



Balancing tourism education and training

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ABSTRACT

This paper assumes that tourism educated and trained students play different roles (in driving future tourist demands and in meeting current tourist preferences, respectively), and it states that the main features characterising the four stakeholders involved in the design, development and implementation of tourism programmes (firms, students, educational and governmental institutions), together with the main facts they face in taking their decisions, lead to a non-optimal strategic long-run equilibrium, where tourism non-graduated or differently-from-tourism graduated employees prevail. The development of an evolutionary model allows to identify the main features characterising firms and students, to be focused on by educational and governmental institutions, in order to move towards the optimal equilibrium, where tourism graduated employees prevail, while the development of a dynamic model allows to show that this equilibrium is not detrimental to tourism trained employees. This work also suggests a possible educational strategy that could allow to move away from the non-optimal equilibrium, by achieving public objectives (such as environmental or ethical tourism), by relying on feasible educational approaches (about what and how to teach), and by taking into account the private characteristics (of firms and students). Therefore, balancing tourism education and training is both possible and beneficial to all stakeholders involved.

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1. Introduction

Tourism is a labour-intensive service industry, dependent for survival (and for competitive advantage) on the availability of good quality personnel to deliver, operate, and manage the tourist product (Amoah and Baum, 1997). Human resource issues in tourism are multi-dimensional: the poor image as an employer, the quality and availability of skilled staff, rewards and benefits, labour turnover, working hours and conditions, use of expatriate labour, barriers to employment, and a traditionally low level of training and education (Peacock and Ladkin, 2002).

This paper discusses the possible balance between (vocational) training (mainly acquired at school) and (technical) education (mainly acquired at university), by characterising the two different roles played in tourism by two types of operators, the static (trained) operators (aiming at meeting current preferences) and the dynamic (educated) operators (aiming at driving future demands) (Section 2): for example, a hotel keeper who tries to foster a market demand from environmentally concerned tourists, or a restaurant keeper who tries to favour the use of ethical

products, are dynamic operators, while a hotel or a restaurant keeper who satisfy consumer preferences are static operators.

Notice that there is no absolute distinction between vocational and technical curricula followed by static operators at schools and dynamic operators at universities, respectively. However (more vocational) schools are more likely to teach well-identified transferable skills that students are able to demonstrate on completion of their curriculum, while students in (more general) universities are more likely to learn how to learn in order to be flexible enough to cope with the changing skill requirements and the rapid technological advances. Next, there is no absolute specialisation of schools and universities in training and education, respectively. Indeed, schools might be required to offer some (general) education also (see Brunello and Checchi, 2007 for a recent study on the impacts of school tracking on educational attainment and labour market outcomes, where it turns out that reducing the extent of student tracking is appropriate for increasing intergenerational mobility), while universities might be required to provide (vocational) training also (see Olave and Salvador, 2006 for a recent study on the effects of internships in firms or training courses organised by universities on the length of unemployment before the first job is found, where the most significant improvements in labour market insertion are shown to be obtained by graduates in economics and finance). Anyway, it is here assumed that tourism operators are more likely to be static if

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trained (at school), and are more likely to be dynamic if educated (at university).

In the tourist sector there are (many) small firms, that cannot afford any effective on-the-job training for employees, and (few) large firms, that cannot solve the problem of retaining their skilled staff (Peacock and Ladkin, 2002). Thus, educational institutions must be involved in the process of educating and training students. Next, tourism often accounts for a large proportion of GDP (both in developed and developing countries), it shows high (static) potentials, both in economic (increasing size) and social (employment basin) terms, but it also shows high (dynamic) threats, for example about environmental and ethical issues (Dale and Robinson, 2001). Thus, governmental institutions must also be involved in setting the training and education processes.

Section 3 focuses on the main features characterising each of the four main stakeholders involved in the design, development and implementation of education and training programmes (enterprises, students, educational institutions and governmental institutions), the main facts faced by them, together with decisions that are usually taken (with a short and/or narrow perspective) and decisions that should be taken instead (with a longer and/or broader perspective), by showing that tourism non-graduated or differently-from-tourism graduated employees are likely to prevail.

The development of an evolutionary model (Section 4) allows to highlight the main features characterising firms and students, that lead to this strategic non-optimal long-run equilibrium (i.e. static students and employees), and that should be referred to by educational and governmental institutions, in order to move towards the strategic optimal long-run equilibrium (i.e. dynamic students and employees), where tourism graduated employees will prevail.

