

TEFI values in tourism education. A comparative analysis

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This paper brings empirical evidence to the conceptual framework of tourism values developed by the “*Tourism Education Future Initiative*” by exploring the content of the mission statements of 84 graduate programs in tourism around the world as well as the content of 156 posts in international job search engines advertising for positions in tourism related industries. Finally a survey conducted in several international universities, with an in depth case study applied at the University of Lugano, Switzerland revealed interesting results concerning the values students in tourism programs believe are important for themselves, their universities and the industry.

Key words: TEFI, values, skills, education

Introduction

Higher education in tourism has been the interest of many authors focusing on the nature of education studies (Airey, 2005; Ateljevic, Pritchard & Morgan, 2007; Ayikoru, Tribe & Airey, 2009; Dwyer, Edwards, Mistilis, Scott, Cooper & Roman, 2007; Hsu, 2005; Pearce, 1993; Tribe, 2006), on the knowledge and the university curriculum development (Gretzel, Jamal, Stronza, Nepal, 2008; Tribe, 2006b) on the disciplinary dilemma of tourism studies (Echtner & Jamal, 1997), internationalization of tourism education (Jennings, 2001; Mok, 2005).

Higher education today is expanding globally with rates of change never seen before (Hjalager, 2003). Studies concerned with the global expansion in tourism education identified three main responsible drivers of this phenomenon: a set of structural changes in higher education in general (Ayres, 2006), a perceived need of increasing qualified human resources for tourism industry (Littlejohn & Watson, 2004) and a common perception of tourism as a major source of jobs and careers (Cooper, 1993; Deery & Jago, 2009). Previous literature confirms that the world economic powers are still leading the trend (Airey & Johnson, 1998) but the growth and the welfare in the emerging economies along with implementation of educational policies will be a strong factor of impact on the future distribution of higher education in the world (Maggi & Padurean, 2009).

However, in today's global environment, universities face a severe challenge to remain both attractive to students and an important source of highly skilled graduates for the industry. Literature debates whether the human resources provided by tourism education are matching the real needs of the industry (Goodenough & Page, 1993) and points out that there is a considerable gap between what education providers offer and tourism industry needs. One source of confusion might be the multi-disciplines character of tourism education and the variety of graduate typologies generated by the educational system. Also, literature is reflecting whether the profiles of the tourism employment as they are today may not exist in the coming decades implying again that educational systems need to change radically to meet these challenges (Wallis & Steptoe, 2006).

The community of tourism scholars continued to debate on how tourism education needs to adapt to societal and industry changes and what are the *values* that should lead the development of the tourism world and therefore that higher education institutions should provide (Antonoli, Cooper, Fesenmaier, Sheldon, Woeber, 2008). In particular, a number of innovative and experienced educators together with some industry leaders have begun to recognize the importance of values at university and in the workplace and tried to provide a framework for the future of tourism education (TEFI 2007, Vienna, Modul University).

Tourism Education Futures Initiative (TEFI)

Universities ... need to fundamentally retool and redesign—not incrementally by adding new courses or simply by putting courses on-line—but by changing the nature of what is taught and how it is taught. Programs (in tourism) must identify the key values, knowledge, and capabilities that graduates will need to lead positively, responsibly and effectively (Sheldon et al., 2008).

Understanding the changing environment that future students of tourism and hospitality will enter upon graduation became the main concern of a group of leading tourism educators (Sheldon et al, 2008) therefore in 2007 the Tourism Education Futures Initiative (TEFI) was born. In 2010 over 70 representatives of the leading universities offering study programs in tourism take part to this yearly meetings seeking to provide vision, knowledge and a framework for tourism education programs to promote global citizenship and optimistic for a better world.

