism in Ukraine evidences the variety of the approaches and initiatives, but the lack of common national agenda and strategy on this field.

Keywords: sustainability tourism education, NGO, mapping of stakeholders, post-war tourism recovery, global networks

PANEL 8

MICRO-CREDENTIALS, AI, AND DIGITALIZATION IN TOURISM EDUCATION

COMPETENCIES AND SKILLS FOR DIGITAL EDUCATION IN TOURISM: A VIEW FROM CHATBOTS' PERSPECTIVES

Andjela Babic (Faculty of Tourism, University of Maribor)

Abstract. In an era of rapid technological advancement, tourism education must adapt to digital transformation. As artificial intelligence (AI) and digital tools—particularly AI chatbots—become more integrated into education, their role in shaping competencies and skills merits deeper examination (Carlisle, Ivanov, & Dijkmans, 2021; Ali & OpenAI, 2023; Benaddi et al., 2024). Accordingly, the study explores AI chatbots' perspectives on digital education in tourism through semi-structured interviews with ChatGPT, Microsoft Copilot, and Claude, selected based on Caswell's (2024) rankings. The interview design followed the methodology proposed by Fusté-Forné and Orea-Giner (2023).

Analysis of chatbot-generated insights reveals a holistic view of the competencies and skills required for digital education in tourism. Key opportunities include the use of AI, virtual reality (VR), and augmented reality (AR) to support personalized, immersive learning. Chatbots highlight essential competencies and skills for educators—such as adaptability, creative pedagogy, technological proficiency, and global networking—while students are expected to develop digital literacy, communication, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills.

Despite these, challenges such as the digital divide, high costs, cybersecurity risks, and data privacy concerns remain. Notably, chatbots did not address the emotional dimensions of digital education. Their lack of cited references further emphasizes the irreplaceable role of human educators in providing contextual understanding, emotional intelligence, and ethical oversight. The study concludes that while AI chatbots offer valuable insights into digital education in tourism, they are not a substitute for human educators. Future research should examine real-world implementation and further investigate the impact of AI-driven education in tourism.

Keywords: Tourism, digital education, chatbots, competencies development, skills development

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TRANSFORMING EDUCATION: INTEGRATING XR TECHNOLOGIES INTO TEACHING

Malcolm Burt (CQ University) and Tjaša Alegro (FT UM)

Abstract. XR (extended reality) technologies, which include virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR), are becoming increasingly important in the educational process, as they enable innovative and interactive learning experiences. XR technology is also increasingly integrated into formal education. Integrating technologies such as VR and AR into teaching methods represents an active learning approach, which is defined as "any teaching method that involves students in the learning process." Active learning requires students to engage in meaningful activities and think about what they are doing (Sanfilippo et al., 2022). When introducing VR technology into education, it is crucial to consider multiple perspectives, such as the technology itself, interaction with it, and immersion. Mütterlein (2018) highlights three pillars of VR: immersion, presence, and interactivity. Freina and Ott (2015) suggest that when integrating VR solutions, these three pillars should be addressed simultaneously, paying attention to sensory channels for multisensory learning. Cuendet et al. (2013) developed three AR educational environments that have become part of regular practice. Their research suggests five principles for designing learning environments: integration, awareness, empowerment, flexibility and minimalism. These principles ensure the effective use of XR technologies in the classroom and reduce the burden of orchestration for teachers.

Our research problem was to examine how XR technologies can contribute to greater accessibility and equity, and how teachers can develop and implement these technologies in their practices and teaching. The research methodology was based on using qualitative and quantitative data collection. The research took place in several phases, with key collaboration with international teachers. They helped the researchers understand the main problems of their students. Data collection was conducted through semi-structured interviews with teachers and students and a short online questionnaire among students.

The findings of the study indicate positive impacts of XR technologies: increased student interest in learning, active participation in class, and easy accessibility of these solutions for teachers. Teachers reported positive experiences using these technologies, as they enabled more engaged learning and increased student interest in the subject matter. One of the key feedbacks from teachers was: "It takes you to a whole new world," which confirms the excitement of students when using XR technologies. The interactivity of these technologies enabled active student participation in learning, which is reflected in a better understanding of the subject matter. Teachers found that the use of these technologies does not require much preparation time, which means accessibility even for those with less experience.

