

## **TOURISM TRAINING IN SPAIN: PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE IN THE NEW EUROPEAN HIGHER EDUCATION AREA**

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Tourism training in Spain could be said to have been described as «inadequate» and «incomplete» for years despite attempts to broaden it and adapt it to the sector's needs. The various levels and courses have also been pointed at as being disjointed and unconnected, which only helps to further damage the quality of the training. This would seem to explain why worker training is one of the most important challenges facing companies in the hospitality sector, according to a study by the Spanish Hospitality Federation (FEHR) and the State Tourism Office (2007). In fact, the role of human resources in hotel business competitiveness cannot be denied because of their close links with the parameters of quality that the consumer (tourist) perceives.

Turning to the academic world and observing reality, one issue that stands out is the belated inclusion of Tourism studies as a University course, in 1996. This is especially significant when the fact that the industry is a major source of income in Spain is taken into account along with the time that Tourism was included in the university environment in other European countries. Some years have gone by since then and the new Spanish University is gradually taking shape, increasingly becoming a present-day fact rather than a project for the future. The Diploma in Tourism of the past is giving way to the new Full Degree and postgraduate students are already a reality in Spanish universities. In this changing scenario, where there is no alternative but to design new strategies and tactics to achieve suitable training for undergraduates and postgraduates in Tourism, the authors of this study wish to be faithful to the learning that they received in that old University that is now being left behind and to look back at the past while analysing the present as a necessary recipe for designing the right strategy for the future. This is the reason why we feel it is interesting to trace the evolution of Tourism studies in Spain in this study.

The article starts with an examination of the origins of these studies in private institutions and the long process that led to them being included in the University environment. Tourism training began in Spain with the founding of the first School of Tourism in Madrid in 1957. Regulation of Tourism training arrived in the extra-

university environment in 1963, when the «Technician in Tourist Companies» (TET) diploma course began to be taught in Spain. Years later, in 1980, a new diploma course appeared called «Technician in Tourist Companies and Activities» (TEAT) at the demand of the sector, which was calling for more business-oriented training. At that time, training in Tourism in Spain —a country which is a major destination for international tourists— was seriously lacking in some aspects, to the point that it was described as inadequate, incomplete, disjointed and obsolete. Some years after the recession of the end of the nineteen-eighties and the beginning of the nineties, thinking on the Spanish tourism model highlighted the need for broadening and improving the tourism training system. In this scenario, in 1996 to be precise, higher studies in tourism were accepted into the University with the «Degree in Higher Tourism Studies» (DEAT) degree. A system was also provided for that allowed private Schools of Tourism to become University Schools attached to the official university regime. A second Royal Decree passed the same year finally created a new official degree: the «Diploma in Tourism» (a three academic year course).

For many, the change from the 'TEAT'-'DEAT' to the Diploma in Tourism was not completely satisfactory, and this not only maintained but even heightened the lack of belief that the business sector had in the ability of the University to attend to its needs. Some authors even state that Tourism education, which up to that point had been based on a Diploma course, was still an unresolved issue.

For years, while waiting for a full degree course in Tourism, many universities offered longer courses of their own making with the aim of responding to the demands for specialization that were also coming out of the sector. The struggle of some of these universities to obtain a full degree course came up against pressures from other environments, and in the end no official full degree in Tourism was established.

Tourism training in Spain is currently done on two academic levels: on the one hand, in Vocational Training (with mid- and higher certificate levels) and, on the other hand, on the university level. In the latter case, many universities continue to offer the official Diploma in Tourism course which is disappearing. As from the 2008/09 academic year, the new university system has allowed a full degree course to be taken at some universities complemented by a wide range of postgraduate (masters and doctoral) courses.

The present circumstances of the Diploma in Tourism in the Spanish university system are examined throughout the article. It can be stated in this respect that Tourism studies in the country, especially with regard to the Diploma in Tourism, have been characterized by a strong business and management focus, as is the case in other countries such as the UK and Australia. The core subjects (common courses) established in the general guidelines initially afforded these fields great importance. Additionally, Tourism studies are very often taught in centres related to economics and business or the social sciences in general, which also justifies this approach to a certain extent. In Spain the business profile can therefore be said to eclipse other important profiles for the tourism professional, including the information guide and the planner.

The fact that university Tourism studies were initially designated as a three year long diploma course meant that it has been severely limited, although many universities have tried to find solutions to this. One of the most salient aspects is the relative brake

that has been put on research and access to a tourism sector-related postgraduate level. Notwithstanding, in light of the appearance of official masters degrees and doctorates in Tourism stemming from the current European Higher Education Area (EHEA), some tourism-related doctoral programmes have been run in the country. Logically, a full degree is a prerequisite for getting on these courses. Apart from official studies, a number of universities have provided their own non-official courses for many years (in the shape of masters, specialist courses, expert courses, etc.). These studies represent huge efforts to improve teaching in the subject and have allowed a large number of both Spanish and foreign tourism professionals to be trained in the country (at the Islas Baleares, Girona, Rovira i Virgili, Alicante, Malaga and Las Palmas de Gran Canaria universities, for example).

