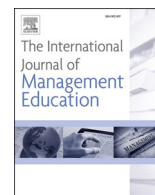


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The implementation of the Principles for Responsible Management Education within tourism higher education institutions: A comparative analysis of European Union countries

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ABSTRACT

Despite the growing body of literature on tourism higher education, there is a notable absence regarding the Principles for Responsible Management Education and the tourism higher education and sustainability nexus. The main objective of this study is to evaluate the implementation of PRME in tourism courses and its outcomes in European Union countries. This conceptual paper finds that PRME is not effectively embedded in tourism curricula. As a result, we present a conceptual model centred around an ambidextrous management approach to enable a deeper contribution to sustainability and the tourism industry when engaging with PRME.

1. Introduction

Education is one of the most powerful and proven vehicles for sustainable development and regional economic development (Shaw & Allison, 1999) and achieving a quality education is the foundation to creating sustainable societies (Sibbel, 2009). There is a growing recognition in the literature that education is an integral part of the sustainable development agenda (Shaw & Allison, 1999; Sibbel, 2009; Sonetti et al., 2019; Srivastava et al., 2019; Wals & Jickling, 2002; Wright, 2002; Åberg & Müller, 2018). Global institutions and initiatives, such as UNESCO Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) and more recently the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), have also addressed the role of education in sustainability. Of the 17 SDGs, 'quality education' is enshrined in the 4th goal, although it is also intrinsic and critical to the achievement of all 17 SDGs. The Principles for Responsible Management Education (PRME), which is a United Nations-supported initiative, have been founded in an effort to raise the profile of sustainability in higher education schools around the world, to transform management education, to build research and thought-leadership globally, and to promote an awareness about the SDGs (Godeman et al., 2014; Parkes et al., 2017; Bradley, 2019; PRME, 2019; Sroufe et al., 2015).

Yet, as Burrai et al. (2019) highlight, there is a need to rethink the ideology of responsible tourism as it is not sufficiently rooted in the daily reality of life and not enough robust reflection has been carried out. The extant literature on sustainability issues in the field of tourism has largely overlooked the impact of PRME in tourism higher education. The literature on tourism higher education has also

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neglected the role of responsible management education as a key element in achieving the goals of sustainability. Against this backdrop, this study sought to address such issues by investigating sustainability in tourism and cognate disciplines with a particular focus on PRME as a potential long-term strategy for the sustainability of the tourism industry.

The main objective of this study is to evaluate the implementation of PRME in tourism courses and its outcomes in European Union (EU) countries. In this study, PRME is viewed as an 'input' for which outputs are analysed and discussed. As a result, this study addresses two main research questions:

1. How is PRME embedded in tourism courses in European Union (EU) countries?
2. How might PRME impact (directly or indirectly) on the sustainability of the tourism industry of these countries?

These questions are important as sustainability programmes in tourism are meant to generate tourism sustainability thinkers, actioners and/or transformers (Kemper et al., 2019) by empowering students (Joo et al., 2020). Furthermore, these questions are of great significance given that standards and principles have been, and are still being, questioned in terms of ethics and actual impacts on the society (Cret, 2007; Elliot, 2013; Heriot et al., 2009; Miles et al., 2004; Proitz et al., 2004; White et al., 2009).

This conceptual paper is articulated in four main sections. The first section is setting the context of the study and presents key debates in the literature on tourism education, sustainability and responsible management education in tourism; the second and third sections present the methodological approach employed in the study to collect data and discusses the related results. Finally, the last section critically discusses PRME and its impacts whilst providing several recommendations and suggesting further avenues for research.

2. Theoretical background

2.1. Tourism education and the sustainability nexus

Given the growing concern over tourism being harmful on the environment and local communities, it is important to have sustainability leaders for the long-term sustainability of the planet and that of the industry alike (Gretzel et al., 2014; Sroufe et al., 2015; Rasoolimanesh et al., 2020). A sustainability mindset can "help educators frame curricula to facilitate broad and deep systemic learning among current and future leaders" (Kassel et al., 2016, p. 1). As higher education institutions are training future leaders, there is a subsequent need for tourism education providers to focus on sustainability (Camargo & Gretzel, 2017; Raagmaa & Keerberg, 2017). Education has an important role to play in the long-term sustainability of the planet, because it can empower individuals with a strong understanding of what sustainability is, and, as equally important, make individuals confident enough to implement their knowledge and skills to address issues related to sustainability (Zanotti & Chernela, 2008; Bowser et al., 2014; Camargo & Gretzel, 2017). Empowerment is widely recognised as a key aspect in achieving successful sustainable tourism development (Scheyvens, 1999; Cole, 2006; Joo et al., 2020).

However, current tourism curricula in higher educations have so far failed to foster leaders with sustainability mind-sets and educate reflective practitioners who can promote sustainability. Thus, there is no evidence so far that tourism education can contribute to sustainability (Gretzel et al., 2014; Raagmaa & Keerberg, 2017). This is all the more important given there is a substantial increase in sustainable tourism-related classes in tourism curricula since the Agenda 21 for the Travel and Tourism industry. Yet, little is known about what students actually know and feel with respect to sustainability (Camargo & Gretzel, 2017). The current approach of sustainability in tourism courses contributes mainly to generate sustainability thinkers, or individuals with critical thinking and questioning attitude, while the ultimate objective of any sustainability empowerment is to generate sustainability actioners and transformers (Kemper et al., 2019). For Camargo and Gretzel (2017), in order to have successful and effective curricula encompassing the key dimensions of sustainability, sustainable tourism programmes should include six core elements, namely:

- 1) Technical literacy: using of literature, theories etc. to give learners the necessary background knowledge in order to understand tourism sustainability, its importance and application;
- 2) Analytical literacy: providing students with the skills required to be able not only to analyse an issue but also to provide appropriate solutions;
- 3) Ecological literacy: enabling students to connect the concepts of actions and impacts/consequences;
- 4) Multicultural literacy: the need to protect local cultures, particularly when they are endangered;
- 5) Policy and political literacy: providing students with a good understanding of the decision-making chain in tourism planning and management;
- 6) Ethical literacy: nurturing a sense of ethics within students.