Student feedback showed positive experiences using XR technologies; they enjoyed the interactivity and visual appeal of the content and believed that the technology made it easier for them to understand the subject matter. Some students expressed a desire for more advanced equipment, indicating the potential for further development and improvement.

Overall, the results of the survey confirm that XR technologies represent an important step forward in achieving greater accessibility and equity in education and offer an opportunity to improve the quality of teaching and adapt to the needs of modern learners (Cuendet et al., 2013).

Keywords: Technology, Virtual Reality, Augmented Reality, XR Technology, Teaching

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AI DISRUPTIONS EFFECTS ON EDUCATION OF COMMUNICATIONS IN TOURISM

Dušan Vrban (Faculty of tourism, University of Maribor)

Abstract. By using the vast amount of data, artificial intelligence (AI) systems can provide a factual story about any heritage object. Text, images and video with more or less artistic interpretation can be produced in seconds. As explained by Vrban (2023) AI could produce a visitor's personalized video about a deceased in the cemetery just by swiftly interpreting data from the tombstone. Interpretations may be personalized by incorporating a specific user's personal data. That is what AI is ready to produce with supreme speed and ease compared to human guide interpretations.

AI agents are emerging that are able to assess, prepare and execute a set of complex tasks. In tourism these agents can plan, organise and purchase all required services for a tourist wanting to visit popular places (digitally available tourism services) in the world. Fetch.ai (2024) has developed AI agents that autonomously manage personalized travel planning, automate bookings, and provide real-time updates, enhancing the overall travel experience (Fetch.ai).

Evidenza (2025) is offering generation of hundreds of synthetic customers that can be surveyed with utmost realistic consumer behaviour research results. Advertising and social media platforms are using AI to create personalized advertisements based on the campaign goals and company assets.

Other AI disruptive technologies and solutions are about to change how we design tourist spaces and attractions, create souvenirs, and support tourists. With AI agents, complex tourism management tasks will be arranged and executed.

In this article we will cover the impact of recent AI innovations on tourists as well as on managing digital communications in tourism and how that affects tourism education. Research will combine analysis of available sources on AI and experiments with various solutions. By extrapolation of the findings on the digital marketing model we will assess most probable future skills and knowledge required for managing digital communications in tourism.

Keywords: Artificial intelligence, Tourism, Digital communications, Education

AI, CLIL, AND ENGLISH FOR TOURISM: TRANSFORMING LANGUAGE LEARNING FOR A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

Biljana Božinovski (Faculty of Tourism, University of Maribor)

Abstract. The intersection of generative artificial intelligence (AI), Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), and English for Tourism is an emerging area of interest in tourism education. As AI-driven tools reshape language learning, integrating them into CLIL-based tourism curricula offers new opportunities to enhance student engagement, improve professional communication skills, and foster sustainability competencies. This paper explores how AI can support the development of tourism-specific language skills through CLIL methodologies, drawing on research in AI-enhanced language learning (Alharbi, 2023) and existing CLIL frameworks for tourism education (Escobar Álvarez, 2020; González González et al., 2022; Prasetyo et al., 2023).

A key challenge in modern tourism education is balancing digital innovation with sustainability-focused competencies. The GreenComp framework (European Commission, 2022) highlights the need for tourism graduates to develop sustainability awareness, future-thinking skills, and adaptive communication abilities. This paper examines how AI-driven tools—such as automated feedback systems, digital storytelling, and interactive simulations—can align with GreenComp by fostering critical thinking, ethical decision-making, and responsible tourism communication.

The study is based on a literature review and classroom observations of AI-supported CLIL instruction in tourism courses. It considers how AI tools influence language acquisition, professional skill development, and digital sustainability competencies in tourism students. The findings suggest that AI can enhance language learning while promoting interdisciplinary knowledge, ethical decision-making, and adaptability—skills that are essential in the evolving tourism industry. These insights contribute to the ongoing discussion on future-oriented tourism curricula and the role of AI in sustainable education.

