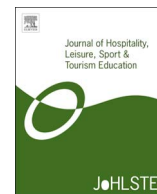


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Practice papers

Values in tourism higher education: The European master in tourism management[☆]

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1. Introduction

We live in a globalised world where tourism transcends geographical space, time, cultures and values. The continued growth, complexity, and socio-economic significance of tourism have played a part in prompting universities to meet the demands and opportunities created by the tourism industry (Airey, 2005). Tourism education and research have evolved in response to, but also in isolation from the larger society and socio-economic contexts in and by which tourism exists. For example, research has showed that there is a strong consensus around the concept of sustainable tourism development, whereas practical implementation and its implications remain problematic. This fact calls forth a change of perspective in tourism higher education, from which these challenges and gaps can be addressed.

From this perspective, learning should not be limited to critical reflections on the complexity of tourism in conceptual terms. The design of the programme curriculum must give room to a variety of learning scenarios that are not restricted to traditional lectures or short-term industry projects, but an opening of the learning space at local and global levels (Mihalič, 2002, 2005; Liburd & Hjalager, 2010, 2011). Moreover, new learning environments and practices should allow tourism higher education students to recognize and critically reflect upon the underlying values of tourism-related behaviours and practices, e.g. stewardship, ethics, professionalism, mutuality and knowledge (Sheldon, Fesenmaier, Woeber, Cooper, & Antonioli, 2008), and the implementation of sustainable tourism development in a diversity of contexts (Liburd & Edwards, 2010). Tourism higher education must evolve from simply promising a mere acquisition of knowledge towards sceptical and questioning attitude towards knowledge creation (Barnett, 1990; Liburd, 2013).

This practice paper reports on values-based education and learning in an elite MSc programme in tourism, the European Master in Tourism Management (hereinafter the EMTM). The EMTM is a joint international MSc programme in tourism management jointly delivered by three European Universities. The EMTM programme sprang from a self-conscious dialogue amongst the authors of the paper over several years about the need to transcend well-established and old assumptions about the practice of tourism higher education. Its creation involved experimentation with transcending institutional and disciplinary boundaries, and benefitting from the Erasmus Mundus initiative promoted by the European Union with the purpose of developing new elite European MSc programmes along those lines.

EMTM is the only programme in tourism awarded the Erasmus Mundus label among around 130 MSc courses from all university disciplines. The programme involves a compulsory mobility scheme between the University of Southern Denmark, Denmark, the University of Ljubljana, Slovenia, and the University of Girona, Catalonia, Spain. Annually, a maximum of 35 students are selected among an average of 600 applications. Among the selected students, half are EU citizens and the other half non-EU students. No more than four students from the same nationality are selected. The average number of nationalities in each cohort is 23 and the disciplinary backgrounds of students encompass a large variety of the humanities and arts and social sciences. As a consequence, global variety in culture, geography, and knowledge is integral to the learning environment of the EMTM programme.

[☆] This practice paper reports on values-based education and learning in an elite MSc programme in tourism, the European Master in Tourism Management.

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As the student cohort follows the same mobility scheme for the three first semesters (first semester in Denmark, the second in Slovenia, and third in Catalonia, Spain), the programme exposes students to different types of tourism, education, and life in three nationally, geographically, and culturally diverse European contexts. Moreover, during the fourth semester when students write the master thesis, they are distributed not only among the three EMTM partner universities, but also among eight excellent, non-EU associated partner universities from Asia, Africa, Australia, Brazil and the Americas, or among tourism industry partners from all over the world. Finally, a visiting scholar mobility scheme is also in place, which brings interaction with, and learning from an invited elite of non-EU tourism professors who expose students to the depth and reach of international scholarship.

In this context of trans-institutional, trans-disciplinary and trans-cultural experience, the EMTM aims to educate graduates who can manage the complex challenges and opportunities in international tourism. This calls for a holistic approach to tourism education where broader aims of the industry and society are explicitly addressed in the curricula. In order to do so the EMTM programme is committed to the values of the Tourism Education Futures Institute (TEFI) where notably ethics, responsibility and sustainability are centre stage.

In the following, we challenge the gap between the concept of sustainable tourism development and its slow penetration into tourism practice. In particular, we examine how EMTM students assess the gap between the industry importance and educational performance of the value-set proposed by TEFI. First, the content of TEFI values and the methodology are outlined. Next, the findings are discussed and as a result we contend that the integration of values into teaching and the creation of tourism knowledge are paramount if we want to bridge the gap between theory and practice of sustainable tourism development. Yet values cannot be taught as dogma but that as points of critical, deep reflection, which guide managerial practice.

