

Case study

# Systems approach to tourism training and education: The Kenyan case study

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## Abstract

Kenya's tourism industry is relatively well developed (with first class hospitality establishments and tourist facilities that are juxtaposed in close proximity to pristine glistening tropical sand beaches and world renowned wildlife attractions in protected parks and reserves). Hence the country, in recent years, has become a popular destination for international visitors, especially European and North American tourists, haggling for safari tourism experience combined with relaxation in pristine glistening tropical sand beaches. Thus, Kenya provides a good case study in the examination of deficiencies in tourism training that characterises many countries in Africa and other emerging tourist destinations in different regions of the world. As this study shows Kenya, as the case is with many other Third World countries, lacks a well-coordinated tourism training strategy and educational institutions capable of providing much needed human resource training and capacity building, especially at supervisory and managerial level. This paper identifies existing deficiencies in tourism education and training in Kenya, and provides a framework that can be applied in the development of a well-coordinated national tourism training strategy and initiation of education programmes. Indeed, systems approach can be replicated elsewhere in Africa and other Third World countries where tourism is increasingly gaining momentum as a major socio-economic phenomenon.

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## 1. Introduction

This article uses a systems approach to identify issues and challenges in tourism education and training in Kenya and provides a framework that can be used as a guideline in the design, planning and developing of a national tourism training strategy. In this regard, Kenya is used as a case study to demonstrate the manner in which a systems approach may be applied in emerging tourist destinations to develop and implement appropriate strategies and policy that will guide the development of efficient tourism training institutions and education programmes.

The rationale for using a systems approach in the design and development of a national tourism education strategy

derives from the fact that tourism being a multi-faceted phenomenon involving many variables, activities and interest groups, training and education in tourism needs to be approached in an integrated and holistic manner. In this regard, a systems approach for developing a national tourism training and education strategy is proposed, and is particularly applicable in emerging tourism destination in developing countries where tourism is increasingly playing a critical role in the national economy such as Kenya. Perhaps more importantly, the approach is supposed to be guided by existing contextual socio-economic, cultural and political underpinnings of a country, as enunciated in the overall national development policy and plan.

Moreover, the development of a country's human resource is crucial in achieving comparative advantage in the highly volatile and competitive global tourism industry. Indeed, as postulated by Amoah and Baum (1997) there is a two-way relationship between tourism and hospitality, in

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one hand, and human resource development and management in the other. Hence, the tourism sector, in any destination, can greatly benefit from close integration of human resource development and national education policy and planning.

Specifically, the objectives of this article are twofold. First, it seeks to stimulate critical thinking and reflection on policy dimensions concerning tourism education in particular and human resource development in general. Second, it seeks to re-emphasise the versatility of systems approach, in conceptualisation and application of appropriate tourism education and training strategies, particularly at regional and national level.

## 2. Debates and controversies

In the last two decades, tourism training and education has gained accelerated momentum as evidenced by the range and diversity of training programmes available at various levels, especially in countries where tourism has become a major socio-economic phenomenon. However, by and large, this rapid growth in tourism training is driven by the fact that many governments and private institutions are increasing recognising the socio-economic importance of the tourism industry. Consequently, government and the private sector recognise that a professional and well-trained workforce is essential in the provision of quality service and enhancing overall service delivery.

There is increased interest in tourism training and education both by the public and private sector. The outcome is increasing numbers of middle level and tertiary academic and training institutions, that were originally not keen in offering tourism as an area of study due its perceived low status as an academic discipline, currently perceive the introduction of new tourism training programmes and education courses as a means of increasing student enrolment and enhancing capitation.

However, despite increased development and expansion in tourism training, there appears to be a lack of strategic plans and policy guidelines on the development of tourism training and education in many countries, especially in Africa and other developing regions of the world. Moreover, divergent and sometimes diametrically opposed curricula development viewpoints and training approaches still exist within regions, countries or even within training institutions (Amoah & Baum, 1997; Baum, 2002; Gunn, 1998; Koh, 1995). Furthermore, there appears to be little evidence to demonstrate public and private sector commitment and willingness to initiate well-coordinated long-term investment in tourism training and education. Also, quite often, there appears to be minimal advanced career opportunity and employment for people with the right tourism skills and/or professional competencies, especially at supervisory and managerial level. In addition, as an area of study, tourism still continues to be surrounded with pedagogical disagreements.

This scenario makes long-term planning for the development of tourism programmes and curricula design difficult compared to well-established conventional disciplines that have had a long life span of academic discourse and scholarly engagement. However, the nature of the tourism industry as an emerging major global socio-economic phenomenon combined with the industry's perceived potential as a tool for regional development and poverty alleviation, especially in economically marginalised regions of the world as well as the increasing quest for maturation of tourism as a field of study, calls for proper coordination in the design and development of tourism education and training programmes at all levels.

## 3. Global issues and challenges

There are many challenges that confront the development of systematic and well-coordinated tourism training initiatives both as a field of study and as a means of acquiring vocational skills (Airey & Nightingale, 1981; Baum, 2002; Collins, Sweeney, & Geen, 1994; Cooper, 2000; Cooper & Westlake, 1992; Koh, 1995; Mayaka & King, 2002; Saayman, 2005; WTO, 1997). Existing challenges as relates to the type and quality of tourism training and education revolve around the following principle issues.

First, tourism is a highly fragmented and multi-faceted industry. What exactly comprises tourism can therefore be difficult to grasp. A proper understanding of the various activities concerning tourism as a major global phenomenon is however necessary for systematic planning curricula and development of course contents that cover the scope and breadth of the industry. Closely related to this issue is the fact that there is lack of agreement between government and private sector as to what the industry really entails and what should be the key tourism training and professional need. As a consequence, industry needs in respect to training and education are divergent and not easy to identify.

Second, in most countries and institutions, there appears to be a general lack of agreement as to where the study of tourism really belongs within the overall education policy framework, particularly at university and middle level training institutions. As a result, tourism is often tagged to unrelated departments and unconnected courses, and in many institutions tourism studies are usually housed in diverse field including geography, sociology, forestry and wildlife management, leisure and recreation studies, environmental studies, development studies and business, among others. This is also tied to lack of credibility within broader academic circles of tourism as an academic discipline.

In some instances, tourism is only offered to enrich some of the more established disciplines due to shortage of staff with the requisite professional qualifications (see Saayman, 2005). Moreover, a good proportion of tourism educators are often not specialists but are usually attracted from

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