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Keywords: English for tourism, English as a second language, CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning), tourism education, generative AI

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THE IMPORTANCE OF AI IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF HEALTH TOURISM DESTINATIONS

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Abstract. Introduction. The path to building strategies and business models based on artificial intelligence (AI) is based on the conclusions drawn from the development of business analytics (Davenport & Harris, 2017), the first stage of which is business intelligence, analytics 2.0 is represented by predictive and prescriptive Big Data analytics, analytics 3.0 – operational, while the most advanced form of generation is analytics 4.0, which includes autonomous (cognitive) analytics, AI and cognitive technologies, machine learning, neural networks, deep learning and natural language processing. Building multiple models quickly means the organization can become much more granular with customers and markets and respond to rapidly changing data. This allows for modeling the propensity of a specific customer to purchase specific products or respond to specific marketing approaches. Creating new, including sustainable and network business models requires the development of AI capabilities (Madanaguli et al., 2024): integrated intelligence (people), process automation and augmentation (process), AI infrastructure and platform (platform) and ecosystem orchestration (partner) as drivers of AI-enabled circular business models. AI may be also used for the development of ecosystem-based business models that require better orchestration of multiple stakeholders for a dynamic, sustainable balance among people, plant, and profit.
Objective. Identifying and explaining the importance of artificial intelligence (AI) in the development of health tourism destinations and providers. Research question was posed: how can AI be used to: create new business models, forecast new business scenarios, build resilience and understand threats using innovative AI solutions for destinations and providers of health tourism (medical, therapeutic/balneological, spa and wellness); response to changes in consumer behavior and ways of interacting?
Method. The article uses a qualitative approach, based on the analysis of scientific literature on the subject and an exploratory case study of the use of AI in health destinations.
Findings. The study allowed for the typification of management technologies used in health destinations and the determination of the great importance of AI as a key technology within Business Intelligence & Analytics (BI&A) solutions. The study also contributes to explaining the diversity of the scope of use of AI technology in health destinations.
Conlusion. Health-related tourism destinations that aspire to be intelligent create ecosystems in which, thanks to BI&A systems equipped with advanced AI solutions, data from various sources are obtained and processed into information supporting management decision-making. In this way, AI as a key emerging technology is transforming the knowledge, skills and competencies needed in the tourism industry.
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Keywords: artificial intelligence, business intelligence, health destinations, business analytics, smart destinations, IT management systems

HIGHER EDUCATION AND AI: ENHANCING DIGITAL COMPETENCE AND CRITICAL THINKING

Andrea Holešinská (Masaryk University)

Abstract. The importance of artificial intelligence (AI) is growing, and thus higher education must reflect it. The qualitative research focuses on the implementation of AI in teaching. The target group was Czech students from master's degree programme. They participated in an experiment that tested their ability to use AI and their awareness of its limitation. Students got instructions to undertake a task. One group of students worked on the proposal of a research project and the second group of students had a task to write a critical essay about tourism policy. The evidence of the experiment was based on students´ outcomes (submitted projects/essays) and on their interviews. The interviews revealed that students acquired valuable personal experience with AI, and they improved their digital competence as well. In general, they appreciated the opportunity to use AI in their learning.
The key findings of the research are the prompt is essential – the more specific the prompt is the more quality answer students received; AI hallucinates – the more complex the task is the more often AI provides inaccurate outputs; the language of the prompt matters – prompts in native language (Czech) return text with misinterpretation (this is the worst limitation of AI). The most crucial finding for students is that they must be critical to AI responses and always check resources and references. AI is a good servant but a very bad master. From the teacher perspective, AI stimulates students' attention and their engagement in learning.

Keywords: AI, tourism, digital competence, critical thinking, limitation of AI

USING MICROCREDIT IN TOURISM EDUCATION: PRACTICES, EXPERIENCES, AND CRITICAL CONSIDERATIONS TO IMPROVE QUALITY AND EMPLOYABILITY

Alireza Alinezhadi (University of Tehran) and Zahra Saki (University of Tehran)

Abstract. This study investigates the integration of micro-initiatives in tourism education in order to improve the quality and employability. The research objectives included identifying current practices, analyzing experiences, and critically evaluating the impact of micro-education on tourism education outcomes. A mixed methodology approach was used, which included a systematic review of the literature, semi-structured interviews with educators and industry professionals, and case studies of existing microcredit programs in tourism education Was. Key findings suggest that microcredit initiatives can significantly improve practical skills, entrepreneurial mindsets, and community engagement among tourism students. However, challenges such as financial sustainability and equitable access were identified. The study concludes that microcredit, when implemented strategically and in conjunction with innovative educational practices such as virtual reality simulations and industrial collaborations, can improve the quality of tourism education and increase the employability of graduates. Recommendations include developing standardized assessment frameworks for microcredit programs, strengthening partnerships with financial institutions, and integrating microcredit initiatives with sustainability-based curricula in order to maximize their effectiveness in tourism education.

