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# Tourism education in Spain's secondary schools: The curriculums' perspective

Miquel Angel Coll Ramis

Department of Geography, Balearic Islands University, Spain

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#### ABSTRACT

Given the growing socio-economic importance of tourism for Spain, this study analyses the teaching of tourism within Secondary Education and the Baccalaureate of the country. To that end, an analysis of the syllabuses of all of the subjects of both of these educational stages has been conducted. The obtained results evidence a scarce presence of tourism within the Spanish basic education, which supposes a weakness for the touristic competitiveness of the country. Consequently, this research suggests the need to enhance the education of tourism in secondary schools as a key element for the touristic competitiveness strategies of the country.

# 1. Introduction

Since the second half of the 20th century, tourism has not stopped growing, becoming one of the most globally relevant economic activities. In 2019 the touristic industry already represented the 10.4% of the global GDP, which evidences the global importance that the travel industry is acquiring. This level of touristic growth has brought a series of economic social and environmental challenges, which have nurtured the interest of the scholarship in their attempts to comprehend and explain aspects of this remarkable phenomenon (Ap. 1992; Archer et al., 2005; Hall & Lew, 2009; Mason, 2015; Mathieson & Wall, 1982; Wall & Mathieson, 2006).

One of the numerous features that have been addressed is the relationship between tourism and education (Airey, 2016; Airey et al., 2015; Airey & Tribe 2006; Amoah & Baum, 1997; Ayikoru et al., 2009; Cooper, 2012, pp. 200–208; Hsu, 2005; Jafari, 1990; Jafari & Ritchie, 1981; Leiper, 1981; Tribe, 2001). Touristic education began approximately 50 years ago in vocational institutions in Europe where students were trained in areas of hospitality and commercial operations As the tourism industry grew and evolved, educators began redefining touristic education in order to include the necessary skills for employability in the industry (Cooper & Shepherd, 1997; Daniel et al., 2017; Tribe, 2001). Although touristic education took roots in schools and universities, its presence has been traditionally highly limited in secondary schools (Velempini & Martin, 2019).

This circumstance has made of the study of tourism in secondary education a field with little research (Adukaite et al., 2016), even though, as some scholars such as Goeldner et al. (2000) state, secondary schools have a great potentiality in the promotion of touristic education, since it is at this stage of education when students are first introduced to the study of tourism (Ritchie et al., 2003; Roberts, Andreassen, O'Donnell, O'Neill, & Neill, 2018). Most studies have aimed at attracting the high school students' interest in tourism studies at the university (Andreassen & Roberts, 2016; Lewis & Airey, 2001; Ross, 1992), analysing the influence of tourism on secondary school dropouts (Adame & Salva, 2010; Amer, 2011), on the perception that teachers in secondary school have on tourism learning, or on tourism within the secondary education curriculum (Lewis & Airey, 2001.

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<sup>\*</sup> Ed. Beatriu de Pinós. Universitat de les Illes Balears, Carretera Valldemossa km 7Palma, Spain. E-mail address: miquelangel.coll@uib.es.

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There is generalized agreement on the idea that the educational level orientated to tourism has a direct impact on the touristic competitiveness of a country (Blanke & Chiesa, 2011). For this reason, an important role within the strategies of the touristic sector's competitiveness is assigned to education (Fayos Solà 1997, pp. 59–72; Renfors et al., 2020). This circumstance is strongly noteworthy, considering a well-established fact in literature on human capital in the touristic sector: its low formative levels in comparison with other economic activities (Lillo & Casado, 2011; Mariscal, 2003). Thus, the scholar knowledge of tourism that a great part of workers of the touristic sector can have are reduced to little notions that they receive during the stage of secondary education.

Considering that touristic destinations, in order to succeed, need an educated, trained and committed workforce (Koyuncu et al., 2008), and that most workers in the sector have an intermediate educational level, the importance of the curriculum in secondary education for tourism seems evident. For this reason, this investigation has focused on analysing how tourism is dealt with in compulsory secondary education and in the Baccalaureate, taking Spain as field of study, given the importance of tourism for the economy and the labour market of the country.

# 2. Methodology and data

In Spain, Compulsory Secondary Education (ESO) is an educational stage (obligatory and free) for the school-aged studentship –from 12 to 16 years. It provides the essential training for further studies towards the baccalaureate or Intermediate Level Vocation Training Programmes. It also enables the incorporation to the labour market. Its aim is the studentship's acquisition of elemental cultural features –humanistic, scientific and technological—, the development and consolidation of study and work habits, the preparation for the incorporation to further studies or for labour integration, and the formation for all students to exercise their rights and duties in their lives as citizens.