Camargo and Gretzel (2017) also highlighted the crucial role of an innovative teaching approach in achieving the objectives set by these core elements. Sheldon et al. (2011) outlined a framework developed by Tourism Education Futures Initiative [TEFI] for the future development of tourism education. They argue that TEFI aims to fundamentally transform tourism education and 'seeks to provide vision, knowledge and a framework for tourism education programs to promote global citizenship and optimism for a better world' (p.3). Drawing on Freirean philosophy on critical pedagogy, Boluk and Carnicelli (2019) offers a conceptual framework for the inclusion of critical pedagogy in tourism curriculum. The authors further argue the implementation of their suggested principles enshrined in Citizenship and Agency in teaching potentially create a curriculum stimulating engaged and politically active citizens.

Jamal et al. (2011) proposed a progressive, experiential and collaborative approach to sustainable tourism pedagogy (STP) which encompasses above-mentioned core STP literacies (technical, analytical, ecological, multi-cultural, ethical, policy and political). The STP literacies “guide skill and knowledge development for the sustainability practitioner” (Jamal et al., 2011, p. 133).

Sustainable Tourism Pedagogy (STP) is a pedagogy based on practical experience (e.g., field experiences), a hands-on approach which can be embedded in traditional (in-class) educational programmes to provide students with real-world experiences. It is viewed as an action and change oriented pedagogy which should tackle environmental and social issues, address the well-being of tourists and tourism-related industry (Jamal et al., 2011), as well as enforcing a sustainable mindset within future leaders (Gretzel et al., 2014; Sroufe et al., 2015). Innovative pedagogic practices are important and have the potential to turn individuals into sustainability actioners (individuals looking to incite changes in other people or the community) and also into sustainability transformers (individuals wanting to unlock changes in the surrounding environment) (Kemper et al., 2019). Sustainability transformers are important for a society because sustainability can only be achieved through transformational leaders with strong ethical values (Visser, 2015; Sroufe



Fig. 1. PRME Principles.
Source: PRME, 2019.

et al., 2015). Outside the classroom environment, new technologies and social media strategy have also proven to be useful, as they enable students from different institutions around the world to collaborate on projects (Camargo & Gretzel, 2017).

According to Buffa (2015), educating the younger generation is indeed important, not only because they are the future leaders, but also because they are the market of the future. She highlights that people between 15 and 30 years of age are keen to discover and learn about new cultures; they are more aware of sustainability issues and more receptive than the older generations to adopting behaviours; and they often have responsible environmental attitudes and beliefs. In essence, Buffa (2015) states that they are often said to be paving the way for responsible tourism. She suggests that between the tourists of the future and the tourism leaders of the future, two groups could be identified:

- 1) The hard-path group: This group is made of pro-active people with regards to collecting information. This group is also characterised by those who fall under this category are more adventurous and willing to try new things.
- 2) The soft-path group: This group tends to rely on external providers to obtain the information they need. They are less open to novelty.

The group of hard-path young people appears to be the most suitable target on which leadership training on sustainability to focus on. That said, soft-path young people are not to be excluded. Indeed, Hutton (2016) explained that, too often, the modern society disempowers groups or individuals that are considered passive and/or powerlessness, while quite often they reveal not to be. Notwithstanding, hard-path young people are more likely to be the most suitable sustainability tourism leaders.

Consequently, identifying the right pedagogical approach to educate young people (either hard or soft path future tourists or tourism leaders) becomes important. This is all the more important as “businesses are the product and the extension of the personal characteristics of their leaders” (Favre, 2017, p. 558). Overall, an effective sustainable tourism pedagogy would need to:

- 1) Foster leaders with sustainability mind-sets;
- 2) Develop their knowledge of sustainability principles;
- 3) Embed the six core elements listed by Camargo and Gretzel (2017);
- 4) Have practical experience dimension;
- 5) Turn sustainability thinkers into sustainability actioners and transformers.

To achieve an effective sustainable tourism pedagogy, the embedding of PRME into curricula in tourism and cognate disciplines would undoubtedly represent a potential suitable alternative.

2.2. The Principles for Responsible Management Education (PRME)

PRME is an initiative launched in 2007 by the United Nations (UN) with the objective to change the curriculum, research, and learning methods of management education based on the UN Global Compact/Corporate Sustainability approach. This initiative aims to foster ethical values and raise sustainability awareness among future leaders who, arguably, are the current students in higher education (Annan-Diab & Molinari, 2017; Parkes et al., 2017). PRME was also created and launched in order to advance the UN SDGs (United Nations Development Programme, n.d.) and help create a more sustainable future (Annan-Diab & Molinari, 2017; Parkes et al., 2017), and ultimately fight poverty at local, national and international levels (Rosenbloom et al., 2017).

Parkes et al. (2017) argue that, to fully embed PRME in the curricula, higher education institutions need to review their curriculum

Table 1
PRME and tourism sustainability.