This emphasis on tourism educated students, however, could be detrimental to tourism trained students. Section 5 develops a dynamic model to show that an effective education system (to prepare dynamic operators) might actually increase employment opportunities for static operators (involved in training programmes), to a greater extent in a technological lively sector and to a lesser extent in a mature industry.

Tourism can be hardly defined as an industry (Lickorish, 1991), since it is an area of economic activity linking sectors through the common objective of its consumers (Amoah and Baum, 1997). Next, tourism can be hardly described as a discipline in its own right (Tribe, 1997), since it lacks a theoretical underpinning (Cooper et al., 1993). Thus, several approaches exist about what and how to teach. A standardised international tourism education, with specialisation and theming with base of knowledge is suggested in Section 6.1, as a possible educational strategy that would allow to move towards the strategic optimal long-run equilibrium (represented in Section 4), by achieving public objectives (highlighted in Sections 3.3 and 3.4), by relying on feasible educational approaches, and by taking into account the private characteristics of firms and students (stressed in Sections 3.1 and 3.2): opportunities and difficulties of the required coordination between stakeholders are emphasised in Sections 6.2–6.4.

Therefore, discussion and analysis developed in this paper allows to conclude that balancing education and training is both possible and beneficial to all stakeholders involved.

Notice that the quotations of the most recent contributions has implied that case studies refer to different countries (as specified before references), both developed and developing countries (see volume 5, June 2006 of *J. of Teaching in Travel & Tourism* for additional case studies): this seems to suggest that the analysis here developed pertains to structural characteristics of the tourist sector.

2. Two types of tourism operators

A *dynamic operator* is here defined as somebody aiming at driving the future tourism demand; for example, a hotel keeper who tries to foster a market demand from environmentally concerned tourists, or a restaurant keeper who tries to favour the use of ethical products. Next, a *static operator* is here defined as somebody aiming at satisfying the current tourism demand; for example, a hotel or a restaurant keeper who satisfy consumer preferences.

Notice that *governmental institutions* could aim at making tourist services characterised by greater environmental or ethical contents being more appreciated by consumers.

3. Stakeholders' preferences

The previous section identified the different roles played by (static) trained and (dynamic) educated operators. This section will discuss the main features characterising each of the four main stakeholders involved in the design, development and implementation of education and training programmes (enterprises, students, educational institutions and governmental institutions), the main facts faced by them, together with decisions that are usually taken (with a short and/or narrow perspective) and decisions that should be taken instead (with a longer and/or broader perspective). It will be stressed that tourism non-graduated or differently-from-tourism graduated (static) employees are likely to prevail in the tourism labour market.

Notice that it is *assumed* that all stakeholders have already chosen the tourism sector so that firms must choose whether to employ tourism graduated (dynamic) vs. tourism non-graduated or differently-from-tourism graduated (static) students (i.e. firms cannot change their activity sector), students must choose tourism graduating vs. tourism non-graduating or non-tourism graduating courses (i.e. students cannot change their study field), educational institutions must identify tourism curricula (i.e. they are not interested in other courses), and governmental institutions must specify tourism policies (i.e. they do not care about other interventions).

3.1. Enterprises

Employers do not recognise the importance of education: quite often the industry is dominated and controlled by entrepreneurs who have a complete lack of appreciation of tourism education and underlying theories, framework and concepts that should guide tourism as a major social and economic global phenomenon (UK, Peacock and Ladkin, 2002). Moreover, there is no interest in education by people involved in recruitment, since that would help people progress faster and higher in a career path (UK, Amoah and Baum, 1997). Finally, employers perceive uncertain nature and content of tourism degrees, and unclear differences from other related service sector programmes, offered by *educational institutions* (UK and Brazil, Knowles et al., 2003).

These *features* make firms to be *intrinsically* inclined to choose non-graduated employees. In particular, the industry seeks personal skills (such as communication, adaptability, and leadership) (Canada, Martin and McEvoy, 2003) and foreign language ability (UK, Leslie et al., 2004), as well as it accuses educational institutions of providing broad-based, generic knowledge linked with the learning of other disciplines (e.g. business studies and economics) (UK, Dale and Robinson, 2001) and of moulding tourism graduates with wrong qualifications (Thailand, Esichaikul and Baum, 1998).

Next, enterprises had no choice in the past, and it is now often difficult to replace qualified non-graduate personnel with inexper-

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