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ACADEMIC PAPER

Generic competences and tourism graduates

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Abstract

This study examines how universities can attain knowledge of the generic competences demanded by society. The paper discusses to what extent this knowledge should be used in the design of tourism programmes and presents a critical approach to the role played by the labour market in tourism education, while the survey and its methods act as a practical tool for those developing the tourism curriculum. The research findings of this study indicate that, in the case of the Balearic Islands, generic competences are relevant for most organisations and that tourism graduates meet the expectations of the employer, although at a lower level than desired.

Keywords: generic competences; Bologna process; tourism curriculum

Introduction

The Bologna process encourages the convergence of education and administrative systems in 46 member countries (Bologna Declaration, 1999). It standardises terminology through the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) (European Commission, 2005), the Diploma Supplement (European Commission, 2006), the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) (Bologna Working Group on Qualifications Framework, 2005), and other proposals such as the Europass initiative (European Commission, 2006). Furthermore, it establishes a common European system of controlling quality standards and criteria using the quality assurance document, ENQA, adopted by the European ministers of education in May 2005 (ENQA, 2005).

With the introduction of standards, the Bologna Process faces an increasing demand for transparency and internationalisation. European students and employers are making greater demands on universities to detail what students are actually able to do on graduation, not

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just what they know (González & Wagenaar, 2003). In addition, education systems in most countries are no longer considered merely a national asset, but increasingly as relevant agents of the enhanced globalisation of university education (Elkin, Devjee, & Farnsworth, 2005; Marginson & Van der Wende, 2007; Sigala & Baum, 2003).

One of the most important tools used to provide a better description of what students can actually do when they enter the labour market is the inclusion of learning outcomes and competences in the descriptors of educational activities (González & Wagenaar, 2003). However, the establishment of this tool as a new European standard is not unproblematic (Reichert & Tauch, 2005). Its implementation demands a concerted effort to adapt specific national academic traditions that usually describe the educational offer through disciplinary content and learning activities. Furthermore, there is the question of what is to be understood by the term “competences”; the relationship between competences and learning outcomes and how these should be articulated remains controversial (Lum, 2004).

Although relevant literature on the issue of competences and skills in higher education (HE) (Beckett, 2004; Bruce & Gerber, 1995; Jones & Moore, 1993; Lum, 2004; Singh, 2000), the field of tourism (Churchward & Riley, 2002; Fayos-Solá, 1997; Goodenough & Page, 1993; Gunn, 1998; Hjalager, 2003; Inui, Wheeler, & Lankford, 2006; Jafari 1990; Koh, 1995; Majó, 2004; Sancho Pérez, 1995; Watson & McCracken, 2002) and that of hospitality (Baum, 1995; Christou, 2000) exists, there is still a need to investigate the issues associated with those competences provided specifically by tourism HE in greater depth. This paper aims to examine how a HE institution can attain knowledge of the competences demanded by society and critically discusses the extent to which this knowledge should be used in the design of educational tourism programmes. The following sections examine the generic competences of tourism graduates at the University of the Balearic Islands (UIB) and reflect on the role that the demands of the labour market should play in the design of tourism curricula.

The findings of the present study may help to develop a broader picture of how the tourism labour market views tourism education. The paper examines the data related to the generic competences of the graduates of two tourism degrees offered by the UIB (the Bachelor degree in Tourism and the Higher Diploma in Tourism) and makes a comparative analysis using the general results obtained by the 40 HE programmes included in the survey. Although other Spanish universities have carried out similar studies on the competences of graduates in disciplines other than tourism, this is the first study of its kind in Spain.

Adapting to Bologna: Generic competences of tourism graduates

The Bologna revolution and Spanish tourism education

This case study focuses on the Spanish HE system and the structure of qualifications offered by the UIB in tourism education. For Spanish HE authorities, the convergence with the Bologna principles laid the path to a profound transformation of the national HE system. Historically, the Spanish HE system did not have an important division between courses taught at the more scientifically-oriented university sector and those taught in the more vocationally-oriented HE sector, such as is seen in Germany, the Netherlands, Austria, Belgium and Finland (Koucky, Meng, & Van der Velden, 2007). When the Bologna Declaration was signed in 1999, Spain's HE system had three levels: the first level had 3 year programmes entitled *diplomaturas*, degrees that did not provide access to any upper HE level. All tourism studies in Spain belonged to this level. The second level, *licenciado*, had 5 to 6 year programmes and provided access to doctoral level. No tourism degree was offered at this level. The final level was that of *doctorate*. No doctoral degree in tourism was offered. However, there were doctoral programmes with a strong tourism focus. Universities were also allowed to offer other educational products, which in most cases were called “own titles” and went under the names of Masters and diplomas. These programmes were only accredited and certified by the institution and not by the Spanish Ministry of Education. None of these Masters or diplomas gave access to doctoral level.