Criteria for an effective pedagogical approach for tourism sustainability	PRME	Evidence
1 - Foster leaders with sustainability mindsets	PRME1/PRME6	-Ethical values of leaders are ethical values of businesses (Annan-Diab & Molinari, 2017; Mayer & Hutton, 2016; Parkes et al., 2017)
2 - Develop knowledge of sustainability principles	PRME2/ PRME3/PRME4	-To have PRME fully imbedded in their curricula, higher education institutions have to review their curriculum design, teaching approach; research strategy and agenda; and equally important, work in partnership with all stakeholders of the sustainability ecosystem (Parkes et al., 2017). -Sulitest (Decamps et al., 2017)
3 - Embed six core elements listed by Camargo and Gretzel (2017)	PRME3/ PRME4/PRME6	-PRME is based on a holistic interdisciplinary approach of education for sustainability (Annan-Diab & Molinari, 2017). -Sulitest (Decamps et al., 2017)
4 - Practical experience dimension	PRME5	-Field actions or field work, such as delivery of talks or presentations; put in place initiatives to reward good actions; development of programmes that can be implemented by a wide range of organisations; etc. (Sharing Information Progress report of the implementation of PRME, 2018; Tyrant, 2017). -Giving the Voice to Value (Gentile, 2017).
5 - Turn sustainability thinkers into sustainability actioners and transformers	PRME1/ PRME5/PRME6	-Ethical values of leaders and then ethical values of businesses (Annan-Diab & Molinari, 2017; Mayer & Hutton, 2016; Parkes et al., 2017)

Source: The authors.

design, teaching approach, research strategy and agenda, and, equally important, work in partnership with all stakeholders of the sustainability ecosystem. In addition to these requirements, there is a need to add field-work experiences, put in place initiatives to reward good actions, and develop learning and assessment platforms such as the Sustainability Literacy Test or Sulitest (Decamps et al., 2017; Gentile, 2017; Tyran, 2017). Adopting such an approach in the curricula would potentially deliver a holistic interdisciplinary approach of education for sustainability (Annan-Diab & Molinari, 2017). The six principles of PRME (see Fig. 1) provide a good overview of the elements underpinning this ideological approach of education for an effective sustainable tourism programme, which is in line with the six core elements listed by Camargo and Gretzel (2017).

Additionally, PRME seems to meet all five criteria required for an effective pedagogical approach to reach a sustainable transformable change in the tourism industry through the new leaders (Table 1).

Séraphin and Thanh (2020), who examined PRME in the context of resort mini-clubs as a springboard for children empowerment as a key element of SDGs (e.g., SDG 4: Quality education and SDG 12: Responsible consumption and protection), argue that PRME could happen anywhere, even in non-purpose and/or designated built education venues. For it to happen, it is important to have flexible partners or systems (De Silva, 1997). Séraphin and Thanh (2020) also argue that PRME may be applied to private businesses and inform their strategy, and, as a result, align their values so that the organisation can contribute to the achievement of SDGs.

2.3. Conceptual framework of the study

In line with the previous research and literature reviewed in this paper, this study puts forward the following propositions:

- P1) Higher education institutions with a tourism curriculum should consider observing and adhering to PRME in the delivery of tourism courses in order to influence and ensure long-term sustainability in the industry.
- P2) Higher education institutions with a tourism curriculum who are PRME signatories contribute to fostering hard-path leaders and tourists, while non PRME signatories generate soft-path leaders and tourists.

These propositions resonate with Johnson’s (2011) views who argued that when a workforce is educated or skilled in a particular area (in this case, sustainability education), adapting to changes becomes easier for the individual work required in the firm (i.e. change towards a more sustainable future). De Silva (1997) also highlights that pace of changes and implementation and adaption is dependent on the level of education.

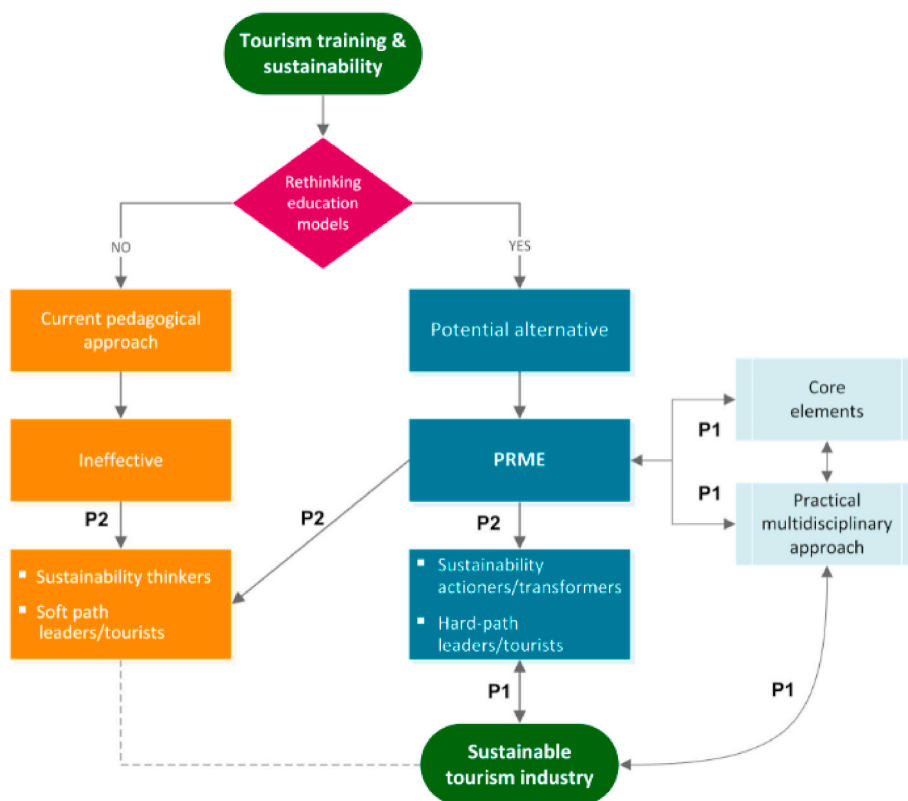


Fig. 2. Conceptual framework of the study. Source: The authors.

