

Reconsidering the Tourism and Hospitality Curricula: Can Tourism Really be an Academic Discipline?

Papa Elimane FAYE, PhD

University Iba Der Thiam of Thies, Senegal

***Corresponding Author:** Papa Elimane FAYE, PhD. University Iba Der Thiam of Thies, Senegal

Abstract: *This paper focuses on conceptual and theoretical approaches to tourism study. In that light, it tries to discuss in detail the fundamental ideas that distinguish the study of tourism from other fields, to find out what kind of course is really specific to tourism, what levels of study tourism education can imply, what subject should be the content. The main question is how to specify and isolate tourism as a scientific discipline and how to find out a study object specific to tourism? The subsidiary question is how to reconsider pedagogy and curriculum in tourism education? This leads us to analyze the conceptual approach and the pedagogy framework of tourism studies. We found out that each university offering tourism courses has its own curriculum. As a consequence, it is difficult to make all tourism studies into harmony. The key aim of this paper is to examine the growth and development of tourism education. to reflect on how tourism curricula develop teaching and learning strategies; To establish a core knowledge base of tourism concepts and principles; To understand the various perspectives for defining tourism and tourists; To describe and understand the whole tourism system and its significance when studying tourism.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Tourism is a quite “young” discipline in university curriculums and still no harmony, conformity nor suitability were found on university programs for Tourism studies. Each university goes its own way so that curriculums are different from one university to another, educational institution to another, professional school to another, etc. Also “little attention has been devoted to the meaning of tourism education” (Yuka & Daniel, 2006) in terms of what to teach and what should be the program and what possible approaches should be suitable for tourism studies. Anyway, educational institutions embed several subjects and topics in the tourism and hospitality curriculum; the point is to prepare students and professionals for future careers in the industry.

This question addresses mainly the tourism curriculum and operability of research in Tourism. Overlooked perspectives and critical issues in Tourism curriculum, it discusses tourism education from the perspectives of harmonizing curricula, specifying the object of study, conceptual and theoretical framework as an urgent task.

2. PROBLEM STATEMENT

Scholars have long debated the relevance of tourism courses as tourism scholars struggle to find an academic identity as well as “academic respectability” for tourism as a university discipline. Many universities try to make programs that match business needs with tourism teaching and learning strategies. This is why many academic structures break with the traditional way of providing courses in the field of tourism. Anyway, tourism curricula seem to be inexorably lost between the unquestioning pressure of the market, on the one hand, and academic issues of philosophy, ideology, and fundamentals, on the other. As a result, tourism studies appear to go in all directions. Seemingly, they do not meet any academic standard, are not harmonized and do not meet any common standard.

This problem encountered by tourism in its quest for academic recognition is due to the fact that tourism has integrated the university a “little too late”. However, nowadays, academic structures in line with tourism scholars try to develop tourism identity as a vocational subject on the one hand and pure fundamental academic subject on the other. Of course, There is no evidence to suggest that tourism scholars share such a stance however the debate is on the go.

As proof, we can observe the increasing number of international conferences on tourism and hospitality putting together teachers, researchers and tourism specialists in the same table of reflection. It is also noted the variety of international academic journals dealing with tourism. This inexhaustible debate pushes our thinking towards two major questions that will be the guiding lines of this paper:

The key question is how to reconsider pedagogy and curriculum in tourism education?

3. OBSERVATION AND ANALYTICAL CRITICISM OF TOURISM CURRICULA

3.1. Brief history of Tourism Curricula

Education of tourism started in Europe (Yuka et al, 2006) and the first schools of tourism seemed to appear in the UK and France. However, a precise date on the start of tourism education is difficult to find even though it can be located in the 1960s (Airey, 2008)^[1]. So, there is no consensus on the date of tourism education's birth (Seraphin, 2011:90). Before the 1960s, Tourism was, according to Airey, taught and studied but was not really a discipline as suggested by Tribe^[2].

These teaching and research were done by individuals who did not belong to any academic structure. In that time, we cannot say tourism curriculum but courses and research focused on economic impacts of tourism development (Yuka, 2006). The land of tourism study's birth seems to be the UK where the first school of tourism started in the 1960s under the influence of tourism industries as it focused on training in hospitality; in that time, specialties and trainings were very few. So far, the known date of first tourism studies as a university discipline was located in France with "*le Centre d'Etude Supérieur du Tourisme (CEST)*" in 1961 and in UK with Scottish Hotel School (SHS) in 1963 (Seraphin, 2011:118).