The Bologna process, by establishing the three-cycle system and demanding that each level must provide access to a superior level of education, has opened up the opportunity for tourism studies to become a member of the club of postgraduate studies. However, the process has not been an easy one. Adapting the Spanish university system to the Bologna proposal was nothing less than a complete revolution. All the study programmes at the first and second level had to be transformed into a first cycle of 3 to 4 years' duration (the Bachelor cycle), and an upper cycle of 1 to 2 years' duration (the Master cycle) had to be established. If they wished to be admitted to the doctoral level, students needed to have secured the minimum amount of 300 ECTS (5 years of HE) and to have obtained a Masters degree. For tourism studies, this was a perfect opportunity to develop both Masters and doctoral programmes.

Tourism education in the Balearic Islands

Tourism education in Spain followed the development of the economic growth of the tourism industry in the country. From the very beginning it was linked to business studies and later to other disciplines in social sciences such as geography, sociology and law studies (Busby, 2006; Majó, 2004). The largest expansion took place during the 1980s and 90s, a similar development to that taking place at international level (Fayos-Solá, 1997; Jafari, 1997). The UIB was one of the universities in Spain that made tourism education and research a strategic objective (UIB, 2002). The University, founded in 1978 and located on the island of Mallorca, has approximately 14,000 students. Its School of Tourism was established in 1987. The University offers a variety of tourism programmes that provide courses and graduates for the massive tourism industry of the islands. Most of them come under the types of degrees that Tribe (2006) described as considering tourism as "a business phenomenon to be investigated through business knowledge" (p. 51).

The Balearic Islands, which are situated in the Mediterranean area, are a mature tourist destination. In 2006 the islands received over 12.5 million tourists, of which over 9 million were international tourists (Conselleria de Turisme, 2006), predominantly British and German. Decades of tourism development have not only provided huge economic growth for the region, but have also had a deep impact on the socio-cultural and natural environment of the islands (Amer i Fernández, 2006; Perez & Nadal, 2004). The growth of the tourism industry in the Balearics was possible not only thanks to hundreds of entrepreneurs, many of them without any formal HE, but also to the growing relationship with European tour operators who provided the necessary promotion and selling of tourism products in the European market (Amer i Fernández, 2006). The knowledge that many people with no formal tourism education had achieved great economic success laid the foundations of a business culture where formal education was far from appreciated.

A change in this mentality developed throughout the 1990s. During these years there was an increasing awareness that the model of massive sun and beach tourism was in decline. A new environmental conscience among residents and increased competition from newer tourism destinations with similar products helped to establish a new social debate (Amer i Fernández, 2006; Perez & Nadal, 2004). A regeneration of the tourism model of the 1960s and 70s was essential and a new way of thinking about tourism development was necessary. The relationship between tourism education and the industry had generally been very poor and unsystematic (Majó, 2004). However, in times of crises, tourism research and education was seen as being able to provide a better prepared and more flexible labour force, thus granting the injection of innovation and technical know-how that could propel the industry to a new level.

Competences and learning outcomes in the design of the new tourism programmes

One of the main issues at the centre of the discussion about the Bologna structure of qualifications and recognition policies has been the standardisation of the way in which HE institutions describe their courses, degrees and qualifications (Bologna Working Group on Qualifications Framework, 2005; Reichert & Tauch, 2005). The aim of this standardisation was not only to increase the transparency and visibility of the educational opportunities

offered by the different European countries. It was also to establish criteria that would allow measurement of the quality of the programmes and aid recognition by other HE institutions. Many European scholars, although supportive of the concept of learning outcomes, did not see this as an easy task (Gonzalez & Wagenaar, 2003). According to the Trends IV report, which monitored the implementation of the Bologna process, "in a number of HE institutions only vague notions of learning outcomes exist, and sometimes with only one group (for example, deans or central administration) showing some degree of familiarity, while others (often the students) have never heard of the concept" (Reichert & Tauch, 2005, p. 16).

Nevertheless, the adoption in Bergen of the European Qualifications Framework signalled a move towards a general understanding of learning outcomes at a European level (Bergen Communiqué, 2005). The Framework adopted the Dublin descriptors as the tool to define the three levels (Bologna Working Group on Qualifications Framework, 2005). The Dublin descriptors were part of the Joint Quality Initiative (2004). Such descriptors included generic competences (skills and knowledge) as well as other attributes such as the capacity to learn. The aim was for these descriptors to become reference points for all stakeholders in HE, from course designers to credential evaluators.

