European hospitality and tourism education: differences with the American model and future trends

Sandro Formica

Department of Hospitality & Tourism Management, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, 362 Wallace Hall, Blacksburg, VA 24061-0429, USA

Hospitality and tourism education in Europe

Until recently, hospitality and tourism development in Europe has been exclusively considered a capital investment issue. As a result, education in this domain was initiated to prepare students to supply the industry with entry level positions. The European educational structure in tourism, hospitality and related fields has highlighted the operational aspects of the industry for more than a century. In past decades, only hands-on vocational programs were offered in the hospitality and tourism field. The curricula were based on skills oriented training, and students received a narrow education. Fusca' (1977) noted that training should not be separated from formal education in tourism schools. He believed that practical experience had characterized European hotel and motel education for over a century, thus generating a lack of general culture. This concept is supported by Kaplan (1982) in his investigation of job opportunities for hospitality and tourism for former students. He emphasized that a vocational, skill-based program inevitably restrains future job opportunities. Conversely, conceptual programs that confer extended knowledge will increase career opportunities.

Since the end of the 1970s, rapid growth and development of new destinations have increasingly eroded the market share of the Old Continent, thus bringing concern among tourism operators. Consequently, hoteliers and travel agents have been forced to have a better understanding of the environmental forces that have been shaping the tourism and travel industry and have turned the hospitality market into a highly competitive-one. A solid background in hospitality management education has become a critical requisite for managers in order to succeed in the complex and fierce market which exists in hospitality and tourism arenas.

The standard managerial European model in the hospitality and tourism industry is traditionally based on a solid background in routine operations. However, this model was revealed to be obsolete and not effectively responding to current market needs. Management education was the key answer to a growing demand for high performance hospitality and tourism managers. The primary objective of educational institutions in this specific domain is to challenge the current market uncertainties through a comprehensive
understanding of the forces that are driving it. This is possible through the preparation of a multi-functional qualified manager able to identify, define, master, and orchestrate the six basic functional areas of management: administration, finance, human resources, marketing, operations, and resource & development. In the European scenario, the demand for a multi-functional qualified manager is a necessity in hotels since it is rare to find middle management assisting the general manager in his/her duties.

Since the European universities were unable to respond to this need and to supply hospitality and tourism management programs, a variety of new institutions have initiated higher level courses in this domain. Bonneau (1990) claimed that higher education in hospitality and tourism in Europe was only considered as a fruitful business by those new institutions. They exploited the fact that numerous employment opportunities were offered by the hospitality and tourism market and students were attending the expensive programs hoping to find a good position in the industry.

The European universities have gradually become more sensitive to the issue and have begun to offer Associate and Bachelors degrees since the 1980s (Cooper et al., 1990). The growth of academic hospitality and tourism education is not developing at the same speed among the different European countries. Inevitably, the cultural diversity of the European continent has caused its countries to implement a variety of hospitality and tourism programs in relation to course length, curriculum, and administrative organization of courses.

In Germany, the tourism specialization was developed within the Fachhochschulen, which confer Bachelor’s degrees after the completion of eight semesters of classes. Within the colleges of Geography, Political Economics, and Business Administration, hospitality and tourism courses are offered as a specialization for one or two semesters.

Switzerland is one of the first European countries to develop tourism courses within business colleges. Bern University has a Department of Tourism Economics in the College of Commerce and Economics.

The tourism specialization by French universities offers two, three and four year programs in various locations. French hospitality and tourism programs are more and more geared toward four year Bachelor degrees that tend to prepare students for managerial jobs in the industry.

Italy began offering three year Associate degrees for “Tourism Professional Operators” and in “Economics of Tourism” in 1993. Two Bachelors’ degrees have been offered since 1994. Within two years—1993 to 1994—the hospitality and tourism programs offered by the Italian universities grew from two to twelve. The programs are developed within the colleges of Political Sciences, Commerce and Economy, Education, and Languages.

Among the European countries of the ex-communist bloc, Poland began offering two Bachelors’ Degrees in hotel management in 1992. In addition, the Polish government, supported by the Commission of the European Communities (CEC), has created a two-year tourism management program entitled “Programme for the Development of Tourism in Poland” and is technically maintained through the consultancy of a Spanish company (Airey, 1994). However, many weaknesses have been listed by Przeclawski (1992) regarding the Polish hospitality and tourism educational system, and solutions through the creation of international programs are proposed.

Bulgaria has offered courses in hospitality and tourism since the middle 1960s. Different from what was offered at that time by the majority of the European countries, Bulgaria
conceived hospitality and tourism courses as part of academic programs, offering these
studies on university sites. The length of the programs is normally five years and offered by
higher institutes of economics or at Geography–Geology Departments (Rakadjiyska, 1990).