TEFI is organized around a process which is both proactive and action oriented and it represents an important model of interaction. An important output of TEFI is the set of five values-based principles that tourism students should embody upon graduation to become responsible leaders and stewards for the destinations where they work or live. The five value sets are:

Stewardship: sustainability, responsibility and service to the community

Knowledge: critical thinking, innovation, creativity, networking

Professionalism: leadership, practicality, services, relevance, timeliness, reflexivity, teamwork and partnerships

Ethics: honesty, transparency, authenticity, authentic self

Mutual respect: diversity, inclusion, equity, humility, collaboration

These values do not represent only a theoretical framework but also a practical instrument that educators could use to improve the quality of their pedagogy. While the annual summit provides the starting point of discussion, TEFI is organized around working groups which throughout the years seek to develop tools that can be used to affect tourism education.

Methodology

This paper is a response to this initiative and tries to bring empirical evidence to the conceptual framework developed at TEFI using the value set as an analytical tool for identifying: (1) what are the values that tourism education programs are promoting; (2) what are the main skills, competences and values that employers of tourism industries are looking for and last but not least, (3) what values the students perceive as important for themselves, the industry and their academic programs of origin, from the perspective of the TEFI value framework.

For the question number (1), in order to identify the values that tourism education programs are promoting we analyzed the content of mission statements of graduate programs around the world. The data set contains 124 graduate programs (post bachelor) taught in *English*. Out of the 124, 85 programs were valid (the rest of 39 were programs providing from the same university, having therefore the same mission, statement and objectives or were programs where there was not obvious statement of intent).

Question number (2) investigates the key skills, competencies and values that the employers in tourism are demanding by exploring the content of 156 job ads in international job search engines that were looking for profiles of graduates with either a background in tourism or in tourism related industries. The language of the ads was *English* but the jobs posted were not necessarily only for Anglo-Saxon countries.

The answer to question (3) came from an international survey conducted among students in tourism and tourism related programs around the world. A focus group also took place February 16th 2010 with the students of the Master in International Tourism at the University of Lugano, Switzerland.

Results

The first research question investigated the values are promoted by academic programs in tourism around the world where the language of teaching is English. Out of the 85 programs analyzed, 49% are programs of Master of Science, 34% programs of Master in Tourism, 10% MBA's, 4% MA and 3% MPhil. In terms of geographic distribution there is a strong dominance of the Anglo-Saxon market (also given the choice of language).

A codebook was developed for the content analysis (Krippendorff, 1980, 2004) based on the assumption that words and phrases mentioned most often are those reflecting important values in the message. Therefore, the authors started with a quantitative content analysis using as key words the TEFI values (word frequencies and keyword frequencies) and extended to synonyms and homonyms that are close to the given categories.

The content analysis revealed that the programs promote *leadership* (43), *critical thinking* (31), *practicality* (28), *networking* (19), *diversity* (16) *stewardship* (10) and *partnership* (9). We were not able to find enough relevant data on *timeliness*, *reflexivity* and *relevance*. The value with the highest overall score is *professionalism* followed by *knowledge*. The *ethics* value had the lowest overall score (Figure 1).