In the case of Spain, and specifically at the UIB, there was no tradition of explaining the education curricula using learning outcomes or competences. This task therefore demanded not only the renewal of the documents in which the different degrees were regulated, but also training and educating of the academic community which would enable professors to design degrees using these new tools. In many cases in the Bologna literature, the terms "learning outcome" and "competence" appear to be used interchangeably, for example in the Trends IV report (Reichert & Tauch, 2005). The ECTS User Guide (European Commission, 2005) explains that the connection between learning outcomes and competences is that the learning outcomes of a specific study programme or a course unit/module are expressed in terms of competences and states:

Learning outcomes are sets of competences, expressing what the student will know, understand or be able to do after completion of a process of learning ...
Competences represent a dynamic combination of attributes, abilities and attitudes. They can be subject specific or generic. (p. 12)

In this study a competence is defined according to the ECTS User Guide:

Competences represent a dynamic combination of attributes, abilities and attitudes. Fostering these competences is the object of educational programmes.
Competences are formed in various course units and assessed at different stages. They may be divided in subject-area (specific to a field of study) and generic competences (common to any degree course). (p. 45)

Generic competences are understood to be those which "identify shared attributes which could be general to any degree, such as the capacity to learn, decision making capacity, project design and management skills, etc. which are common to all or most of the degrees" (González & Wanegaar, 2003, p. 27).

Objectives and method of study

In order to achieve the objectives of the study, the research identified the relevance that generic competences had for tourism employers, examined to what degree tourism graduates demonstrated their ability to master these competences, established a ranking of competences and finally analysed the consequences of the results for tourism graduates compared with the results for all graduate students. Building upon this knowledge it aimed to open a platform for debate and question the use that HE institutions could make of the demands of the industry.

The method used to meet the main objectives of the study was a transversal survey based on a structured questionnaire. The transversal method of analysis provides insight into the views that employers have about generic competences in tourism at one point in time. The

use of a longitudinal method would have allowed the examination of the evolution of the employers' opinion over time but this approach lay beyond the aims of the present analysis, and could be addressed in future research.

The sample consisted of 500 private and public organisations registered on the database of the careers service of the University. The sample comprised an existing database of organisations and firms which had employed students from the UIB and no additional data on the characteristics of these organisations were collected in advance. However, in the questionnaire, the organisations were asked to provide information regarding their economic sector and size, that is the number of employees. The interviews were conducted by telephone and the data recorded in a new database. Completion of the questionnaire by telephone allowed the study to achieve a response rate of 100% and all the organisations which participated in the study had at some point employed graduates of the UIB.

Experience has shown that the administration of a questionnaire by email or mail only results in a significantly lower response rate, while interviews in-person would have been too costly. Finally, at the beginning of each interview, there was a thorough explanation of the meaning of the values on the Likert scale used. There was no report of any comprehension problems by the respondents. Prior to this, a small pilot study involving 10 organisations had been carried out in order to obtain an initial evaluation of the questionnaire. A total of 40 programmes offered at the university were represented in the sample. The average number of workers per organisation was 23. The total number of organisations related to tourism studies was 73. These organisations stated in their answers that they preferred to employ graduates of the first-level degree in Tourism and those with the Higher Diploma in Tourism.

The questionnaire had two distinct parts. The first had a number of questions that covered a description of the general characteristics of each organisation and an overall evaluation of the adequacy of the education of the graduates. The second part was structured through a list of questions which examined the generic competences of the graduates. In developing the questionnaire, two major European projects on generic competences, Tuning (Gonzalez & Wagenaar, 2003) and REFLEX (2008), were analysed by a committee of members of the different faculties and services at the university.

After some debate, a list of 30 generic competences was approved and an extra competence relating to the mastery of field or discipline of study was included (see Table 1). For each of the competences two aspects were studied. The first aspect, named *importance*, referred to the degree of relevance that the competence had for the employer and aimed to measure the degree of competence requirements. The second aspect named *level* referred to the extent to which mastering the competence had been demonstrated by the graduate and aimed to measure the acquired level of competence. The employer was asked to grade each competence, taking into consideration both aspects, on a 5-point Likert scale. The different points were: 1 – not at all, 2 – a little, 3 – some, 4 – pretty much/sufficiently (“bastante” in Spanish), and 5 – very much. Finally, the employer was asked to select a maximum of three competences on the list as being strengths of the graduates and three as being weaknesses.

Analysis of the data was carried out using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The interviews were conducted between January and April 2006. A main aim was to identify the competences in which the level demanded by the employer was higher than that demonstrated by the graduate and vice versa. The study therefore first established the percentage by which the importance given by the employer exceeded the level demonstrated by the graduate and then the percentage by which the level demonstrated by the graduate exceeded the importance given by the employer. Finally, two tables specifying the times when a competence was indicated as being considered a strength or a weakness of the graduates were produced. The same analysis was carried out with the sub-sample consisting of the 73 organisations which employed graduates in tourism, thus allowing comparison of results and examination of the importance of generic competences for the tourism labour market.

