

## TOURISM EDUCATION: A PROPOSED GENERAL FRAMEWORK

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*Tourism is major and dynamic global sector. University tourism curriculum is fundamental to properly prepare future employees in the sector; however, a debate is present on what tourism curriculum should comprise. Based on previous literature this paper aim is to contribute to the debate, such as the balance between vocational and academic subjects in tourism curriculum, on tourism curriculum in universities and to propose a general model for tourism curriculum. The diversity of skills required in the tourism sector together, including changing tourist needs, are addressed in the proposed tourism curriculum model. Thus, the proposed model offers a balance between vocational and academic subjects and includes issues related to tourism's global positioning.*

**Key words:** *tourism, curriculum, tourism curriculum, education, tourism education.*

**JEL Classification:** *L83.*

*A curriculum for tourism needs to develop a tourism society not just as society for business but one of society for all its stakeholders. In other words, practical and emancipatory interests need to be addressed as well as technical interests. (Tribe, 2001:447)*

**I. INTRODUCTION**

Research on tourism education and curriculum (Jugmohan et al., 2022, p. 127) has been on-going for the past four decades (for example see McIntosh, 1983; Koh, 1995; Tribe, 2001; Fidgeon, 2010; Leung et al., 2018; Wattanacharoensil, 2014). Previous studies focused on vocational and academic approaches to such education and the need to strike a balance between the two (Yusuf et al., 2018, p. 65). Tourism education initially favored a vocational approach that aimed to prepare the workforce for the tourism sector. This is in line with the need to ensure that the higher education sector produces graduates fit for the workplace, thereby enhancing their employability (Guachalla and Gledhill, 2019, p. 1). However, it has gradually also evolved as an academic field that seeks to produce professionals and intellectuals with critical and analytic capacities (Yusuf et al., 2018, p. 65).

Tourism is a fast-growing major global sector that makes a significant contribution to economic and social development (Mungai et al., 2021, p. 14), underlining “the importance of higher education in

hospitality and tourism” (Bao and Huang, 2021:1). While the number of tourism qualifications and courses on offer has increased, gaps remain (Jugmohan et al., 2022, p. 126; Mungai et al., 2021, p. 15). Appropriate tourism qualifications and curriculum are required to shape future tourism professionals who will be able to lead the sector to render it more sustainable “for both the industry and the world” (Phi and Clausen, 2021, p. 8; see also Jugmohan et al., 2022, p. 127). A purposeful tourism (or hospitality) curriculum is thus fundamental. Mulenga (2018, p. 20) defined curriculum as follows:

Curriculum is all the selected, organized, integrative, innovative and evaluative educational experiences provided to learners consciously or unconsciously under the school authority in order to achieve the designated learning outcomes which are achieved as a result of growth, maturation and learning meant to be best utilized for life in a changing society.

This article aims to contribute to the debate on tourism curriculum in universities. Such curriculum needs to be continuously updated to reflect current realities, and simultaneously ‘fit’ the local context. A general model is proposed that is globally applicable but, importantly, flexible to adjust to specific contexts. The ongoing evolution of the tourism sector makes it

difficult to agree on “what constitutes tourism studies” (Yusuf et al., 2018, p. 64). A basic guiding framework is therefore necessary.

## II. METHODOLOGY

This conceptual article is based on a review of articles on tourism curriculum (Kambali et al., 2022) and on tourism research (Acampora et al., 2022; Vong et al., 2021). Literature reviews play “a critical role in scholarship because science remains, first and foremost, a cumulative endeavor” and a review article summarizes literature of the research topic without primary data (Paré and Kitsiou, 2017, pp. 157, 158). It can consist of one of two forms. The first is a ‘literature review’ or ‘background’ which synthesizes the existing literature and typically identifies knowledge gaps present proposed by empirical studies. The second form is an original work of research that involves all members of a community interested in particular research, as a starting point compared the to the more traditional approach, where the researcher provides a base for his/her own work (Paré and Kitsiou, 2017, p. 157). The article therefore aims to evaluate and interpret available literature and research related to the investigated topic (Kitchenham, 2004:1). Furthermore, it is a conceptual article that also attempts to logically clarify the topic under investigation (Xin et al., 2013, p. 7). However, it should be borne in mind that, ultimately, the difference between empirical and conceptual research is not the final objective, but how to reach it. Both empirical and conceptual papers share the same goals, creating new knowledge by following a set of norms, however, with conceptual papers, arguments involve the assimilation and combination of evidence form previously developed concepts and theories (Jaakkola, 2020, p. 19).

