The Profile of Degree Level Tourism Curriculums in Turkey

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Abstract

Tourism education began in vocational and technical schools in many countries around Europe (Inui, Wheeler, & Lankford, 2006) as tourism was being recognized by governments as a significant economic field. Because of the perceived need for trained workers, first tourism education was mostly vocational and technical oriented. However many scholars argue that tourism curricula should also include liberal aspects and have an academic focus since tourism is a much broader phenomenon that has impacts on the natural and social environment. Thus balancing vocational and liberal aspects in tourism education have been the main issue for years. In the present study, the profile of Turkish degree level tourism schools' curriculums are aimed to analyze to question this balance by focusing on sustainability and cultural heritage related courses. By gathering all degree level tourism curriculums, a content analysis is performed to find out the present density of sustainability and ethical competence courses, which found to constitute only a small percentage in curriculums. The findings are discussed based on the distribution of percentages along with apparent approaches for curriculum design.

Keywords: *Tourism Education, Curriculum, Sustainability, Cultural Heritage, Natural Heritage*

Introduction and literature review

Tourism studies and the definition of tourism itself have long been criticized by researchers for just covering economic aspect of the phenomenon. Economic impacts of tourism development dominated earlier studies but since 1970s social, cultural, political and environmental effects of tourism have also become current issues for tourism scholars[1]. Especially since 1990s social impacts have attracted researchers' considerable attention and describing tourism as a broader phenomenon has been widely attracted attention. By reviewing numerous conceptualizations in the related literature, Tribe (1997, p. 641) defined tourism as *"the sum of the phenomena and relationships arising from the interaction in generating and host regions, of tourists, business suppliers, governments, communities, and environments"* to embrace all the related aspects. His review and modified definition is crucial for tourism education in a sense since the design of tourism education is very much related with how this phenomenon is perceived and described.

When it comes to tourism education, debates generally formed around curriculum. In a review of literature on tourism education showed that most of these studies are discussing curriculum as the major topic (Tribe, 2005). It could be asserted that discussions on tourism education and curriculum are affected by the concerns in tourism as a research area. Scholars similarly criticize curriculum because it just focused on developing vocational or technical skills and not covering related topics of a much broader phenomenon. Despite the attempts to widen the scope of schools since the beginning of 1990s, in a study examining the content of tourism degree courses in UK, found that vocational, career and industry issues are the key elements of courses (Airey & Johnson, 1999). Another study also points out the need for addressing all stakeholders' interests, not just the industry partners (Tribe, 2001). In this study, the effects of research paradigms on curriculum design are examined and argued that scientific positivism was mainly employed with technical derives by ignoring competing values for the society.

On the other hand, one party of scholars warns that is universities' responsibility to provide well-rounded and employable graduates for tourism industry. Researchers highlight the importance of examining sector expectations from tourism schools and design their studies to suggest some implications to schools by exploring those expectations. Principal rationalization for this approach is that the development and sustainability of tourism industry is very much related with well-trained employees since it is a labour-intensive service industry (Amoah &Baum, 1997). Producing well-rounded students could be achieved with curricula designed to provide vocational skills. To illustrate, study draws the attention that employers seek personal skills such as communication, adaptability, leadership and numeracy in candidates[6]. Industry professionals consider leadership, internship or industry experience, and preparation for industry employment as the most

important subject areas for success in the industry (Gürsoy, Rahman, & Swanger, 2012). An abstract curriculum designed with no clear boundaries could cause students difficult times to obtain employment because of lacking practitioner approach (Cecil & Krohn, 2012). For some professional disciplines such as business, engineering and tourism programs to develop a competency based curriculum is indicated as the best way to prepare students for the competitive environment (Cecil & Krohn, 2012). Numerous studies found in the literature indicate the importance attributed to the topic.

