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Socialising students for Philosophic Practice? An analysis of learning outcomes in tourism taught Master's programmes

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ABSTRACT

Tourism education may have an important role to play in 'resetting' tourism onto a more sustainable trajectory post-Covid-19. However, neoliberal policies that have increasingly encouraged higher education institutions to prioritise vocational learning over liberal learning may hinder the development of Philosophic Practitioners (Tribe, 2002), those graduates who may be best equipped for this task. The purpose of this research was to explore the extent to which education for Philosophic Practice (Tribe, 2002) – that which balances vocational and liberal learning - is reflected in the curricula of tourism taught Master's (TTM) programmes offered globally. In particular, the popularity of TTM programmes, combined with a focus on high-level professional responsibilities, means that future decision-making for and about tourism may increasingly rest with the graduates that emerge from these programmes. Using qualitative content analysis, findings show that overall TTM education does have a strong vocational orientation. There are, however, some signs that liberal learning outcomes addressing broader socio-cultural and environmental needs are also being emphasised. Crucially, though, there is little evidence to suggest that vocational and liberal learning are being balanced in TTM curricula. This is a potentially problematic situation that may have implications for sustainable tourism in the future.

Bionotes

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1. Introduction

Long before Covid-19, the world faced myriad and unprecedented socio-cultural, economic and environmental challenges:

[P]overty ... rising inequalities within and among countries ... Gender inequality ... Natural resource depletion and adverse impacts of environmental degradation ... Climate change ... The survival of many societies, and of the biological support systems of the planet, is at risk (UN Resolution 70/1, 2015, p. 5).

Itself a powerful socio-cultural, economic and environmental 'force' (cf. [Higgins-Desbiolles, 2006](#)), tourism was heavily implicated in many, if not all, of the issues mentioned above. As an example, a recent pre-Covid-19 report by [Gabbatiss \(2018\)](#) pointed to carbon emissions from touristic air travel as being a major contributor to global climate change. Similarly, tourism's global resource use had already exceeded sustainable levels ([Gössling & Peeters, 2015](#)). In many ways, Covid-19 served simply as a salient reminder of such

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issues, and as Crossley (2020) notes, for example, “The [recent] escalation of climate consciousness, agitation and anxiety ... has, in a way, reached a bewildering and unexpected climax in the form of this pandemic” (p. 5). Consequently, the pandemic is widely being seen as an opportunity to ‘reset’ tourism in ways that maximise its benefits whilst minimising socio-ecological costs (Brouder, 2020; Everingham & Chassagne, 2020; Higgins-Desbiolles, 2020; Nepal, 2020 (and other articles from *Tourism Geographies* July 2020 Special Issue)).

After all, the potential of tourism for bringing about sustainable benefits in and for global society is well documented. For example, tourism may have the potential to act as a force for good by alleviating poverty through job creation (United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO), 2019) or by improving food security in developing countries (Ambelu et al., 2018). In bringing together people from different backgrounds, tourism may also act as a force for peace through the engendering of intercultural understanding (Pratt & Liu, 2016) and empathy (Tucker, 2016). Examples such as these speak more broadly to tourism’s ongoing role in addressing the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UNWTO, n.d.)

Arguably, restarting tourism so as to maximise its benefits whilst minimising any potential costs is, to varying degrees, a task that falls to tourism leaders¹ (Page & Connell, 2006). This, however, is likely to be a challenging task given that “differentiated social groups hav[e] different interests in causing and alleviating economic, environmental and social problems” (Demeritt, 2001, p. 313). In this, tourism might best be considered as a ‘supercomplex’ force (Airey, 2015; Barnett, 2000), one characterised by multiple layers of governance, economic, socio-cultural and environmental relationships, and power (Hayes et al., 2019). Now, more than ever, this calls for tourism leaders who are capable of navigating supercomplexity in order to make decisions that are in the best interests of the broader tourism society and world (Tribe, 2002).

Some, if not many, of tourism’s future leaders are likely to be today’s tourism students. Subsequently, the tourism education that students undertake now is likely to influence how they choose to restart tourism in the future. In this sense, tourism education² has an important role to play in ‘socialising’ the next generation of tourism leaders (Pritchard & Morgan, 2007, pp. 12–28). As Airey et al. (2015) note:

Using tourism as a vehicle not just for students’ immediate employment needs but for bringing together a whole range of challenges that are present in the practice of tourism, from ecological and environmental issues to effective managerial practice and ethical behaviour, provides the subject with a setting that is well placed to provide the kind of education that is needed for future leaders (Airey et al., 2015, p. 148).

As the world looks to ‘restart’ tourism in more hopeful and sustainable ways, post-Covid-19, Airey et al.’s comments underscore tourism education’s potential role in and for this. As Tribe (2002) puts it, tourism education has the potential to develop Philosophic Practitioners; tourism graduates who may be best equipped to “promote a balance between satisfying the demands of business and those of the wider tourism society and world” (p. 34). It is, arguably, these sorts of graduates who may be most capable of navigating tourism’s supercomplexity in order to bring about positive and meaningful change in and for the post-Covid-19 tourism world.

However, despite there being a recognised need for education that balances business needs with sustainability needs (perhaps more so than ever post-Covid-19), delivering this kind of education may be problematic within the current neoliberal higher education context. In this context higher education has arguably become a valuable market commodity, with many claiming that the processes of marketisation (Molesworth, Scullion, & Nixon, 2011) has served to shift the role of higher education away from serving the needs of society (public needs) to serving the (immediate) employment and operational needs of students and industry (private needs) (Barnett, 2004a, 2004b; Bessant et al., 2015; Giroux, 2014; Molesworth et al., 2011; Wright & Shore, 2017). Thus, a growing emphasis on vocational education within tourism higher education may serve to make balancing vocational and liberal education a difficult task (Dredge et al., 2012). Against this potentially problematic backdrop, an important question must be asked: to what extent, if at all, do the intended learning outcomes of tourism programmes reflect an orientation toward the ideals of Philosophic Practice?

In attempting to address this question, tourism taught Master’s (TTM) education was chosen due to the particular characteristics of this type of programme. Taught Master’s programmes,³ including TTM programmes, can be completed quickly (normally one-year) and are open to, and increasingly sought by, students wishing to convert to a different professional/academic field (e.g. tourism) (King, 2009). In part, these characteristics have served to make TM programmes, including TTM programmes, the most popular form of postgraduate study (Altbach et al., 2009; King, 2009; Morgan, 2014; Thomas et al., 2014; Education Counts, 2018). Furthermore, the overarching aim of TTM education, because it is ‘Master’s’ level, is to develop students’ leadership capacity (in some way or another). Because of this, and coupled with being highly popular, many of tourism’s future leaders will potentially emerge from today’s TTM programmes. Therefore, this type of programme represents an especially important context with which to analyze the extent to which tourism education may be socialising students for Philosophic Practice. Specifically, this article does this by drawing on research conducted just prior to Covid-19 which analysed the curriculum spaces for different TTM programmes.

¹ In the context of this article, the term ‘leader’ is not limited solely to the world of work (e.g. managerial decision-makers). Instead, the term denotes anyone who may be in a position to influence others, either directly or indirectly (including tourists who may, because of their learning, influence others through their words/actions/online postings etc.).

² In this article, tourism education refers collectively to tourism teaching and learning.

³ The term taught Master’s is often used interchangeably with coursework Master’s. In this article, the term ‘taught Master’s’ is used throughout.

2. Education for Philosophic Practice

2.1. *Philosophic Practice: A post-Covid-19 ideal*

According to [Tribe \(2002\)](#), balancing vocational and liberal education within the curriculum is one way that tourism education can produce graduates who can work effectively in tourism whilst also maximising tourism's societal benefits: Philosophic Practitioners. More specifically, a curriculum for Philosophic Practice must attend to learning in four different, but interactive, quadrants. These are vocational action, reflective vocational, liberal action, and reflective liberal.