Against this background, this article synthesizes the previous literature in order to propose an original guiding model for tourism curriculum development, laying a foundation for future research on the tourism curriculum.

## III. LITERATURE REVIEW

The tourism (and hospitality) industries are important sectors in terms of job creation. The nature of this sector means that it requires a wide variety of skills (Wang and Ryan, 2007, p. 30; for an Australian case, see Goh and King, 2020, p. 266). Tourism operates at various geographical levels and different economic sectors of the economy. It is one of the most diversified sectors in the world with a “wide number of different occupations and professions” (Babalola, 2019, p. 7). In order to satisfy its requirements, universities’ tourism curricula should be wide-ranging (Tiwari et al., 2020, p. 13) and promote skills

development that enhances graduates’ employability as well as investment and economic growth (Ezeuduji et al., 2023, p. 331). Employability is important because in the end students must find jobs. However, within the university context, employability “is more than the ability to obtain employment but to also exhibit attributes and competencies” (Ezeuduji et al., 2023, p. 330, 331; see also Guachalla and Gledhill, 2019, p. 1). Various other stakeholders, including students, government and industry representatives, should collaborate with universities to design appropriate qualifications (Daniels et al., 2022).

Technological advancements (Phi and Clausen, 2021, p. 1) and tourists’ changing needs and desires (Mungai et al., 2021, p. 14) call for “capable and talented staff who can manage business and people in this dynamic and competitive environment” (Wang and Ryan, 2007, p. 30; see also Jugmohan et al., 2022, p. 128). Sustainability, having local experience, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), authenticity and fair-trade are amongst the new trends in the tourism market (see Davtyan, 2023, pp. 88, 89; Dewi et al., 2022, p. 444; O’Mahony, 2020; Stanciu et al., 2022, p. 2; Talalova et al., 2021, p. 274). Global megatrends such as tourists’ diverse preferences, a shrinking planet for tourism (for more see Pellešová, 2020, p. 2), solo tourists (Leith, 2020), increased use of technology in tourism (see Davtyan, 2023, p. 88, 89) and alternative tourism and niche markets (Sánchez et al., 2022, p. 225) are other examples of important extant trends. These need to be taken into account as tourism “is service-oriented, constantly adapting to the needs and requirements of customers and the market” (Stokłosa et al., 2022, p. 128). There is thus a need to adapt, and continuously update, the tourism curriculum.

However, studies point to “the inadequacy of tourism knowledge in relation to society, the main element of the tourism phenomenon” (Wattanacharoensil, 2014, p. 17). Tourism and hospitality studies were initially strongly vocationally oriented due to their utilitarian contextualization (Fidgeon, 2010, p. 700; Gross and Manoharan, 2016, p. 44). However, scholars like Tribe (2002) propose that tourism education should go beyond tourism business issues to be comprehensively related to society, thus including “nonvocationalist aspects” in the curriculum (Tribe, 2001, p. 447).

The debate on vocational vs. academic approaches has been central to the tourism curriculum literature. The liberal academic and vocational streams has always been debated, some scholars are proponents of integrating the two streams, while others believe that the two streams should be separated (Yusuf et al., 2018, p. 65)

Numerous scholars have engaged in debate on the evolution and current relationship and balance between vocational and academic tourism curriculum programs (see for example, Airey, 2008; Tribe, 2001;