Keywords: Microcredit, Tourism Education, Employability, Practical Skills, Entrepreneurship

PANEL 9

THE FUTURE OF TOURISM AND HOSPITALITY EDUCATION

LOCAL LANGUAGES BASED ONLINE / OFFLINE MICRO-CREDENTIALS IN PAKISTAN'S TOURISM INDUSTRY WILL BE THE KEY TO ACCELERATE EMPLOYMENT GENERATION

Kamran Khan (Pakneftegaz)

Abstract. Tourism is a key economic driver worldwide. In 2023, tourism contributed 5.8% to Pakistan's economy, amounting to 19.8 billion USD, while Slovenia's tourism sector contributed 9.8% of its GDP, equivalent to 6.9 billion USD. Pakistan faces a growing unemployment rate. The Planning Commission estimating a need to create 1.5 million jobs annually. This is not a real time digital estimate. The tourism industry, requiring skilled and well-trained professionals, could significantly address this issue. Micro-credentials based on tourism assets in Pakistan could create jobs in rural and urban areas.

Research was conducted using qualitative methods, collecting data from various tourism departments, higher education institutions, and both inbound and outbound tourists. Micro-credentials, which represent small, targeted learning outcomes, could be developed in local languages to meet Pakistan's tourism needs. Digital learning platforms focused on these micro-credentials should be developed to cater to Pakistan's diverse linguistic landscape.

The Pakistani government should include micro-credentials in the 2024 national education policy framework. Collaborations between Pakistani universities, Pakneftegaz, and Slovenia's University of Maribor could enhance tourism education. An economic leakage in tourism is a key micro-credential that should be introduced in tourism departments at universities in Slovenia and Pakistan. Slovenia, despite its smaller land area, ranks 42nd in the Travel and Tourism Development Index, while Pakistan ranks 101st due to factors such as low literacy and lack of localized tourism education. Micro-credentials could improve literacy, employability, and tourism professionalism, especially for women, who currently hold only 2.4% of tourism jobs in Pakistan.

Keywords: micro-credentials in tourism, touristic assets mapping, unemployment

THE ROLE OF ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION IN SUSTAINABLE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT

Hamide Mahmoodi (Assistant Professor, Department of Tourism Policy and Development, Faculty of Tourism, University of Tehran)

Abstract. Intrduction: Tourism significantly contributes to global carbon emissions, with the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) reporting 1.3 billion tons of emissions from the industry in 2005. It is projected that emissions will increase by 152% by 2035, reinforcing the fact that tourism is not an energy-efficient sector. The reliance on fossil fuels imposes social and environmental costs, creating obstacles to sustainable tourism growth. Environmental education is a crucial tool for addressing these challenges. It aims to raise awareness and promote sustainable tourism practices, particularly in countries like Iran, where environmental issues are pressing. By incorporating environmental education into early learning curricula, societies can instill environmental responsibility from a young age, mitigating long-term environmental problems. Strengthening public awareness through education fosters behavioral changes that contribute to sustainability. Environmental protection is not just an integral part of sustainable tourism but also a fundamental value for both present and future generations.
Research Methodology: This study adopts a qualitative, analytical approach using document and literature review methods. Data were gathered from reputable academic sources such as Google Scholar, ScienceDirect, Springer, Scopus, and Web of Science. Selection criteria focused on studies published after 2010 with direct relevance to sustainable tourism and environmental education.The research findings were categorized thematically, and comparative evaluations of different studies were conducted to assess similarities and differences.
Findings: Sustainable tourism aims to minimize the negative environmental impacts of travel while enhancing the travel experience. Educating tourists on sustainability fosters responsible behavior, benefiting both ecosystems and local communities. Key strategies for promoting sustainable tourism include: Eco-Friendly Transportation – Public transportation and eco-friendly vehicles, such as bicycles and electric cars, help reduce emissions and air pollution. Travel agencies should encourage sustainable transportation options. Sustainable Accommodations – Green accommodations use renewable energy and manage waste efficiently, reducing tourism's environmental footprint while supporting sustainable businesses. Resource Conservation – Using water and electricity efficiently, such as switching off unnecessary appliances and choosing local products, helps reduce resource depletion. Plastic Waste Reduction – Avoiding single-use plastics by carrying reusable bottles and bags can significantly reduce environmental pollution (National Geographic). Respect for Local Cultures – Tourists should be encouraged to respect local customs and traditions, supporting indigenous communities through ethical tourism practices. Energy & Water Efficiency – Simple actions like limiting air conditioning use and minimizing water consumption contribute to sustainable tourism. Participation in Conservation Programs – Travelers engaging in activities such as beach cleanups, tree planting, and wildlife conservation contribute to environmental protection while gaining meaningful experiences.