Vocational action focuses specifically on the practical/technical skills and knowledge required for employment in the tourism industry (e.g. specific skills and knowledge for a particular job and/or transferrable skills). Teaching and learning in this quadrant is aimed at developing operational competence, something that, in a skills-based and service-oriented industry such as tourism is crucial ([Dredge, 2016](#); [Tribe, 2002](#)). Here, disciplines/fields within business and management studies (e.g. marketing, strategic management, accounting and finance) may be heavily drawn upon. Reflective vocational emphasises 'reflection-in-action' or, to put it another way, thinking about, and critically reviewing, one's own work-related actions with the aim of making improvements in the future. Work placements and/or work-based projects can, for example, help students reflect on their understanding and use of vocational knowledge and skills (vocational action).

Liberal reflection extends beyond the 'vocational' to consider all and any aspects of the tourism phenomenon as it relates to the wider society. It is about understanding tourism's broader world-making role in society ([Dredge et al., 2015](#)) and the issues associated with that. Here, providing opportunities to 'view' tourism through different disciplinary lenses is crucial, as are opportunities to critically reflect upon/evaluate the role of tourism in the world. Disciplines from within the Social Sciences (e.g. Geography and Anthropology) may be drawn upon to achieve these outcomes, as might those from within Humanities (e.g. Philosophy). Finally, liberal action is about providing opportunities for individuals to literally act upon (or at least make plans based on) their liberal reflections (and to carry this on throughout life). Thinking about the world differently and having a better understanding about what is 'ethical' and 'just' is not enough on its own though. Nor is the ability to be sceptical of the status quo. For liberal action to be effective requires that individuals (at the curriculum level at least) also have the ability to translate their newly internalised values, attitudes and dispositions into actions for a better tourism world. [Tribe \(2002\)](#) suggests that, for example, work placements with ethical pressure groups or a module on the politics of tourism (p. 345) may encourage liberal action.

Therefore, based on Tribe's conceptualisation of tourism education, a curriculum that incorporates all four interactive and overlapping quadrants could result in the development of Philosophic Practitioner graduates, those best able to think and act in the best interests of society through their professional (and, arguably, personal/touristic) practices. In this sense, Tribe's Philosophic Practitioner curriculum, with its blending of liberal and vocational education, might be considered optimal for developing graduates who can maximise the benefits of tourism for all society. Arguably, this may be especially important if post-Covid-19 tourism is to 'restart' in a truly sustainable way. However, one potential problem with Tribe's conceptualisation of education for Philosophic Practice is that it may be considered as a philosophical ideal, one which, as [Dredge et al., 2012](#) point out, fails to consider that the tourism curriculum space is "bounded by a forcefield of influences on higher education" (p. 2154).

2.2. *Problematizing the ideal: constraining education for Philosophic Practice*

[Bessant et al. \(2015\)](#) make the point that, as a result of neoliberalism, liberal values associated with higher education being the critic and conscience of society "such as social justice, equity, environmental protection and ethical democratic decision-making" (p. 420) have been traded off for other values. Arguably, this is part of a broader 'revolution' that has taken place in higher education, one which has brought about considerable changes in terms of the focus for teaching and learning ([Altbach et al., 2009](#)). Specifically, the development of 'employability skills' is now regarded as a (the?) key goal for higher education ([Bessant et al., 2015](#)). This is summed up in [Giroux's \(2014\)](#) scathing commentary:

The current threat to higher education ... is ... The view that students are basically consumers and faculty providers of a saleable commodity such as a credential or a set of workplace skills. More striking still is the slow death of the university as a centre of critique, vital source of civic education ([Giroux, 2014](#), p. 16).

Here, Giroux is referring to the damaging influence of neoliberalism (a 'war' as he puts it) on the teaching and learning functions of higher education. In this, there is the implicit view that the traditional focus on liberal education within higher education has now been supplanted by an (almost exclusive) emphasis on vocational education. This is a view widely supported in the literature and is one that highlights a shift away from higher education being considered a 'public good' to something more akin to a private economic investment ([Barnett, 2004a, 2004b](#); [Bessant et al., 2015](#); [Shore & Wright, 2017](#), pp. 1–27).

To some degree, though, tourism education has always had its roots in vocational education. Partly, this is "a product of the history and development of tourism in higher education over the last three decades" ([Wilson and von der Heidt, 2015](#), p. 134) wherein most tourism departments have ended up in business or management schools ([Shweinsberg et al., 2013](#); [Wilson & von der Heidt, 2013](#)). Subsequently, tourism students tend to be "predominantly business/management students, graduating with business/management degrees" ([Wilson & von der Heidt, 2015](#), p. 134), the focus of which has been on supplying industry-ready graduates (e.g. [Airey & Johnson, 1999](#); [Busby, 2001](#); [Busby & Fiedel, 2001](#)). More than this, the specific focus of many tourism curricula rooted in business/management schools has been on the "functional aspects of working in business in general or the operational aspects of tourism organizations" ([Sharpley, 2011](#), p. 73).

However, in terms of developing Philosophic Practitioners (cf. [Tribe, 2002](#)), the focus on business/management/vocational

education becomes potentially problematic if is not counter-balanced with liberal education (Sheldon et al., 2008; Tribe, 2002). As Sharpley (2011, p. 61) puts it, a lack of “a more liberal, reflective dimension alongside ... vocational/technical elements” in the curriculum means that graduates may become passive employees who lack the “skills or confidence to question, challenge or reflect” (ibid) upon the world as is. Here, Morgan’s (2004) metaphor of the ‘production line’ provides a salient reminder of how a narrow focus on utilitarian skills within the tourism curriculum may be problematic when it comes to developing graduates who can also think and act in and for a better (tourism) world. However, in light of the demand for utilitarian ‘employability skills’ in higher education, balancing vocational and liberal education may be a challenging prospect for tourism scholars and curriculum planners.

Indeed, as Dredge et al. (2012) argue, neoliberal influences in higher education (such as the increasing emphasis on ‘employability skills’) serve to problematise the ideals set out in Tribe’s (2002) Philosophic Practitioner education. To a large extent Dredge et al. (2012) agree with Tribe’s argument that the *ideal* tourism curriculum should balance vocational and liberal education. However, they also suggest that the curriculum space is becoming increasingly crowded due to different demands (mainly those associated with neoliberal higher education policy), meaning that scholars and curriculum planners must invariably make ‘choices’ about what to include/exclude. The result is that individual curriculum spaces may likely tend toward vocational or liberal education.

In this context, the combination of a growing demand among students for ‘employability skills’ (Busby, 2001), coupled with pressures to secure ever increasing numbers of student enrolments, creates a tension wherein tourism education for Philosophic Practice may become constrained. Furthermore, a potentially narrow focus on vocational education could serve to integrate, or as Pritchard and Morgan (2007, pp. 12–28) put it ‘socialize’ (p. 19), future generations of tourism graduates into the logic that tourism operates only as an industry to serve tourists and/or provide a future job. It may also obscure from view the idea that tourism is a worldmaking and worldchanging force (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2006; Hollinshead, 2007, pp. 165–193; Dredge et al., 2015), leaving students without the full means to transform society through the practices of tourism. In light of the tensions outlined, it seems vital, therefore, that empirical insights into the orientation of tourism programmes be generated. For several reasons that will now be discussed, focussing particular attention on TTM programmes may be especially important at this time.