1.	Mastering of field or discipline
2.	Knowledge of other fields or disciplines
3.	Analytical thinking
4.	Ability to rapidly acquire new knowledge
5.	Ability to negotiate efficiently
6.	Ability to perform well under pressure
7.	Ability to identify new opportunities
8.	Ability to co-ordinate activities
9.	Ability to manage time efficiently
10.	Ability to work in teams
11.	Ability to mobilise the capabilities of others
12.	Ability to communicate properly
13.	Ability to assert one's authority
14.	Ability to use information technologies
15.	Ability to come up with new ideas and solutions
16.	Willingness to question own and others' ideas
17.	Ability to present publicly ideas, products or reports
18.	Ability to write reports, memos or documents
19.	Ability to write, draw up reports and speak in a foreign language
20.	Ability to apply knowledge to practice
21.	Basic knowledge of the profession
22.	Research abilities
23.	Ability to manage information
24.	Ability to communicate with non-expert audiences
25.	Ability to work in an international context
26.	Knowledge of culture and tradition of foreign countries
27.	Ability to work autonomously
28.	Ability to design and manage projects
29.	Social and ethical commitment
30.	Ability to integrate in the organisation
31.	Willingness to succeed

Table 1: Generic competences of graduates

Evaluation of generic competences by tourism employers; the triumph of the local

The general results of the survey indicated that employers in tourism consider tourism education provided by the UIB as suitable but with room for improvement. When asked if they considered the graduates' education to be appropriate, only two employers answered a little, while the great majority of employers (89%) answered sufficiently. However, only 8.2% of employers, of a sample of 73, considered the education to be very much appropriate. This result is similar to the one obtained for all the degrees offered at the university.

In general, for the labour market of the Balearic Islands, generic competences appear to be very valuable: 27 competences were considered by more than 83% of the employers to be sufficiently important or very important. Furthermore, the first five competences in the ranking were evaluated by more than 99% of the employers as sufficiently important or very important. This coincides with the results obtained in the study carried out by the Polytechnic University of Valencia (Ayats, Zamora, & Desantes, 2004) and the Tuning project (González

& Wagenaar, 2003), which concluded that the labour market considered generic competences to be of great importance. Interestingly, in the UIB study, the highest ranking was obtained by the competence entitled *basic knowledge of the profession*, while *mastering of field or discipline* appeared as number 13 in the general ranking. However, 97.4% of the respondents considered the mastering of field or discipline competence to be sufficiently or very important. Following in importance were: *ability to communicate properly*; *ability to apply knowledge to practice*; *ability to integrate in the organisation*; and *ability to rapidly acquire new knowledge*.

The analysis of organisations employing tourism graduates with the Higher Diploma in Tourism showed greater appreciation of the generic competences compared to the general results, with over one third of all competences being considered by 100% of employers to be sufficiently or very important. The results relating to the organisations employing graduates of the 3 year tourism degree were very similar to those obtained generally, with a positive evaluation throughout of the importance of the generic competences, 26 of them being considered by more than 88% of the employers to be sufficiently important or very important. Some of the main differences in the scores given by tourism employers and the rest of the sample appeared in the evaluation of the importance of the competence mastering of field or discipline which, as mentioned previously, was in 13th position in the general ranking and 26th and 25th in the evaluation of the employers of graduates with the Higher Diploma in Tourism and the 3 year tourism degree respectively. In both cases, the competence basic knowledge of the profession scored much higher at 9th and 4th respectively.

Interestingly, this result indicates a tourism labour market that is less aware of the relevance of tourism as a field of study or as a discipline when compared to other programmes offered at the university. However, the study does not show a totally negative picture of how the labour market views tourism as a field of study. Only 18% of the tourism degree respondents and 11% of the Higher Diploma in Tourism respondents believed *mastering of tourism as a discipline* to be of little relevance. Comparing these results to other similar international research data lies beyond the scope of this study but such a task could be considered an interesting contribution to the academic discussion regarding the view of tourism as an immature academic discipline (Tribe, 2006; Westlake, 1997).

	Higher Diploma in Tourism	Tourism
	<i>Most important</i>	
1	Ability to rapidly acquire new knowledge	Ability to work in teams
2	Ability to use time efficiently	Ability to communicate properly
3	Ability to work in teams	Ability to apply knowledge to practice
4	Ability to make your meaning clear to others	Basic knowledge of the profession
5	Ability to use information technologies	Ability to manage information
	<i>Least important</i>	
27	Ability to write reports, memos or documents	Ability to perform well under pressure
28	Research abilities	Research abilities
29	Ability to negotiate efficiently	Ability to write, draw up reports and speak in a foreign language
30	Ability to work in an international context	Ability to work in an international context
31	Knowledge of culture and traditions of foreign countries	Knowledge of culture and traditions of foreign countries

Table 2: Ranking of generic competences according to tourism employers

The study showed that labour market representatives grade highest those abilities and attributes that are rooted in the local activities of the workplace. The most appreciated

competences are basic knowledge of the profession; ability to communicate; and ability to apply knowledge to practice. These three abilities are also ranked highly by companies which employ tourism graduates (see Table 2). Previous studies such as the Tuning project and another survey conducted by the University Carlos III, located in Madrid, also identified the ability to apply knowledge to practice and the ability to learn (fourth in the general ranking of this study) as the most important (Universidad Carlos III, 2006).