The Diploma in Tourism does seem to have redressed many of the deficiencies that tourism studies had presented previously, although it is also true that the impression that it gives is that it is too theoretical and general in character, touching on a wide range of topics but not going into any of them in detail.

Due, probably, to the lack of a full degree course in Tourism studies and official postgraduate courses, instruction for the higher management levels can be said to have been to the most severely criticized of all Tourism training, and a gap can still be found between the managerial skills taught in Tourism studies at educational institutions and the needs expressed by the industry (Huete (2007). Most managerial staff do not possess any formal managerial training despite recognition of the importance that managerial training has for organizational effectiveness and competitiveness (Wexley and Latham, 2002; Llorens et al., 2000, *inter alia*).

Currently, the Diploma in Tourism exists alongside the new degrees that come from the recently regulated and implemented EHEA qualifications, i.e., the Full Degree, Masters Degree, and Doctorate. A great deal of effort is being done in Spain to harmonize studies there with the rest of Europe as the current system is rather different to the one with which it is being converged. This is not an exceptional case, as a lack of homogeneity in structure and content can be seen to exist on the international level, which is doubtlessly making it difficult for these studies to be converged in the framework of the Bologna Process.

The Spanish Higher Education System, meanwhile, is characterized, or used to be characterized, by the primary role of content, rather limited mobility (of students and qualifications) within Europe, and a credit system quite unlike the one proposed in the new system, amongst other things. One of the main changes that this new legislative framework involves is that there will be no prescribed list of qualifications established by the government, as used to be the case, but that each university will create and propose courses and qualifications that are to be taught and awarded in accordance with the established norms. Qualifications and their contents are now defined according to the competences that are to be acquired. We believe that tourism studies in Spain will become one of the most competitive qualifications due to the importance that tourism has in the country, the development and quality of the sector and the worth and experience of the many professionals who dedicate their lives to it. The new way that teaching is structured also encourages student mobility, which is especially important in Tourism studies.

From a quantitative point-of-view, the arrival of the full degree course in Tourism improves training in the subject, as it has 240 credits, 22% more than the Diploma course. The greater length of the course also both provides some respite and gives it a major multi-disciplinary character that means that the «social and legal sciences» and «arts and humanities» branches can be linked. It is to be hoped that the universities will include a range of specialities in their full degree courses which will allow students to shape their own syllabuses on the basis of the future careers they wish to pursue. This would respond to long-standing demands in a sector which encompasses a wide range and variety of activities.

Another difference is in the way practical training is done. Apparently, this is to be expanded in this new full degree. Nevertheless, although practical training represents 25% of all credits, in fact it is not a compulsory part of the make-up of the study programme at the current time, so it can either be omitted or included as an optional course. A final degree assignment is another prerequisite and something new to the new qualification compared to the Diploma in Tourism and will be awarded between 6 and 30 credits.

Evidently, greater university autonomy makes it more complicated to determine what kind of training Full Graduates in Tourism will receive, although it is hoped that the studies will maintain their business focus, at least.

The full degree course in Tourism is complemented by a postgraduate degree (masters and doctorate). These postgraduate degrees are an excellent opportunity for improving training in the tourism sector and achieving high levels of specialization in business management- and administration-related aspects, for example. The institutional, academic and professional environments are demanding and driving the design of formula that allow private companies to become involved in defining and implementing the various tourist sector-related qualifications. A major effort is also being made in many Spanish universities to prepare and offer masters degrees, and the «Masters Degree in Tourism Management and Planning» that is taught in several within the *Red Intur* (university network) framework stands out. Some universities have even begun teaching these postgraduate courses before the full degree courses.

Meanwhile, doctoral programmes consist of one period of training and another of research after which the qualification of Doctor of the corresponding University is obtained. A period of training such as the aforementioned Official Masters Degree in Tourism Management and Planning is required to get on these courses. We believe that the possibility of developing doctoral courses in this field will energize research in tourism in Spain both quantitatively and qualitatively. This is an aspect in which the sector has been found wanting for a long time.

As will be seen throughout the study, tourism training today seems to have improved substantially. The new university teaching structure has at last conferred on tourism studies both the qualitative and quantitative attention that they have been demanding for so long. There are broader options that seem to be more focused on the needs of the sector; the system is much more structured, the professional profiles much better defined and there is greater specialization. New opportunities are opening up both to future professionals and those already working through life-long learning.

After a thirteen-year university journey, training in Tourism has reached an age of maturity which allows it to face this new period of change with much better qualified teaching staff who have a much clearer idea of what the sector needs. Other, more or less accurate indications are given throughout the article as to this new horizon that is being opened up with the new Full Degree, Postgraduate and Doctoral courses in Tourism. Notwithstanding, it will not be known for some years whether these changes have truly transformed the state of affairs of Tourism Studies in Spain.