**Differences between the American and European hospitality and tourism education systems**

The hospitality and tourism education’s history is relatively new. Despite its newness,
hospitality and tourism programs have been growing rapidly in the United States, as well
as in other regions of the world (Strohbehn, 1994; Koh, 1995). The availability of
hospitality and tourism programs are mainly driven by the increasing demand for middle
and upper management by the hospitality industry. Whether in the United States or in
Europe, the first institutions offering hospitality programs—Ecole Hoteliere de Lausanne
and Cornell University—began with the full support of the domestic Hotel and Restaurant
Associations. Therefore, the principal purpose of these programs, no matter their
European or American locations, was to prepare students for promising careers in the
diverse areas of the hospitality and tourism industry.

However, as specified by Lawson (1974), there are two separate university systems: the
first belongs to the Anglo-Saxon tradition; and the second to the European tradition. As
far as the university system is concerned, the Anglo-Saxon approach, which is the one that
has been inherited by the United States, focuses on personal professional development. In
the specific domain of hospitality and tourism, the Anglo-Saxon system is geared towards
the improvement of personal knowledge through the use of proper skills and knowledge in
order to manage a lodging or restaurant business firm. Particular attention is also given to
managerial problem-solving. The European approach is more culturally-driven. The
university system in Europe is directed to a theoretical study of the economic and social
aspects of tourism. The conceptual approach of the European system has inevitably
created a profound gap between the new academic discipline and the well established trade
schools.

In the United States, the hospitality industry from its early stages assumed a more
extensive dimension. Large hotels demanded a great deal of specialization. Job descrip-
tions were created to assign tasks and duties to each member of the hotel organization.
Beginning from the late 1940s, the rapid changes in the United States demographic trends
caused a fast development of the domestic hospitality companies, which in turn called for
capable managers. Since 1922, the hotel management program at Cornell University
supported the hospitality industry’s development offering college programs geared toward
students’ managerial preparation in the hotel sector.

European education in hospitality was officially initiated in 1893 in Lausanne, Switzer-
land, by the local hoteliers association. Traditional practices and knowledge were the
necessary tools to achieve Lausanne’s school goals. The assumption that has driven the
European development of hospitality management for over a century, has been the
consideration of the hotel manager as the individual able to perform all the duties within
the lodging and restaurant facilities. European hospitality education mirrors its industry.
In fact, the European hotellerie was started as, and still is, a mom and pop industry, where
doers are necessary and thinkers are not.
Contrary to conditions in the United States, where tourism sciences are generally embedded into hospitality, the tourism concept in Europe represents the umbrella under which hospitality is located. University studies focusing on tourism are perceived to better provide a theoretical knowledge of the different components of the travel, tourism, leisure and hospitality industry. The evolution of tourism programs has developed in opposition to the division among field disciplines created earlier by vocational courses (Fragola, 1987).

Another significant difference between the American and European hospitality and tourism programs is related to the time frame of programs offered. Despite the fact that the United States has a significant number of Associate Degrees in this field, the most popular and successful option taken into consideration by students is the four year bachelor's degree. In Europe, hospitality and tourism programs are offered by institutes of higher education, colleges and polytechnics, and are concentrated within a shorter period of time: one to three years. The one and two year courses generally focus on specific specializations, such as tourism guide, hotel planning, and culinary arts. The purpose of these courses is to grant the necessary technical background to access the hospitality and tourism industry through entry level positions. This is why a great emphasis is placed on foreign language skills. The three year courses instead, are very similar to the theoretical four year bachelors' programs and provide for an overview of the tourism system. Unfortunately, the fact that the European university system is so deeply rooted in its traditional principles influences considerably the changing process of its academic programs. Instead, the fast growth and rapid change of the hospitality and tourism sector requires programs that are consistently keeping track of trends and applying new concepts in class.

Another major difference between the two systems involves the state of research in hospitality and tourism. In the United States the most qualified and accredited international journals are published in tourism—*Journal of Travel Research, Annals of Tourism Research, Journal of Leisure Research*—and hospitality domain—*Cornell HRA Quarterly, FIU Hospitality Review,* and *Hospitality Research Journal.* A robust presence of high quality academic journals related to the hospitality and tourism discipline stands as a confirmation of the existence of a consistent body of knowledge, which is tied to the evolutionary trend of the industry (Goeldner, 1990). Various professional associations are very effective in promoting applied research and creating synergies between industry leaders and academia professionals. The Council on Hotel, Restaurant, and Institutional Education (CHRIE) and the Travel and Tourism Research Association (TTRA) are two examples of field associations whose members are either coming from industry or university.