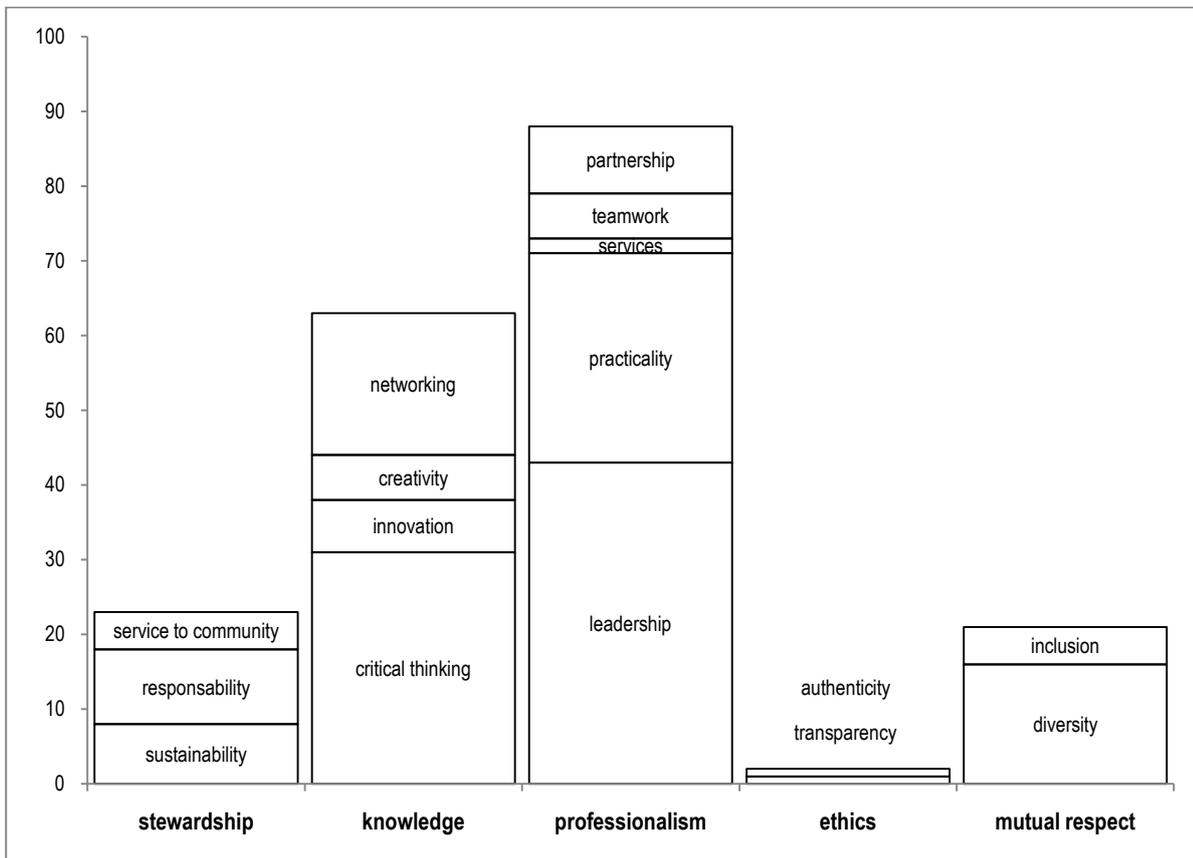


Figure 1, Values in tourism education

The results are not very surprising considering that the majority of the programs are focused on business and management and just a small minority in specific fields like sustainability, environmental, destination, etc. However, we have noticed a strong variation in content and format of various mission statements. Some universities tend to declare mission statement for the whole faculty/department, while other universities have mission statements specific to individual degrees and still other degrees lack a proper statement altogether.

The second research question investigated the key skills, competencies and values that the employers in tourism are demanding. Using the same methodological approach as in the first question, the authors analyzed the content of 156 ads from various international websites that target qualified workforce in the area of tourism, travel, leisure (www.careerbuilder.com, www.monster.com; www.leisurejobs.com ; www.traveljobsearch.com ; www.jobsearchusa.org from UK, USA, Switzerland, France). The source countries were again dominated by the Anglo-Saxon countries, given the language of analysis, with UK 60%, USA 34%. The rest of the ads came from Switzerland, France and Belgium 3%, Germany 2%, and Spain 1%. Most of the ads we encountered (but didn't consider valid) consist of menial work (especially restoration and accommodation staff) and require little or no education, hence a shortage of suitable job offers. Some job offers contain inadequate or incomplete descriptions, especially as far as requirements are concerned (no requirements at all; "university degree" without further specification, etc.). Work experience seems to be more important than tertiary education in tourism/hospitality industry. Also, some of the positions are not directly connected to tourism industry, although a tourism degree might be useful in fulfilling the job (hence their inclusion).