Conclusion: Environmental education plays a vital role in promoting sustainable tourism and reducing its negative impact. Raising awareness among tourists, industry professionals, and local communities encourages responsible travel practices. Key strategies include adopting renewable energy, minimizing resource consumption, implementing responsible waste management, and fostering environmental stewardship. Achieving sustainability requires collaboration between policymakers, tourism service providers, and travelers. Expanding educational programs and integrating green technologies into tourism operations will further advance sustainability. A strong culture of sustainable tourism benefits the environment, enhances travelers' experiences, and supports local economies.

Keywords: Education, Tourism Development, Sustainable, Environmental

SUSTAINABLE ENTREPRENEURSHIP EDUCATION-A MULTIDISCIPLINARY APPROACH FOR BUSINESS SCHOOLS TO CULTIVATE SUSTAINABLE HOSPITALITY STARTUPS

Dhruv Kishore Bole (State Institute of Hotel Management, Siddhpur, India)

Abstract. The pressing urgency of climate change, coupled with resource constraints and shifting social expectations necessitates that business schools promote sustainable hospitality startups. However, the conventional sustainable entrepreneurship education in business schools-focused mostly on traditional core business concepts with little stress on sustainability-is widely seen as an obstacle to establishing such startups. Synthesizing previous research studies, this study examines key elements that business schools must include in their sustainable entrepreneurship education to foster the establishment of sustainability-oriented startups. The conclusions of this study indicate that incorporating the identified elements into conventional education, may assist business schools in removing barriers, and facilitate student entrepreneurs to create hospitality startups that attain profit, purpose, and sustainability thus contributing to the growth of much-needed sustainable entrepreneurship industry. The study contributes to aligning sustainable entrepreneurship education with the Principles for Responsible Management Education (PRME) and also further accelerate the movement toward the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), ensuring business education that will prepare future managers to cope with global issues and bring about social, environmental, and economic sustainability. This study offers valuable insights for educators, curriculum designers and policy makers, aiming to strengthen sustainable entrepreneurship pedagogy. There is a considerable scope for further research in the subject. Though this study creates a model of sustainable entrepreneurship education, further research is required to strengthen the pedagogical approach.

Keywords: sustainable entrepreneurship education, sustainable entrepreneurship pedagogy, business schools, sustainable hospitality startups, entrepreneurial curriculum

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NEW TECHNOLOGIES AND SKILLS IN TOURISM AND HOSPITALITY EDUCATION

Hamideh Saderi Osguie (M.A. in Tourism Management, Faculty of Tourism, University of Tehran, Tehran, Iran.)

