

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

DIAGNOSIS OF THE COMPETENCIES TAUGHT IN TECHNICAL AND PROFESSIONAL CAREERS IN THE TOURISM SECTOR IN CHILE

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1. INTRODUCTION

Due to its extension across 4.200 kms, its natural resources and cultural heritage, Chile is a country with great tourism potential (SERNATUR 2018). These attributes allow for a wide range of tourism types, such as adventure tourism, ecotourism, and cultural tourism. In 2019, the country reached 4.52 million international tourists, with an 8% growth compared to the previous five years. Although the COVID-19 pandemic affected the industry, the recovery in 2022 was significant, remaining only 13% below pre-pandemic levels (UNWTO 2023). The most visited destinations include Santiago, Viña del Mar, Valparaíso, Easter Island, the Atacama Desert, and Torres del Paine in Patagonia.

Tourism in Chile has had a significant economic contribution, representing 3.3% of the GDP and generating nearly 590,000 jobs (SERNATUR 2022, SERNATUR 2023). However, the sector faces important challenges, in particular there is an increasing need to improve the training of its workforce, especially to meet the needs of key areas such as hospitality, restaurant operation, transportation, and destination management. To meet this challenge, higher education institutions offer various tourism programs, distributed in Technical Training Centers (CFT), Professional Institutes (IP) and Universities. Overall, there are 78 programs taught by 40 institutions, with about 30,000 enrolled students (Ministerio de Educación 2016). The training is highly centralized around the metropolitan areas of the central zone of the country, with 70% of technical courses and 90% of professional courses located in these regions. The main disadvantage of this model is the

limited access to education in the areas with greatest tourism potential, such as the Atacama Desert, Easter Island and Patagonia.

2. OBJECTIVES

The objective of this study was to characterize the generic and specific competencies declared in the graduate profiles of technical and professional programs taught by different types of higher education institutions in Chile. The specific objectives were: 1) To describe the institutions and study profiles of tourism programs in Chile; 2) to evaluate the specific competencies declared in the study profiles and; 3) to compare the competencies between technical and professional degrees. We expect that this work may provide guidelines for academic planning based on the competency-based training model.

3. METHODS

The study is based on the analysis of the graduation profiles of technical and professional degrees in tourism in Chile. Competences declared in the different profiles were standardized and homologated to the White Book on Tourism Degrees (ANECA 2024). Through a descriptive geographic analysis, we evaluated the distribution and concentration of tourism courses by location. The regions were grouped into five macro-zones: north, north-central, south-central, south and austral. The most used concepts in the names of courses and graduate profiles were also analyzed by counting frequencies. Competences were ranked by occurrence across different technical and professional degrees. The calculated frequencies were plotted into a concept cloud, using the freely available software SCImago Graphica (Hassan-Montero et al. 2022). A ranking of personal, instrumental, systemic, and specific competencies was also analyzed. To visualize and determine the degrees of similarity and/or differentiation between types of programs (i.e. technical vs. professional programs), and to detect the competencies that best explain these similarities and differences, we performed a “Non-Metric Multidimensional Scaling” (NMDS, Bray-Curtis distance) together with a “Similarity Analysis” (ANOSIM, Bray-Curtis distance) using PAST software (Hammer et al. 2001).

4. RESULTS

The analysis of the academic offer for tourism studies in Chile included 78 higher education programs, being 49 graduation profiles associated with technical degrees and 29 with professional degrees. The programs were taught by 40 institutions: 13 Technical Training Centers (CFT), 13 Professional Institutes (IP), and 14 Universities, with a total enrollment of approximately 30,000 students, representing 3% of the total enrollment in the country. The geographical distribution showed a strong concentration in the central macro-zones, with 70% of technical courses and 90% of professional courses located in these areas, reflecting a centralized offer.

This centralism affects the diversity and specialization of tourism training, replicating homogeneous curricula in different regions, which lacks a focus on local identity and territorial needs. The lack of student mobility, due to high costs and low connectivity

in some areas, aggravates this problem, limiting access to tourism training in areas with significant natural attractions.

Technical courses in tourism in Chile are characterized by offering general programs in areas such as restaurant operation, hospitality, gastronomy, logistics and tourism products, with a notable lack of specializations. The most frequent skills were ethics, organization, native language, entrepreneurship and teamwork. However, few institutions offer specialized courses in areas such as Wine Tourism, Adventure Tourism, Sustainable Tourism and Tourism Destination Planning, although they are few compared to the general offer. In contrast, in countries such as Costa Rica, Colombia and Peru, technical training in tourism is more specialized, offering programs such as Ecological Tourism, Rural Tourism and Official Tourism Guide. As for professional degrees, most curricula focus on Hotel Administration or Hospitality, with little offer in other specialized areas. This contrasts with countries such as Argentina and Peru, where professional careers tend to have a more specific focus, contributing to the development of public policies and better management of tourism resources.

6. CONCLUSIONS

Our study reveals the following characteristics of tourism training programs in Chile.

1. Centralization of the academic offer: Tourism training is highly concentrated in the central zone, with 40 institutions offering 78 programs to 30,000 students. However, the main tourist regions, such as the Atacama Desert, Easter Island and Patagonia, lack educational programs, which limits practical learning in these key destinations.

2. Lack of specialization: Graduate profiles focus mainly on restaurant operation, hospitality and general tourism, with few specialized courses in areas such as enology, adventure, or nature. This lack of specialization negatively affects the competitiveness of the tourism sector, that should reflect the geographic and cultural diversity of the country.

3. Excess of competencies: Graduate profiles present an overload of skills, both for technical and professional certifications. This can hinder the effective preparation of students, especially in short courses. Although some competencies are common and desirable, they do not contribute to a clear differentiation between technical and professional profiles, which weakens competitiveness.

4. Limited differentiation between certifications: Among the few competencies that make it possible to differentiate between types of certifications, the following can be mentioned for technical careers: “interpersonal relationship skills”, “problem solving” and “motivation for quality”. Meanwhile, professional careers were differentiated by competencies such as “critical, conceptual, relational and self-management reasoning”, “capacity for analysis and synthesis” and “directing and managing different types of organizations”. Due to the characteristics of the different levels of certification, it is advisable to structure profiles that clearly differentiate technical careers from professional ones and allow differentiation between the areas of application in tourism.

5. Curricular redesign: It is crucial to continue with the update, but most needed the redesign of study plans, adapting them to national and global needs. Territorial relevance, specialized programs and a clear differentiation between technical and professional profiles must be incorporated.