The continental European hospitality and tourism programs suffer from the lack of research at the university level. The only journal published in continental Europe is *The Tourist Review.* It represents one of the first academic publications in the field—first published in the mid 1960s—and focuses on theoretical and exploratory research. *The Tourist Review* is supported by the "Association Internationale d'Experts Scientifique du Turisme" (AIEST), which is the only European association of hospitality and tourism academicians. Applied research is lacking in this domain and the absence of associations gathering both researchers and industry executives contributes to the lack of synergy between the two. In Europe, in order to uphold and justify the growing offer of university programs in this field, an increasing number of books have been recently edited. By
contrast, in the United States academic journals often represent the first instrument to measure an academic discipline. As noted by Cooper et al. (1990):

there are no professional bodies or publishers taking a European view of tourism education and research.

In the United Kingdom the approach to hospitality and tourism research can be defined as intermediate, in between the European and the American systems. The presence of two international journals—Tourism Management and the International Journal of Hospitality Management—has contributed to shorten the cultural distance between hospitality and tourism research in Britain and the United States.

In America, the shortfall of doctorates in the hospitality domain (Nebel, 1986) has been slowly absorbed by the crescent offer of graduate programs—12 PhD and 26 Master’s (CHRIE, 1991). Faculty members in the United States universities have a solid industry background—42% has less than nine years of experience and the remaining have ten or more years of experience (Parlow, 1990)—that enables them to better evaluate and analyze the different hospitality and tourism needs and future trends.

In Europe the lack of faculty members is a major concern (Bonneau, 1990; Cooper et al., 1990). Few teachers can be recognized for having experience in industry and academic qualifications. As a result, an increasing number of part-time teachers are coming from the hospitality and tourism industry.

Future trends

Future trends in the development of hospitality and tourism education suggest a need for a great deal of interaction between the European and American systems. It has been stated (Moreo and Christianson, 1988) that Europe is developing a growing interest in the American approach to academic and managerial aspects of education. In the meanwhile, American educational institutions are increasingly attracted by the European hospitality traditional practices. The literature that followed Moreo and Christianson's publication seems to support this observation. The European trend is to move far from its traditional vocational approach and to evolve into an educational system, similar to that offered by the United States. Developing honors degrees is interpreted as a process of maturation and recognition of hospitality and tourism as an academic discipline. Ironically, Goodman and Sprague (1991) forecasted that the traditional US four year bachelor's degree in hospitality and tourism would have been reduced to a two year craft oriented program, like those programs widely offered in Europe.

More importantly, the United States' universities that, until recently, were offering programs only focused on hospitality curricula have changed their denomination, adopting the word “tourism” to the name of their departments (Koh, 1995). For example, the Department of Hotel and Restaurant Administration at the University of Massachusetts and the Department of Hotel, Restaurant and Institutional Management at Virginia Tech, have respectively changed to Department of Hotel Restaurant and Tourism Administration, and Department of Hospitality and Tourism Management. Universities offering leisure studies also appear interested in adding tourism to their curricula. The University
of Texas A&M, changed from Department of Recreation and Parks to Department of Recreation, Parks and Tourism Sciences.

On the other hand, the European university programs are increasingly adopting the United States semester and credit hour systems. This administrative approach is easier to apply and allows for more flexibility e.g. the case of exchange students. In addition, more and more European schools are using the word “management” to emphasize the United States’ managerial approach to the program, as opposed to the conceptual approach of European university studies.

Concluding comments

The globalization of the hospitality market and the internationalization of hospitality curricula are the buzzwords of the 1990s. Accordingly, the body of literature dealing with the internationalization of hospitality and tourism programs, foreign study courses, and the overall global perspective of hospitality and tourism education has dramatically increased in the last few years (Barclay, 1990; Clark and Arbel, 1993; Chon, 1990; Strohbehn, 1994). For example, Bosselman and Fernsten (1989) noted that at least one quarter of graduate students attending hospitality courses in the United States come from overseas. Because this phenomenon is partly due to the fact that the United States is the country offering the most advanced studies in this field, some universities have already exported their hospitality and tourism programs abroad.

A joint “Bachelor of Science” degree in international hospitality management between the University of Massachusetts and Hotel Consult SHCC in Brig, Switzerland has been offered since 1992 (Bosselman et al., 1992). Another example of American–European hospitality education partnership is presented by the 1991 agreement between Washington State University and the International Institute of Tourism and Management in Krems and Semmering, Austria. The partnership concerns a Bachelor of Arts degree in hospitality and entitles the European students to conclude their studies at Washington State University (Samenfink and Smetana-Novak, 1994).

There is little doubt that students coming from different parts of the world will increasingly attend courses in hospitality and tourism administered in the United States and Europe. This trend will demand appropriate hospitality and tourism curricula capable of matching the students’ different cultural background and their various professional experiences. This is why the American and European hospitality and tourism educational institutions are joining forces: to be ready for future global challenges.

References