The content analysis revealed that the industry needs *experienced* employees most of all. There is a slight paradox here, because they are also looking for young qualified staff, so having both relevant work experience and a high degree education at a young age is a challenge. This should be however a signal for students and universities to try to combine the academic study with relevant internships and other work experiences. The second thing most sought after was people with excellent *communication* skills given probably by the fact that tourism is a sector of diversity and human interaction. The industry values almost equally *leadership*, demands *technological* knowledge, is looking for people that value the *clients and the organization*, are *team players* with *good analytical* and *negotiation skills*. Most jobs require a great deal of *travel experience* and a high *education degree*. People with *initiative*, *creativity*, capable of *multitasking* and with *knowledge of the local environment* and other *languages*, especially in the case of Europe are also valued. These results can be interesting for new programs rising in the field of tourism as well as for future graduates trying to enter a very competitive market. To resume the industry demands, we elaborated the "ideal" profile of a future employee:

highly educated, young and experienced team player that can creatively manage and perfectly communicate with demanding international and local clients and lead in innovative ways a competitive organization

In 2007, at the first edition in Vienna, TEFI leaders also identified four key capabilities and knowledge areas that graduates entering the world of the future will need but do not currently acquire in their education: destination stewardship skills; political and ethical skills; enhanced human resource skills; dynamic business skills.

Destination stewardship skills: management of real and virtual networks, knowledge sharing skills, ability to respect and work with all stakeholders, managing complex adaptive systems, environmental management skills

Political and ethical skills: ethical behavior, demonstration and motivation, integration of basic human values into the workplace, lobbying and the ability to influence the political process

Enhanced human resource skills: team building, effective listening and negotiation, motivation and leadership, working with distributed, virtual project teams, emotional intelligence

Dynamic business skills: flexibility, multi-tasking, critical thinking, optimal use of common sense, innovation/entrepreneurship, communication skills using new multi-media technologies, cross-cultural competencies ,risk identification, estimation and control, avoiding problems rather than solving them.