Abstract. The tourism and hospitality industry is one of the largest and fastest-growing sectors globally, playing a vital role in economic development and cultural exchange. This sector is undergoing rapid transformations driven by advancements in technology, and these changes significantly impact the way education is delivered. The growing reliance on digital tools and technologies has led to the evolution of training methods and skill development processes, which are now adapting to the changing needs of the industry. Emerging technologies such as augmented reality (AR), virtual reality (VR), artificial intelligence (AI), and the Internet of Things (IoT) are being increasingly integrated into education, providing students with innovative and interactive learning experiences that replicate real-world scenarios without the need for physical presence. This research aims to explore the influence of these technologies on educational practices in tourism and hospitality and identify the key skills and tools necessary for both students and educators in this field to succeed in the digital age. To achieve this goal, the research takes an analytical approach, drawing on a comprehensive review of existing literature, industry reports, and academic case studies. This approach allows the study to examine how new technologies are integrated into tourism and hospitality education, assessing their effectiveness in enhancing learning outcomes. It also explores the challenges faced by educational institutions, such as the need to update curricula, train educators on the use of new technologies, and adapt traditional teaching methods to accommodate technological advancements. The findings reveal that VR and AR are particularly effective in providing immersive learning environments, enabling students to experience and interact with various tourism destinations, hotel operations, and customer service scenarios in a simulated environment. Additionally, AI and IoT technologies support data collection, analysis, and behavior prediction, which are becoming crucial for making informed decisions in the tourism and hospitality sector. These technologies offer students the opportunity to engage with real-time data, develop critical thinking skills, and apply analytical techniques to solve industry-specific challenges. Furthermore, the research emphasizes the importance of ensuring that students develop a strong foundation in both technical and soft skills. As the tourism and hospitality industry becomes more technology-driven, equipping students with knowledge of emerging tools and fostering an innovative mindset are essential for future success. The study also highlights the need for continuous professional development for educators, ensuring they remain up to date with the latest trends and technologies. By incorporating these technologies into curricula and training programs, educational institutions can prepare students to meet the evolving demands of the industry and contribute to the digital transformation of tourism and hospitality. Overall, the research underscores that a comprehensive approach to integrating emerging technologies into education is crucial for the preparation of a skilled and adaptable workforce that can excel in an increasingly digital world.

Keywords: Emerging Technologies, Tourism and Hospitality Education, Digital Transformation, Virtual Reality (VR), Skill Development

REVOLUTIONIZING SUSTAINABLE EDUCATION IN TOURISM: BRIDGING THE SOCIAL, ECONOMIC, AND ECOLOGICAL GAPS

Helia Shokripour (M.A. in Tourism Management, Faculty of Tourism, University of Tehran, Tehran, Iran.)

Abstract. Sustainable education in tourism is essential to addressing the complex challenges that the industry faces today, including environmental degradation, economic inequality, and social instability. Traditional educational methods have often focused on isolated aspects of sustainability, but there is an increasing demand for a more integrated framework that connects the social, economic, and ecological dimensions of sustainability. This research explores how tourism education can evolve to foster transformative learning that addresses these interconnected aspects in a holistic manner. The primary goal of this study is to examine how the interdependence of social, economic, and ecological well-being can be embedded into tourism curricula to create a more sustainable future for the industry. Specifically, the study investigates how the design and delivery of tourism education can deepen students' understanding of sustainability and encourage them to adopt ethical, responsible, and actionable behaviors in their future careers. Furthermore, the research looks at how educational institutions can play a crucial role in preparing future tourism professionals who can address global sustainability challenges. This study employs a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative case studies with quantitative surveys. The case studies involve an in-depth analysis of tourism education programs at leading academic institutions worldwide, focusing on how sustainability principles are integrated into their curricula. Additionally, a survey is conducted among tourism students and industry professionals to assess their understanding of sustainable practices and the role that education plays in shaping their professional paths. The research also includes interviews with educators to explore the challenges and opportunities in incorporating sustainability into tourism education. The findings suggest that effective sustainable tourism education must emphasize the interconnectedness of social, economic, and ecological factors. While many institutions have made progress in integrating sustainability principles into their curricula, the research reveals a significant gap in equipping students with the practical skills needed to address sustainability challenges in real-world contexts. The study also highlights the importance of collaborative learning and partnerships between academia, industry, and communities in bridging these gaps. Key recommendations include more explicit integration of sustainability into tourism programs, fostering interdisciplinary learning, and offering students hands-on experiences that will prepare them for the complexities of sustainable tourism practices. Revolutionizing tourism education requires a shift towards a more integrated and transformative approach that acknowledges the deep interdependence between social, economic, and ecological systems. By bridging these gaps, tourism education can better equip future professionals with the knowledge, skills, and competencies needed to promote sustainable tourism practices. This approach not only benefits the tourism industry but also contributes to the global effort to achieve sustainability goals.

Keywords: Sustainable tourism education, transformative learning, social, economics, ecological sustainability, tourism curricula

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PURPOSEFUL EDUCATION IN TOURISM: ADAPTING CURRICULA FOR THE FUTURE DEMANDS

Helia Shokripour (M.A. in Tourism Management, Faculty of Tourism, University of Tehran, Tehran, Iran.)

