

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

THE PERSPECTIVE OF ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY IN MASTER AND DOCTORAL TOURISM STUDIES IN SPAIN

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Environmental sustainability and training of human resources are two structural factors in the quality and competitiveness of a tourist destination. The incorporation of environmental sustainability into university studies is a fundamental and necessary pillar in the academic development of the students, considering that this stage is a previous step of their incorporation into professional life. In the case of Tourism studies, the consideration of environmental sustainability is particularly relevant since Tourism is based on the use of natural and cultural resources that constitute the attractions along with the foundation for the development of tourism activities. Teaching how to ensure and attain the conservation of resources within the framework of university education is a crucial issue as a guarantee, not only for the economic survival and competitiveness of the Tourism sector, but especially for reasons of environmental and social ethics. Therefore, universities are seen as agents to promote sustainability in the society, while the university Tourism students are viewed as key players in this entire process. They represent the immediate future of the sector, given that we are living in a moment in the Earth's history that is characterized by a strong imprint that human activities leave on the planet and that, additionally, the climate is changing with obvious consequences on the territory and, specifically, on the development of tourist activity.

Despite the relevance of Spain as a main tourist destination, the universities have started to offer studies in Tourism quite recently, since bachelor's degrees in that field appeared in the late '90s of the 20th century, while master and doctoral studies appeared in the 21st century. Regarding the orientation of the studies, the bachelor's degrees are of general scope that allows the students to guide their professional future, while the students of master's degree get a more specialized education focused on very diverse topics such as destination management, tourist companies, and technologies, among others. In

relation to doctoral degrees, there is an increasing number of programmes of still very broad in nature.

The key issue aimed in this work is whether the Higher Education Tourism studies in master's degrees and doctoral programmes in Spain adequately consider the aspects of environmental sustainability. This is to know if the technical knowledge and skills that are necessary for the students to professionally face the immediate future in a competitive and sustainable tourism sector, have been acquired.

Therefore, this paper shows that there are not too many subjects, that train the students to be able to make decisions that are related to the environmental sustainability of tourist destinations, the rational interaction with the environment in an ethical and responsible manner.

The methodology used to attain this objective was the content analysis of 55 academic master's programmes and the 7 doctoral programmes, based on the documents published by the Ministry of Science, Innovation and Universities in the Spanish Official Gazette and on the websites of the universities. The identification of existing master's degrees was carried out through consultations in the Register of Universities, Colleges and Higher Education Qualifications of the same Ministry of Science, Innovation and Universities of Spain using the following keywords "turismo", "turística", "turístico", "turísticas", "turísticos". In addition, the term "hotelera" was used to address a wide range of master's studies associated with this productive sector.

Once identified, the programmes were classified according to the following main 6 topics:

1. Direction, Planning and Management of Tourist Destinations
2. Direction of Tourism Companies
3. Direction and Management of Hotel Companies
4. Cultural and Urban Tourism
5. Sustainable Tourism
6. Others. This group includes master's degrees focused on certain aspects of Tourism (events and congresses, wine tourism, leisure and sport, etc.), as well as those focused on innovation in management.

A group including Erasmus mundus programmes was also added.

Subsequently, the collection of information continued with the consultation to the websites of the Spanish universities that offer Tourism studies in master's degrees and doctoral programmes to obtain the details of each one.

The analysed general aspects included the curriculum design and academic organization (start date of the programmes, distribution of credits by subjects and courses, duration of studies, teaching mode —face-to-face, blended or online—, existence of academic itineraries, and language in which they are taught). Afterwards, the content of the programmes was analysed to determine the scope of the consideration of the environmental sustainability. The analysis was mainly focused on the master's degrees of Group 5 "Sustainable Tourism". More specifically, a qualitative analysis of the subjects they include was carried out.

The results obtained, first, show the rapid increase in the number of universities that have incorporated the Tourism studies into their respective offers, both in master and doctorate. In the case of master's degrees, two types were detected: professional and research orientations, the latter one supporting the doctoral programmes in Tourism.

As final reflections, it can be said that, for the moment, the concept and scope of environmental sustainability in Higher Education Tourism studies in Spain has a low impact on the *curricula* of master's degrees, research lines of doctoral programmes and doctoral dissertations presented over the last decade. It has also been noted that environmental sustainability is addressed without being inserted into comprehensive visions. Beyond of social and economic responsibility concerning the use of natural resources, it must be noted that environmental sustainability is considered to be a key area for improvement in the framework of the tourist destinations offer, in order to increase their competitiveness. It is, therefore, the responsibility of universities to educate their students in the development of concepts, techniques and skills that meet these needs of the sector and to instil them with an ethic of environmental values and respect for nature and the planet.

Other reflections that arise after analysing the offer of courses and subjects for Spanish master's degrees are the enormous thematic diversity and the lack of uniformity in their denomination. Each university has set up an academic offer according to its own criteria without coordinating with other universities. In this way, it becomes apparent that there are study plans that offer various programmes under very similar titles. This fact can be viewed as a weakness of the system as certain common content should be foreseen, in the same way as in case of bachelor's degree, for programmes that have very similar titles. So that the students can endorse their knowledge and professional skills in any context and circumstance, and that the employers might know the professional profile behind the academic title of the candidates' degrees. The simplification, reordering and regulating the offer under minimum thematic guidelines grouped into blocks with common subjects would be very much needed.

As a final conclusion, the remaining fact worth mentioning is that the planet's environmental situation requires all sectors of the economy to rethink their production schemes towards more sustainable approaches. In the Tourism sector, this improvement inevitably requires an adequate training of human resources. In this way, it will be possible to contribute to the rational governance of natural resources based on the environmental sustainability principles from any workplace in the sector (public institutions, hospitality companies, heritage managers, etc.). The training of human resources in environmental sustainability can be a key factor in this context, which, for the time being, allows a wide margin of improvement.

Universities have the capacity and means to respond to this challenge. Therefore, they must be willing to adapt their programmes to new social and environmental needs in order for their offer to be a real response to the changes that need to be addressed. It is their responsibility to educate their students in the best possible way so that they know how to tackle the challenges of respectfully using this planet's resources.