3. TTM programmes – an important yet under-researched context

One particular type of Master’s level programme to emerge over the past 20 years is the taught Master’s degree programme. These programmes are generally 12 months to two years long and thus are considerably shorter in duration than traditional undergraduate and honours programmes (usually three or four years). Teaching and learning is based around a curriculum that is divided into individual modules, each of which focuses on particular content, and carry a range of assessment methods (e.g. exams, essays, projects). Research remains a major emphasis of most taught Master’s programmes (Altbach et al., 2009; Drennan & Clarke, 2009) but much less so compared to research-only Master’s degrees (Kiley & Cumming, 2014).

Morgan (2014) points out that for many institutions taught Master’s programmes have become the most popular option for postgraduate study, much more so than research-only Master’s programmes (Thomas et al., 2014). An example of this can be seen in recent data from Australia where, in 2018, enrolments in taught Master’s programmes accounted for 19% of all enrolments compared to just 0.4% for research-only Master’s (Department of Education and Training, 2018).

The growing interest in this type of programme has been driven by various factors, among which is a perception that a taught Master’s qualification will improve employment prospects and increase earning potential (Morgan, 2014; Soilemetzidis et al., 2014). The relatively short duration of most taught Master’s programmes also presents a cost effective study option, in addition to offering students the chance to ‘convert’ to a different field of study/professional area (e.g. from English literature to tourism) (King, 2009). The subsequent growing interest amongst students in taught Master’s programmes has been matched *vis-à-vis* by an increase in the provision of such programmes (Altbach et al., 2009; Thomas et al., 2014).

The sort of demand trends evident in taught Master’s education are mirrored in the specific context of TTM education. TTM programmes, like taught Master’s programmes in general, have become very popular. In New Zealand, for example, enrolments in these programmes more than doubled between 2008 and 2017 (Education Counts, 2018). It should be noted that these particular statistics are based on tourism Master’s level study as a whole (rather than distinguishing between taught and research-only programmes). We know, however, that interest in research-only Master’s in many subjects/disciplines has waned over recent years (Thomas et al., 2014). Coupled with anecdotal evidence about the lack of demand for research-only tourism Master’s programmes⁴ it would be reasonable to assume that most of the enrolment statistics are for TTM programmes. In the UK, for example, there was a 172% increase in enrolments for tourism-related taught Master’s programmes between 2004 and 2014 (Higher Education Funding Council for England, 2015).⁵ Given the interest in taught Master’s education more generally, there is little reason to suggest that these trends are not repeated elsewhere around the world, despite specific TTM enrolment statistics for other countries being unavailable.

Against this backdrop, TTM education, like Master’s education more broadly, remains specifically tasked with developing students’ leadership capacity. In this sense, as Jenkins (1980) has noted, “The complexity of tourism together with the need to develop a comprehensive view of the subject logically suggests that training for policy makers is best done at university postgraduate level” (p. 240). This speaks to the idea that the general and overarching focus of Master’s level education is on high level learning. By virtue of this focus, therefore, Master’s level education is necessarily aimed at preparing graduates to be leaders/decision-makers/independent

⁴ For example, between 2016 and 2019 there was only one student completing this sort of programme at my University.

⁵ In England, enrolments declined slightly in subsequent years, a trend common to many subjects at undergraduate and postgraduate level, including taught Master’s (Higher Education Funding Council for England, 2015).

thinkers (in whatever professional or personal context graduates find themselves). This is evidenced in the wording of many qualification frameworks from around the world that highlight these aims.

Therefore, an overarching focus on developing students' leadership capacity, coupled with the growing demand for TTM education, may mean that decisions and actions about/for/within tourism may, in the future, increasingly rest with the graduates that emerge from TTM programmes. Again, then, the question of what to include in the TTM curriculum space becomes critical when it comes to thinking about how students might be differently socialised by their TTM experience (thereby influencing the nature of the actions and decisions they may make about/for/within tourism in the future). Whilst the TTM curriculum space may be subject to many of the same pressures faced in tourism education more generally (see reference to [Dredge et al., 2012](#) earlier), the TTM curriculum space also faces its own unique pressures.

For example, when it comes to the already potentially difficult task of positioning the curriculum space, the challenge faced by curriculum planners in terms of what to include, and what not, may be particularly complicated at the TTM level. For example in a three or four year tourism undergraduate programme, despite the various influences that crowd the curriculum space ([Dredge et al., 2012](#), see earlier discussion), there may still be sufficient 'space' to balance vocational and liberal education. In contrast, though, the curriculum space for a one or two year TTM programme is already small, even before all the other pressures are taken into account. Thus, as [McInnis et al. \(1995\)](#) have noted, the challenge of balancing vocational and liberal education becomes a focal point at the taught Master's level. Yet despite the apparent importance of the TTM context, almost nothing is known about the orientation of TTM programmes and the extent to which, if at all, such programmes are poised to socialise Philosophic Practitioners.⁶

Previous studies have attempted to examine TTM education at a broader level. [Flohr \(2001\)](#), for example, sought to investigate the role of sustainability within TTM programmes⁷ in the UK. Flohr analysed the titles of TTM programmes and their component modules to find evidence of words and phrases linked to sustainability. She found that words and phrases associated with sustainability were extremely limited in the titles of TTM programmes and, where it was evident in module titles, sustainability tended to be linked to optional rather than compulsory modules. Further, environmental sustainability took considerable priority over socio-cultural and/or economic sustainability. Flohr concluded that sustainability plays a limited role in TTM education in the UK, with programmes instead characterised by a strong focus on tourism management. Flohr's findings built on those of [Airey and Johnson \(1999\)](#) who conducted a similar, albeit more inductive, content analysis of TTM programme prospectuses. Their study found that the aims and objectives of TTM programmes in the UK were overwhelmingly vocational and business/management oriented.

The studies conducted by [Airey and Johnson \(1999\)](#) and [Flohr \(2001\)](#) are undoubtedly useful. However, as well as being limited to the UK context both studies are now almost two decades old. Therefore, and in particular given the ever-pressing need for Philosophic Practitioners – those who may be best placed to 'restart' post-Covid-19 tourism - a broader and more up to date study investigating intended learning outcomes of TTM programmes is needed.⁸ The aim of this research, therefore, was provide an initial first-step in identifying the extent to which the intended learning outcomes of different TTM programmes reflects an orientation toward Philosophic Practice.

4. Research methods

4.1. Data collection

The data upon which this article is based was collected from electronic programme prospectuses for TTM programmes offered globally. Programme prospectuses, in print or online, are used by higher education institutions to communicate information about programmes to prospective students. In this, as [Pettinger et al. \(2018\)](#) note, programme prospectuses communicate "explicit and tacit promises ... of future experiences" (p. 472) and, arguably, future outcomes. Thus, as [Airey and Johnson \(1999\)](#) have noted, the material contained within prospectuses provides a sufficiently useful basis with which to evaluate the possible nature and scope of educational programmes.

The data was collected between May and July 2018 and the prospectuses were found using the five most popular/comprehensive databases of TTM programmes. In each of the databases, the most relevant category from a drop down list was selected and a search of tourism-related taught Master's programmes (e.g. 'tourism and hospitality', 'tourism and leisure') was conducted. Different disciplinary areas (e.g. 'geography', 'business/commerce') were also searched using a range of different keyword searches (e.g. 'tourism', 'leisure', 'hospitality', 'sustainable tourism').

The initial search generated 299 separate programmes and this data set was then narrowed to include only those programmes that

⁶ This reflects a general lack of understanding associated with taught Master's education ([Forsyth et al., 2008](#); [Kiley & Cumming, 2015](#)), especially when compared to that of doctoral and undergraduate education ([Kiley & Cumming, 2015](#)). As a potential consequence of this, general confusion surrounds such programmes ([King, 2009](#)).

⁷ Flohr referred to the programmes as 'postgraduate courses' but the programmes analysed were all examples of taught Master's.