The resulting conceptual framework of the study is presented as follows (Fig. 2).

Theoretically, PRME appears as fully suited to develop effective leaders in tourism sustainability. The next section discusses the research approach used in evaluating the propositions made in this study.

3. Research approach

From a methodological point of view, this study employed a problem-focused approach (Gilson & Goldberg, 2015) based on objective interpretation (Hammond & Wellington, 2013) of publicly available secondary data as means of guiding the development of a theoretical framework. Consequently, this study endeavoured to build a conceptual model “by offering propositions regarding previously untested relationships” (Gilson & Goldberg, 2015, p. 129) based on existing knowledge and theory reviewed in this paper. Contrary to a purely theoretical paper, the propositions in conceptual papers such as the present study are more closely linked to testable hypotheses and in doing so offer a bridge between validation and usefulness (Weick, 1989; cited in; Gilson & Goldberg, 2015). The propositions formulated in this study were further evaluated through a review and analysis of publicly available secondary data from extant literature and reports.

This research, and hence the secondary data collection used to guide the conceptual model’s development, is based on 27 countries of the European Union (EU), which also constitute popular European tourism destinations. However, in recent years, several European destinations have experienced sustainability issues, such as overcrowding, pollution and pressure on public facilities (Adie et al., 2019), and overtourism and tourismphobia (S eraphin et al., 2018). Among these countries are Spain (Blaququez-Salom, 2019; Goodwin, 2019), Italy (Nolan & Seraphin, 2019; Visentin & Bertocchi, 2019), the Czech Republic (Roncak, 2019), and Portugal (Costa et al., 2019), to name a few. As a result, the European Commission (2019) recently adopted a new initiative named the ‘EU sustainable development track by 2030’ which provides members countries with insights and guidance about sustainable development.

The secondary data was collected, organised, and aggregated in a format that facilitates the analysis of the data (Fox et al., 2014) (see Table 2). The data presented in Table 2 reflects the following:

- The European countries examined and their corresponding official country code. The list of 27 countries of the European Union was obtained from the Schengen Visa Information website: <https://www.schengenvisa.info/eu-countries/>.
- The number of PRME institutions for each country. The list of PRME institutions was sourced from the UN PRME official website: <https://www.unprme.org/participation/search-participants.php>.
- The number of PRME institutions with either tourism, hospitality, leisure and events training and education programmes. The provision of programmes offered by each PRME institution was carefully checked against the respective PRME institution website and information provided on education programmes and courses offered to students.

Table 2

Tourism and PRME in EU countries (Tourism, T/Hospitality, H/Leisure, L/Events, E).

	European Countries	Country Code	Number of PRME Institutions	Number of PRME Institutions with either T, H,L,E	Number of HE institutions in the country
1	Austria	AT	6	4	82
2	Belgium	BE	5	2	22
3	Bulgaria	BG	1	1	51
4	Croatia	HR	3	2	119
5	Cyprus	CY	0	0	60
6	Czech Republic	CZ	5	0	68
7	Denmark	DK	2	1	30
8	Estonia	EE	1	0	20
9	Finland	FI	8	4	39
10	France	FR	39	14	3500
11	Germany	DE	39	10	450
12	Greece	EL	3	3	38
13	Hungary	HU	3	1	68
14	Ireland	IE	7	3	34
15	Italy	IT	10	7	254
16	Latvia	LV	8	0	24
17	Lithuania	LT	3	0	47
18	Luxembourg	LU	1	0	6
19	Malta	MT	0	0	6
20	Netherlands	NL	10	0	50
21	Poland	PL	10	6	428
22	Portugal	PT	9	2	127
23	Romania	RO	1	1	92
24	Slovakia	SK	1	0	36
25	Slovenia	SI	2	1	61
26	Spain	ES	25	3	84
27	Sweden	SE	11	5	35
	Total		213	70	5831

Source: The authors.

- The number of higher education institutions in each country. This list was obtained from the European Commission website: https://ec.europa.eu/education/study-in-europe/country-profiles_en.

4. Secondary data analysis and results

4.1. PRME institutions in the EU

A quick overview of Table 2 reveals that there are 213 PRME signatory institutions in the EU. France and Germany are the European countries with the highest number of PRME institutions (39), followed by Spain (25), Sweden (11), and Italy, Netherlands, and Poland (10). All other destinations have less than 10 institutions part of the PRME network.

4.2. PRME in tourism higher education institutions in the EU

70 European institutions that are PRME signatories offer tourism (T), hospitality (H), leisure (L), and events (E) programmes and courses. France (14) and Germany (10) remain the top performing destinations. Followed by Italy (7), Poland (6), and Sweden (5). All the other destinations have less than 5 institutions falling into this category (see Fig. 3).

However, it appears that in France the ratio of institutions combining taught programmes in tourism/PRME signatories is 0.4%. In Germany, it is 2%, Italy 3%, and Poland 1%. Sweden stands out with 14% and is subsequently the destination performing the best (Table 3).

