



The Creativity of Tourism Undergraduates as Future Creative Tourism Experts

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Abstract

It is widely acknowledged that creativity does not only manifest itself as artistic inclination, but is equally essential and reflected in any other fields and activities of life. Over the last decade it has basically become a trend leading to the boom of creative economy and industries, including creative tourism that emerged from the increasing demand for spending time creatively during the holiday, i.e., by taking part in creative activities. Creativity is our innate ability, however, if neglected, over the time and under the pressure of certain circumstances, it may decline; therefore, its regular nurturing is as important as the development of any other skill. Due to rapid technological and social advancement and changes, leading companies worldwide have already been screening their future employees' creative competencies within the recruitment process. Undoubtedly, tourism, as a constantly and rapidly evolving industry, cannot exist without creative professionals either. A creative workforce in any of its sectors is also highly justified in terms of sustainability and competitiveness. Hence, it seems that for Slovakia with its huge potential for the development of creative tourism, creative human resources is even one of the key factors of reducing regional disparities. But are tourism undergraduates as future creative tourism experts creative enough to address this challenge? The present paper shares results of a brief opinion survey conducted among teachers of the Department of Tourism at Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra, in Slovakia. The investigation aimed at mapping their views based on their teaching experience on tourism undergraduates' and professionals' creativity, the importance of creativity for the tourism professionals, as well as the areas that require creative approaches in tourism. The findings of the survey, which revealed that teachers consider their students to be rather average in terms of creativity, are to be compared with the results of a further examination focused on measuring tourism students' level of creativity. In addition, these results serve as a basis for the research on testing and developing educational methods for supporting and enhancing creativity as a fundamental skill of future tourism professionals.

Keywords: *tourism, higher education, creativity, creative tourism, opinion survey*

1. Introduction

Creativity can be approached from several perspectives. The present research is concerned with creativity as people's ability to come up with new and useful ideas and solutions. According to Teodorescu [8], the economic impact of creativity and innovation in tourism is significant: integrating creativity in production, selling and promotion activities may increase the added value of a tourism product as well as the final consumers' satisfaction. Hence, creativity is highly necessary for the tourism industry where traditional solutions may no longer necessarily result in the expected outcomes. What is more, it seems that in terms of the COVID-19 pandemic, creative and innovative solutions are a must for tourism companies if they want to survive.

However, even starting a business is no more only a matter of funding; the innovativeness of the offered product is also equally important. This trend can be well illustrated by the incredibly vibrant scene full of start-ups yearning to capture a slice of the travel industry pie mainly through digital innovations, especially in travel management, e-tourism solutions or the field of accommodation, catering and gastronomy [2]. The growing number of innovative start-ups in the tourism industry is also enhanced by support programmes and initiatives worldwide, such as the *UNWTO Tourism Start-up Competition* which received proposals from almost 5,000 start-ups in the first two rounds [4].

The increasing demand for creativity has also led to the emergence of *creative tourism*, a new generation of tourism, which can be understood as the "co-creation" of the tourist product both by the tourists themselves and the local inhabitants [1]. Visitors are given the opportunity to use their creative potential by actively participating in activities that reflect the cultural specifics of the holiday destination [6]. As Richards puts it [5] integrating creative content into tourism experiences can reach new target groups, improve the image and competitiveness of the destination, as well as support the growth of creative industries and creative exports.



A plethora of creative tourism products is offered worldwide, including experiences such as “Tapas” workshop in Barcelona or Amulet Making in Thailand [1]. However, the list of creative activities offered for the visitors of Slovakia is rather limited [3]. This fact contradicts the great potential of this country with rich cultural traditions and spectacular natural conditions for developing creative tourism. [7] Undoubtedly, one of the ways how to tackle the unsatisfactory offer of creative tourism products in Slovakia’s regions is to prepare current tourism undergraduates as future creative tourism experts to address this challenge.

2. Teachers’ Opinions on Tourism Students’ Creativity

The analogies presented above led to the formulation of the main goals of the prepared pedagogical research. The preliminary stage in creating the strategy for creativity development contained a brief opinion survey among the teachers as tourism experts whose role can be described as a highly important part of the teaching-learning cycle since their work can greatly foster students’ skills - including creativity. Therefore, *the main objective of the research was to explore the opinion of the teachers employed at the Department of Tourism at Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra, in Slovakia on tourism students’ and professionals’ creativity.* In addition, the questionnaire survey also investigated the respondents’ views on:

- the importance of creativity for future tourism experts;
- the fields of tourism that require creativity to a great extent.

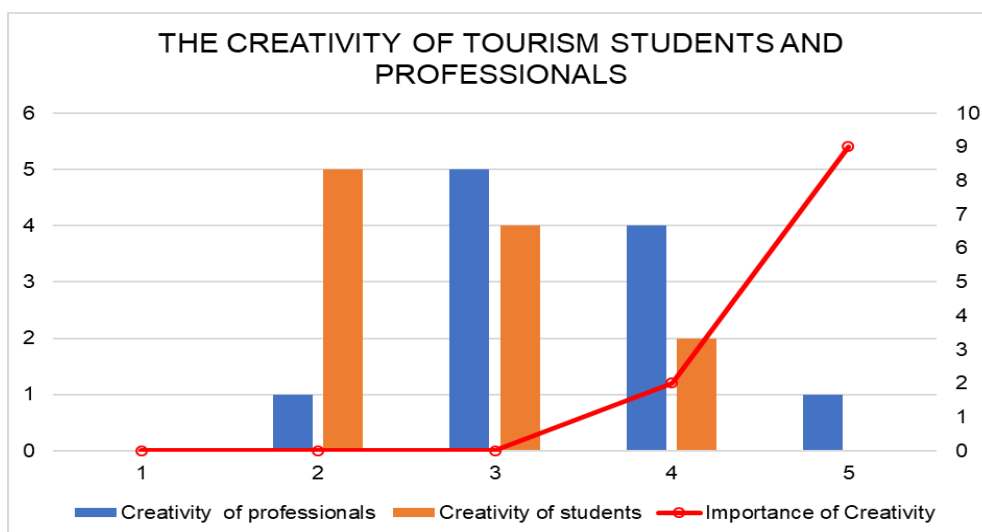
Based on the given goals the online questionnaire contained eight questions; however, for the present study, only four of them were analysed. One of the selected items was formulated as an open-ended question, whilst the other three were developed as five-point Likert scale questions.