⁸ It should also be noted that in the context of [Airey and Johnson's](#) study, TTM programmes and undergraduate programmes were analysed together making it difficult to draw definite conclusions about the aims and objectives of TTM programmes specifically.

contained the word 'tourism' in the title ($n = 217$). The data field was further narrowed to exclude other associated terms such as 'hospitality', 'leisure' and 'events'. The decision to exclude these terms was a pragmatic one, made on the basis of limiting the scope of the enquiry to tourism-specific programmes.⁹ Moreover, the need to focus specifically on generic and/or generalist tourism programmes was also identified. Generic and/or generalist programmes can be characterised as having a broad focus (as indicated for example by titles such as Master of Tourism Management or Master of Tourism) rather than a specialised focus (as indicated for example by titles such as International Tourism and Hotel Management which points to a more niche programme). King's (2009) observations about demand trends in tourism education also provide some theoretical justification for choosing to focus on more generic/generalist programmes. King suggests that:

As often occurs in competitive markets, there has been some development of niche products in tourism education. This has been an emerging characteristic of [tourism, hospitality and events] programmes. Such niches have included programmes in club and gaming management, sports tourism, cultural tourism, ecotourism and indigenous tourism ... However it appears as if the narrower the concentration within a degree programme, the more limited the prospective student ... demand (King, 2009, p. 5).

Accordingly, this indicates a likelihood that a greater proportion of future tourism leaders will be emerging from generic/generalist programmes rather than niche or specialised programmes. Despite up to date enrolment data for specific programmes being unavailable, this conclusion is based on certain inferences in King's comments that point to generalist/generic programmes being potentially more popular than niche or specialised programmes.

Therefore, niche or specialised programmes (e.g. Sustainable Tourism and Protected Area Management), as well as those containing hospitality, leisure, events etc., were also omitted from the selection. This narrowed the selection to 58 potential generic/generalist programmes, from which 43 programmes were chosen for inclusion in the final sample. (Note: Of the 58 programmes (in addition to some not having sufficient useable data) some institutions were offering multiple programmes so the most generalist of each was selected for the final data set). For each programme, descriptions (where available) of core and optional modules and their intended learning outcomes were collected.

4.2. Data analysis

A qualitative approach to content analysis was employed in order to generate descriptive and context specific insights about the learning outcomes of TTM programmes. In general terms, qualitative content analysis is a "qualitative data reduction and sense-making effort that takes a volume of ... material and attempts to identify core consistencies and meanings" (Patton, 2002, p. 453). In the context of this research, the aim was to make sense of, and find meaning in, the electronic prospectuses of TTM programmes.

Hsieh and Shannon (2005) outline three approaches to qualitative content analysis: conventional, directed and summative. The major differences between these approaches coalesce around coding procedures:

In conventional content analysis, coding categories are derived directly from the text data. With a directed approach, analysis starts with a theory or relevant research findings as guidance for initial codes. A summative content analysis involves counting and comparisons, usually of keywords or content, followed by the interpretation of the underlying context (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p. 1277).

The content analysis used in this particular research combined all three approaches. The analysis of the module descriptions of core and optional modules in TTM programmes was conducted in order to identify whether, and the extent to which, TTM curricula align with the basic tenets of Tribe's (2002) Philosophic Practitioner curriculum. One aim, in particular, was to explore the range of different curricula 'spaces' being offered (i.e. what does the curriculum 'space' for different TTM programmes look like in terms of a balance between vocational and liberal education?).

Using Tribe's Philosophic Practitioner curriculum, coding categories were based on the titles of the four curriculum quadrants: vocational liberal, vocational action, liberal reflection, and liberal action. This part of the analysis is what Hsieh and Shannon (2005) refer to as a directed approach (see earlier). In developing categories from which to code the data, Mayring's (2015, pp. 365–380) suggestions also proved particularly useful. According to Mayring, categories must first be explicitly defined, a process that involves identifying and determining which text likely belongs in any given category. With this in mind, extracts were selected from the data that accurately represented each category, what Mayring (2015, pp. 365–380) refers to as 'anchor samples'. The table below (Table 1) provides definitions for each category along with an anchor sample taken from the data.

Based on these categories a "trial run-through" (Mayring, 2015, p. 377) of the first few programmes was conducted in order to check whether the categories were broadly applicable. From there, the entire data set was worked through and all relevant text extracts (module descriptions/descriptions of intended learning) were assigned to the appropriate category. It should be noted that the content analysis is based on 31 out of the possible 43 programmes. This is because information about the intended learning outcomes and/or a detailed description of the specific aims and objectives of modules was not provided for 12 programmes (i.e. only the module title was provided with no further information/description). In total, 292 modules across 31 programmes were analysed. The spread of the 31 programmes covers 15 countries: UK, Ireland, Germany, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Slovenia, Austria, Spain, Malaysia, China, Australia, New Zealand, USA, and Canada.

The anchor samples shown in Table 1 served as exemplars, and all extracts were then compared with these in order to determine

⁹ It is accepted that this is a potentially contentious decision as there are many who assert that hospitality, leisure and events are inexorably linked with/part of tourism. However, in the context of a study such as this, each of these sub-fields (including tourism) warrants specific attention on the basis that they are research/educational entities in their own right. Thus, for example, future research could explore the outlook of and for hospitality (or leisure, or events) education in contributing to Philosophic Practice.

Table 1
Definition of categories and anchor samples for directed content analysis.

Category name	Definition (based on Tribe, 2002)	Anchor sample from data
Vocational action	Learning outcomes that focus on practical tourism knowledge and skills; preparation for work; technical skills for tourism-specific jobs; personal transferable skills; <i>'doing the job'</i>	Students will participate in preparing investment projects and understand how performance measures should be linked to overall organizational strategy. The course requires students to both identify and apply techniques that aid in decision-making to maximise financial performance.
Vocational reflection	Learning outcomes that provide opportunities to reflect on or evaluate vocational skills and knowledge; personal 'critique of vocational action'; limited to the area of business or management actions; <i>'thinking about the job/how to do the job better'</i>	By the end of the [module] students will be able to critically evaluate service quality models and know how service quality can be measured
Liberal reflection	Learning outcomes that provide opportunities to reflect on the broader tourism world/society/project; beyond the confines of business/management; scepticism, critical thinking or reflection about tourism as a phenomenon; affective learning; values and attitudes (e.g. ethics); <i>'critically thinking about the tourism world/how to make the tourism world better'</i>	Encourage critical analysis of sustainable tourism development in terms of potential positive and negative impacts on cultures and the environment
Liberal action	Learning outcomes that emphasise action or participation; focus on improving practice but not just business practice; behaviours aligned with liberal values and attitudes; <i>'changing/improving the tourism world'</i>	Consider the challenge of a more sustainable industry from a range of perspectives ... [and] apply this knowledge to a live situation and discuss the limitations of achieving a more sustainable industry

which category or categories they best fitted into. Using Microsoft Excel, the extracts were highlighted in different colours according to the category or categories they were assigned to. Some modules were coded only once, but others were coded into multiple categories. Based on the frequencies for each category, and with the use of 'radar charts', a unique visual 'curriculum space' for each programme was then able to be developed.

Radar charts are graphs with multiple scales, commonly used to provide visual comparisons between two or more categories, and have been successfully employed in qualitative evaluation research. Kaczynski et al. (2008), for example, used radar charts based on six categories (e.g. assessment, communication, content) to compare the extent and components of blended learning in and across different institutions. Their demonstrated use of radar charts "as a tool to enhance qualitative enquiry" (Kaczynski et al., 2008, p. 25) in this way prompted their use in this research. In this article, radar charts serve to visually represent different curriculum spaces occupied by TTM programmes.