Competences related to the international dimension received very low evaluations in terms of both importance and the level demonstrated by graduates (see Figure 1). This result is similar to that obtained by the Tuning project (Gonzalez & Wagenaar, 2003). In the general ranking of the survey the competences which scored the lowest ranking were *ability to work in international context* (only 24.8% of the respondents regarded this competence as sufficiently or very important) and *knowledge of culture and traditions of foreign countries*, with only 43.8% considering it to be sufficiently or very important. Taking into consideration the overwhelming presence of international tourism on the Islands and the increasing international expansion of the hotel companies, the researchers of the study expected international abilities to be better appreciated by the organisations employing tourism graduates. Surprisingly, this was not the case. Although the results for tourism in relation to those competences scored a little higher than in the general survey, these competences were also ranked lowest according to tourism employers. Table 2 shows the results of the five highest and five lowest ranked competences for both degrees in tourism.

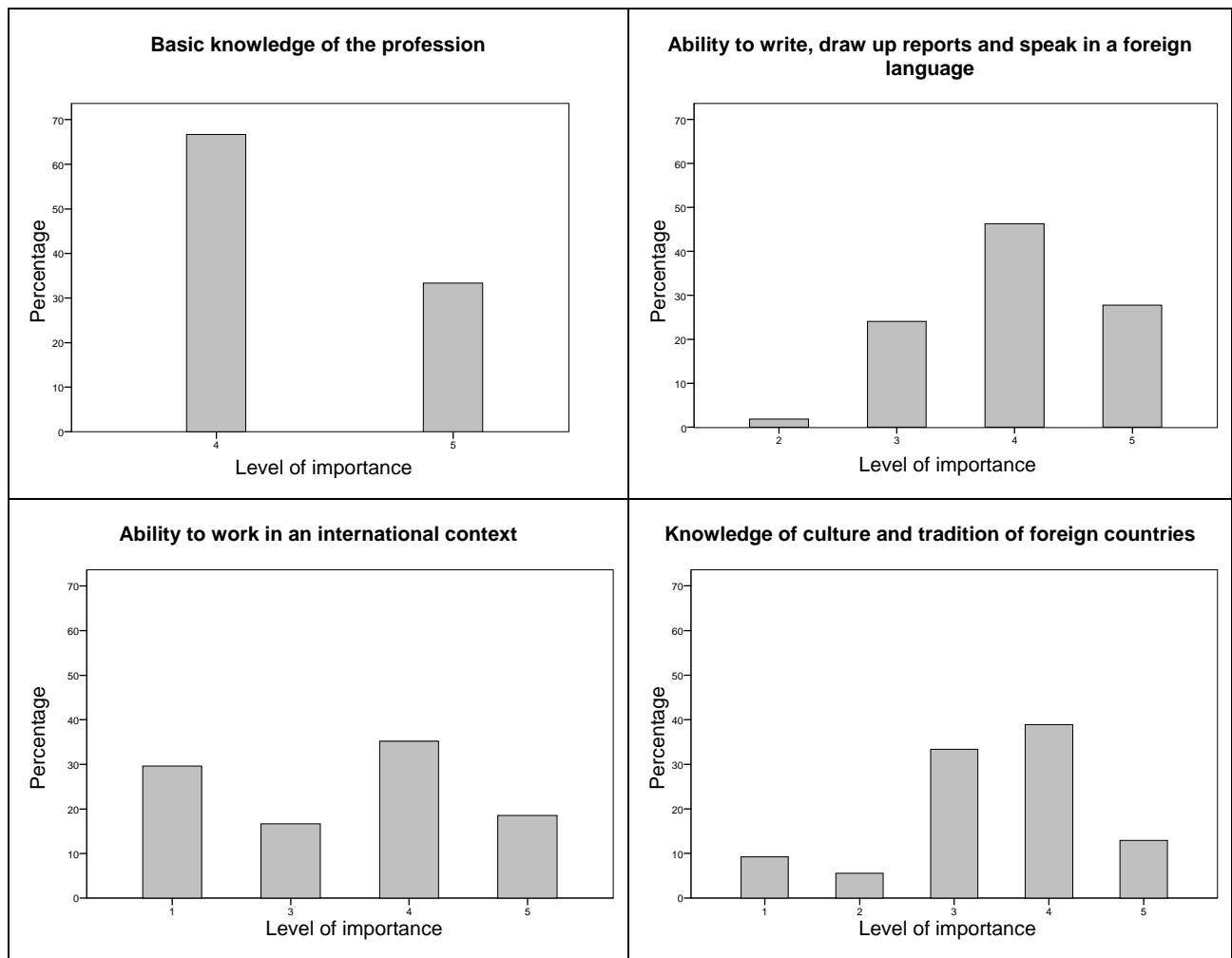


Figure 1: Comparison between the importance of the competence 'Basic knowledge of the profession' and international competences (in terms of percentage)