Abstract. The tourism industry is experiencing rapid changes driven by technological innovations, shifting consumer expectations, and an increasing demand for sustainability. To remain relevant, tourism education must evolve to address the industry's emerging challenges and opportunities, preparing students for the future. Traditional tourism curricula have often focused on general knowledge, but the dynamic nature of industry calls for a more purposeful, forward-thinking approach. This paper explores how tourism education can adapt to meet the evolving demands of the industry and better equip students for meaningful careers in tourism. The primary objective of this study is to examine how tourism curricula can be reshaped to reflect the future needs of the industry, ensuring that graduates are well-prepared to contribute to sustainable, ethical, and innovative practices. The research investigates current gaps in tourism education and identifies key areas where curricula should evolve to align with emerging trends such as technological advancements, sustainability imperatives, and changing consumer behaviors. This study uses qualitative research methodology, incorporating semi-structured interviews with educators, industry professionals, and tourism students. These interviews aim to gather diverse perspectives on the future of tourism education and the skills required for success in the industry. Additionally, a content analysis of tourism curricula from leading academic institutions is conducted to identify common themes, strengths, and gaps in addressing future industry needs. The study also examines case studies of innovative tourism education programs that have successfully adapted to the changing demands of the industry. The findings highlight several key areas where tourism education must evolve. First, there is a clear need to integrate digital literacy into curricula, focusing on emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, data analytics, and virtual reality. Students must be equipped with the skills necessary to navigate the rapidly changing technological landscape of the tourism industry. Second, sustainability should be embedded at the core of tourism education, emphasizing ethical decision-making and environmental stewardship. The research also emphasizes the importance of developing soft skills, such as communication, leadership, and cultural intelligence, to meet the needs of a diverse and globalized workforce. Finally, the study underscores the importance of industry collaboration in shaping curricula, ensuring that students gain practical, real-world experience and are well-prepared to face the challenges of their careers. Adapting tourism curricula to meet future demands requires a comprehensive approach that integrates digital competencies, sustainability, and soft skills. By aligning education with the evolving needs of the industry, academic institutions can ensure that graduates are equipped to lead and innovate in the rapidly changing tourism sector. This transformation will help foster a more responsible, sustainable, and innovative tourism industry, ultimately contributing to the long-term success and resilience of the sector.

Keywords: Tourism education, curriculum adaptation, digital literacy, sustainability, industry collaboration

MEANINGFUL TOURISM AND HOSPITALITY EDUCATION: THE ROLE OF TOURISM EDUCATION IN TODAY'S WORLD AND THE EVOLUTION OF CURRICULA FOR THE FUTURE

Alireza Alinezhadi (University of Tehran) and Zahra Saki (University of Tehran)

Abstract. This comprehensive study examines the transformative potential of tourism and hospitality education in contemporary and future contexts. This research has achieved important results by analyzing current approaches to curriculum design and examining emerging trends that shape tourism education, through an extensive review of the scientific literature and industry case studies. The findings show that although tourism education has moved from technical and vocational training to Comprehensive academic programs have evolved, but many institutions continue to struggle to achieve transformative learning outcomes that prepare graduates for complex industry challenges.

The study identifies key external factors driving educational change, including technological advancements, changes in market demand, concerns about climate change, and post-pandemic industry reconstruction. Critical pathways for curriculum innovation are identified through this analysis, particularly in the context of the integration of smart tourism concepts, sustainability principles, experiential learning methods, and cross-cultural competencies.

This research shows that meaningful tourism education requires striking a balance between developing technical skills and fostering critical thinking, ethical awareness, and adaptive capabilities. In addition, successful educational models increasingly include technology-based learning, industry collaboration, and flexible learning systems that support lifelong learning.

The study concludes that targeted tourism education should move beyond updating the curriculum and fundamentally revolutionize how learning experiences are designed and evaluated, so that graduates understand not only the operational dimensions, but also the broader social impacts of tourism. These findings provide valuable guidance for educational institutions looking to develop future-ready tourism professionals through program modificationcurriculum and innovation in educational methods.