Wattanacharoensil, 2014; Gross and Manoharan, 2016; Yusuf et al., 2018; Cotterell et al., 2019; Commey et al., 2021; Farsari, 2022; Fidgeon, 2010; Hu, 2022; Stokłosa et al., 2022; Pratiwi and Fathiraini, 2023; Viol and Southall, 2023). Proponents of the vocational approach emphasize the need to design a curriculum that is relevant in the “world of work”, as opposed to the ‘liberal or academic’ approaches that “stress the open acquisition of knowledge and the understanding of all aspects of the discipline” (Fidgeon, 2010, p. 708). While a balanced approach has been recommended, based on the argument that the two methods can coexist and together equip the students “with equally valued technical and conceptual tools” (Gross and Manoharan, 2016, p. 45), the vocational/technical perspective continues to hold sway. This approach, which focuses on issues related to employment, tourist satisfaction and the generation of wealth, has been critiqued as “one-dimensional and narrow-minded” as it focuses on business issues to the exclusion of social and cultural matters (Farsari, 2022, p. 6; see also Gross and Manoharan, 2016, p. 45). Instead, it is noted that educators should also inculcate critical thinking (Stokłosa et al., 2022, p. 127; on the above topics, see also Wattanacharoensil, 2014). A solely academic perspective is also criticized as it ignores the world of work, risking detaching students from reality (Mungai et al., 2021, p. 17). Debate also continues on the values that tourism education should nurture (Gross and Manoharan, 2016, p. 44). In general, more developed nations have focused more on critical thinking, with developing countries favoring vocational aspects (Mungai et al., 2021, p. 17).

The issue at hand is not to shift from one predominant approach to another (such as from a vocational to an academic approach) but is about addressing “the present predominance of a vocationalist agenda in hospitality higher education through a more balanced approach” (Gross and Manoharan, 2016, p. 44; see also Commey et al., 2021, p. 178; Viol and Southall, 2023). It is not sufficient to produce job-ready graduates. Graduates should possess a combination of knowledge, skills, and capacities in order to be able to confront various issues such as economic challenges and social responsibility (Mungai et al., 2021, p. 22; see also Yusuf et al., 2018, p. 72).

It is also important to acknowledge that the requirements of the curriculum change with time as tourism – and society – change. For example, the sector has witnessed technological advances and tourists’ preferences have changed (Ndou et al., 2019, p. 1). Furthermore, there is a need to produce graduates with innovative capacity in order to enhance economic, social and environmental sustainability (Phi and Clausen, 2021, p. 1). However, tourism education seems to have not kept up to date with technological and other changes in tourism (such as how tourism businesses are managed) (see Ndou et al., 2019:1).

Experiential training has also been a weak component of the curriculum (see Commey et al., 2021; Farsari, 2022). Practical training is important because it inculcates attributes such as an entrepreneurial mindset (see Commey et al., 2021, p. 178 on the value of experiential learning or Work Integrated learning (WIL); also see Jugmohan, 2010, p. 38; Babalola, 2019, p. 8). The choice of subjects should also strike a balance between vocational and academic approaches.

Tourism is a multidisciplinary field that draws on various disciplines such as geography, psychology, politics, sociology, and economics (Fidgeon, 2010, p. 708; Şimşek and Kalıpçı, 2023, p. 2;). From an academic/liberal perspective, students are encouraged to “see the ‘bigger picture’, find their own voices and develop critical agendas” (Fidgeon, 2010, p. 708). Universities around the world offer a wide range of tourism programmes at different academic levels with both a generic and a specific focus (for a UK case see Fidgeon, 2010, p. 720). Thus, different subjects or fields of study are included in such programs. The literature highlights numerous areas that are significant in tourism studies, including critical thinking (Slocum et al., 2019, p. 33); “human resource management and labor skills” (Renfors et al., 2020:725); “marketing, sales and customer service skills, skills in strategic management and financial management and ICT skills” (Renfors et al., 2020, p. 726); “equality, politics, and sustainability” (Yusuf et al., 2018, p. 64); learning English or other languages (Namtapi, 2022; Resmayani and Putra, 2022); issues relating to disabilities (Liasidou et al., 2018, p. 11); tourist territorial resources (Garzón-García and Florido-Trujillo, 2021, p. 581); innovation and creative and soft skills (Tiwari et al., 2020); and humanities related subjects (Caton, 2014). Tourism is susceptible to various external forces and internally (self-generated) challenges; thus, tourism professionals should be equipped to understand and be capable of dealing with all these issues (Bouwer et al., 2022, p. 337).