The research sample consisted of 11 respondents who had the relevant, several-year teaching experience through different courses related to the field of tourism and offered for a yearly average of 250 students.

The data were processed, with regard to the small sample and the character of the respondents’ answers, mainly through applying the method of qualitative content analysis. The findings displayed in graphs and figures are described in the next part of the study.

2.1 The results

The respondents’ opinions about the creativity of tourism professionals based on their previous experience can be considered as considerably important since tourism teachers as “tourism expert customers” may have seen and explored the tourism market and tourism services in a different and more critic way than other customers do in general. Within the framework of the present research, neither the quality of the experience nor the sector of tourism in which it had been gained, was examined. The data were then compared to the respondents’ views on the level of tourism undergraduates’ creativity, as well as on the importance of creativity in tourism. Teachers could express their opinions on a five-point Likert-scale, whilst the highest value (Grade 5) reflected the highest and the lowest value (Grade 1) the lowest level of creativity or importance.



Graph 1: The creativity of tourism students and professionals compared with the importance of creativity



As it is shown in Graph N.1, tourism professionals' creativity received higher ratings than tourism students' creativity, since nine out of eleven teachers considered students to be average (Grade 3) or even below average (Grade 2) in terms of creativity; only two of them indicated that they are quite creative and none of them perceived students as very creative. On the other hand, five teachers thought that tourism professionals were rather creative (Grade 4) or very creative (Grade 5), according to five of them, they were average (Grade 3) and only one teacher considered them to be below average (Grade 2). However, it can also be noticed, that teachers agreed almost unanimously, that none of the examined groups, (i.e. tourism undergraduates and professionals) is very creative since tourism professionals received the highest rating (Grade 5) only in one case. Yet, the respondents' agreement on the importance of creativity is indisputable since nine out of eleven respondents assigned the highest value (Grade 5) to the importance of creativity and the other two of them indicated Grade 4.

The next item of the questionnaire, which had been formulated as an open-ended question, investigated the activities and fields of tourism that according to the respondents require creativity to a great extent. Each respondent could give multiple answers which were then divided into several groups.

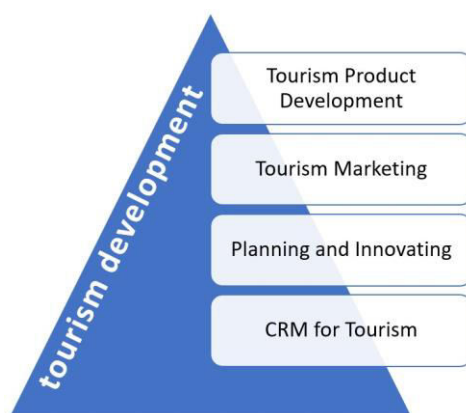


Figure 1: The fields of tourism that require creativity to a great extent

It can be seen in Figure N.1 that the fields and activities of tourism, in which creativity is a must, according to all the respondents, are primarily related to *Tourism Product Development* (mentioned eleven times). *Tourism Marketing*, including mainly the activities connected to promotion and advertising, was identified less frequently (three times). Similarly, *Planning and Innovation* including various planning and strategic responsibilities, project management, training, etc., were identified by three teachers. Finally, *Customer Relationship Management* (CRM) also appeared among the answers (two times); it means, that according to the teachers, the activities related to this field may require creativity to a smaller extent in comparison with those mentioned above.

3. Conclusions

In light of the above-presented results, several conclusions can be drawn. Firstly, the apparent difference between the tourism undergraduates' and tourism professionals' creativity may be explained by the fact that the latter group has been exposed to everyday real-life situations that often require creative solutions, and, thus, their creativity have continuously been fostered. However, the fact that none of the examined groups was identified as very creative, indicates the necessity of developing creativity for both of them. Besides, creative approaches and fostering creative competencies seems to be the most relevant in terms of courses/people working in fields, as follows: Tourism Product Development, Tourism Marketing, Planning and Innovation, as well as Customer Relationship Management.

4. Limitations and implications for further research

The limitations of the study can be described in terms of the small research sample, even though the findings clearly imply the importance and the need for nurturing both tourism professionals and tourism undergraduates' creativity. Since the present research is the preliminary stage of further investigation, solid conclusions will be drawn after the comparison with the results of measuring tourism students' level of creativity. These findings will then create a platform upon which the investigation on testing and developing creativity-enhancing teaching methods will be built.



Implications for further research arise from the clear difference between the tourism undergraduates' and tourism professionals' creativity. Among other things the length of the professionals' work experience may be quite relevant to explore; in addition, the participation in various training activities could also be worth examining.

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