At a point in time where the challenges of globalisation are transforming national and local realities (Beck, 2000; Held, McGrew, Goldblatt, Perraton, & Auger, 1999), attention is drawn to the poor evaluation given by the professional world to competences related to the international sphere. Furthermore, the results of the study challenge two of the main goals of

the Bologna process: the international mobility of graduates and the improvement of global competitiveness in the European region (Bergen Communiqué, 2005; Berlin Communiqué, 2003; Bologna Declaration, 1999). The question that remains unsolved is: To what extent is it the duty of tourism in HE institutions to encourage the learning of international skills and competences if these do not seem to be considered relevant by the labour market?

Paradoxically, the situation revealed by the study is one of a tourism labour market in the Balearics that does not appreciate internationally oriented competences, while the socio-economic reality of the region is increasingly international. In 2007, residents of the islands born outside Spain constituted 20% of the population, a 50% increase in only seven years (IBAE, 2006, 2007), while the number of international tourists in 2006 was over 9 million.

The appraisal effect and the performance gap

The results of the general study show that there was positive Spearman correlation, and also a situation of agreement between the importance ratings given by employers and the levels of competence demonstrated by the graduates. The same propensity was found in the sample of tourism employers and graduates. The results show that the expectations of the employer and the demonstration of competence by the graduate have the same tendency. It is possible to speculate that graduates may be subject to an appraisal effect, which makes them show a higher degree of competence in abilities more appreciated by employers while other competences which they may possess become silent or unseen because they are not considered important by the managers of organisations.

For all competences evaluated by the 500 organisations, with the exception of the ability to work in an international context, the level demanded by employers is higher than the level demonstrated by graduates. In the case of the tourism degree, the level demonstrated by the graduates in all cases is slightly lower than that demanded by the employers. However, among the employers who gave a different score to the aspects of importance and the level of demonstration of tourism graduates, 33% indicated that the level of demonstration of the ability to work in an international context was higher than expected, while 25% reached the same conclusion regarding knowledge of culture and traditions of foreign countries. Both competences were at the lower end of the scale in importance. In the case of graduates in the Higher Diploma in Tourism, the study shows that, in general, their level is slightly lower than that demanded by the labour market. However, the analysis of the data illustrated some interesting exceptions. With regard to the competences *ability to manage information* and knowledge of culture and traditions of foreign countries, 50% of employers who gave a different score to the aspects of importance and the demonstration of tourism graduates answered that the level demonstrated by the graduates was higher than the importance given to the competence, while 33.3% indicated that the demonstration of the *ability to design and manage projects* was also more important than its relevance. In the case of mastering of field or discipline, 25% considered that graduates demonstrated a higher level than might be expected. While the same competence evaluated by the employers of graduates of the tourism degree showed that an overwhelming majority (91.6%) believed the importance of the competence to be slightly higher than the level demonstrated.

Research findings illustrate that there is a gap in the tourism graduates' performance and the level of competence demanded by the labour market. In Europe there has been a policy concern over the possible risk of young people acquiring more skills than those needed to perform a job, the so-called over-education problem (Koucky et al., 2007). This analysis does not support this hypothesis in the case of the Balearic Islands, as it seems that graduates still have something to learn. This conclusion matches the results of the REFLEX project (2008). This project examined the judgment of graduates of 13 European countries on the use of knowledge and skills obtained through education, work or other experiences in their current job, and demonstrated that the majority of graduates (73%) used their knowledge and skills to a high or very high extent (Pettersson, 2007).

The strengths and the weaknesses of tourism graduates

The study showed that for all graduates of the university their strengths were in the following competences: mastering of field or discipline, ability to rapidly acquire new knowledge and ability to work in teams. These three competences were also among the strengths mentioned

in relation to tourism graduates (see Table 3). In the Tuning project (González & Wanegaar, 2003) these competences also appear as some of the most important, according to European employers. The analysis revealed that the weaknesses of graduates were the ability to use information technologies; ability to write, draw up reports and speak in a foreign language; and ability to identify new opportunities. In the case of tourism graduates, although two of the weaknesses are coincident, there is a difference with regard to the ability to use information technologies. This competence, which appeared as a weakness in the general sample, was not mentioned by the tourism employers, which could indicate better development of IT skills in tourism education.