Despite the ambitions of PRME, whose emphasis is largely on “the next generation of managers, leaders and business professionals committed to developing their capabilities to be generators of sustainable value for a more inclusive global economy” (Parkes et al., 2017, p. 62), and, with membership status conferred to signatory institutions, PRME does not appear sufficiently established in Europe. Sweden is the exception.

The reviewed literature supports the position that, to achieve sustainability of the industry in the long-term, tourism higher education institutions should be a PRME signatory (Annan-Diab & Molinari, 2017; Parkes et al., 2017). However, the secondary data collected and analysed in this study does not reflect this connection. Hence, the first proposition (P1) of this study is not supported, i.e., higher education institutions are not observing and adhering to PRME in the delivery of tourism courses. The remainder of this study investigates this lack of adoption and integration of PRME in EU countries, despite the clear need for such a framework (in tourism and related subjects/industries). Thus, the focus now shifts to the evaluation of the second proposition (P2) that tourism higher education institutions who are PRME signatories contribute to fostering hard-path leaders and tourists, while non PRME signatories are more likely to generate soft-path leaders (and tourists). The compelling case of Sweden is used in this endeavour.

4.3. Tourism and PRME in Sweden: what can be learnt?

The tourism industry in Scandinavia is mainly based on its natural attractiveness, which makes the area a nature-based destination (Kaltenborn et al., 2001). Beyond the tourism industry, outdoor recreation is also a tradition and lifestyle for Scandinavians (Kaltenborn et al., 2001; Hall et al., 2008). Outdoor recreation also includes hunting and fishing (i.e., extractive activities). Hunting, in particular, is declining in Sweden, mainly due to socio-economic and cultural transformations (increasing education and urbanization, growing environmental concerns) and, nowadays, a series of non-extractive activities are offered to tourists (Margaryan & Fredman, 2017). Moreover, Sweden offers the Right of Public Access for recreationists (i.e. unlimited access to nature, not just into the designated natural areas, and no entrance fees) (Margaryan & Fredman, 2017). Because Scandinavia has a small population, a deep attachment with their environment, and still a low volume of visitors, the natural areas are in good ecological state (Hall et al., 2008). This good state of the nature also contributes to locals' quality of life and their strong sense of place. This form of tourism could also be said to prevent tourismphobia by promoting the development of social capital between locals and visitors, as this form of tourism is a playful exploration that foster encounters between locals and visitors (Buckley, 2007).

The information provided about Scandinavia as an area could be applied to the specific case of Sweden. Indeed, Sweden is also a nature-based, nature-orientated and recreation; or ecotourism destination, with 60% of the country being forested (Bostedt & Mattsson, 1995; Buckley, 2007; Cottrell & Cutumisu, 2006). Locals' concern and protection of their environment (Kaltenborn et al., 2001), combined with the fact that domestic nature-based tourism and outdoor recreation are well developed in Sweden (Margaryan & Fredman, 2017), may also explain the good state of natural areas. The destination is ranked 11 (Fig. 4) in the world for environmental

Table 3

Performance of destinations with institutions combining PRME/Tourism.

European Countries	PRME institutions/HE institutions [%]	PRME institutions with either T, H, L, E/HE institutions [%]
France	1%	0%
Germany	9%	2%
Italy	4%	3%
Poland	2%	1%
Sweden	31%	14%

Source: The authors.

sustainability (World Economic Forum, 2019).

Tourism *stricto sensu*, Sweden is a competitive destination (World Economic Forum, 2019). Indeed, out of 140 countries assessed for their Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Index, which measures the set of factors and policies that enable the sustainable development of the travel and tourism sector, Sweden was placed 22nd (Fig. 5).

When comparing the data on the performance of destinations (PRME/Tourism) (Table 3) with the World Economic Forum (WEF) data on the travel and tourism competitiveness index 2019 overall rankings (Fig. 5), and the environmental sustainability performance of destinations (Fig. 4), it appears that all countries listed in Table 3 are also in the top-performing destinations when it comes to sustainability and competitiveness.

According to initial data, Table 4 presents the performance rankings of destinations for the top five performing destinations in terms of PRME/tourism. The rankings in the first two columns of Table 4 were obtained from data presented in Table 3. Destinations are ranked based on their performance in terms of the percentage of institutions that are delivering tourism and are PRME signatories as well. Rankings in the third and fourth columns of Table 4 were obtained from data presented in Figs. 4 and 5. The ranking was scaled down to the five destinations represented in Table 4.

The data in Table 4 reveals that, firstly, there is no correlation between PRME and destination performance in terms of environmental sustainability and competitiveness. Indeed, France is the best performing destination in terms of competitiveness, but it is placed second in terms of environmental sustainability (despite doing poorly when it comes to combining PRME/tourism). Sweden, on the other hand, is the least performing destination for both competitiveness and environmental sustainability. To some extent, Table 4 is rejecting Proposition 2 (P2) by reducing PRME to a less involved supporting role or sub-criteria in evaluating the performance of a destination as part of a multi-criteria decision analysis (MCDA), i.e., a comparison method supporting the decision-makers facing with numerous and conflicting criteria/alternatives to make an optimal decision (Modica et al., 2014; Greco et al., 2016). PMRE is not a decisive criterion within this particular outlook. Indeed, Hermansson et al. (2017) argue that external impacts of higher education training are often overlooked in educational policy design.

