PREPARING FUTURE INDUSTRY LEADERS:
A FRAMEWORK FOR PHILIPPINE TOURISM EDUCATION

by

Susan L. Solis
University of the Philippines,
Asian Institute of Tourism,
Commonwealth Avenue, Diliman,
Q,C 1101, The Philippines
E-mail: leticia_susan.solis@upd.edu.ph

ABSTRACT

This paper proposes a model for Philippine tourism education that reflects prerequisites in order to prepare graduates who shall be instrumental in steering the Philippine tourism industry toward the twinfold objective of sustainable development and a competitive advantage. Since the education and training of human resources is essential to achieving competitiveness in tourism enterprises, a tourism education program that encompasses both global and local responsiveness, and at the same time provides a strong sociological and philosophical base is proposed. To set the context within which the model is framed, the paper initially chronicles the development of tourism education in the Philippines and describes its current status in the country. Alongside with educational reforms, environmental forces that need to be addressed are also examined.

INTRODUCTION

Many changes in the tourism field have brought about the need to look into the quality of tourism education provision in the Philippines and the extent to which it responds to the needs of the industry. Globalization, the advent of information technology and its widespread application in the tourism industry, and the increasing concern for the sustainable development of the tourism industry are critical issues that will have to be given significant weight in the design and administration of tourism education programs to ensure professionals whose training matches up with the requirements and demands of the sector. Particularly for developing nations, quality of education is critical as it has a significant impact on economic growth. Specifically, it has been noted that a more educated society may translate into higher rates of innovation, higher overall productivity through firms' ability to introduce new and better production methods, and faster introduction of new technology (UNESCO, 2006).

PHILIPPINE TOURISM EDUCATION: BACKGROUND AND DEVELOPMENTS

Tourism education in the Philippines began three decades ago at a time when the tourism industry was an emerging industry. In 1983, there were only forty-three institutions which offered tourism and/or hotel and restaurant management programs in the Philippines. Prior to this, the tourism industry in the country was at its infancy stage and the sudden growth of tourism activity in subsequent years propelled the offering of tourism programs by more schools. Today the number of schools offering tourism and hospitality management programs currently recognized by the Commission on Higher Education (CHED), an education governing body in the Philippines authorized to provide guidelines and policies governing the curriculum of schools in the country has multiplied to more than six hundred higher education institutions(HEI's).

In the early 1970s, tourism and hospitality programs consisted mainly of short programs either as skills oriented courses in hotel services and one year courses. The first baccalaureate tourism program was first offered in the country in 1976. It had a strong management orientation and general education base and with a mission to develop executive and managerial skills, and not that of producing qualified people at the craft and technical level. In the following years, several other educational institutions also began to offer the baccalaureate program in tourism in addition to new certificate programs.

One study concluded that the establishment of tourism programs was primarily due to the fast rate of growth of the country's tourism industry since the early 1970s, with trained manpower required by tourism-oriented establishments such as hotels and restaurants, tour operators, and travel agencies. The study pointed out that majority of the tourism educational institutions sought to fill the need wherever it occurred (Talastas, 1983).

Recognizing changes in the tourism field and the need to produce graduates that will not only survive but will also thrive in a borderless economy, the CHED, made a thorough study of the management oriented curriculum that has since the 1970's pervaded among tourism and hospitality schools. Beginning 2008, a new curriculum is now required of all public and private higher educational institutions that offer a degree in tourism, hospitality management, and other related fields. The focus of the curriculum is on job readiness of the graduates, whereby the curriculum design enables the students to leave school after completing the first two years and take on entry- level positions in accommodation, food and beverages, travel agencies, government or non-government agencies. While a competency based curriculum is prescribed, there is provision for flexibility which leaves room for innovation and enhancement. Schools are encouraged to think global and act local, scan their milieu, understand their clientele and develop subjects that respond to the needs of their environment. The new curriculum aims to make tourism education in the country more responsive to the needs of the tourism industry, and hence be able to address its manpower needs (CHED, 2008).

While the government took major initiatives to make the tourism and hospitality curriculum relevant, a number of concerns vis a vis the preparation of graduates still remain among which include poor language proficiency, limited apprenticeship exposure as compared to other prestigious tourism and hospitality schools in other countries, thereby giving less opportunities for students to master technical skills. Other constraints that have been identified include the heavy focus on degree programs, laboratories which lack quality in some schools, and the proliferation of inexperienced administrators and non-practitioners teaching in HEI's.