The literature also reflects the tourism education needs of different contexts, including Nigeria (Babalola, 2019); Ghana (Commey et al., 2021); Indonesia (Pratiwi and Fathiraini, 2023; Yusuf et al., 2018); the United Kingdom (Fidgeon, 2010); the Baltic countries (Renfors et al., 2020); Lebanon (Khoury and Bellos, 2022); Australia (Goh and King, 2020); the European context (Smith and Hall, 2006); and Thailand (Tiwari et al., 2020). For example, Ghanaian institutions have emphasized theoretical skills rather than practical training, highlighting the need to include entrepreneurship-oriented courses (Commey et al., 2021, p. 20). Scholars also note that curriculum standardisation poses the risk of suppressing creativity; however, if locally contextualised, such problems can be moderated. Lastly, there is a need for curriculum to constantly be updated to remain relevant. As Khoury and Bellos’ (2022, p. 2495) case study in Lebanon

shows, this is not always the case.

A European case study highlights the need to consider the current global context in tourism curriculum development. It proposes various topics and subjects including core subjects such as the meaning of tourism, “and other subjects and issues such as socio-cultural impacts and ethical issues, technological issues, globalisation and localization, and sustainable development” (Smith and Hall, 2006, p. 39). The authors add that the standardisation of curriculum may stifle creativity (Smith and Hall, 2006, p. 39). Thus, while some issues/topics should remain fundamental, a tourism curriculum should also be locally contextualized and be developed based on local resources, and requirements.

However, the current global context may contribute to standardization of curriculum. The neoliberal global context could favor a free-market, tourism industry-friendly approach that emphasizes, for example, job skills and industry training with less focus on theory, philosophy, and critical thinking (Slocum et al., 2019). As observed by Slocum, Dimitrov and Webb (2019, p. 33), “a public good, education is becoming increasingly market-driven as public funding for education decreases and universities ‘chase’ tuition dollars. Moreover, these policies emphasize training over CT [Critical Thinking] and tend to move education towards job-skill development in such areas as finance, accounting, and marketing, as a means to ensure student satisfaction”. They assert that a more engaged curriculum should go beyond industry skills to include broader issues, such as the role of tourism as a contributor to achieving sustainable development goals (Slocum et al., 2019, p. 33).

The ‘western’ centrism of tourism studies also calls for adaptation/contextualization of tourism curriculum to different settings (Viol and Southall, 2023). This is important because when tourism curriculum is transferred without revision, students not in western-based universities “are taught to apply Western frameworks to both the management and critique of tourism, rather than develop as reflective practitioners who can contribute to sustainable tourism development in their home regions” (Viol and Southall, 2023, p. 2). Cotterell et al. (2019, p. 2) argue that higher education institutions should include multiple conceptualizations of sustainability rather than focusing only on neo-liberal business viewpoints, this approach will promote varying worldviews and transformative learning experiences.

The issue of sustainability – including social, economic, and environmental aspects – in tourism is becoming more relevant and the debate on tourism curriculum proposes various ways (such as the Principles for Responsible Management Education (PRME) - Seraphin et al., 2021) to include sustainability issues in the curriculum (see for example Camargo and Gretzel, 2017; Cotterell et al., 2019;

Jamal et al., 2011; Saleh and El-Fattah Zohry, 2022; Seraphin et al., 2021; Stokłosa et al., 2022, p. 27; Watson et al., 2013; Wattanacharoensil, 2014). However, Farsari (2022, p. 8) observes that little progress has been made in this regard. Other important issues that should be covered include an entrepreneurial mindset (Ndou et al., 2019, p. 1), ethics, CSR (Hornig et al., 2019, pp. 100, 101) and fair-trade (Bowen and Dallam, 2020:213). Labor conditions in tourism (Costa et al., 2022, p. 61; Walmsley et al., 2022) should also be recognized as important in order to promote tourism personnel’s well-being. Sustainability in the tourism sector is fundamental for the future of tourism itself, thus it should be an ‘umbrella’ concept in any tourism qualification.