Botti and Peypoch (2013, p. 109) explain that MCDA helps with decision-making using a variety of criteria as in the real world, when sorting problems, the approaches are rarely mono-criterion, but incorporate a variety of criteria, which could sometimes be contradictory. According to a model developed by Botti and Zaman (2015), which was adapted from an earlier model of Ritchie and Crouch (2003), five criteria are generally used to evaluate destinations' performance: supporting factors and resources (transports, ICT, etc.); core resources and attractors (infrastructures, natural resources, cultural resources, etc.); destination policy, planning and development (human resources; etc.); destination management (regulations, tourism plan, etc.); and, qualifying and amplifying determinants (environmental sustainability, safety, hygiene, and health, etc.). In this typology, as a strategic HR developmental tool, PRME falls under destination policy, planning, and development. This criterion is even more important for destinations like Sweden and Scandinavian countries in general as locals and visitors have full access to public and private natural areas such as forests (Bostedt & Mattsson, 1995; Kaltenborn et al., 2001). A trained workforce to look after those areas contributing to the attractiveness and competitiveness of the destination is of great value (Kaltenborn et al., 2001).

Thus far, the study has highlighted two important points: (1) PRME is not a common pattern within the delivery of tourism,

Rank	Economy	Score
1	Switzerland	6.0
2	Norway	5.8
3	Austria	5.7
4	Luxembourg	5.6
5	Finland	5.6
6	Netherlands	5.4
7	Denmark	5.4
8	Slovenia	5.4
9	Germany	5.3
10	France	5.3
11	Sweden	5.2

Fig. 4. Environmental sustainability. Source: adapted from WEF TTCR (2019).

Rank	Economy	Score ¹	Change since 2017		Diff. from Global Avg. (%)
			Rank	Score ²	
1	Spain	5.4	0	0.3	41.4
2	France	5.4	0	1.5	40.4
3	Germany	5.4	0	2.0	40.0
4	Japan	5.4	0	2.1	39.6
5	United States	5.3	1	2.6	36.6
6	United Kingdom	5.2	-1	-0.2	34.9
7	Australia	5.1	0	0.8	33.6
8	Italy	5.1	0	1.9	32.2
9	Canada	5.1	0	1.6	31.3
10	Switzerland	5.0	0	1.5	30.4
11	Austria	5.0	1	2.0	28.8
12	Portugal	4.9	2	3.2	27.2
13	China	4.9	2	3.2	26.7
14	Hong Kong SAR	4.8	-3	-1.1	25.1
15	Netherlands	4.8	2	3.2	24.5
16	Korea, Rep.	4.8	3	4.7	24.3
17	Singapore	4.8	-4	-2.0	23.7
18	New Zealand	4.7	-2	1.4	23.4
19	Mexico	4.7	3	3.4	21.9
20	Norway	4.6	-2	-1.0	19.4
21	Denmark	4.6	10	3.4	19.1
22	Sweden	4.6	-2	0.2	18.6

- Asia-Pacific
- Europe and Eurasia
- The Americas

Fig. 5. Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Index 2019 overall rankings.
Source: adapted from WEF TTCR (2019).

Table 4

Performance of destinations PRME & Tourism/Environment sustainability/Competitive index.

European Countries	Ranking institutions/PRME tourism et al.	Environmental sustainability	Competitive index
Sweden	1st	5th	4th
Italy	2nd	-	3rd
Germany	3rd	3rd	2nd
Poland	4th	-	-
France	5th	4th	1st

Source: The authors.

hospitality, leisure and events management courses; and (2) Being a PRME signatory does not influence the performance of destination in terms of sustainability performance or performance in terms of competitiveness. From a business perspective, PRME could be considered as a signatory model not worth investing in by HE institutions as it does not have any impacts on the performance of a destination. That said, from an ethics point of view, enforcing PRME still remains valid. PRME is only a decade old (Parkes et al., 2017) and its short history could explain the relatively low number of signatory institutions in Europe. In comparison, the Advance Collegiate

Schools of Business (AACSB), the most longstanding accreditation, dates back to 1916 and was founded by leading American universities, which partly explains the surge of demand over the years for this accreditation (Elliott, 2013). PRME does not have this antecedent.

This study suggests that more emphasis should be placed on expanding and anchoring PRME within higher education institutions. In the long-term, PRME could be considered as an input that could play a direct role in the tourism planning and development of the destination and, therefore its competitiveness. Furthermore, PRME plays a crucial role in the performance of higher education institutions, as sustainability is now selling point for customers (Bostedt & Mattsson, 1995; Buckley, 2007; Cottrell & Cutumisu, 2006; Seraphin & Nolan, 2016).