Focused group discussion that involved administrators and officials of established Philippine tourism schools affirmed the existence of these problems and issues and the urgent need to address these if the outputs of tourism education are to meet the requirements of the Philippine tourism industry.

MODEL FOR PHILIPPINE TOURISM EDUCATION

As a developing country, the Philippines recognizes tourism as among the industries that has a potential to boost the Philippine economy and serve as a powerful economic growth engine and has hence placed it as a priority industry. As spelled out in the National Tourism Development Plan 2011-2016 (DOT) the vision is "to become the must experience destination in Asia" with the stakeholder's goals identified as "an environmentally and socially responsible tourism that delivers more widely distributed income and employment opportunities targeting 6.62 million international arrivals and 34.78 million domestic travelers by 2016 contributing 6.78 % to GDP and directly employing 6.5 million people," To achieve this, quality tourism education that shall prepare graduates to ensure the competitiveness of the industry, and which is at the same time geared toward sustainable development, is henceforth seen as imperative.

The model that is proposed reflects three prerequisites in order for Philippine tourism education to become globally competitive: global responsiveness, local responsiveness and provision for a strong sociological and philosophical foundation. The ultimate aim of an undergraduate tourism higher education program in the Philippines henceforth is named as the achievement of sustainable tourism development and a competitive advantage for the Philippine tourism industry.

Competitive advantage is a status achieved by an entity when gaining a superior market place position relative to its competition. The creation of a better quality product or service than its competitor is one of the means by which this competitive advantage can be achieved. In order for the Philippine tourism industry to gain a competitive advantage over its Asian neighbors, and hence be able to attract visitors and stimulate tourism activity that shall bring about much needed tourism receipts and employment generation, tourism organizations must rely on their manpower to implement improved service delivery processes.

Go, Monachello and Baum (1999) advanced that tourism education is the key to achieving and sustaining a competitive advantage in tourism. At the same time, as it contributes to the competitiveness of tourism corporations, tourism education has an obligation to contribute to the standard of living of the host society. Tourism, henceforth must be competitive with other industries, but must be perceived as a responsible sector which provides for the sustainable development and balanced approach to economic and environmental issues.

Without a concern for sustainable tourism development tourism may lead to environmental destruction, a degeneration of moral values and have negative impacts on the economy and society. The tourism industry needs to have manpower resources which can spearhead the stewardship of the industry such that the objective of sustainable development can be achieved (Figure 1).

FIGURE 1
MODEL FOR PHILIPPINE TOURISM EDUCATION
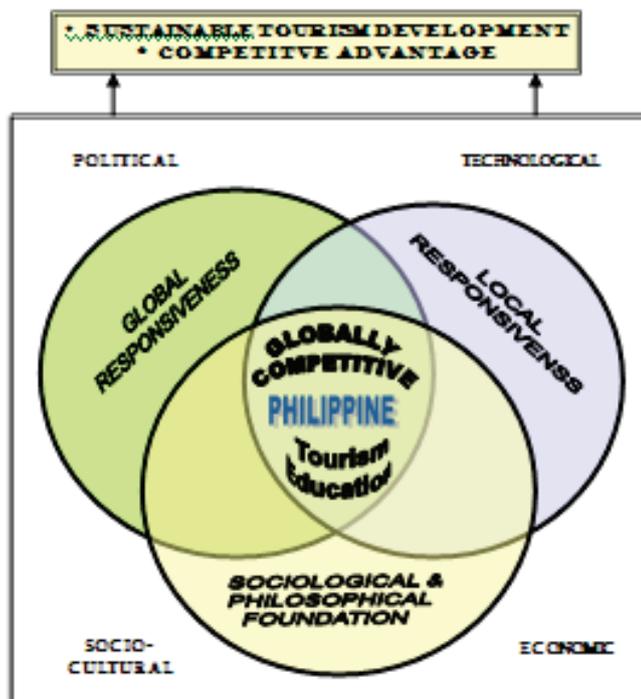
Global responsiveness

The world today is faced with a global environment that has changed dramatically. Developments such as globalization and the advent of information and communication technology have changed the landscape in which the tourism industry operates in. New knowledge and skill requirements are now required of tourism manpower to deliver service in a highly competitive environment.

Education must henceforth be geared toward preparing students to deal with the changing world and to enable them to cope with the different aspects of globalization. The changing nature of the world of work, especially due to globalization and technological change demands for the development of a skilled, committed and motivated workforce that understands the impact of global changes particularly on business and industry and how these changes impact upon the quality of local social, economic and environmental conditions.