2. The TEFI values

The Tourism Education Futures Initiative (TEFI) was borne out of a concern that tourism higher education did not sufficiently address the challenges of the present while educating future responsible world-makers in order to meet demands by the industry as well as those of the wider society. In order to understand how the TEFI values are being brought into the learning experience of tourism higher education students we refer to [Ramdsen \(2003: 7\)](#) who stated that “there can be no such thing as value-free education”. Indeed, Barnett laments how

“the higher education community consistently evades its responsibility to declare the particular values that underpin its activities.” (1990: 44)

The ambitious vision of TEFI is to reshape tourism education worldwide and to help tourism graduates follow practices that are informed by the five value-sets, illustrated in [Fig. 1](#).

Drawing on [Liburd \(2013\)](#) the interrelated five values can be explained as follows. First, ethics is the basis for good action and is concerned with distinguishing between right and wrong; ethical behaviour derives from specific value systems, such as teleology and deontology. Second, knowledge is more than data (summary descriptions of parts of the world around us) and more than information (data put into a context); knowledge comes in both explicit and tacit forms; the knowledge of others should be recognised, and existing knowledge that may be taken for granted should be challenged. Third, professionalism implies not only a profession and the skills, competencies or standards associated with it but also attitudes and behaviour reflecting these; aligning personal and organisational conduct with ethical and professional standards, professionalism includes a responsibility to the customer or guest and community, a service orientation, and a commitment to lifelong learning and improvement. Fourth, stewardship suggests that tourism faculty and students should learn to understand leadership in three distinct aspects, namely sustainability, responsibility, and service to the community; stakeholders share a responsibility for the environment and the society, as well as the responsibility to exercise their relational power and/or the restriction of power of others; tourism students, teachers and other stakeholders can demonstrate their responsibility through service to the community. Fifth, and last, mutual respect is a value grounded in human relationships that require attitudinal developments; these are evolving and dynamic and involve acceptance, self-awareness of structural inequalities, open-mindedness, empowerment, and the ability to revisit one's cultural understanding of the world.

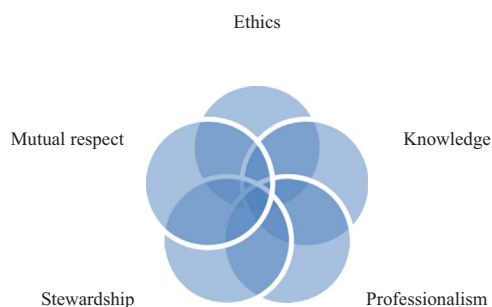


Fig. 1. The TEFI Values (adapted from [Liburd, 2010](#)).

Table 1

TEFI values and its elements.

Source: Adapted from Sheldon et al., 2010, Fig. 1.

Stewardship	Ethics	Knowledge	Professionalism	Mutual respect
Sustainability - natural	Ethics	Expertise and skills	Professionalism	Diversity
Sustainability – soc.-cult.	Honesty	Critical thinking	Leadership	Inclusion
Sustainability – economic	Transparency	Creativity and innovativeness	Practicality	Equity/ equality
Responsibility – sust. behaviour	Authentic self	Networking – direct	Service to the customers	Humility
Service to the community		Networking – Internet and Web2.0	Timeliness	Collaboration & partnership
			Teamwork	

3. Methodology

The TEFI values are conceptually portrayed as interlocking value principles made up by different elements, which have been discussed by a range of authors (e.g. Liburd, 2013, 2014; Liburd & Christensen, 2013; Liburd, Hjalager & Christensen, 2011; Prebezac, Schott, & Sheldon, 2013; Sheldon et al., 2008). For this study, these elements have been operationalize to measure their use, importance, etc., in tourism practices as listed in Table 1.

Action research has been employed, which generally relates to research that is connected to a change process and to generate new knowledge and learning for both researchers and participants (Munch, 2014: 139). Action research often involves investigation being undertaken by the persons directly concerned with the social situation under consideration (McGugan, 2002), here that of the EMTM teachers and students. In the case of this research, the first author of this paper took active part in identifying the TEFI values, their description and the experimentation with their content in online learning contexts. Further, all three authors have been actively involved in EMTM teaching and a range of sustainable tourism development initiatives.