Hugues Seraphin^[3] in his doctoral dissertation adds that in France, any trace of university education in tourism did not exist before 1961. However, we can locate, according to Dr. Seraphin, the first non-university education of Tourism in France in 1944.

Unlike these arguments, other researchers fixed the emergence of tourism education in the early 1900s with training in cooking and hospitality (Cooper et al)^[4]. These authors argue that in the 1920s economists and geographers embedded tourism in their curriculum; that led to travel agency development and tour operators. Quebec seems to get its first tourism school thanks to the notary and historian Victor Morin when he understood very early the need to train tourist guides due to the increase of vacationers^[5].

However, they agree that the real training in tourism and its university development started in the 1960s.

Reading these different arguments between Airey, Cooper et al. and SÉRAPHIN, we can say that tourism education started in the early 1900s as limited specialties (hotel, restaurant, cooking, etc.) but got powerful among students and teachers in the 1960s. Also, the birth and development of Tourism education is known to be from Europe and especially between France and the United Kingdom.

3.2. Development of Tourism Curricula

More than 50 years have passed since tourism education started as an academic discipline; so far, there is no harmonization on tourism curriculum however; many steps and developments have been noted in curricula. It has long been influenced by the industry of travel and hospitality with strong emphasis in hotel (in terms of accommodation and lodging) operation and restaurant studies. Some kinds of scholarship in tourism were probably located earlier as suggested by *RAE (1891)* but "*were fragmented either by sector or by individual scholars*" (Airey, 2004).

After the 1960s, interest and demands for tourism education grew up as well as research and publication. Both research and education were oriented on hospitality and travel industries as vocational education. Tribe (2002) divided tourism curriculum into four categories such as vocational education, reflective vocational, reflective liberal and liberal education. As for vocational education of tourism, the emphasis is set on the needs of hospitality industries. The vocational education aims to provide to the labor market graduates ready to make practical and relevant contributions (Lewis, 2005).

Unlikely, a liberal tourism education is broader and seeks ideology for tourism; it mainly provides students with a holistic approach of tourism as a phenomenon and not only as industry (Lewis 2005). This approach comprises the understanding of all tourism principles and practices, as policy, planning and tourism itself as science.

It's through this evolution from a vocational to liberal education that we observe the wanderings of tourism education. If it is common to notice some similarities in what schools teach in so-called vocational education, at university level, the liberal education or what is supposed to be liberal education in tourism remains very disparate.

Since the 1960s or before, Tourism as a university discipline has been in search of legitimacy. Still, there is neither specific object of study and/or research nor specific method. What is taught at university in terms of tourism is still vocational and remains fully oriented to tourism and hospitality employment.

Observing the university curriculum, it is clear that some changes were operated but still differ from university to university. For-example at Tokyo Metropolitan University in Japan, the department of tourism is related to graduate school of Urban Environmental Studies and there is no tourism related-study as undergraduate program. As a result, the department of tourism of TMU recruits students from different backgrounds such as Sociology, Anthropology, civil engineering, geography, urban studies, agriculture, architecture, environmental studies, etc. the school is the first of its kind in Japan promoting tourism studies as a scientific endeavor. In the background of the department we can read this:

In addition to conventional studies of tourism and tourism policy, it approaches tourism using scientific methods from geography and ecology, engineering methods from urban engineering and transportation engineering, practical methods of community development, and methods of information science which are involved the analysis and dissemination of tourism information and behaviors using IT tools.

Students enrolled in this department are specifically studying survey methods, analytical methods, and methods of expression to help them theoretically explain and propose plans related to tourism promotion, the preservation and appropriate use of the natural environment, and the creation of distinctive, creative communities.

Students of this university find this approach very useful; it brings a revolutionary view in tourism studies but is also evasive as a curriculum. It will be very difficult to find another university, school or department having the same or close study program. The TMU' Department of Tourism Science comprises 3 sections named 'nature-based tourism', 'culture-based tourism' and Tourism information system.

In the nature-based tourism field, research and education is conducted by using geography, ecology, and other sciences in its approach to the conservation and appropriate use of nature and a locality's tourism resources; in the culture-based tourism field, the desirable state of urban tourism resources is considered and research and education on community development methods is conducted by using an engineering approach including urban planning and architecture.

This curriculum is likely unusual since what is called culture-based tourism, comprises only civil engineering, urban and landscape planning, architecture, transport and infrastructure planning lecturers and researchers; neither culture, history, sociology, anthropology, nor global studies are taught there so that it should be interesting to wonder what is culture in this section, what is the part of culture in the so-called culture-based tourism.