In view of the Mutual Recognition Arrangement (MRA) with neighboring Southeast Asian nations, a proposed arrangement among ASEAN member countries designed to facilitate the freer movement and employment of qualified and certified personnel between its members, there is an urgent need to reassess the way tourism schools are doing things. With the minimum competency standards for ASEAN tourism professionals as well as an intra-ASEAN curriculum exchange program with cross training and cross-certification, tourism education institutions would have to ensure that their programs are consistent with the changed scenario in terms of the requirements for a tourism professional. Once these standards are defined and the corresponding assessment system made operational, a certain level of proficiency in terms of skills and knowledge requirements shall be required of a tourism graduate for him to become prepared for the challenges of industry.

Another significant advocacy of nations around the world of which Philippine tourism education must be able to respond to involves the recognition of the urgent need for changes to a more sustainable way of life. The United Nations adopted 2005-2014 as the decade to recognise education and learning as the key to achieve such proposition. A resolution was signed by nations all over the world, including the Philippines. Named as the Decade of Education for

Sustainable Development (ESD), the overall goal is to allow for the integration of values inherent in sustainable development to all aspects of learning to encourage behavior that will lead to a more sustainable and just society for all.

With education as the primary agent of transformation towards sustainable development, its key task henceforth has been named as building the capacity of a futures oriented thinking that shall increase people's abilities to transform their visions for society into reality. As education for sustainable development has come to be seen as a process of learning how to make decisions that consider the long-term future of the economy, ecology and equity of all communities, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (2006) advocates the need for a review of existing curricula in terms of their objectives and content to develop transdisciplinary understandings of social, economic and environmental sustainability as well as an examination of approaches to teaching, learning and assessment so that lifelong learning skills such as creative and critical thinking, oral and written communication, collaboration and cooperation, conflict management, decision-making, problem-solving and planning, using appropriate Information and Communication Technologies and practical citizenship are fostered.

Local responsiveness

Tourism has a big potential as a tool for development and economic growth, especially in a developing country as the Philippines. Similar to many other countries in the Asia Pacific region, tourism can become one of the frontline sectors in the fight against poverty. Since unemployment is one of the principal social and economic challenges that the country is faced with, the potential of tourism to create jobs is of paramount significance and which can create a number of development synergies. With the target of increasing direct tourism-generated employment from 3.7 million in 2010 to 6.5 million by 2016, tourism schools are faced with the challenge of ensuring the job readiness of graduates, that is with the relevant skills and language proficiency and other qualifications. The outputs of the tourism education system should be those which possess skills and competencies that are required by the market and respond to industry needs. It is through the development of the critical skills that the gaps in the supply and demand requirements of the tourism industry can be addressed. In this way, the tourism education program is aptly placed in the context of the nation's needs and interconnected with the development plans. In the end, it is not only the individual who is prepared by the education system through the acquisition of knowledge and skills who benefits, but also the society and community of which he is a part of.

On the local scene, tourism and hospitality schools have to adapt to developments among which include a new regulatory environment affecting tourism education institutions. The CHED directive for tourism education institutions to adopt the competency based curriculum is a development that tourism schools would have to contend with, having no option but to comply since all state universities and colleges (SUCs), and local colleges are obliged to strictly adhere to the provisions of the order. Schools now have to reassess their ability to deliver the requirements of the new program

Another recent major development that affects the tourism and hospitality program offering is the implementation of the K-12 program where the total number of years in Basic Education will be increased from 10 to 12 years to make the country's basic education program at par with other countries of the world. This is an opportunity for the priority being given to tourism, with it being viewed as the engine to economic growth and job creation, to find its way in the elementary and high school education system. Tourism and hospitality orientation can be injected in various subjects, as well as inclusion of skills that would develop students' aptitude in tourism and hospitality education. These high schools which are able to develop their curriculum as such can serve as feeder schools of tourism and hospitality management colleges and universities.

Philosophical and Sociological Foundation

In order to fill the gaps between supply and demand especially for critical skills in tourism manpower as per the projections for the Philippine tourism industry in the forthcoming years, undergraduate higher education tourism programs in the country should be one that is geared toward occupational preparation. This would imply a vocational focus where sector specific technical skills are honed in the students. However, more than tourism career development where students are prepared primarily for employment, higher education in tourism should likewise provide knowledge and skills that would make one a well rounded graduate. Aside from honing craft based skills that shall enable graduates to perform job requirements efficiently, the tourism program must provide the necessary preparation for graduates to take responsibility for stewardship of the industry.

Tribe (2002) suggested that sociological and philosophical perspectives be addressed in curriculum development in order to lead to having reflective graduates who have the insight to question and improve common practice in the context of tourism development.