The combined use of content analysis and radar charts in this way offers a potentially useful platform upon which to critically evaluate the propensity of TTM programmes to develop Philosophic Practitioners (Tribe, 2002). It is of course important to note that the radar charts presented in the remainder of this article offer only a 'snapshot' of particular TTM curriculum spaces at a certain point in time. However, recursive applications of this method (i.e. repeating the aforementioned process of data collection/analysis at intervals in the future) may also allow for the on-going (re)evaluation of programmes/the sector over time.

5. Findings

This section is divided into three parts, beginning with an example of the curriculum space for Umeå University's Master of Tourism. This example is provided as a means to illustrate how a radar chart (i.e. the curriculum space) was developed based on the interpretation of learning outcomes data. Following this, consideration is given to those curricula that appear well aligned with the tenets of Philosophic Practice (Tribe, 2002) as evidenced by a balance of vocational and liberal learning outcomes. Finally, a sector wide view of the learning outcomes in TTM education is provided.

5.1. Umeå University's Master of Tourism

This example is based on an analysis of the intended learning outcomes as stated in the module descriptions for Umeå University's Master of Tourism. As is evident in Fig. 1 below, liberal reflection was highly prominent in the learning outcomes for this particular programme.

In the case of Umeå University's Master of Tourism programme, all four modules analysed mentioned learning outcomes that were interpreted as aligning with 'liberal reflection'. Learning outcomes that were interpreted as aligning with either 'liberal action', 'vocational reflection' or 'vocational action' were also detected in three modules. Below are the descriptions of two out of the four modules (Table 2), followed by an explanation of how these were coded.

The module descriptions, in this instance, provided considerable details about the intended learning outcomes, and this was useful. The curriculum was strongly underpinned by human geography and, because of this, a liberal orientation was perhaps unsurprising. Much of the programme appeared to be theoretical, and many of the intended learning outcomes focussed on developing students' ability to analyze and evaluate issues that sit outside the world of tourism work. In the module Population and Mobility, for example, one of the stated learning outcomes was for students to 'analyze population geographical issues on different geographical levels'. A stated learning outcome such as this emphasises high-level thinking in relation to complex issues influencing the tourism world, rather

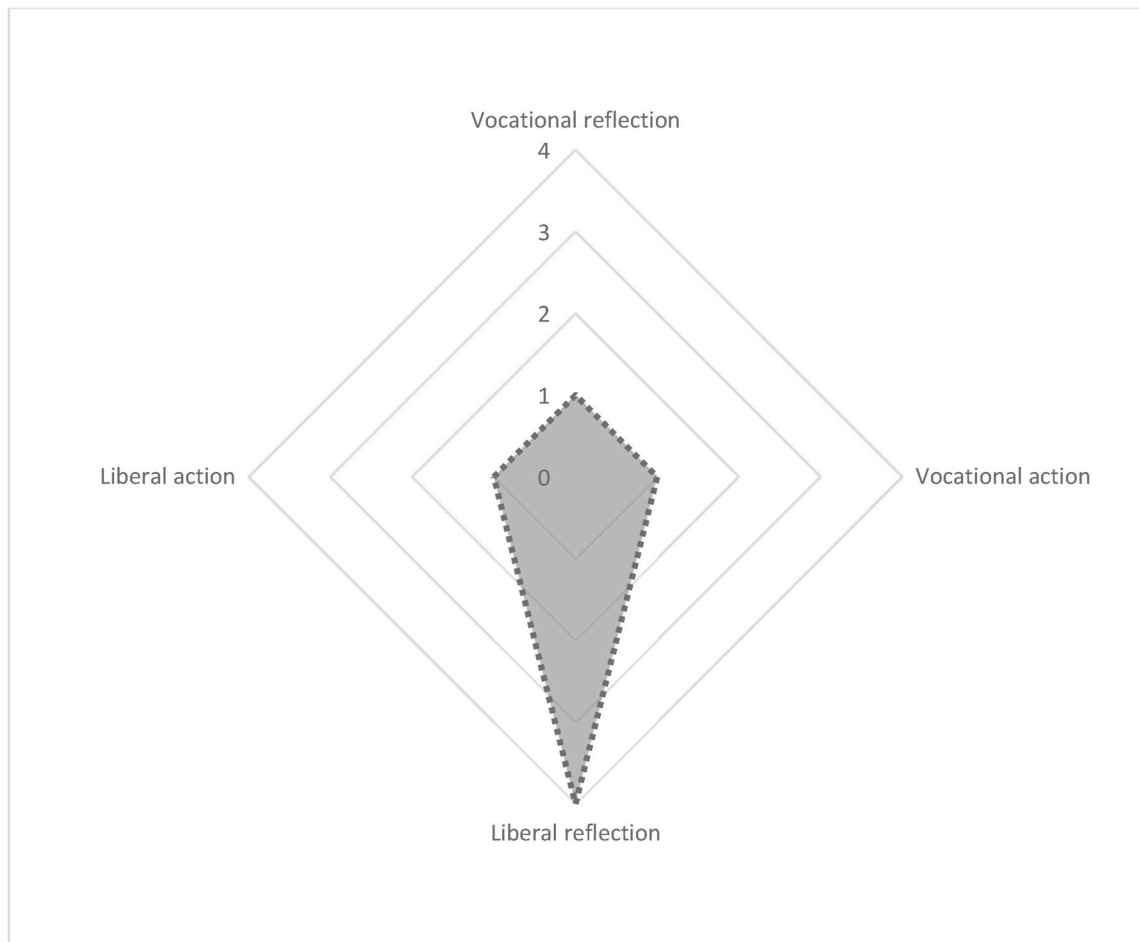


Fig. 1. Umeå University curriculum space.

than the application of this thinking to actual or simulated scenarios. As such, this particular learning outcome aligned with liberal reflection (rather than liberal action), of which there were many other examples throughout Umeå's curriculum.

Elsewhere in the curriculum students were also being provided with opportunities to *do something* with the liberal knowledge and skills being reflected upon and/or evaluated. For example, in the module Destinations and Regional Development, in addition to critically assess[ing] theories and models concerning destination development' (liberal reflection), students were also required to present a destination analysis (presumably based on the aforementioned critical assessment) and 'plan for tourism development'. These last two learning outcomes appear to involve the real-world, operational application of knowledge and, as such, were potentially aligned with vocational and liberal action. Planning for development also appeared to involve judging or evaluating different courses of potential action (vocational/liberal reflection). Accordingly, this module was coded into all four categories.

5.2. The prospects for 'balance'

As is potentially the case for Umeå University's Master of Tourism, a programme that appears to lean mainly toward liberal reflection may run the risk of developing graduates who are not in touch with the everyday realities and practices of the tourism industry. As Tribe (2002) explains, "A tourism curriculum framed solely for liberal ends may be criticized as one which has turned its back to the world of work" (p. 346) and wherein consequently a situation may arise "for the tourism world to be inspected at arms length, and for prognostications about that world to be made without regard to the practical realities of competitive business conditions" (Tribe, 2002, p. 347).

Therefore if Philosophic Practice requires a 50/50 balance – or more precisely, a 25/25/25/25 balance between vocational action and reflection and liberal reflection and action - then potentially we must look to radar charts whose four components were *proportionally* 'full'. There were no programmes that struck a perfect balance, but perhaps two of the closest were the UIT University of Norway Tourism Studies programme and the University of Otago's Master of Tourism (Fig. 2).

Whether intentionally or not, both of these programmes appeared to have Philosophic Practice (Tribe, 2002) as the end goal for graduates. In the example of UIT, vocationally oriented modules balanced other, more liberally oriented modules. In the module Travel

Table 2
Module descriptions (Umeå University).