Unlikely, the department of recreation, park, and tourism sciences of Texas A&M University proposes a different curriculum but has almost the same aim with TMU as it "prepares students to become leading professionals in recreation, parks and tourism and major contributors to quality of life in their community". In its undergraduate program, we can see tourism management, Community recreation and park administration, park and conservation, youth development. This program has the merit of being clear and matching with its objective. It brings as TMU department specific vision on what should be tourism studies. With the course of Youth development, it contributes to the development of young people's personal, physical, social and educational abilities.

The Department of Tourism at Munich University of Applied Sciences is the largest academic department in the field of tourism in Germany. It offers courses in Tourism management (tourism basics, tourism economics, accounting, business administration basics, law, management process, information technology, personal management, Marketing, hotel, hospitality and language).

Tourism studies are found so wide that in Japan there is a whole university dedicated to tourism; Osaka University of Tourism is the *first of its kind in Japan*. In this university, students are prepared to practically apply their knowledge within actual fields of tourism, such as the travel, aviation and hotel industries. The courses are fully professionalized and specialized in fields such as management and administration of tourism, business or work related to the international development of tourism, the cultural aspects of tourism, etc.

In Senegal (West Africa), Iba Der Thiam university of Thies has a “Tourism studies section”. The title of the program is “Management of tourism and cultural activities”. The curricula in this university includes many disciplines but still concentrated in tourism activities such as “Marketing of tourism, E-tourism, Tourism promotion, Hospitality system, etc.” One of the problems noted in this university is that the number of students is big while it’s difficult to include the company practice in the study.

These 5 above universities have different curricula but they all address tourism; they are complementary in their approaches but separately, they deepen the incredibleness of tourism as a serious university discipline. Some universities have widened their field by getting away from the sole vocational issues of tourism. But what tourism studies need now is to find a harmony in what should be taught. The evolution of tourism curricula and the avoidance of some universities to offer tourism studies as a vocational course encourage the debate on the scientific nature of tourism. However, both vocational and liberal approaches are important and the reconciliation of these two approaches helps provide tourism discipline a scientific character.

Evolution of the tourism curriculum is going on according to the observation of tourism curricula worldwide. But the same observation shows each university develops its own curriculum and number of them are now oriented their evolution to community-based tourism such as development of responsible tourism, solidarity tourism, sustainable tourism, voluntourism; these concepts can be developed in the tourism curriculum but they appear not to be exactly academic subjects, as the practice is closer to slogan.

These tourism dismemberments are included in the liberal approach of tourism teaching and are viewed rather as a phenomenon. So, they are not specific programs for tourism studies but can help enhance tourism curriculum. Anyway, the scientific nature of tourism requires an identified specific object of study, specific methods, specific elements likely to be called tourism fact or tourism phenomenon.

4. DISCUSSION

4.1. Tourism as Pracademic Discipline: What is or should be the Nature of the Tourism Knowledge?

The essence of a discipline is to produce knowledge with paradigmatic, methodological and historical framework. The lack of a specific object, known paradigms and recognized methods make tourism not to be a fully academic discipline. There is no specific discipline called tourism; people whose major is tourism studies are oriented in hotel management, hospitality industry or management of travel industry.

Several universities have whole faculty dedicated entirely to tourism studies or tourism sciences but the contents of the course are mostly based on management or business development. Those courses are actually related to other disciplines such as marketing, business or management itself.

This reminds us of the big question that Emile Durkheim (1894) asked in the early foundation of sociology. He wanted a science which is objective, specific and methodical because sociology should be distinguished from other disciplines. The notion of specificity is very important from Durkheim point of view. “His explicit methodological intentions for sociology concerned its objectivity, its specificity, its methods of explanation and its transformative relation to other disciplines”^[1]. He found a specific object of sociology he specified and called “social fact” that became famous as sociology's objectivity was, for him, a matter of treating 'social facts as things'. Tourism is not sociology and

cannot be treated as sociology but the development of sociology as a discipline and its differentiation or dissociation is relevant for tourism in its quest of academic identity. As sociology struggled to show its difference with psychology, philosophy and anthropology, a specific object and method were found. This is relevant for tourism in its quest for recognition as a scientific discipline.

Even though there exist no formal criteria for defining an academic discipline, we can argue that an academic discipline is a field of study or a branch of knowledge that can be learned or taught and researched as part of higher education.