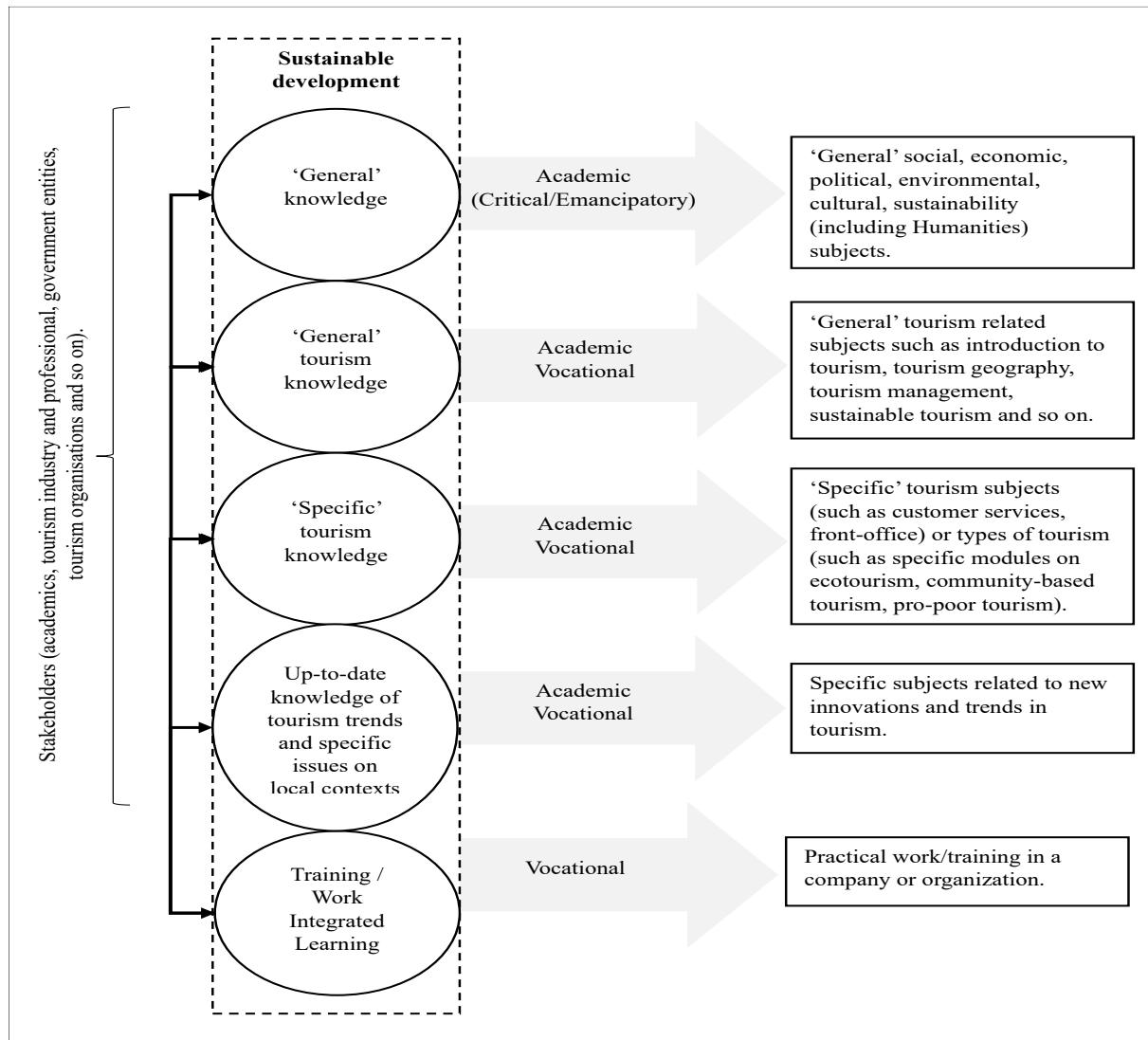
#### IV.A WAY FORWARD

This brief overview of the requirements of tourism (and hospitality) curriculum in higher education suggests the need for a comprehensive curriculum that covers diverse subjects and strikes a balance between academic and vocational learning. As noted by Jugmohan et al. (2022, p. 135), the “literature emphasizes three main matters: first, tourism qualifications need to be comprehensive and go beyond mere tourism issues; second, a tourism qualification is changing towards including sustainable and other alternative tourism forms; third, a balance of theory and practice is required.”