Module title	Module description
Destinations and Regional Development	<p>Departing from the Tourism Area Life Cycle (TALC) model, applications of the model on destinations are addressed. Theories behind and use of the TALC and other models of destination development is critically scrutinized. Interrelationships of destination development and regional development are addressed, i.e. economic, socio-cultural and environmental impacts of tourism in geographical contexts. Theories, policy and planning for tourism and regional development are addressed.</p> <p>Knowledge and understanding</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. assign relevant impacts and problems to the different stages of the tourism destination life cycle, assess various planning methods for tourism development, <p>Competence and skills</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. distinguish and critically apply methods for tourism research within destination analyses, 2. analyze a destination regarding demand and supply, 3. present a destination analysis in oral and written form 4. distinguish and criticize impacts of politics on tourism, 5. plan for tourism development, <p>Judgement and approach</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 6. critically assess theories and models concerning destination development 7. critically assess ideas and theories of tourism and regional development.
Population and Mobility	<p>Population development, human migration and mobility is central to current societies not least with regards to the globalization and transnationalization of social space. New forms of mobility are developing at the same time as impacts and driving forces at least partly are in change. Global population issues as well as economic development are also important themes during the course. The course addresses the broad variety mobility comprising everyday travel, commuting, migration, sojourning and tourism of mobility comprising everyday travel, commuting, migration, sojourning and tourism as well as development- and global population issues in different parts in the world. Particular emphasis is put on the interrelationship of different forms of mobility. Theoretical perspectives are balanced by empirical studies.</p> <p>Competence and skills</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. analyze population geographical issues on different geographical levels, 2. analyze different forms of mobility and their relationships, 3. evaluate constraints to population development and mobility, 4. apply different methodological approaches in population analyzes, 5. apply and analyze gender and ethical perspectives on studies in population development and mobility, <p>Judgement and approach</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. critically appraise theories of population development and mobility, 2. critically assess one's own as well as others analyses in population geography.

Note: Descriptions collected from [Umeå University \(2018\)](#).

and Tourism Marketing, for instance, learning outcomes were focussed on vocational reflection (e.g. 'apply theoretical reasoning in travel and tourism marketing') and vocational action (e.g. 'identify and implement activities that will increase tourism companies' degree of market orientation'). In contrast, the learning outcomes for the module Advances in Tourism Theory were centred on developing high-level cognitive skills in students (e.g. 'apply critical thinking on tradition and modernity on tourism as a phenomenon'). Here, the emphasis was on liberal reflection exclusively but, in the module Nature Tourism, this was extended to include liberal action as well. In Nature Tourism, students were given opportunities to develop regional nature based tourism products (liberal action) based specifically on a critical analysis of the relationship between tourism, society and nature (liberal reflection)¹⁰. In the example of UIT, therefore, it was the programme as the sum of its parts that was contributing to a balanced focus (i.e. different modules, all of which were compulsory, focussed on different categories of learning, e.g. liberal reflection or vocational reflection etc.).

On this final point, the same can be said for the University of Otago's Master of Tourism, in that all four learning categories were also addressed in specific modules (as well as being addressed through the combination of modules). For example, in the optional module Tourism Destination Development students were encouraged to critically evaluate the role of destinations within the broader tourism system (liberal and vocational reflection) and, in a team, develop a real-life tourism destination strategy (vocational and liberal reflection/action) based on this.

It should be emphasised that the programmes discussed in this section were the only two that seemed to balance elements of vocational and liberal education. Most other programmes, whether intentionally or not, appeared to prioritise vocational or liberal learning outcomes.

5.3. Aims and objectives for learning at the sector level

Virtually all of the 31 programmes analysed appeared to prioritise vocational learning over liberal learning. As can be seen in [Fig. 3](#) below, for example, in 90% of the programmes ($n = 28$) the majority of module descriptions were categorised as vocational (reflection and/or action). This compared with only one programme (3%) where the majority of modules were categorised as liberal (reflection and/or action). As mentioned previously, only two programmes appeared to balance vocational and liberal learning.

From across the entire sample of 292 module descriptions, the frequencies for all four categories (i.e. coded extracts of intended

¹⁰ Examples of learning outcomes taken directly from module pages on UIT University of Norway website ([UIT University of Norway, 2018](#), n.p).

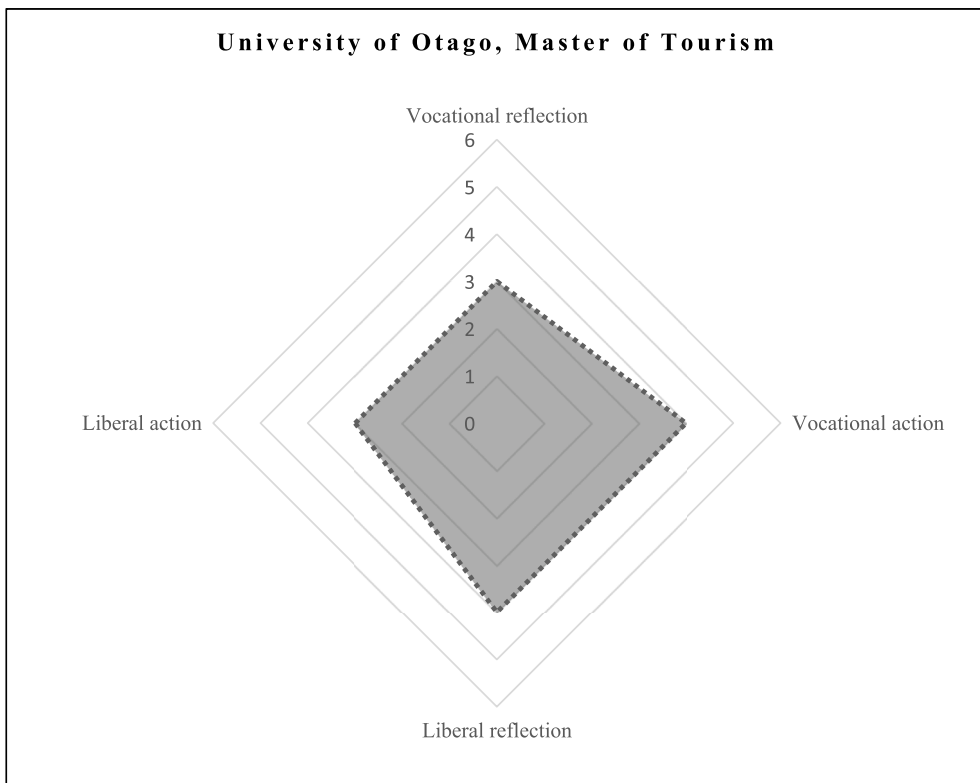
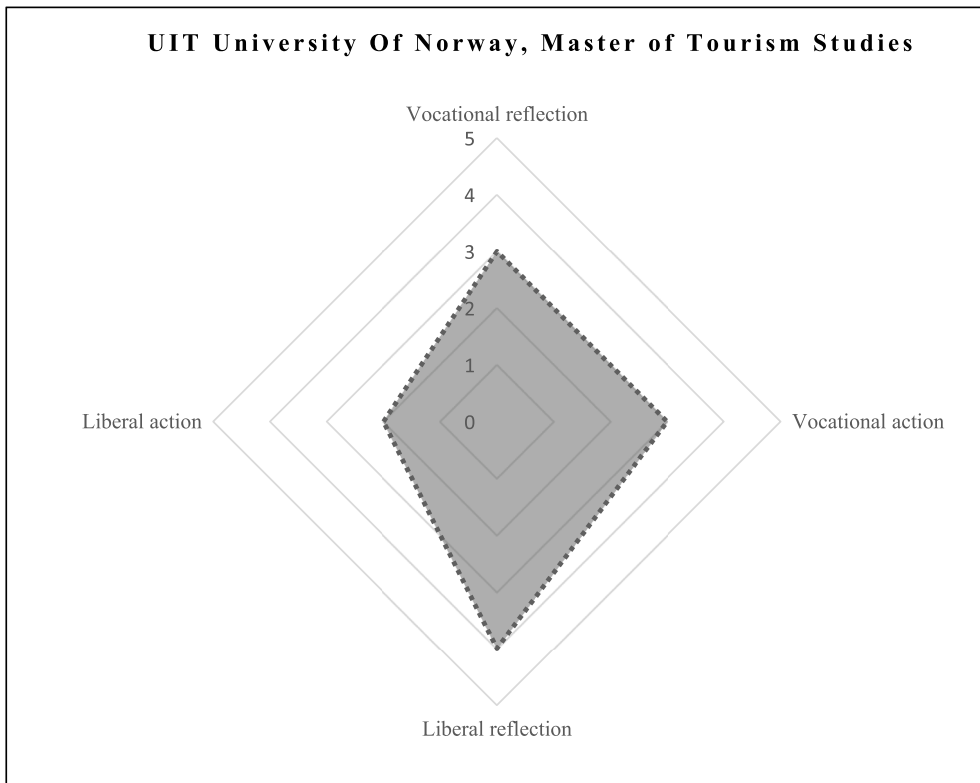