The Baccalaureate is part of the Post-compulsory Secondary Education and it is therefore voluntary. It comprises two academic years that ordinarily take place between 16 and 18 years. The Baccalaureate comprises different modalities –science, humanities, social sciences, arts— and its aims are to provide to the studentship formation, intellectual and human maturity, knowledge, and skills that enable them to develop social functions and to enter active life with responsibility and competence as well as to educate them to access Higher Education. The Baccalaureate gives access to university studies or to Higher Level Vocational Training Programmes.

According to the Organic Law 8/2013, of December 9, for the improvement of the educative quality (LOMCE), each ESO and Baccalaureate course is structured in several core, special and elective subjects, and it is the curriculum which regulates the elements that determine the teaching and learning processes for each modality. In that sense, the Spanish Constitution of 1978 establishes a decentralized state model that distributes the exercise of educational competences among all administrative level in a way that both the State and the regions participate in designing the curriculum. Thus, each autonomous territory has its own curriculum for each subject. Additionally, according to Graburn and Jafari (1991), no discipline can address or understand tourism by itself: it can only be studied by crossing the interdisciplinary borders. Therefore, taking into account that the study of tourism is based on concepts, theories and ideas from different academic disciplines (Airey, 2005; Fidgeon, 2010; Jafari & Ritchie, 1981), the curriculum of every subject of each Autonomous Community has been analysed for this research (n = 850).

Once all the curriculums were compiled, the following keywords –tourism, touristic, tourist, and destination—have been used in order to identify the curriculums that make reference to tourism. Among the 40 curriculums that have been found, the following categories of content were established to be analysed (Table 1): A) subjects in which knowledge related to tourism is taught; B) educational level in which knowledge related to tourism is taught; and C) basic elements of the curriculum in which there is reference to the teaching of tourism.

Later were the different categories to proceed to its cultivating analysis through the Atlas.ti programme codified (Hwang, 2008). Just as other scientific disciplines, educational research has been influenced by communications technology, especially in its analysis

Table 1
Categories used to analyse the curriculums.

Categories used to analyse the curriculums.		
	Category A. Subject	
	1 Geography	
	2 Geography and History	
	3 First Foreign Language	
	4 Second Foreign Language	
	5 Physical Education	
	6 Introduction to Entrepreneur and Business Activity	
	7 Cultural and Artistic Heritage	
	8 Earth and Environmental Sciences	
	9 Design	
	Category B. Educational Level	
	1 Baccalaureate	
	2 Compulsory Secondary Education	
	Category C. Basic elements of the curriculum	
	1 Aims	
	2 Competences	
	3 Contents	

4 Assessment Criteria 5 Learning Standards

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processes (San Martín, 2014; Valles, 2002). The use of software in educational research increases the transparency in the analysis process (Richards & Richards, 1994) and enhances the quality of the educational research, since it strengthens the coherence and the rigour of analytical procedures (Weitzman, 2000). Through the usage of Atlas.ti, it has been possible to extract and synthesise a great amount of information through frequency tables and networks, which has facilitated the interpretation and the descriptive analysis of the subject of study.

# 3. Results

Tourism is often introduced as a subject in Secondary Education study plans due to its contribution to the economy of many countries (Adukaite, 2016; Roberts et al., 2018), especially emerging economies from Asia and Africa (Cuffy et al., 2012; Hsu, 2015; Mayaka & Akama, 2015), which identify in tourism an opportunity for the socio-economic development. Notwithstanding, in Spain, despite being one of the major global touristic powers, tourism does not exist as an independent subject, and its teaching during Secondary Education falls mainly on geography, just as in many other countries in the world (Chili, 2013; Velempini & Martin, 2019).

The geographic discipline has been traditionally characterised by its contribution to the transversality of the curriculum (Moreno, 1993), unlike other disciplines that seem less influenceable. Furthermore, the interdisciplinary approach of touristic education in the context of geography is advantageous (Klemm, 1998). Geography enables integral knowledge of tourism due to the convergence of the social and ecological aspects of other disciplines, which allows the achievement of an integrated vision of the touristic area (Guzmán & Fernández, 2002). This causes that tourism has a scarce integration in other subjects, having been confirmed this same circumstance in other regions of the world (Hall et al., 1991).