While it is, of course, not possible to include everything, it is possible to propose a model of ‘areas’ of knowledge and learning that a curriculum should include. Finding the correct balance between academic and vocational learning seems to be the fundamental issue. Figure 1 presents a proposed general guiding model for tourism curriculum development. The model includes five learning areas (general’ knowledge, ‘general’ tourism knowledge, ‘specific’ tourism knowledge, up-to-date knowledge of tourism trends, and training/Work Integrated learning (WIL)) that should be all be included in a tourism (with adjustments to a hospitality) curriculum. These areas of learning include both academic and vocational subjects. Thus, in the ‘general’ knowledge area, students should learn the fundamentals of social, economic, environmental and other issues relating to the world and lived realities. These should be understood from a critical, emancipatory perspective and be linked to the tourism sector. A tourism graduate should not be static in his/her work approach but should have the desire and capabilities to comprehend and be involved in innovation. ‘General’ tourism knowledge would cover the fundamental issues relating to the tourism sector through subjects such as tourism development and management, the geography and history of tourism, tourism’s impacts, tourism diversification,

leakages/linkages in tourism, and so on. It should also go 'beyond' tourism to include issues connecting it with, for example, local community contexts and

poverty, thus holistically considering the relationship between the sector and local, regional and global contexts.



**Figure 1: General guiding model for tourism curriculum qualifications. Authors' elaboration.**

The third area of knowledge is devoted to the 'specific' field of tourism and is mainly vocational in its approach. Here the curriculum includes various specific aspects of tourism such as customer services, front-of-office, travel agency management and so on. This 'specific' tourism area also includes possible modules/subjects dedicated to specific types of tourism such as pro-poor tourism (PPT), community-based tourism (CBT), responsible tourism and so on. A fourth area of learning should focus on specific tourism sector trends. The evolution and changes in the tourism sector make it important that these subjects are continuously revised and amended. This area also includes local contextualization that is contextualizing tourism issues within the local setting. Lastly, training/WIL is important as students must ultimately obtain jobs, and training is a fundamental tool to familiarize and insert

the students in the work environment. This area is essentially vocational in nature even if it is hoped the student has the possibility and the capacity to critically experience the training.

The model is based on these five areas of learning and aims to strike a balance between academic and vocational learning. With contextualization, it is sufficiently flexible to be applied anywhere and to any type of tourism related qualifications. Thus, the model's specific requirements and plans will be case specific and will also be based on the university/institution's resources. However, all five areas should have issues related to sustainability/sustainable development as a common denominator. The fundamental importance of promoting a holistically sustainable world renders this necessary.

The model implies that various actors other than academics who will play a primary and fundamental role, can be involved in preparing the curriculum. Beyond this curriculum model, it is also important to underline that new trends and continuous innovations in the tourism sector should prompt the development of specific qualifications (with their own specific curriculum) dedicated to specific types of tourism or specific aspects of it. For examples, more qualifications should be dedicated to specific types of tourism such as ecotourism, CBT (see Jugmohan et al., 2022), sustainable tourism, responsible tourism, justice tourism, fair-trade tourism and so on.

## V.CONCLUSION

This article proposes a general guiding model for tourism curriculum in universities. The debate on tourism curriculum in higher education is ongoing. The primary concern has been to maintain a balance between vocational and academic learning, with the need to include sustainability and innovations as important topics. With these considerations in mind,

the article proposes a guiding model for tourism curriculum consisting of five leaning areas. Each relates to academic or vocational (or both) learning and is circumscribed by the relevant issues relating to sustainable development. The role of tourism and education stakeholders is highlighted as they all need to be involved in various ways in curriculum development. The model is a flexible one, as local and institutional contexts will determine the specificities of the curriculum. It seeks to balance academic and vocational learning and, at the same time, consider current issues and trends such as sustainability.

While this model is part of the general debate, it aims to provide a few fundamental guidelines for tourism curriculum development. Further research and debate will hopefully inform curriculum development in tourism. Designing the best possible tourism curriculum is important for universities to attract students, for students to find work, and for industry to gain knowledge and future personnel. Ultimately, the tourism sector, and by extension society, will benefit from active, productive, critically thinking citizens.

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