Fig. 2. Two examples of relatively balanced tourism curricula.

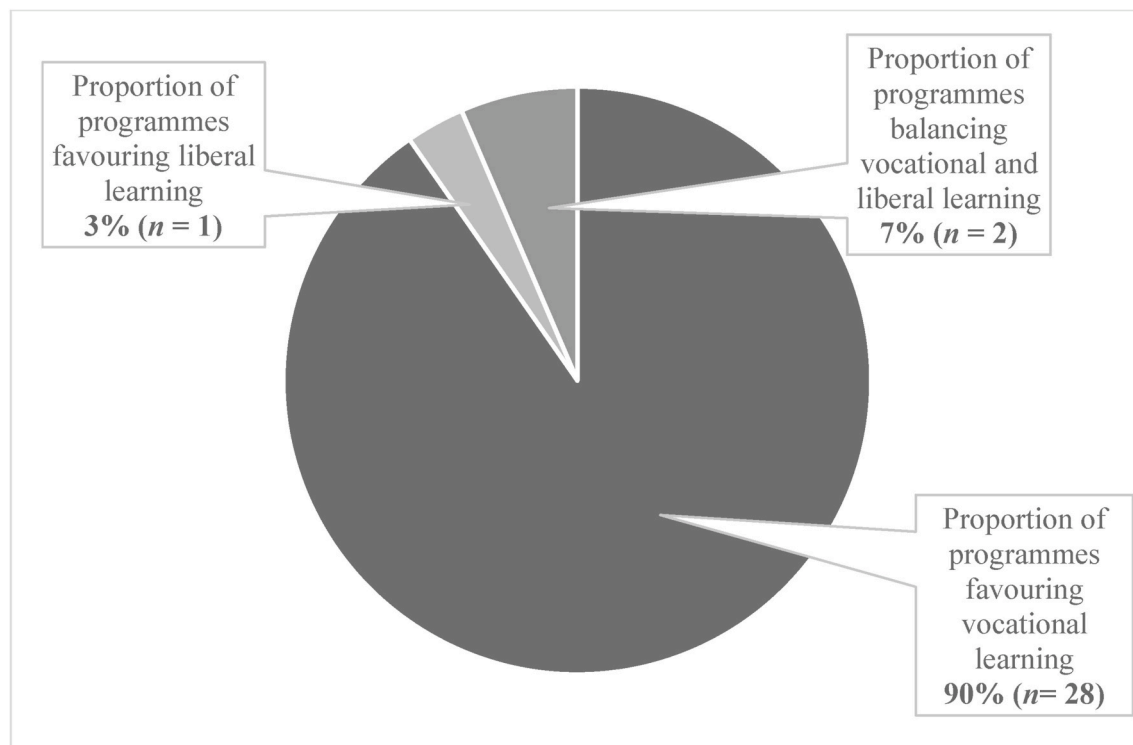


Fig. 3. Vocational vs. liberal education in TTM education at the sector level.

learning outcomes associated with vocational action, vocational reflection, liberal action, or liberal reflection) were also pulled together into one chart. This provides a visual tool to see the overall orientation for learning in TTM education. This can be seen in Fig. 4 below.

Of the 292 module descriptions analysed, 238 (82%) mentioned or referred to learning outcomes that were interpreted as being linked to ‘vocational action’. In contrast, only 52 (18%) module descriptions mentioned or referred to learning outcomes that were interpreted as being linked to ‘liberal action’. This is potentially concerning given that programmes with a strong vocational focus - and in particular those that focus on vocational action above all else - run the risk of developing graduates with an abundance of technical expertise but limited critical/ethical competency, all of which may serve to perpetuate “a narrow tourism society of consumers and producers” (Tribe, 2002, p. 346).

Overall, therefore, TTM education appeared to prioritise the development of technical skills and knowledge above all else; in other words, the central aim appeared to be on developing work-ready graduates. Evident too were lots of opportunities for students to reflect on the technical skills and knowledge they were developing. An excellent example of this can be seen in the Project Management module at the University of Southern Denmark, where one intended learning outcome was: describe and compare project management models and techniques and access their underlying assumptions ... analyze and reflect on critical issues associated with the use of specific project management techniques. Such critical assessment includes both considerations of the main assumptions of the theoretical model, its limitations, and the challenges that may occur when the theoretical model is put into practical use (University of Southern Denmark, 2018, n.p.).

Despite the somewhat narrow focus on vocational learning outcomes, there were signs, albeit to a much lesser extent, that students were also being encouraged to think more widely – and more critically – about the broader relationship between tourism and society. Evidence of this can be seen in the proportion of learning outcomes in the liberal reflection quadrant. Overall, however, learning outcomes designed to encourage liberal action were attended to least. This suggests that, even in cases where liberal reflection was being encouraged, students had few opportunities to operationalise their critical thinking. In terms of the capacity of TTM education at the sector level to develop Philosophic Practitioners (Tribe, 2002), this analysis paints an especially damning picture.

6. Discussion and conclusion

The aim of this research was to evaluate the extent which, if at all, TTM programmes appear poised to socialise students for Philosophic Practice. Using Tribe’s (2002) Philosophic Practitioner curriculum as a theoretical lens, this was done by analysing the intended learning outcomes for different TTM programmes as stated in online programme prospectuses. Programme prospectuses can, of course, never provide a complete overview of all curriculum activities. Furthermore, the findings presented in this chapter offer only a ‘snapshot’ in time and, as Ring et al. (2009) previously noted in their study of undergraduate programme prospectuses, “The present