Moreover, there is a temporal limitation to teach contents related to tourism from geography, and the thing is that the geographical contents in ESO are included in the subject of Social Sciences, in which it shares time with History during the first two years, while it is independent in the third year and not studied at all in the fourth year. In this way, contents about Physical Geography are taught in the first year, and Human Geography in the second. The contents of third of ESO are fully based on geography, and even though there is often a review of what has been taught in previous years, they mostly focus on economic aspects, and it is in this course when the issue of tourism is approached. This course is paramount for teaching tourism, since it is the last year in which most students study geography. Never again will they study geographical contents in an institutionalised way. Only those students that follow the Social Sciences and Humanities modalities in the Baccalaureate reencounter geography in the second year (Buzo, 2012, pp. 37–48).

The contents on tourism only appear in 5.3% of the curriculums in Secondary Education and Baccalaureate, and they are mostly taught from geography (Table 2). The teaching of tourism from geography is the result, on the one hand, of the interest in the analysis of the Spanish territorial panorama as a whole as well as in its different regions and, on the other hand, of the specific –"thematic"—tendency towards the knowledge of the touristic phenomenon (Antón et al., 1996). Its approach has focused on the analysis of the social, economic and environmental components of tourism, and it is possible to identify three main blocks of contents (Table 3): 1) the touristic area, 2) the touristic system and 3) the effects of tourism.

Besides geography, the teaching of tourism is limited to specific linguistic contents related to the importance of foreign languages for tourism, historical aspects related to the evolution of the economy of the country, and other elements related to specific touristic activities such as active tourism or cultural tourism.

The LOMCE establishes a complex system of assessable teaching criteria and standards, which allow teachers to evaluate the contents in an objective way. According to the current legislation:

They are the specific referent to assess the students learning. They describe what is intended to be appreciated and that the studentship is expected to accomplish, in both knowledge and competences; they respond to what is expected to achieve in each subject. (Royal Decree-law 126/2014).

The assessment criteria for the contents on tourism aims to measure the degree of learning of the students to understand the economic importance of tourism, to be able to locate the main touristic areas, to know the tourism flows, and to be able to analyse the effects of touristic development (Table 4). Hence, it is intended to ensure that the students have managed to learn the transforming role of tourism for the country, on both the socio-economic and territorial dimensions. The results obtained show how only the geography subject contemplates assessment criteria on tourism.

There is no doubt that an assessment mentality has become the structuring element of the education system. In Spain, this issue is

**Table 2**The teaching of tourism according per subject.

Subject	Level	No. Of cases	Total %
Geography	Baccalaureate	18	40%
Geography and History	Secondary Education	8	17.8%
Second Foreign Language	Secondary Education and Baccalaureate	7	15.6%
First Foreign Language	Secondary Education and Baccalaureate	6	13.4%
Physical Education	Secondary Education	2	4.4%
Introduction to Entrepreneurial and Business Activity	Secondary Education	1	2.2%
Cultural and Artistic Heritage	Baccalaureate	1	2.2%
Earth and Environmental Sciences	Baccalaureate	1	2.2%
Design	Baccalaureate	1	2.2%
Total	Secondary Education and Baccalaureate	45	100%

**Table 3**The contents about tourism in Secondary Education and Baccalaureate subjects.

Subject	Contents
Geography	The tertiarization of economy.
	The service sectors.
	The economic sectors and the formation of geographical areas (agricultural, industrial and touristic).
	Tourism: development, evolution, and touristic areas.
	Touristic areas. Characteristics and evolution.
	Touristic supply and demand.
	Touristic areas: socio-economic, environmental and landscape effects and touristic policies.
	Tourism and environment.
	The analysis of the economic role and the environmental incidence of touristic areas.
	Tourism and its effects on the current world.
Foreign Languages	Tourism and languages.
Physical Education	Physical activities in the natural environment and their importance at economic and social level. Active
	tourism.
	Active tourism as a socio-economic resource.
Introduction to Entrepreneurial and Business Activity	Tourism as an important source of wealth.
Cultural and Artistic Heritage	Heritage as a resource. Cultural Heritage Management. Cultural tourism, crafts and traditional industries.
Earth and Environmental Sciences	Coastal resources: tourism, fishing, sports activities. Effects of the exploitation of resources.
Design	Touristic promotion.

Table 4
The assessment criteria on tourism.