One party of scholars criticize the current curriculums for just focusing on vocational aspects to provide technical skills while the other party warns that is not possible for higher education to ignore future employment opportunities of its students. This debate refers to the duality dating back in the literature between *vocationalism* –to stand for significance of acquisition of skills, qualities, attitudes and knowledge perceived to be important for work- and *liberal reflective* –to signify the understanding and critical evaluation of the phenomenon (Tribe, 2002). By following the warnings, researchers incline to consult both parties and imply that equilibrium could be achieved between what is called as vocational and liberal aspects. The distinction between liberal arts education and vocational education, and the desired balance between them, provides the basis of discussion in the areas of professional education programs such as town planning, accounting, nursing and tourism (Dredge et al., 2012). For tourism education, Paris notes that there is a general agreement that a balance between vocational and liberal aspects of tourism should be achieved (Paris, 2011). Tribe (2002) suggests that is possible to combine "vocational and technical" aspects with "liberal and academic" ones in higher education to produce graduates who are both employable and sensitive to their environment we all live in. He conceptualizes the graduates as "philosophic practitioners" to receive their education at juxtaposition of mentioned approaches.

Cultural Heritage and Sustainability Education

Additionally all, as one of the largest industries in the world, tourism has many positive and negative impacts on cultural heritage, natural landscapes and local people where it takes place. On one hand tourism ensures employment of local population, provides additional income, promotes peace and intercultural communication, helps preservation of cultural and natural resources. On the other hand, tourism as an industry causes increase in population, pollution, wildlife destruction, tax burdens, local government debt and changes in traditional cultures (Andereck, Valentine, Knopf, & Vogt, 2005; Boley, 2011). Adopting sustainable tourism management approach will provide enhancing the positive outcomes while minimizing negative impacts of tourism. In this context, scholars consider education as a tool for adopting sustainable behavior and believe that education suggests the best chance of equipping future tourism professionals with knowledge and skills to handle these

negative impacts (Sheldon et al., 2007; Sheldon, Fesenmaier, & Tribe, 2011). Improving management standards in tourism by enhancing environmental awareness and building up a sustainable tourism industry is possible through education.

One of the most important aims of degree level tourism programs should be preparing the future tourism leaders for the workforce equipped with sustainable mentality and the curriculum should also move towards sustainability (Boley, 2011). Tourism students can become effective managers if they are taught about sustainability in many contexts across the curriculum. Boley (2011) indicated that teaching various aspects of sustainability is substantial for destination's natural and cultural resources which have strategic role attracting tourists with their uniqueness; poor management of these strategic resources is a threat for sustainability of tourism. Maintaining balance between conservation of the destination's natural and cultural assets and negative environmental, social and economic impacts of tourism will result in accomplished sustainable tourism management (Barron & Prideaux, 1998).

In the light of these considerations, this study aims to analyze the current profile of degree level tourism curriculums in Turkey. University level tourism education was first introduced in 1965 in Turkey, which hosts millions of tourists each year with its rich cultural and natural heritage. From the existing literature, it can be observed that the similar debates about the curriculum are prevalent in Turkey too. Thus a study analyzing the current situation could provide a platform to discuss the reflection of the long lasting debates about tourism education.

Methods and Material

Tourism schools in universities could be organized in different forms in Turkey; there are two-year vocational high schools, four-year tourism schools, and four-year tourism faculties. There were much of this variety of programs and schools related to tourism in the past that confused both the potential students and society in general (Karsavuran, 2016). Since 2009, tourism faculties are started to be founded which has also served to prevent this confusion. Faculties have also organized the departments with four specific degree level programs; tourism management, gastronomy and culinary arts, tourist guidance, and recreation management. Some of the formerly four-year tourism schools were transformed to faculties and these tourism faculties together with the newly founded ones have started to dominate the degree level tourism education in Turkey.

For the present study, data was composed of four-year (which is to be eight semesters) curriculums of tourism faculties. Currently there are 41 tourism faculties but it was not possible to find curriculums for 18 of them since they are not accepting students to their

programs as being newly founded faculties, they do not have four-year curriculums designed. Thus the sampling had to be the faculties that are currently accepting students. 49 curriculums from 23 faculties were included in the analysis and the departments are as below;

- 26 tourism management,
- 10 tourist guidance,
- 13 gastronomy and culinary arts.

There is only one recreation management department that accepts students, hence which is not included in data analysis.

Data analysis and Findings

To analyze the curriculums that include numerous degree courses, a categorization is used. To see the vocational and non-vocational focus of curriculums, a categorization was needed since there were 2001 compulsory and 2153 elective courses that makes impossible to comment on them. A recently suggested categorization by Karsavuran (2016) for university degree tourism programs in Turkey was utilized for the analysis. The categorization encapsulates the bunch of courses to an interpretable and explicable form.