Therefore, tourism cannot be considered as a full discipline because of the nature of knowledge it provides. At university, we can study specific branches such as the travel industry, hospitality industry and destination management. These are inescapably related to tourism even though it shares them sometime with other disciplines under the concept of multidisciplinary. These fields of study or branches do not give tourism its fundamentals. So why should we call a branch tourism studies or tourism science or simply tourism? It's because there is a specific study object, teaching object and researching object with, as suggested by Durkheim, a specific method. So since the actual field of study that is taught at university can be claimed to belong to another discipline, they appear as a shared discipline which involves other fields.

Thenceforth, tourism is not qualified to be a full academic discipline. Although, a destination is a specific tourism object, it cannot make alone the fundamentals of tourism; the travel industry is between transportation, business, management and economy; hospitality as well touches several fields in the manner it is approached. To fully meet the academic standard of discipline, tourism studies shall specify its object of study, define its fundamentals and stand its method. Otherwise, it can be only qualified as a pracademic discipline. The big issue of tourism education and scholarly debates is: what should be considered as a 'tourism fact'?

4.2. Tourism as a Professional Discipline

Tourism scholars should accept that tourism is a professional phenomenon, a business fact and it should be mainly treated like that. Tourism earns credibility when it is treated as a pracademic discipline and professional phenomenon.

If tourism still has a recognition issue in the classic university system as a discipline, in professional or vocational education institutes, it is fully recognized as a discipline. The study of hospitality things such as restaurant, accommodation such as resorts, hotel and travel industry like tour operating, travel agency, voyage management, etc. are dedicated to tourism studies in any professional school, university or institute.

Students learning tourism and hospitality in these educational centers are trained to be directly absorbable in the market and professional organizations. How to develop a tourism activity, how to manage a destination and how to promote a tourist attraction are the big issues in tourism as a professional discipline.

Unlike what should be academic tourism where the tourism phenomenon itself, its history, its development and mutations, its structure, its methods and its relation with other academic areas are studied or should be studied; tourism as a vocational field provides tools to be immediately able to function in a professional environment, to be technician of tourism activities.

Therefore, tourism viewed in a professional angle seems to be already accomplished with an object, materials and methods.

However, this vocational character of tourism is not enough to make it knowledgeable, it needs some epistemology. In this light, we can understand the assertion of Belhassen & Caton (2009) introducing three dimension in tourism knowledge generation; they argue that research progress in tourism includes *tourism morphology* which is the creation and adjustment of concept, term and models by tourism scholars; this will name and interpret the tourism as a phenomenon, this is for them, *Interpretations and understandings* of tourism phenomenon and their application in the practical tourism field which includes problem solving to meet the needs of practitioners and policymakers.

This thought camped the two faces of tourism education, its academic aspect and its professional aspect. According to this thinking, each one is in need of the other one. The practitioners might be,

generally, people trained to work in the tourism industry. They surely need the scholars' research, findings and development for their activities. Policymakers as well as decision-makers need the scholars' outcomes and professional workers to develop and apply their policies. The professional education needs the tourism academia to strengthen their curricula.

5. CONCLUSION

Evolution of the tourism curriculum is going on according to the observation of tourism curricula worldwide. But the same observation shows each university develops its own curriculum and number of them are now oriented their evolution to community-based tourism

As a professional discipline, Tourism seems to be already accomplished with an identified object, materials and methods that are specific to it.

The literature reveals that the pedagogy of tourism has long focused on the vocational origins of tourism in higher education, the need to broaden the curriculum from its essentially business-oriented origins and the emergence of tourism as a subject of study in the academic system. At the start of this paper, it was discussed whether tourism as a subject can be considered a "serious" academic discipline and what the curriculum can and should entail. It was also discussed as suggested by the key question: how to reconsider pedagogy and curriculum in tourism education? For those who teach tourism, one of the most important challenges and of concern to specialists and researchers in tourism has been the standardization and harmonization of the object of study and common methods for approaching it. This is why we are witnessing today an increase in the literature going in this direction and vigorously posing the debate, but we also note new and innovative forms of design of teaching and learning strategies in the field of tourism especially with the rise of OTAs and GDSs accentuated by information and communication technologies.

Today more than ever, there is an urgent need to hold international conferences on the design of tourism curricula. If the scholars meet in congress to examine tourism and hospitality curricula, things can change. This appears to be more relevant to leave this nagging question to the sole debates of scientific papers which unfortunately remain in the annals of researchers.

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