Subject	Tourism Assessment Criteria
Geography	Describing the impact on the economy and the territory of an area transformed by touristic activity.  Discussing graphics and statistics that explain the Spanish touristic development.  Locating in a map the touristic areas, listing their regional features and inequalities.  Identifying the Spanish touristic areas, their features, and problems.  Classifying through images the main Spanish humanised landscapes (agricultural, industrial, touristic, etc.).  Analysing the development of tourism and its economic importance.  Exploring the possibilities that the natural environment provides to physical activity and active tourism.  Identifying and discussing a landscape transformed by a relevant touristic area.

reflected in the incorporation of assessable learning standards within the education law (LOMCE), which are defined as:

Specifications of the assessment criteria that allow the definition of learning outcomes, and that specify what the student must know, understand and be able to do in each subject: they must be observable, measurable, and assessable, and allow the grading of the performance or the achievement. Their design must contribute to and facilitate the design of standardized and comparable tests. (Royal Decree-law 126/2014).

Therefore, the standards define which tourism must be taught and learnt in Spanish Secondary Education centres. The obtained results show how the assessable learning standards about tourism are associated with essential tools for geography, such as the handling of maps, graphics, and statistics (Table 5). The three constitute working elements that are useful for the analysis and interpretation of the touristic processes and their territorial, socio-economic, and environmental implications.

The obtained results evidence that tourism in Spain has an educational component of cultural nature rather than training. In

**Table 5**The assessable learning standards about tourism.

Subject	Assessable learning standards
Geography	Locating in a map the main Spanish touristic areas.
	Creating and discussing a graphic of the tourists' origin and a map of the most visited areas, using current data.
	Analysing and explaining the imbalances of the touristic space
	Measuring the importance of tourism in the economy.
	Analysing the territorial impact of tourism on the Spanish landscape through the observation and comparison of images, with special
	attention to coastal areas.
	Measuring the role of tourism in the tertiarization of the economy.
	Identifying the types of tourism and their effects.
	Analysing the development and the economic and territorial incidence of the touristic sector in Spain, based on variables, such as the offer of
	hotel beds, the evolution of the number of visitors and the incomes from tourism.
	Discussing the problems of the activity.
	Explaining the multiplying effect of tourism in other economic activities.
	Discussing graphics and statistics that explain the touristic development.
	Relating the bordered areas to specific types of touristic activities.
Foreign	Writing very basic, simple and short, formal correspondence addressed to any sort of organization (a tourist office).
Languages	Understanding the details of what is told in everyday travel arrangements.

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Secondary Education, a lack of professional skills has been detected, which are delegated to the cycles of Vocational Training —which are basic, intermediate and higher— and to university education—degrees, postgraduate courses and masters.

# 4. Discussion

According to the Travelling and Tourism Competitiveness Index (TTCI), education is one of the factors that contributes to the development and to the touristic competitiveness of a country (World Economic Forum, 2019). In that sense, Goeldner and Ritchie (2002) assert that an effective teaching and learning through formal education plays a fundamental role in the development of a skilled and competent workforce for the touristic sector. Along the same lines, Fletcher et al. (2013) warn that the dependence of unskilled employees is responsible of low-quality touristic services and products, which affects negatively the destination's competitiveness. Notwithstanding, the results of this research evidence that, despite the importance that the education has for the competitiveness of the touristic sector (Dwyer & Kim, 2003), it does not completely reflect on all levels of education, since the presence of tourism within the curriculum of Secondary Education in Spain is currently very scarce, like it is in other countries (Shalem & Allais, 2014), and its development does not frequently pay attention to the development of useful competences and knowledge to satisfy the needs of the industry (Lam & Xiao, 2000).

Even though Spain is touristically the most competitive country according to the TTCI (World Economic Forum, 2019), it displays a certain weakness in the subindex Human Resources and Labour Market, occupying the 41<sup>st</sup> position of a total of 140 countries in the ranking. The components of this subindex measure how well countries develop skills through education and training and enhance the best allocation of those skills through an efficient labour market. Regarding this issue, this study has evidenced that Spain puts limits on the touristic teaching for post-compulsory studies (universities and Vocational Training). Nevertheless, its presence is virtually inexistent within the stages of compulsory education. The results obtained in the analysis of the curriculums of secondary education have shown how the teaching of tourism –during this formative stage—is limited to certain subjects such as geography, which, given its transversality, is more likely to incorporate contents associated with tourism. This connection of tourism to the curriculum of social sciences has also been verified in other regions of the world such as in the Caribbean (Cooper, 2000) and Africa (Chili, 2013).