All courses of the departments are coded under related categories by considering the contents. Coding was performed discriminating between departments and between compulsory and elective courses. Thus three tables were produced for three departments. Despite the large number of courses existing, it is possible to group all the courses under major categories.

To start with, it should be noted that all tourism departments have compulsory internship to graduate. However some of the faculties have internship in their curriculums as credited. The code of internship in tables stands for only those have in their curriculums. The second important finding is that the intensity of foreign language courses. Foreign language has one of the highest frequencies and percentages for all of the departments since these courses are taught each semester. It is also possible to see the variety of the languages that English, German, French and Russian are taught mostly. Generally English is taught as compulsory lesson at all departments and students have to choose at least one another language. In addition to courses designed to teach a foreign language, there are also vocational language courses aiming to teach professional jargon in foreign language. Thus in Turkey as hosting many international tourists, to able to speak at least one foreign language is considered as essential to graduate and to be employed.

Table 1. Categorization for the Department of Tourism Management (N= 26)		Compulsory		Elective	
Categories	Sub-categories	n	%	n	%
Management	Accounting/Finance/Investment Courses	95	9	49	4
	Management and Organization Courses	110	11	76	6
	Public Relations/Marketing Courses	63	6	79	7
Tourism Domain	General Tourism Courses	36	3	88	7
	Tourism Management Courses	120	12	118	10
	Interdisciplinary Aspects and Impacts of Tourism	28	3	52	4
Economics and Law	Economics Courses	61	6	7	
	Law and Regulations Courses	52	5	27	2
Information Systems	Computing Courses	22	2	11	1
	Vocational Packaged Softwares	35	3	26	2
Behavioral and Cognitive Improvement	Behaviour and Communication Courses	24	2	32	3
	Ethics	7		16	1
Gastronomy and Cullinary Arts	Gastronomy	25	2	64	5
	Kitchen Practice	7		5	
	Arts Courses			4	
Tourist Guidance	Tourist Guidance Field Courses	4		8	1
	History and Archeology Courses	1		31	3
	Art History Courses			9	1
	Geography Courses	12	1	22	2
Foreign Languages		202	20	371	31
Numerical Courses		52	5	7	
Thesis/Field Project		27	3		
Internship		39	4	10	1
Other Courses		11	1	76	6
Total		1033		1188	

Table 1 presents the coding for Tourism Management departments. Besides language courses, management (26 %) and tourism (18 %) are the most frequently taught domains for this department. The similar distribution of domains is applicable for elective courses, too.

For the analyzed Tourist Guidance departments (see Table 2), the notable intensity of language courses as both compulsory and elective draws the attention. The second major category for tourist guidance is field specific courses, which is followed by management subject. Even if the department consists the courses that could be considered as academic subjects such as archaeology, art history as being field courses, the importance attached to management is still prevalent.

Table 2. Categorization for the Department of Tourist Guidance (N= 10)		Compulsory		Elective	
Categories	Sub-categories	n	%	n	%
Management	Accounting/Finance/Investment Courses	8	2	7	2
	Management and Organization Courses	26	6	27	7
	Public Relations/Marketing Courses	18	4	22	6
Tourism Domain	General Tourism Courses	16	4	20	5
	Tourism Management Courses	29	6	27	7
	Interdisciplinary Aspects and Impacts of Tourism	5	1	20	5
Economics and Law	Economics Courses	16	4	3	1
	Law and Regulations Courses	22	5	4	1
Information Systems	Computing Courses	11	2	1	
	Vocational Packaged Softwares	11	2	4	1
Behavioral and Cognitive Improvement	Behaviour and Communication Courses	14	3	16	4
	Ethics	1		5	1
Gastronomy and Cullinary Arts	Gastronomy	6	1	14	4
	Kitchen Practice				
	Arts Courses			3	1
Tourist Guidance	Tourist Guidance Field Courses	14	3		
	History and Archeology Courses	66	15	17	4
	Art History Courses	23	5	12	3
	Geography Courses	17	4	11	3
Foreign Languages		102	23	135	35
Numerical Courses		12	3	3	1
Thesis/Field Project		11	2		
Internship		10	2	3	1
Other Courses		15	3	28	7
Total		453		382	

Gastronomy and Cullinary Arts departments (see Table 3) have relatively the most of field specific courses (37 %) such as nutrition, sanitation and hygiene, and cooking classes in their curriculums. The faculties having the department have also at least one kitchen for training. Kitchen practice seems to be indispensible in these departments. The students also take management courses to be future managers.