5. Discussion: higher education, ethics and sustainability

Ethics and sustainability are important issues in business. It is well-documented in the literature that sustainable business practice needs to be set within a framework of understanding of ethics (Crane, 2004; Parkes et al., 2017). Yet, and to expand the discussion beyond the findings, it has been argued that business schools have not managed to sufficiently embed ethics (as a facet of sustainability, Camargo & Gretzel, 2017) in the curriculum; it has instead been weakened (Crane, 2004). The subject of ethics has been gradually replaced in business schools' curricula with more focussed business topics, and the main reason some business school programmes still deliver it (albeit to the minimum) is because Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB), or another impacting stakeholder, requires ethics to be included in the curriculum (Crane, 2004). This highlights the need to emphasize ethics education approach in business schools and finding alternative approaches and methods to strengthen this vital part of the curriculum. AACSB recognises the value and importance of ethics and are intrinsically driven to have it embedded in programmes, whereas business schools are extrinsically driven, often being blamed for focusing too narrowly on efficiency and profit maximisation (Blasco, 2012). Indeed, academic excellence in terms of scientific research is the main metric business schools are measuring themselves against (Bennis & O'Toole, 2005). AACSB and other accreditations such as the European Quality Improvement System (EQUIS) developed by the European Foundation for Management Development (EFMD), Association of MBA (AMBA), etc. offer credibility and endorsement of business schools in terms of their performance (Elliott, 2013; Miles et al., 2004; Proitz et al., 2004). These recognitions lead to benefits in terms of rankings (White et al., 2009), which subsequently lead to an increase of student recruitment (and retention) at international and local levels; this therefore leads to increased income for the institution (Cret, 2007; Elliott, 2013). Other benefits include better employment prospects for students, better salaries for academics, increased research productivity and quality, etc. (Elliott, 2013). Accreditation benefits all stakeholders (White et al., 2009). However, accreditations come with a cost (Heriot & Austin, 2009), and, as a result, business schools have to be business orientated, which implies a diversion from their original values (Bennis & O'Toole, 2005). One of the consequences is the increase in student fees (Elliott, 2013). Nevertheless, as the benefits of accreditations outweigh the costs, the number of institutions seeking accreditation has significantly increased (Elliott, 2013). In a dynamic and competitive academic environment, this shift is inevitable (Heriot & Austin, 2009) as proven by the change of orientation taken by AACSB for instance, which originally was mainly an accreditation for research-led institutions and, throughout the years, it opened up to teaching-led institutions (Heriot & Austin, 2009).

As more ethics is needed not only in the society but also in business schools (Bennis & O'Toole, 2005; Blasco, 2012; Crane, 2004), PRME becomes even more important amidst other influential stakeholders, e.g. AACSB and a focus more on ethics as opposed to sustainability with ethics as a core part of that focus. That said, despite the fact PRME has been around for a decade, and also despite the growth of this model in terms of signatories (Parkes et al., 2017), there has been extremely limited (academic) research examining the possible benefits and challenges of this signatory model. Research focusing on PRME mainly deals with the state of the world and the role that business schools and PRME can play in the improvement of society and business schools, and practices in terms of the application of PRME (Parkes et al., 2017).

The intrinsically-driven benefits of PRME do not appear well-aligned with the extrinsically-driven objectives of business schools in terms of recognition for academic excellence (Elliott, 2013; Miles et al., 2004; Proitz et al., 2004) or with the benefits of accreditations such as the AACSB. With the surge of demand for ethics in society and business schools (Bennis & O'Toole, 2005; Crane, 2004), as well as in the tourism industry and related sectors (Seraphin & Nolan, 2019, 2019), PRME have an opportunity to flourish, but might have to operate a strategic and value shift, the same way AACSB did (White et al., 2009), in order to meet the needs of higher education institutions not only in terms of sustainability education (Bennis & O'Toole, 2005; Crane, 2004), but also in terms of reputation and therefore income generation (Cret, 2007; Elliot, 2013). Whilst the tourism industry has established that there is a relationship between environmental sustainability and destination attractivity (Pulido-Fernandez et al., 2019), the same has not yet been evidenced in tourism education.

With proposition 1 (P1) not being supported in terms of larger numbers of EU higher institutions uptake to adhere to PRME in course delivery, there are limitations in supporting proposition 2 (P2), i.e., higher education institutions fostering hard-path leaders and tourists who embrace adventure and dynamic change for sustainable practice in the future. Indeed, there is a paucity of evidence to support P2 in general. Thus, and linking to the above, there is a need to consider a repositioning of PRME that can adopt a more business-orientated approach in order to align with the benefits of accreditations such as AACSB, while maintaining its current identity, values and objectives. A strategy to engage more effectively with the limitations of fostering future hard-path leaders and tourists (P2), as well as assisting a higher uptake for PRME in course delivery (P1), could be achieved through an ambidextrous repositioning, which would occur within an ambidextrous management approach. This approach consists in combining two strategies or approaches that might appear contradictory (Mihalache & Mihalache, 2016), act as polar opposites (Birkinshaw & Gupta, 2013; O'Reilly & Tushman, 2004, 2008, 2013; Raisch & Tushman, 2011), or even appear as paradoxical tensions (Stokes et al., 2015; Smith,

2016, 2017). In a tourism context, an ambidextrous management approach has been associated with innovation, performance improvement, value creation, market performance, and customer loyalty (Vo Thanh et al., 2020). It can also be connected to short-term versus long-term aspirations and approaches, with the latter being the most relevant limitation for P2 for fostering the future leaders and tourists needed. The impacts of ambidextrous management align with the benefits of accreditations discussed earlier in the paper. This management approach combined with PRME would align more with the current vision of business schools. To some extent, the philosophical approach of this study is in line with Flohr (2001), who states that sustainability should be a core unit or aspect of every tourism course. On the other hand, as suggested by Stough et al. (2018), it would be useful to assess the outputs resulting from the integration of the issues of sustainability in higher education courses (e.g. acquired competencies or learning objectives).

5.1. Proposed conceptual model

The resulting conceptual model of this study following the analysis of the secondary data available and the extant literature could be framed as suggested in Fig. 6.