In order to collect data about the TEFI values, a quantitative research instrument was designed to identify EMTM students’ understandings of the presence of TEFI values in higher education and their importance in the tourism industry. The survey was conducted in spring 2013 with the participation of three consecutive cohorts of EMTM students. The web questionnaires were e-mailed to the whole population of 77 students. A total of 54 usable questionnaires were returned, which were subjected to analysis. The questionnaire included all elements of the TEFI values in order to measure how much their practical implementation in tourism industry and their integration in tourism higher education programmes is realised, or not. Respondents assessed their perception about both the presence of the values in higher education and their importance in the industry by means of a 5-point Likert scale. The questionnaire also included statements on gender, nationality, country of residence, enrolment year and employment status.

The analysis of the data thus collected was done applying the Importance-Performance Analysis (IPA) tool (Fig. 1). IPA was first proposed and introduced by Martilla and James (1977) as a means by which to measure client satisfaction with a product or service. It understands satisfaction as the function both the importance of a product or service to a client and the performance of the supplier in providing that service or product (Martilla & James, 1977). The combined ratings by individuals for those two components provide an overall view of satisfaction. Therefore, the use of this tool results in particular findings that, on the basis of the particular position of each value in terms of their lower or higher importance and performance, advise on potential avenues for product or service improvement. As shown in Fig. 2, the four quadrants in importance-performance analysis are characterized by Martilla and James (1977, p. 78) as:

- “A. Concentrate here - high importance, low performance: requires immediate attention for improvement as they are major weaknesses;
- B. Keep up with the good work - high importance, high performance: indicate opportunities for achieving or maintaining competitive advantage as they are major strengths;

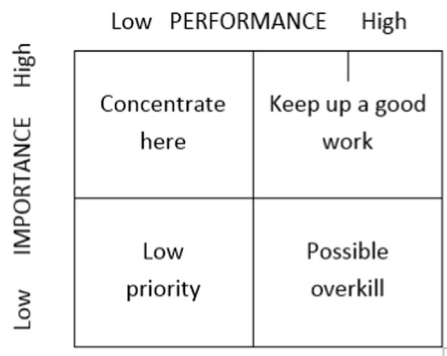


Fig. 2. Importance – performance matrix. Source: (Martilla & James, 1977, p. 78).

Table 2
IPA for EMTM and industry values.

TEFI values	Education performance Mean	Industry importance Mean	Difference	Importance – performance analysis
Stewardship	4,08	4,06	0,02	Keep up good work
Ethics	3,83	3,88	-0,05	Concentrate here
Knowledge	3,92	3,95	-0,03	Concentrate here/Keep up a good work
Professionalism	3,7	3,4	0,3	Low priority
Mutual respect	4,06	3,81	0,25	Keep up a good work/Possible overkill
Mean	3,92	3,82		

- C. Low priority - low importance, low performance: they are minor weaknesses and do not require any additional effort;
- D. Possible overkill - low importance, high performance: indicate that any resources committed to these attributes would be overkill and therefore should be deployed elsewhere”.

4. Findings and discussion

Some positive and negative gaps in the implementation of TEFI values in tourism higher education in the case of the EMTM programme and their importance in the tourism industry can be identified in Table 2. These may help tourism educators to critically discuss, and potentially align values-based education with practices that are of importance to the tourism industry.

As for the implementation of TEFI values in the EMTM programme listed in Fig. 3, results point to areas of potential improvement in the adoption of TEFI values (e.g. ethics), areas with low priority (e.g. professionalism), and areas of keeping up the good work (e.g. stewardship).

The area of possible overkill by education exceeding industry expectations is empty. According to the IPA findings, the EMTM programme needs to improve delivery of ethical issues to its students, which are valued as relatively important for tourism industry. We can only speculate whether the EMTM students think that more teaching and discussion on how to deal with ethical issues are needed in order to increase their understanding of tourism industry ethics. Or they might think that ethical issues in the tourism industry are very complex and difficult to handle and thus wish to be taught more efficient tools to handle ethical issues, which might not exist. In addition, EMTM teachers have observed that students from different part of the world do not share the same understanding of unethical tourism behaviour. For example, EU students often think that tourism industry is more unethical than non-EU student who see ethics in tourism as less of a problem (Mihalič, Liburd, & Guia, 2015).