However, the ability to write, draw up reports and speak in a foreign language is identified by the general study as less relevant for the labour market, while the ability to use information technology appears as one of the highest in relevance for companies and organisations. This was also found in previous studies of competences in the Spanish labour market (Ayats et al., 2004), while knowledge of a second language received a low rating (Gonzalez & Wagenaar, 2003; Universidad Carlos III, 2006). The international dimension is very poorly represented in the classification of strengths and weaknesses of tourism graduates. None of the competences relating to international skills appear as strengths, while only one (ability to write, draw up reports and speak in a foreign language) appears as a weakness and only in the case of employers of graduates of the Higher Diploma in Tourism. The question is, why is this a weakness when the general ranking shows that it does not seem to be relevant for the profession? Maybe it is a strength that graduates do not use their time to develop given that this skill is of very little importance to their employers.

The analysis of the answers of the 500 organisations highlights that there exists a positive Spearman correlation between the ranking of importance given by the employers and the competences established as the strengths of the graduates. This result may be a consequence of the appraisal effect mentioned previously. However, it is very interesting that when analysing the tourism data there is one competence which appears to be an exception to this rule. The competence mastering of field or discipline, although it did not score very highly in the ranking of importance of competences, appears as the most important strength of graduates. This sheds a positive light on the appreciation which tourism studies at the UIB receive from the labour market in relation to the task of delivering knowledge of the field of study. However, looking critically, one could ask whether the labour market representatives evaluate this knowledge to be so strong because they do not know much about the discipline itself, nor find it the most relevant for succeeding at the job.

	Higher Diploma in Tourism	Tourism
	<i>Strengths</i>	
1	Mastering of field or discipline	Mastering of field or discipline
2	Ability to rapidly acquire new knowledge	Ability to rapidly acquire new knowledge
3	Ability to find new opportunities	Ability to work under pressure
4	Ability to use time effectively	Ability to use time effectively
5	Ability to work in teams	Ability to work in teams
	<i>Weaknesses</i>	
1	Ability to identify new opportunities	Knowledge of other fields or academic disciplines
2	Ability to find new ideas and solutions	Ability to identify new opportunities
3	Ability to write, draw up reports and speak in a foreign language	Ability to find new ideas and solutions
4	Ability to apply knowledge to practice	Ability to question new ideas
5	Research abilities	Ability to work in an international context

Table 3: Strengths and weaknesses of tourism graduates

Tourism labour market and tourism knowledge in curriculum making

Surveys and data, although providing relevant information, should not be expected to supply a recipe for how to develop high-quality tourism curricula. The academic community of tourism may have to debate to what extent it is the duty of HE tourism institutions to encourage the learning of international competences, and other competences such as research abilities that are considered by the labour market to be of less importance. Boterill (1996) stated that "relations between any sector of the industry and HE institutions that seek to educate students for and about that industry are bound to generate a tension of interests" (p. 1). The debate regarding the relationship between the demands of the industry and the curriculum content is not a novel one and has been analysed by tourism research throughout the years (Busby, 2001; Bushell, Prosser, Faulker, & Jafari, 2001; Goodenough & Page, 1993; Gunn, 1998; Schulman & Greenberg, 1994; Tribe, 2001). It may be argued that tourism, being a pre-paradigmatic discipline (Tribe, 2006), may be more easily affected by the actual demands of the labour market than other traditional disciplines. In the specific debate on educational reforms, it is important not to forget that tourism knowledge, understood as the rational discourse (Habermas, 1998) on tourism, will have to find its place in the curriculum alongside the demands of a fast developing labour market. Although Tribe states that one should not consider the terms *curriculum* and *knowledge* to be synonymous, and that the "two key issues for the tourism curriculum are first, a choice of which aspects of the tourism phenomenon are to be studied and second, a choice of which type of tourism knowledge is used to approach these phenomenon" (2006, p. 50), it can be argued that it is difficult to legitimise any tourism curricula without it being inducted into knowledge.

A clear division should be made between the content of the curriculum, and the deliberative and decision-making processes related to curriculum establishment. While the first element corresponds to the question of what and how to teach, the second refers to who decides what is to be taught and through what procedures. This crucial distinction is based on the differences presented by Habermas (1998) between the *juridical* form of the norm and the *discursive* creation of the norm. The curriculum content, once the curriculum is established, can be considered a general normative structure which is an abstraction and generalisation of the broader world of tourism. The curriculum in this form embodies tourism knowledge and functions as a rational discursive structure helping to create educated tourism experts. In addition, a rational discourse is a powerful tool to change the reality of the world. Alternatively, the procedures to create a legitimate curriculum follow the discourse principle by which the only legitimate norms of action are those that have been accepted by those affected by them as participants in rational discourses (Habermas, 1998). The deliberative and decision-taking processes that have the legitimacy to structure such curriculum should include stakeholders of tourism education such as students, faculty members and employers, as well as other partners.