To this scarce presence of tourism in the curriculum, it is necessary to add the fact that, in Spain, teachers who give the subject of geography in secondary education, according to the current law, cannot be graduates in tourism and, thus, they do not have a specific formation for the teaching of tourism. Due to the lack of teachers who are specialists in tourism, some studies such as Chili's (2013) indicate that geography teachers are the most suitable ones to teach tourism without technical problems. Notwithstanding, the process of teaching tourism remains dependent on the interest and formation about the topic that each teacher has. Hence, besides having a scarce presence in the secondary education and Baccalaureate curriculum, the students' learning of tourism remains subject to the personal characteristics of the teacher (Roberts et al., 2018).

In the case of Spain, it has been observed how the teaching of tourism in secondary education is limited to certain subjects such as geography, which is more likely to incorporate contents associated with tourism given its transversality. This relation of tourism to the curriculum of social sciences has been confirmed in other regions of the Caribbean (Cooper, 2000) and Africa (Chili, 2013). Therefore, the authors (Charles, 1992; Hall et al., 1991; Zhang & Fan, 2006) that have claimed that there is a need of further formation for the teachers on tourism within the Secondary Education. As a consequence, it has been considered the need of establishing future lines of research that would be focused on studying the perception that some teachers have on tourism teaching in Secondary Education, as it has been done in other countries such as New Zealand (Roberts et al., 2018) or South Africa (Adukaite, 2016).

Nevertheless, touristic education is important, not only from a working point of view, but also in the need to train people with education to travel. More and more people are travelling to different places in the world, and the lack of an education for tourism leads some tourists to behave in ways that native people might consider offensive against their culture and that have caused demonstrations against tourism (Martins, 2018). Consequently, touristic education can be a key element to maintain the balance in the coexistence between residents and tourists.

### 5. Conclusions

Tourism has become one of the most extended and important socio-cultural phenomena in the world for the last decades. Its economic parameters, its importance for the territorial development in social change, as well as the complexity of its human and social contributions have caused that many disciplines have focused their attention on it, either to study its phenomenology or to give answers and solutions to many situations that its development has brought (Colom & Brown, 1993). However, from an educational perspective, this interest has been reflected in most countries mainly in higher levels of education (universities and vocational training), since the presence of tourism in secondary education is more testimonial (Eade, 1990; Lewis, 2005), despite having a great transcendence for the touristic competitiveness of the country.

The results of this research, which is based on the analysis of the contents of the curriculum, have evidenced that, in Spain, the teaching of tourism in secondary education and the Baccalaureate is virtually restricted to the subject of geography, which is obligatory in third of ESO and optional depending on the Baccalaureate modality chosen. As a consequence, even though the country is one of the major global touristic powers, the students' touristic education is very scarce. This circumstance can imply a weakness for the touristic competitiveness of the country, given the importance of factors such as human capital and its people's hospitality (Dwyer & Kim, 2003).

Moreover, the results of this research suggest that, if the aim of secondary education and Baccalaureate is to facilitate the insertion of students as integrated people and citizens in the current society, it seems evident the need of increasing the presence of tourism in

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the curriculums of this educational stages, considering the influence of this activity on Spanish daily life. For this, it is intended to create a specific subject about tourism, following the example of other countries or, at least, to benefit from the transversality of tourism for its inclusion within a wider spectrum of subjects. Finally, these proposals should be followed by an improvement of the teachers' pedagogic skills for the teaching of tourism in secondary education and the Baccalaureate, given the multidisciplinarity of the teachers who currently play this role.

Notwithstanding, this task presents limitations since it has only analysed the curriculums. In that way, it is necessary to define future researches that allow the exploration of the perceptions of the other concerned parties, such as the teachers themselves and Secondary education students, or professionals and businessmen of the touristic sector. In that sense, it would be useful to conduct qualitative and quantitative surveys to obtain a wider understanding of the touristic education and to analyse other areas, such as the ability and availability of the teachers, the resources for teaching, the perceptions and motivations of the students, or the training necessities of the touristic sector. The outcomes of these researches will enable the definition of strategic guidelines to improve the teaching of tourism withing the secondary education curriculum that could contribute to improve the touristic competitiveness of the country. Lastly, it is necessary to highlight that, even though this research has been conducted in Spain, the implications of this study for the development of the touristic education in secondary education schools could be applied to touristic destinations in a global scale.

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