Fig. 6 highlights that PRME can play a role in the long-term sustainability of the tourism industry if, as a model, PRME is repositioned and managed in an ambidextrous way. A ‘long-term’ orientation, however, is key for two reasons. First, because PRME will require a long time to become an established model; this is possibly similar to the amount of time AACSB has required to reach its international recognition level. The AACSB accreditation was created in 1916 and has known a surge, for example, in the last two decades (Elliott, 2013). Second, the impacts on education, and therefore the impacts of the application of PRME in a tourism context, will also be long-term (Vo Thanh et al., 2020). In addition, more recent research carried out by Séraphin et al. (2021) at Kedge Business School, a PRME institution in Marseilles, France, revealed that studying at a PRME institution does not influence positively the students’ understanding of sustainability, and does not turn them into sustainability actioners, i.e., individuals involved into sustainability initiatives. Also, the study revealed that practical applications of PRME to issues experienced or witnessed by students (such as case studies/field work) would enhance the effectiveness of the tool over time (Séraphin et al., 2021).

As a result, this study is calling for a longitudinal strategy to be put in place by all stakeholders of the tourism industry and cognate sectors. Subsequently, data regarding the impacts of the proposed strategy should be collected during the time the strategy is being implemented.

That said, despite the flaws identified in terms of providing suitable and effective sustainable courses in tourism and cognate disciplines, it is important to acknowledge that EU higher education institutions delivering tourism and related courses, either PRME

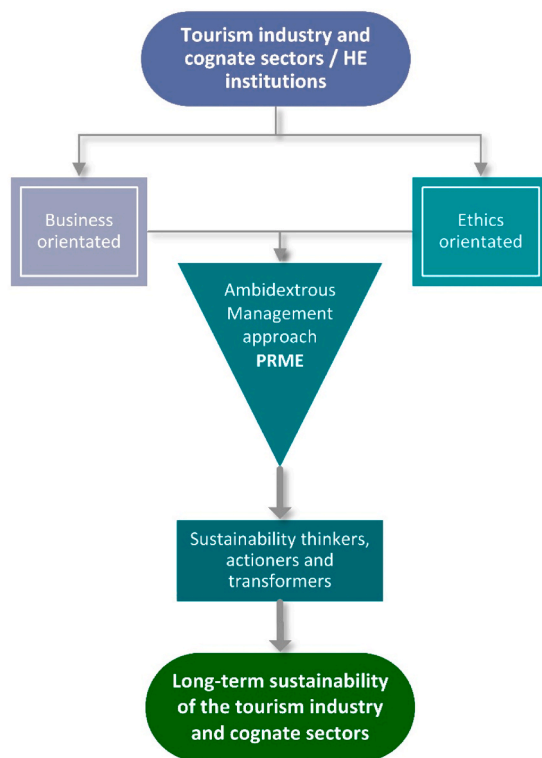


Fig. 6. Proposed conceptual model. Source: The authors.

accredited or not, are not dismissing the importance of sustainability. There is recent evidence that demonstrates that they are initiating events and actions in their efforts to develop students into sustainability thinkers. For instance, in France, in February 2020, four higher education institutions delivering tourism courses (two of them PRME institutions) jointly organised a competition called 'Get Up 4 Tourism' (Tourmag, 2020 [Online]). Using a variety of resources over two months, student teams researched, prepared and presented an informed view about what strategy could be put in place in a destination to foster its sustainable development while maintaining its authenticity (Tourmag, 2020 [Online]).

6. Conclusion

Education has strong potential in terms of educating the future generation of leaders and managers and is a key element in achieving the SDGs. This study focused on PRME and its relations to tourism higher education, with a particular focus on EU member countries. The analysis of our study showed that, due to its short history, a lack of clear financial benefits for higher education institutions, as well as a lack of clear correlation between PRME and the performance of destinations, PRME has not been fully embedded in tourism curricula. Sweden remains the exception in the EU due to the country's tradition of nature protection and close connection with the natural environment. An ambidextrous management approach should be applied to PRME in order to enhance its overall contribution to sustainability and to the tourism industry in particular. Additionally, the application of PRME should also go beyond the *stricto sensu* education environment and be extended to (tourism) businesses in order to reach out to a maximum of individuals and stakeholders.

This study contributes to the growing literature on sustainability and tourism higher education. The findings of the study show that education has a strong potential to the realization of SDGs. An ambidextrous management approach is also suggested as it best fits with the SDGs and the global community in general.

Nevertheless, this study has some limitations. For instance, the findings based on the analysis and interpretation of the performance of destinations/countries presented in Table 4 (as well as the entire study) only took into consideration PRME institutions. There is no evidence that other institutions do not cover sustainability in their tourism courses. In the UK, for example, Flohr (2001) explained that some postgraduate courses in tourism, albeit with no reference to sustainability in their title, cover certain aspects of sustainability in their curriculum. Furthermore, in order to gain a clearer picture of the impacts and consequences of adopting PRME in tourism higher education programmes, a longitudinal study is recommended to examine these issues, which may be the focus of further research.

Author statement

Hugues Seraphin: Conceptualization, Methodology, Formal analysis, Investigation, Data curation, Writing- Original draft preparation, Writing- Reviewing and Editing, Supervision.

Anca C. Yallop: Conceptualization, Methodology, Writing- Reviewing and Editing, Project administration, Supervision.

Simon Smith: Conceptualization, Writing- Reviewing and Editing.

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Hugues Seraphin: Conceptualization, Methodology, Formal analysis, Investigation, Data curation, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing, Supervision. **Anca C. Yallop:** Conceptualization, Methodology, Writing – review & editing, Project administration, Supervision. **Simon M. Smith:** Conceptualization, Writing – review & editing. **Giuseppe Modica:** Conceptualization, Formal analysis, Visualization, Writing – review & editing.

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