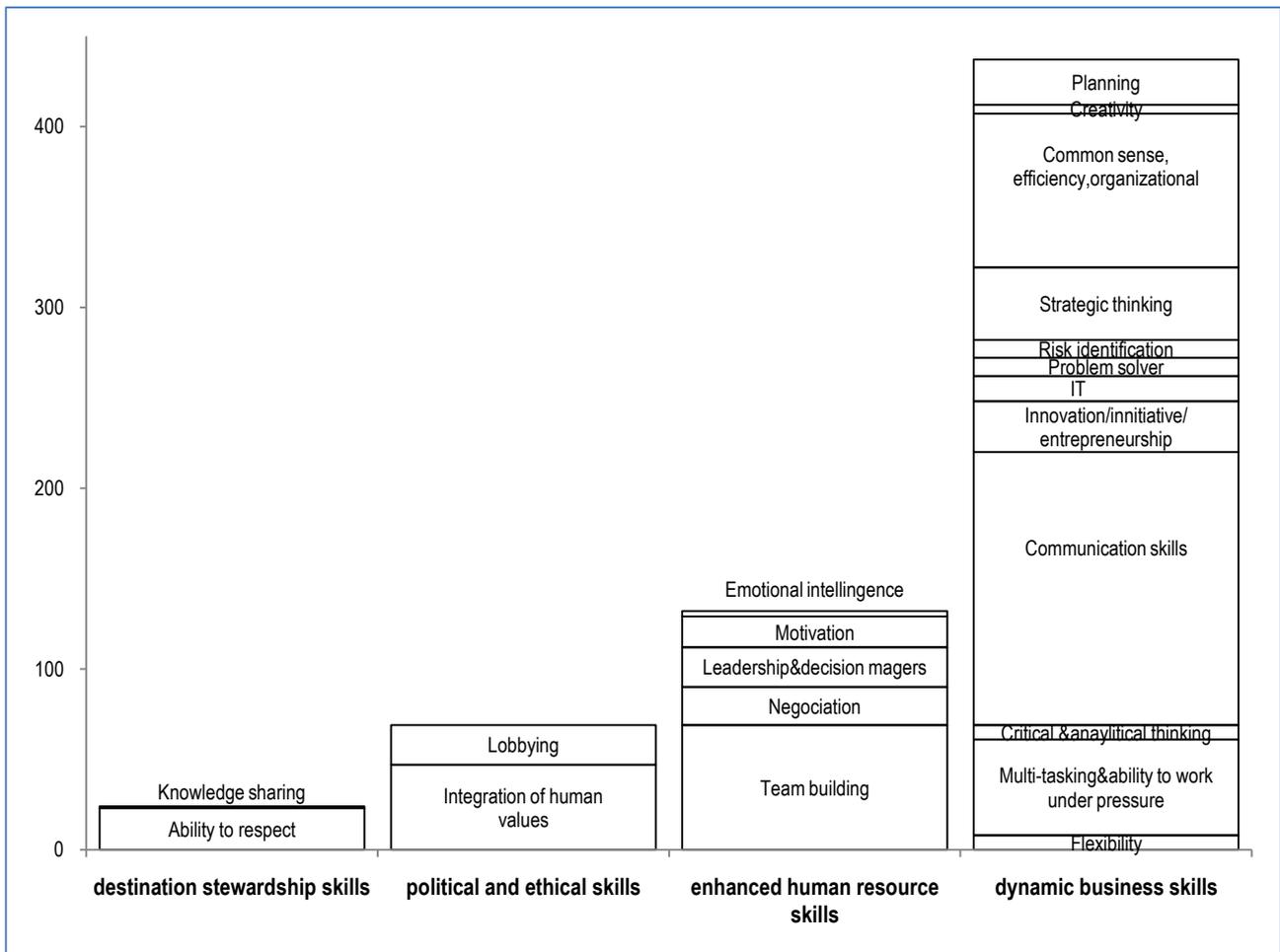


Figure 2, key capabilities and knowledge areas

We clustered our findings from the ads' content analysis using the same methodology and identified that as expected, dynamic business skills are most valued followed by enhanced human resource skills. Destination stewardship had almost no relevant results. While arguing that the profile of a future employee should be industry transversal, the lack of interest for destination stewardship when working in such a complex, multi-cultural and multi-perspective field is a matter of concern. Universities should probably find ways to communicate with the industry the importance of the "softer" skills that are so critical for a sustainable socio-economic development.

The third question asked students in tourism to reflect upon which values they believe are important for the industry, for their own programs and for themselves. In this step of the research we were interested to find the students' perceptions in relation to the TEFI framework given the fact that they are both a "product" of the academia and a "tool" for the industry. To measure the perceptions of students who are currently studying tourism at university level in universities around the world, an online questionnaire was administered starting October 2008 until April 2009. There were a total of 198 valid responses out of 318 from the cohort of tourism students, female 78.79 and male 21.21%. 63% of the respondents are bachelor, 29% graduate or master and the rest are PhD students. The majority (62%) graduated in 2009 or will do in 2010 (26%). The vast majority is convinced that they will pursue a career in tourism after graduation or at least consider it (92%) and almost 52% would consider continuing an academic career (e.g. PhD). The respondents provided from all 5 continents, with a high response rate coming from Italy, Australia, UK, US, Phillipines, Denmark and Canada. The findings of the questionnaire will be discussed in five stages, each stage corresponding to one of the five TEFI values.

Stewardship

The students' reflection upon the value of *stewardship* which includes the subset of *sustainability*, *service to community* and *responsibility*, revealed that their universities are less interested in the *relationship with the community*, something that the industry might value more, while they place themselves somewhere in between the two, with a stronger interest for *responsibility*.

Knowledge

The students' reflection upon the value of *knowledge* which includes the subset of *critical thinking*, *innovation*, *creativity* and *networking*, revealed that *critical thinking* is important for the universities, while *networking* is less whereas for the industry *networking* stands high. *Creativity* was the only variable perceived equally important for industry, students and academia. When it comes to the students, they are again somewhere in the middle of the industry and the academics, with a stronger interest in *innovation*.