Finally, mutual respect falls between the areas of keeping up good work and possible overkill. It subsequently calls for less attention by the EMTM teaching programme, as the perception of its performance in the programme is rated higher than the perception of its importance to the industry. This last result may be directly attributable to the composition of the EMTM student body, which encompasses an average of 23 different nationalities, and where mutual respect may be more taken for granted than in other settings. Indeed, in an international class like the EMTM, multicultural diversity and respect are integral to daily lived experiences and practices. We refer to Barnett (2004) ontological call for learning, which is not limited to knowledge and skills, as represented by the TEFI value of knowledge. It also involves authentic being. The EMTM students live and learn in transnational, intercultural, and socio-political contexts where they collaboratively engender critical, dynamic, and holistic understandings of tourism and the wider tourism world.

The high performance of EMTM in each and all the TEFI values shows the value of adopting new methods of teaching and learning, and new learning environments, which enhance and ensure that the values are critically reflected upon and practiced in higher education training programmes. The experience of EMTM proves that learning in a trans-cultural, multi-disciplinary and cross-

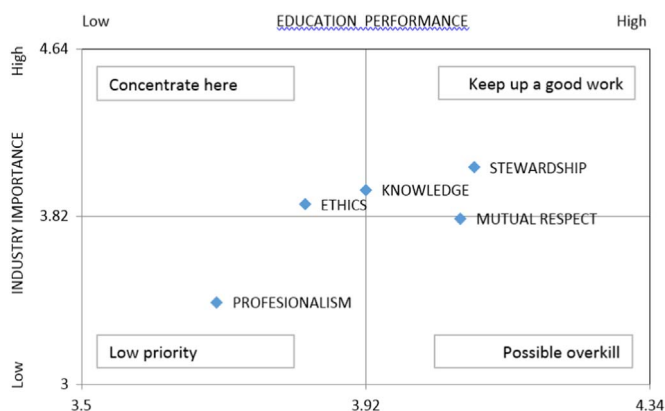


Fig. 3. IPA for EMTM and industry values.

institutional setting enhances students' understanding and acceptance of the TEFI values. Moreover, these settings also contribute to develop critical knowledge about the past and present, which is instrumental in forming uncertain futures (Sheldon et al., 2008; Liburd & Hjalager, 2010, 2011). This does not imply that values-based teaching and learning should be seen as the only way to prepare students for their future field of practice. Rather, here is an embedded understanding of professionalization, reciprocal relationships and sustainability that goes well beyond a traditional transfer of knowledge, proficiency and skills from teachers to students.

Whereas IPA is a recognised method to measure relevant gaps in product delivery and satisfaction, the fact that the importance of these values for the industry has been only indirectly measured by the perception of EMTM students is a significant limitation. Nonetheless, the fact that most of the students have previous work experience in the tourism industry and all are active tourists, they engage lifelong knowledge in their assessment about how important these values are in the industry, which merits the assessment.

Epitomising the EMTM programme is the transformation from closed and institutionally controlled tourism education through multiple dimensions of collaboration, mobility, and communicative action (Liburd, 2013). We have experimentally integrated and tested how the TEFI values can be applied to challenge students' understanding about issues of tourism world-making. However, our mutual learning exposed that the TEFI values cannot be seen as dogma. Rather, the values may be feasibly addressed as topics of critical reflection in the classroom, industry settings and beyond. The EMTM students learn in, with, and from, transnational, intercultural and socio-political contexts through which dynamic understandings of underlying values can be critically and experimentally facilitated.

5. Conclusion

This practice paper reports on a survey of the performance and importance of values in tourism higher education and the tourism industry, through the eyes of the European Master in Tourism Management (EMTM) students. Reclaiming the aims of tourism higher education, tourism post-graduates should be capable of thinking not only about the means to current problem solving, but to critically and philosophically reflect upon tourism business practices and ends in the context of desirable futures (Liburd, 2010 and Liburd, 2013).

Therefore, future research is planned to invite the tourism industry in the respective consortium countries to also assess the TEFI values. Moreover, inclusion of future tourism trends and the opinions of relevant stakeholders, including tourists and local inhabitants, could feasibly capture aspects of communities and natural environments, in order to generate insights into contextual performances, potential gaps and suggested areas of improvement. The latter is supported by an IPA analysis of tourism and quality of life by Liburd, Benckendorff and Carlsen (2012), and based on a holistic understanding of tourism's contribution to sustainable development.

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