Table 3. Categorization for the Department of Gastronomy and Cullinary Arts (N= 13)

Categories	Sub-categories	Compulsory		Elective	
		n	%	n	%
Management	Accounting/Finance/Investment Courses	34	7	4	1
	Management and Organization Courses	35	7	31	6
	Public Relations/Marketing Courses	21	4	24	5
Tourism Domain	General Tourism Courses	14	3	16	3
	Tourism Management Courses	25	5	29	6
	Interdisciplinary Aspects and Impacts of Tourism	3		13	3
Economics and Law	Economics Courses	14	3	2	
	Law and Regulations Courses	12	2	11	2
Information Systems	Computing Courses	12	2	2	
	Vocational Packaged Softwares	6	1	5	
Behavioral and Cognitive Improvement	Behaviour and Communication Courses	11	2	18	3
	Ethics	2		7	
Gastronomy and Cullinary Arts	Gastronomy	109	21	118	20
	Kitchen Practice	71	14	18	3
	Arts Courses	8	2	16	3
Tourist Guidance	Tourist Guidance Field Courses				
	History and Archeology Courses	1		3	
	Art History Courses			3	
	Geography Courses	2		5	
Foreign Languages		84	16	226	39
Numerical Courses		17	3	3	
Thesis/Field Project		9	2		
Internship		15	3		
Other Courses		10	2	29	5
Total		515		583	

A closer look into categories allows us for further evaluations. Most of the categories aim to provide vocational and technical skills, give experience, and teach at least a foreign language. Management related courses (considering general management and tourism management categories) apparently have the intensity for all of departments. The departments also provide some behavioural skills and teach software programs used in the industry to produce employable graduates. By the frequencies and percentages, it is possible to comment on the curriculums that there is a strong tendency to regard expectations of the industry.

However discussing effects of tourism on the society and nature is lacking in the curriculums. In the above categorization, sub-categories of interdisciplinary aspects of tourism and ethics have the content that is described as "academic" or "liberal" aspect in the literature, which are relatively very low in percentage. The sub-category of interdisciplinary aspects of tourism includes courses such as tourism sociology, tourism and environment, and so on. The ethics sub-category could be ethics in tourism, business ethics or ethics for some cases. The percentage of these liberal aspects slightly increases for

elective courses pointing that these aspects are perceived as subsidiary or secondary but not as important as the other categories.

For the sustainability education, two departments have compulsory sustainable tourism course for one semester. Sustainable tourism is taught in eight of tourism management departments, three of tourist guidance, and in one of the gastronomy and culinary arts departments as an elective course.

For cultural heritage education, tourist guidance is dissociated from other departments. Generally all departments have Anatolian Civilizations course for one semester as compulsory or elective. Solely curriculum of tourist guidance provides depth of knowledge and expertise. However it could be argued that cultural heritage education is indispensible and could be also considered vocational for tourist guidance since future tourist guides have to have the knowledge to transfer it to tourists.

Conclusion

Turkey receives millions of international tourists and income from tourism industry thanks to its rich cultural and natural resources. However it is difficult to claim that there is awareness about the importance of these assets for sustainable tourism industry by analyzing the degree-level curriculums. The analysis of the curriculums showed that departments of tourism faculties have a vocalionalist approach in curriculum design. It is difficult to trace the reflection of scholars' warnings (Boley, 2011; Sheldon et al., 2007; Tribe, 1997) to graduate students with also ethical competence in the curriculums.

However it could be also argued that there is a growing awareness especially for cultural heritage management. Recently masters' degree and undergraduate programs in cultural heritage are founded which could be a sign of increasing attention attached to the subject in education. Considering recent developments and changes in the area of tourism research and tourism education, an increase in the number of cultural heritage management programs and an increment in the percentage of sustainability courses in the curriculums could be a realistic expectation.

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