It is in the procedure of curriculum making that the demands and judgments of the labour market, such as the ones expressed in this study, can be a useful and necessary contribution to the deliberative process of curriculum development. However, a danger exists whereby these types of studies investigating the adapting of programmes to Bologna could possibly be used to press the academic community to develop a type of curriculum which is tailored to meet the demands of the labour market. It will be a task for those responsible for tourism HE to remember that preparing students to enter and stay in the labour market should be just one among several goals of education. It is good to bear in mind that the EQF identifies three other main issues as being important in underlying aims of HE: preparing students to be active citizens in democratic societies, helping the personal development of the students, and developing and maintaining a broad and advanced knowledge base (Bologna Working Group on Qualifications Framework, 2005).

Conclusion

Europe is undergoing a huge transformation of its HE structures. The use of competences as a common standard to describe courses and educational activities is one of the pieces of a complex puzzle of initiatives that aim to achieve the establishment of a common European Higher Education Area (EHEA). Although Spain has many tourism degrees and a long

tradition of tourism research, knowledge about how the Spanish tourism labour market judges the competences attained by graduates during their education is very limited. To contribute to a broader understanding in this area was one of the objectives of this study. The other was to critically discuss how the demands of the labour market should be used in the design of a tourism curriculum which meets the Bologna criteria.

The analysis showed that tourism employers judged generic competences to be of great importance and that there was a slight gap between the demonstration of competence by the graduates and the desired level of performance. The ranking of competences in tourism education gave the highest rating to those related to abilities and attributes rooted in local alliances and the workplace, such as basic knowledge of the profession and ability to work in teams, while competences which had an international dimension obtained the lowest score. The empowerment of the local dimension was a surprising result considering the huge level of internationalisation within the tourism industry of the islands. However, the result was similar to that obtained in previous studies of competences in relation to the Spanish labour market. A limitation of the quantitative method used in the study is that it does not allow the examination of the reasons why the labour market has a low appreciation of the international dimension. The analysis showed that this judgment by the professional world, if not properly faced by the academic community, may end up challenging two of the main goals of the Bologna process: the international mobility of graduates and the improvement of global competitiveness in the European region. Further research based on other qualitative methods such as in-depth interviews with tourism employers could provide broader and more comprehensive answers to complement the findings of this study.

In the data comparison of the interviews between the sample of 73 organisations that employed mainly tourism graduates and that of the main survey with a sample of 500 organisations, not only were there many similarities but also some interesting differences. An important divergence appeared in relation to the low ranking that tourism employers gave to the competence mastering of field or discipline, which achieved a much higher rating in the general survey. Nevertheless, an examination of the results provides a more optimistic picture of how the labour market sees tourism as a field of study: only 18% of employers of graduates of the Higher Diploma in Tourism and 11% of employers of tourism graduates considered this competence to be of little relevance.

The results show that there existed a positive correlation between the importance given by employers and the level of demonstration of the competence by the graduates. The expectations of the employer and the demonstration of competence by the graduate both point towards an appraisal effect in which the graduate shows a higher degree of competence in the abilities appreciated most by the employer, while other competences have possibly become silent or unseen because they are not considered important by the management of the organisation.

The study, through analysing the implications of the data obtained and by debating the use of competences as a tool to achieve better descriptors of educational activities, has questioned to what extent HE institutions can make use of this knowledge. While trying to find a balance between education for emancipation and education for labour, education for the first job or education for life, the community of tourism scholars could benefit by strengthening tourism knowledge understood as being the rational discourse of tourism and establishing an analytical division between the curriculum contents - the juridical form of the norm - and the deliberative and decision-making processes related to curriculum establishment - the discursive creation of the norm (Habermas, 1998). It is as input to the deliberative and decision-taking processes that the demands of the labour market can provide a valuable and necessary contribution towards helping create high-quality and emancipating curricula in tourism. The tensions that usually arise between the industry and those who educate people to work in it will be reflected in the way in which the EHEA is implemented throughout Europe. However, it is the task of the community of tourism academics to remember that the goals of HE are not and should not be mimetic to those of the industry, and that tourism education is also about preparing active citizens, helping personal development, and enhancing a broad and advanced tourism knowledge base.

Still, many questions may have to be researched regarding the issue of generic competences in tourism education. Currently, a common understanding of the concept of competence does not exist. There is neither a clear understanding of how competences can be taught or evaluated nor recognition of the limits of assessing competences. The issue of generic competences will continue to be a controversial one. As Lum (2004) writes:

Of all the various manifestations of human capability the least tangible and the least disposed to precise explication are those centred in the person: the understandings, the capacities for judgement, imagination, problem-solving and the host of other propensities and proficiencies that are so vital for competent action. (p. 489)

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