Keywords: Tourism Education, Curriculum Innovation, Sustainability, Technology Integration, Experiential Learning

FUTURE COMPETENCIES AND GREEN TOURISM: SKILLS AND EDUCATIONAL APPROACHES FOR SUSTAINABLE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT

Alireza Alinezhadi (University of Tehran) and Zahra Saki (University of Tehran)

Abstract. In the face of global environmental challenges and evolving tourism dynamics, green tourism has emerged as a key driver for sustainable development. This descriptive-analytical and library-based study explores the competencies required for future tourism professionals and the educational approaches essential to promoting sustainable tourism. Through a literature review and critical analysis, the paper identifies the core skills—including environmental literacy, digital competency, and ethical awareness—and emphasizes pedagogical strategies that align with sustainability goals. The findings suggest that a transformative educational framework is necessary to equip future professionals for the demands of green tourism.

Keywords: Green tourism, sustainability, future competencies, educational approaches, tourism development

PREPARING THE NEXT GENERATION: HOSPITALITY EDUCATION IN THE AGE OF DIGITAL INNOVATION AND AI

Tashfeen Ahmad (The University of the West Indies)

Abstract. The Fourth Industrial Revolution is reshaping how we live, work, and interact with the world. As digital technologies and artificial intelligence (AI) continue to permeate all aspects of life, the tourism and hospitality industries are undergoing profound transformations. To remain competitive and thrive in this hyper-digital future, it is critical to ensure that students in hospitality education are well-prepared. This presentation addresses a central question: how can we best prepare students for a world where digital innovation and AI drive the evolution of the tourism and hospitality sectors?

The first section of this talk will examine the current trends shaping the tourism and hospitality industry, focusing on the rapid integration of AI and other digital technologies. From AI-driven guest services to automated operations and personalized experiences, the industry is becoming increasingly data-driven and tech-centric. These innovations are not only enhancing operational efficiency but also significantly altering customer expectations. Understanding the impact of these technologies on both industry practices and the global economy is essential in equipping the next generation of hospitality professionals with the tools and mindset needed to succeed in this transformed landscape.

Building on this foundation, the presentation will delve into the critical steps required to prepare students for the future of tourism and hospitality. It will outline the key skills, competencies, and personal priorities that students must develop in order to remain relevant and effective in an AI-driven world. Emphasis will be placed on fostering essential skills such as critical thinking, creativity, and adaptability. Additionally, there will be a strong focus on emotional intelligence, as the hospitality industry will continue to rely on human interaction, even in an increasingly automated environment. Students must also gain a deep understanding of emerging technologies—such as machine learning, big data, and cloud computing—so that they are not only consumers of these innovations but active contributors and innovators in the industry.

The presentation will also provide personal reflections on the challenges and opportunities facing educators in preparing students for this new era. Hospitality education is uniquely positioned to play a key role in shaping future leaders who can navigate the digital transformation. However, this requires curriculum redesigns, new pedagogical approaches, and greater collaboration between educators and industry leaders. Practical takeaways will be shared for students, lecturers, university administrators, and other stakeholders in the educational ecosystem. These insights will ensure that institutions not only keep pace with technological advancements but also create learning environments that equip students with both the knowledge and the mindset to lead in the AI-driven world of tomorrow's hospitality.

This talk will serve as a roadmap for higher education institutions to realign their curricula with the future needs of the hospitality industry. By focusing on the intersection of technology, education, and industry, it will help ensure that students are prepared to drive meaningful change. As hospitality professionals, they will be empowered not just to adapt to emerging technologies, but to innovate and lead in the ever-evolving, technology-driven landscape of tourism and hospitality.

Keywords: Fourth Industrial Revolution, Artificial Intelligence (AI), Preparing students, Industry trends, AI in tourism, Technology-driven world, Hospitality Education

SUSTAINABLE TOURISM EDUCATION THROUGH TOURISM BUSINESSES IN THE ALTA VALLEY

Kari Jæger (UiT The Arctic University of Norway)

Abstract. Sustainable Tourism Education through Tourism Businesses in the Alta Valley is a development project aimed at fostering new knowledge through collaboration between tourism businesses in the Alta Valley and UiT the Arctic University of Norway, Alta.
How can future tourism education better serve local tourism businesses and the local community? In Norway, classroom-based tourism education has been significantly reduced in recent years at many universities, with much of the teaching now conducted digitally.
Simultaneously, year-round tourism has expanded and become increasingly important for communities in northern Norway and the country as a whole. In Alta, year-round tourism is now well-established, with distinct activities across the four main seasons: summer, autumn, winter, and spring.

Keywords: Sustainable, Tourism, Education, Year-round tourism

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