Professionalism

The *professionalism* set which includes *leadership*, *practicality*, *services*, *relevance*, *timeliness*, *reflexivity*, *teamwork* and *partnerships*, revealed *teamwork* and *relevance* as least important for their universities, followed by *reflexivity*, *timeliness* and *partnerships*. The industry is perceived as very concerned about *practicality*, *relevance* and *teamwork*. The students perceive as very important for themselves *practicality* (highest ranking overall), followed by *relevance* while the *teamwork* got the lowest ranking.

Ethics

The set of *ethics* which includes *honesty*, *transparency*, *authenticity* and *authentic self* revealed that their universities do not value *transparency* and the *authentic self* but they do value *honesty*, while the industry is considered more interested in *transparency* and *honesty*. The students valued more the *authenticity* and the *authentic self*, both highest ranked overall.

Mutual respect

The value of *mutual respect* includes *diversity*, *inclusion*, *equity*, *humility* and *collaboration*. The students belief is that universities are less concerned about *collaboration* and *humility*, but much more concerned with *diversity* and *equity*. In the students perception the industry is also less concerned with *collaboration* (the lowest ranked overall) and *humility*, but might be more interested in *equity*, *diversity* and *inclusion*. The results are very similar when it comes to what the students are more interested in, with a high ranking of the *inclusion*, *equity* and *diversity* and very little on *collaboration* and *humility*.

In summary, the general perception of the students in tourism is that there is a gap between what the industry needs and the academia provides while they see themselves to be more or less in the middle. They believe that the industry is much more interested in *sustainability*, *creativity*, *practicality*, *honesty* and *transparency*, *diversity* and *equity* and much less in the *community*, *partnerships*, *authenticity*, *collaboration* and *humility*. The universities are perceived overall as being much more interested in *critical thinking*, *innovation*, *diversity* and *humility* but less in the *community*, *teamwork* and *transparency*. The students believe is very important for themselves the *innovation*, *responsibility*, *practicality* and *honesty* as well as *equity* and *diversity*.

Overall, the students seem to believe that the industry is the champion of *stewardship*, the academia of *mutual respect* and while they resonate mostly to the *professionalism*.

These results are not aligned with the findings of the previous two questions; therefore it made us reflect whether the surveyed students really understood the meaning of the values or whether there is really a misalignment in this triangle.

For this purpose we conducted in February 16th, 2010 a two hour focus group on the values promoted by TEFI with 41 students of the Master in International Tourism at the University of Lugano, Switzerland (MT-USI) of which 27 from the first year of the master, 11 from the second and 3 graduates. After having presented the TEFI's mission and intent, the students were divided in six teams to discuss the TEFI's values and fill up a short questionnaire as a group, trying to find a common agreement. The questions were similar to the survey discussed previously: "(1) Which values do you believe are important for the Universities? (2) Which values do you believe are important for the industry? (3) Which values are more important for you as students in tourism?" The groups' discussions, moderated and recorded by us, were very active and the students reacted positively to the task. However, we have noticed that there was some confusion around the meaning of a few of the values, especially in the case of *mutual respect* and *ethics*. The problem was solved with our assistance or in some cases the solution came from the group discussion. The data collected was analyzed and summarized in three steps, each corresponding to the question of research.