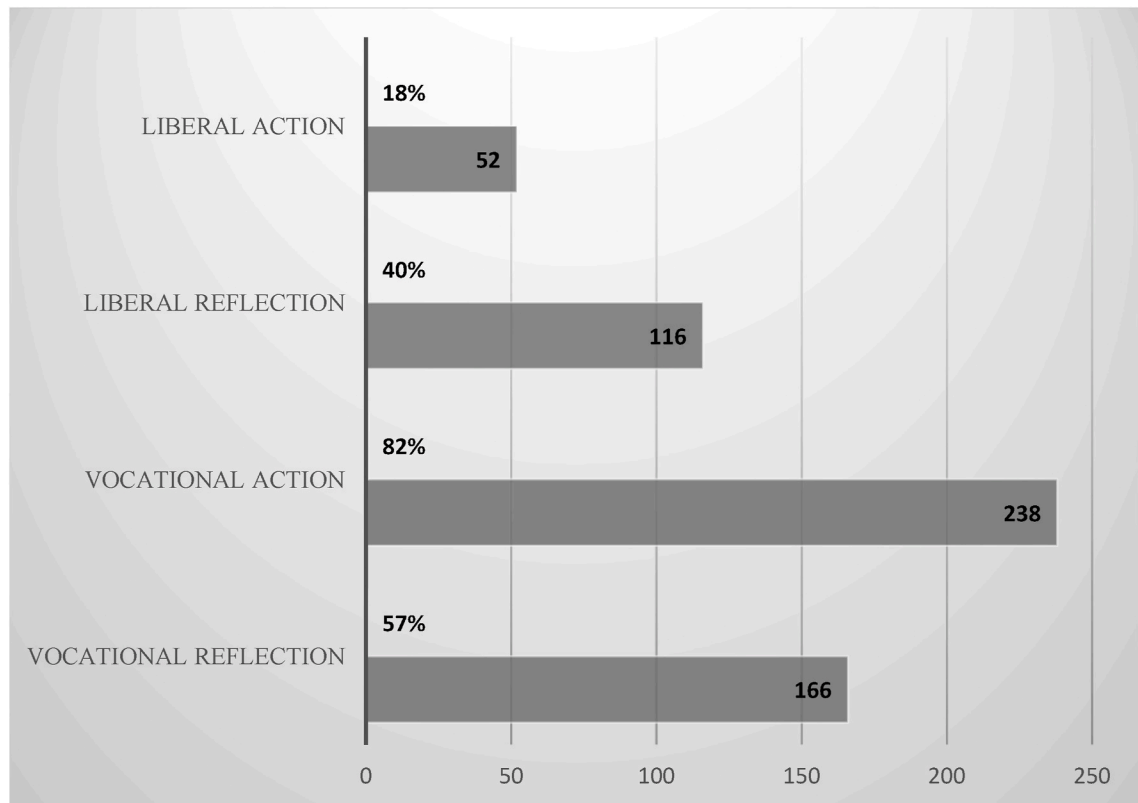


Fig. 4. Categorisation of all modules analysed.

situation is subject to change” (p. 119).

Based on this particular ‘snapshot’, however, the majority of TTM programmes appeared to have a strong vocational focus and, based on their intended learning outcomes, the potential for almost all programmes to develop Philosophic Practitioners (Tribe, 2002) seems somewhat limited. In particular, vocational action (getting equipped with skills and knowledge to *do* a job) and vocational reflection (getting equipped to *think* about how to do the job better) were foregrounded. Arguably, this a necessary focus within in a service industry like tourism, and it means that the graduates that emerge from these programmes are likely to be competent employees. As they develop reflective skills, these graduates may also be able to recognise when they, or the organisation they work in, is underperforming, and take corrective actions to mitigate this.

Beyond vocational efficiency, though, how else might these programmes be encouraging graduates to think and act? To some extent the stated learning outcomes of TTM programmes appeared to encourage student reflection on the complex relationship between tourism, people and the planet (i.e. liberal reflection). Whilst promising, these sorts of liberal reflective learning outcomes were far less prominent than vocational learning outcomes. Less prominent still were opportunities for students to put their reflective thoughts into practice (i.e. liberal action).

For the most part, then, the thoughts and actions of TTM graduates may be mainly directed toward improving service for tourism consumers and producers. Graduates may, however, also have the capacity, albeit to a lesser extent, to think about and envision a better tourism world for stakeholders and places. As part of this, graduates may even be aware of their own potential as tourism world-makers (Hollinshead, 2007, pp. 165–193). However, given the scarcity of learning outcomes in the liberal action quadrant, graduates may be under-prepared or ill equipped to participate in the process changing tourism for the betterment of society.

Perhaps most importantly, almost all TTM programmes were characterised by a lack of balance between vocational and liberal education. At the individual programme level, most programmes prioritised vocational education over liberal education. There were rare exceptions to this common foci, and in one programme the imbalance was reversed in favour of liberal education. Neither scenario, however, is conducive to Philosophic Practice, wherein balance is seen as key. Subsequently, the graduates emerging from such programmes are likely to be constrained in some way or another, and this may be particularly problematic when it comes to the future of tourism post-Covid-19.

In response to the devastating economic impacts of Covid-19 there have been recent high-level calls for a return to ‘business-as-usual’:

A joint public-private coordinated approach across the G20 to re-establish effective operations, remove travel barriers and reopen borders. This would ensure the efficient resumption of flights, movement of people and widescale travel essential to re-build confidence in travel and tourism” (World Travel & Tourism Council, 2020, n.p.)

The sort of approach outlined by the WTTC speaks to a reengagement with principles of growth and efficiency that had come to characterise tourism pre-Covid-19 (Dwyer, 2018). Whilst a return to ‘business-as-usual’ may be seen as important in offsetting some of the economic damage wrought by Covid-19, arguably this should not come at the cost of the people and places upon which tourism relies. In this sense, pre- and post-Covid-19 arguments for and about sustainable tourism are one and the same. Pre-Covid-19, explicit attention was turned to how tourism might best be harnessed to address the [United Nations Sustainable Development Goals \(UNWTO, 2019\)](#). Post-Covid-19, this situation remains, albeit the calls have grown potentially louder (see recent *Tourism Geographies Special Issue*, July 2020), but less explicitly focussed on the UNSDGs, drawing instead on evidence of the planetary benefits (e.g. reduction in carbon emissions) that have been shown to accrue when the tourism world unexpectedly slows down or even stops ([Gössling et al., 2020](#)).

Now, just as before, the tourism world needs Philosophic Practitioners who can actively disrupt ‘business-as-usual’, but not in so far as the importance of business is ignored. Arguably, a curriculum that focuses too heavily on narrow vocational ends may serve to reinstate a (mindless) growth agenda. Somewhat worryingly, a key implication of this research is that the strong focus on vocational ends identified within most of the curricula analysed means that TTM programmes may be implicated should such a scenario eventuate post-Covid-19. Similarly, a curriculum that prioritises liberal ends above all else runs the potential risk of perpetuating an idealistic, even activist, discourse of hope and redemption for about a more sustainable tourism, all the while blinded to the sort of harsh and precarious realities of everyday business life that have also been highlighted by the Covid-19 crisis (e.g. job losses, business closures; see [Gössling et al., 2020](#)). Thus, if Covid-19 can teach us anything, it is that for tourism to be truly sustainable requires a balancing of business world needs and socio-cultural and environmental needs. This is Philosophic Practice in action. In light of this (ongoing) need, and as global society begins to move tentatively forward post-Covid-19, the question that must continue to be asked therefore is to what extent are we as educators willing to balance vocational and liberal education within our curricula? If we are genuinely interested in contributing to a better and more sustainable tourism world through our educative work (and not just our research work), then arguably this question must be foregrounded.

Reflecting on the task ahead, and on the potential role of and for tourism education in producing Philosophic Practitioners, there is, however, also another question that cannot be overlooked: within the current neoliberal higher education environment, how to convince students, institutional leaders, and the industry of the merits of Philosophic Practitioner education, and in particular the (less popular) liberal elements? This, of course, is a challenging question, but a good starting point might be to engage with the ideas of [Caton \(2015, pp. 43–54\)](#) and [Barnett \(2004b\)](#) who, in the past, have directed educators to consider the utility of a liberal education. As Barnett notes, for example, dispositions such as carefulness, thoughtfulness, receptiveness and resilience, such that a liberal education may cultivate, may also “yield the ‘adaptability’, ‘flexibility’ and ‘self-reliance’ that the corporate sector ... looks for” (p. 258) and thus “have economic and performative value” (*ibid*, p. 259). In this sense, explicitly alerting students, institutional leaders, and the industry to the practical value of a liberal education ([Caton, 2015, pp. 43–54](#)) may be one way to ensure that opportunities for liberal reflection/action can be consistently afforded *equal* space within tourism curricula.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Stuart Hayes: Conceptualization.

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