This position is consistent with that of other authors who believe that tourism education must prepare the student for more than just employment noting that there is a need to balance the liberal and vocational aspects of tourism education to eventually have students who are broadly educated, knowledgeable about and responsible in tourism development as well as occupationally functional in tourism (Inui, Wheeler and Lankford, 2006; Lewis, 2005;Stuart-Hoyle, 2003).

Environment

The extent to which sustainable development and a competitive advantage of the Philippines relative to its Asian neighbors can be achieved is largely influenced by the dynamic interplay of the various environmental factors that impinge on the tourism industry. Educational administrators must always analyze and take into account the environment as well external trends and changes in the economic, political, socio-cultural and technological scenarios have a bearing on decisions and actions that have to be made in terms of the administration of the educational program. While tourism is considered a top priority of the government, major improvements in tourism infrastructure, including information technology development, safety and security conditions, and focus on environmental sustainability have to be addressed in order to increase its competitiveness. These are among the pillars of competitiveness identified in one study where the Philippines has been noted as having a competitive disadvantage resulting in a relatively low ranking for the country as compared to its Asian neighbors and many other countries in the world (Blanke and Chiesa, 2011).

On the lego-political scenario, there are still many improvements that need to be made in order to increase the Philippines' competitiveness vis a vis its neighbors. For one, it has been noted that the extent to which the government prioritizes and gives importance to the industry as reflected in the thrusts, development plans and budgetary priorities is a determinant of competitiveness and sustainable tourism development. Political instability has also adversely affected tourism activity. Safety and security issues which are primarily linked to the political situation have also been identified as contributory to a competitive disadvantage. These include the business costs of terrorism, crime and violence, road traffic accidents and reliability of police services

CONCLUSION

Tourism education plays a pivotal role for it is the means by which individuals are provided with value-added knowledge and skills required by the tourism industry that shall ensure its competitiveness. Second, it is the avenue that shall enable them to take a proactive stance with respect to ensuring the sustainable development of the industry. It is a known fact that the Philippines has diverse natural and man-made attractions that gives its tourism sector a huge potential for development. It is sad to note that this potential has not been fully realized and still has room for expansion and growth. It has lagged way below its ASEAN neighbors even those countries which it used to be ahead of in terms of visitor arrivals in previous years. With tourism graduates who have the necessary knowledge and skills and adequate preparation to face the challenges of the industry, the country may yet be able to fulfill its considerable potential and establish itself as a premier tourist destination in Asia

REFERENCES

Blanke, J. and Chiesa, T. (2011) The Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Report 2011: Beyond the Downturn downloaded Nov 2012 from htyt//www.weforum.org,

Commission on Higher Education CHED Memorandum Order (2006) "Policies and Standards for Bachelor of Science in Tourism Management (BSTM)/Bachelor of Science in Hospitality Management (BSHM)/ Bachelor of Science in Hotel and Restaurant Management (BSHRM)/ Bachelor of Science in Travel Management (BSTrM)" downloaded July 2012 from http://www.ched.gov.ph/chedwww/index.php/eng/InformationCHED-Memorandum-Orders/2006-CHED-Memorandum-Orders.

Department of Tourism National Tourism Development Plan 2011- 2016.

Inui (2005) Inui, Y., Wheeler D., and Lankford. S. (2006) Rethinking Tourism Education:What Should Schools Teach? Journal of Hospitality, Leisure, Sport and Tourism Education vol. 5 no. 2.

Go, F. Monachello, M. and Baum, T. (1999) Management for the Hospitality Industry. New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold.

Lewis, A. (2005) Rationalizing a Tourism Curriculum for Sustainable Tourism Development in Small Island States: A Stakeholder Perspective. Journal of Hospitality, Leisure, Sports and Tourism Education, vol. 4(2).

Rieder, L. (2003). Final Mission Report: Institutional strengthening support to the tourism sector of the Philippines, (unpublished report, Manila).

Stuart-Hoyle, M. (2003) The Purpose of an Undergraduate Tourism Programmes in the United Kingdom. Journal of Hospitality, Leisure, Sports and Tourism Education, v 2 (1).

Talastas, Eusebia (1983) The State of Management Education and Training for the Travel Industry(unpublished report, Manila).

Tribe, J. (2002) The Philosophic Practitioner. Annals of Research, v 29 (2).

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (2006)-Education for All Global Monitoring Report downloaded August 2012 from http://www.unesco.org/ education/efa/ed_for_all.