Indeed our doubts about the survey findings, especially about the understanding of the values seem to be confirmed as the results of this focus group showed a completely different picture, with almost a perfect alignment between the industry, the academia and the students. The students believe *professionalism* to be the most important value for all 3 variables followed by *knowledge*. The 3rd place is *stewardship* for the industry and *mutuality* for the students and the academia. The last was *ethics*, however, a long debate started on how and who should teach ethics – family, school, personal education, etc. In specific, for the first question "Which values do you believe are important for the universities?" the focus group revealed *critical thinking*, *teamwork* and *practicality* as very important. To the question (2) "Which values do you believe are important for the industry?" the students agreed on *teamwork*, followed by *responsibility*, *critical thinking*, *creativity* and *collaboration*. The students have indicated as central also *innovation*, *leadership* and *practicality*. For the third question (3) "Which values are more important for you as students in tourism?" they indicated *critical teamwork* followed by *critical thinking*, *collaboration* and *networking*. They agreed also on *practicality* and *diversity*. The focus group was also asked to critically discuss their program. The results revealed that the Master in International Tourism at the University of Lugano, MT-USI is a leader of *critical thinking* being very strong in creating opportunities for *teamwork* and students' *collaboration* as well as *diversity*, *knowledge* and *innovation*. The main problems of the MT-USI program are in the area of *professionalism*. The students have criticized the lack of *partnership* with the tourism companies that lead to issues on finding internship and job opportunities. They are confused about their possible career paths, would appreciate more guest speakers from the industry and overall more interest in *networking* and *practicality*. These observations are critical for the administrators of the program and can become useful guidelines for strategic decisions.

The main observation regarding the survey and the focus group is that in the survey is possible that the understanding of the values was not obvious. This investigation might be more adequate for a focus group rather than a survey since the values need to be "translated" to the students therefore we encourage further research interested in the topic to take this method of analysis.

Conclusions

This research is based on the five value framework provided by the Tourism Education Future Initiative and has tried to give an empirical support to the TEFI values by analyzing both (1) supply - tourism academia and (2) demand – tourism industry. Also, we surveyed students involved in programs that offer degrees in tourism in order to find out their perception on the importance of TEFI values for the industry, academia and themselves. The content analysis of the academia statements revealed that universities value *professionalism* and *knowledge*, with a strong focus on *leadership*, *practicality*, *critical thinking* and *networking*. *Diversity*, *stewardship* and *partnerships* are also values that the analysis revealed to be important. Looking at the content of the ads for jobs in tourism we found that the industry is mostly looking for *experienced*, young adults, with great *communication* skills, capable of *multi-tasking* in teams' part of *international* organizations. While most ads didn't specify the discipline of the degree, most of them are looking for highly educated people with strong business skills. This message is important for our future graduates in tourism programs, that have to be aware that the industry is very demanding as well as for the suppliers of programs in tourism that intend to become

more competitive on international markets. The survey results indicated that students might feel confused about their positioning in between the academia and the industry, and they perceive a big gap in between the two parties. The findings of the survey reveal that universities where our respondents are coming from value mostly the *mutual respect*, with a specific interest in *innovation, diversity and humility* but might be less interested in the *service to the community, teamwork and transparency*. Their responses on the industry conclude that *sustainability, creativity, practicality, honesty, transparency, diversity and equity are important* and much less the *service to the community, partnerships, authenticity, collaboration and humility*. Students perceive a general gap between what the industry is looking for and the academia provides and they are somewhere in the middle. This situation can be given by where they are in this critical point in their life. The findings from all three questions of research in this paper are not aligned. This is a problematic signal. If what the academia provides is not exactly what the industry needs or the students might believe important, there is the time for reflecting upon strategies for programmatic change. Our findings clearly demonstrated barriers but also potential strategies for changing educational processes within the universities.

This research is relevant in the context of the five value framework provided by the Tourism Education Future Initiative. Using this structure, we conducted the research only in programs taught in English and we looked only at job ads posted in English. Other languages and cultures might offer different results and further investigation in this direction would certainly be interesting. The bias of the findings could also be given by the set of values used for investigation. While the TEFI values are very relevant, they are representing the beliefs of a relatively small group of experts.

The findings are important for the academic programs that are contemplating strategic transformations, just as much for students in tourism and not only, preparing to face the demands on the industry. We hope that this article will be the reason for reflection upon translating the core values into action and implementation in order to create a fundamental change in tourism education.

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