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In the case of tourism, it is important to consider the geographical location of the destination and its part in a larger entity. In the Baltic Sea area, destination products covering the highlights of the seashore have growing importance and the area is increasingly seen as a coherent tourism destination. Thus, tourism education without borders should also be promoted in the area. This paper focuses on internationalisation of a tourism business curriculum in higher professional education in three Baltic Sea states: Finland, Estonia and Latvia. The aim of this paper is to describe the development of a joint curriculum and a study programme delivered online. The curriculum and the programme support regional development by aligning and providing skills needed for the area to grow as a common tourism destination.

Keywords: internationalisation, curriculum, tourism education, the Baltic Sea

Developing the Baltic Sea as a common tourism destination

The contextual background of the curriculum, i.e. the social, cultural and economic setting, provides a key to understanding the curriculum planning process in an applied subject area such as tourism (Cooper, 2002). In the case of the Baltic Sea, tourism is a growth sector contributing to the economy of the area significantly. It is a regionally important source of livelihood and a major employer. The tourism industry in the region is labour-intensive, employs a high number of young people, and is dominated by SMEs.

However, the Baltic Sea area's destinations are facing growing global competition. To stand up to this competition, *the area should be developed as a common tourism destination*. It is a coherent market, where the tourism industry calls for similar professional skills to reach international markets jointly and to receive more international tourists from other parts of Europe and from the other continents. The Russian market and growing Asian markets can also be addressed better together. In addition, there is a need to translate skills and future labour-market needs into curricula and teaching processes. Further, the education programmes should be marketed to attract more international students (Central Baltic Programme 2014–2020, 2014).

Rapidly changing market demands make it necessary to combine efforts to improve professional skills in the tourism sector. In practice, the skills in the tourism industry should be aligned in the area by means of education. This contributes to labour mobility, especially among the youth, encourages the youth to enter the labour market and gives them better opportunities for work. As stated in the European Union Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region, it is now essential for educational institutions to enhance skills and to develop quality tourism in terms of services (European Commission, 2015).

This paper deals with the central Baltic area, which is located in the north-eastern part of the European Union. The paper focuses on the internationalisation of a tourism business curriculum in professional higher education in three Baltic Sea states: Finland, Estonia and Latvia. The aim of this paper is to describe the development of a joint curriculum and a study programme delivered online. The curriculum and the programme support regional development by aligning and providing skills needed for the area to grow as a common tourism destination.

Internationalisation of higher education in Europe

The international work environment has an impact on the internationalisation of higher education. It is evident that the world in which higher education plays a significant role is changing. Key drivers for this change include the development of information and communication technologies, increased
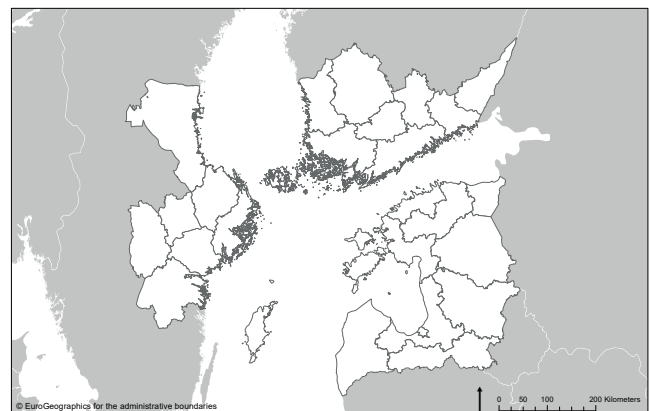
Figure 1: The central Baltic area, Central Baltic Programme 2014–2020. © Eurogeographics (Available at http://centralbaltic.eu)

international labour mobility, focus on the knowledge society and decreased public support for education and lifelong learning. These developments require new employability skills from graduates that enable them to cope with the changing circumstances of the tourism business world (Zehrer & Mössenlechner, 2009). The international dimension of tertiary education is therefore becoming increasingly important and, at the same time, more and more complex (Knight, 2004).

Until recently, internationalisation in Europe has focused on mobility, reacting to the European Commission initiatives, with the main goal of increasing the number of incoming and outgoing students within the European Union (De Wit & Hunter, 2015). Emphasis has now been shifted from physical mobility to internationalisation of the curriculum and learning outcomes, as the internationalisation of the substance of teaching and learning has become more important (Kehm & Teichler, 2007; European Parliament, 2015). Accordingly, more attention should now be paid to the development of international curricula and learning outcomes, strategic partnerships and short-term credit mobility (European Commission, 2013; De Wit & Hunter, 2015).

New technology has had a deep effect on the course of integration of education in Europe. The use of information and communication technology (ICT) has become an integral part of higher education. As a result, electronic internationalisation presents new possibilities for the development of international higher education curricula and supports novel forms of distance education (Callan, 2000; Svensson & Wihlborg, 2010). While the physical mobility of students will continue to grow, we can also expect to see an increase in virtual exchanges and collaborative international online learning (De Wit & Hunter, 2015).

Internationalisation of the curriculum in higher education

The internationalisation of the curriculum is defined as the inclusion of an international dimension into the content of the curriculum and teaching and learning processes to meet the needs of an international student body (Haigh, 2002; Leask, 2011; Leask & Bridge, 2013). A successfully internationalised curriculum emphasises a wide range of teaching and learning strategies designed to develop students. In other words, it aims at preparing students for performing professionally and effectively in an international and multicultural context (Knight & De Wit, 1995; Leask, 2001). It is about creating graduates who are capable of engaging in a work and communication culture which is becoming increasingly global (Sangpikul, 2009).

The internationalisation of a curriculum may also be seen as a way to internationalise programmes as products composed of international contents and designed for targeted students or defined professions with the aim of generating income and/ or enhancing the international competitiveness of graduates and institutions in the global economy (Takagi, 2015). The internationalisation of a curriculum is a process which will lead to a product, an internationalised curriculum, which will engage students with internationally informed research, cultural and linguistic diversity, and purposefully develop their international and intercultural perspectives as global professionals and citizens (Leask, 2009).

It is important to notice that the internationalisation of a curriculum may mean different things in different disciplines because the international perspectives required by different professions vary. Leask and Bridge (2013) point out that there is no frame of reference or guide to understanding how these curricula fit into the bigger picture, for critiquing their validity or, at a more concrete level, for determining how they might better prepare students to rise to the challenge of being productive workers in a complex, globalised world.

The growth of international business in tourism has created a need for internationally competent and qualified graduates who are able to understand and work effectively in a multicultural and global society (Ayoun et al., 2010). Because the tourism industry is highly diverse and internationally oriented, employers rely on a multicultural workforce to be involved with international tourists (Hearns et al., 2007; Sangpikul, 2009). Also, many prominent markets such as China, India, and Brazil, as well as regions such as the Middle East, have grown so rapidly that they now represent markets with great promise for the tourism industry (Ayoun et al., 2010). This requires new skills from the graduates.

However, the internationalisation of the curriculum is not only, or even principally, about teaching international students. International students require a curriculum that is internationally relevant and informed (Leask, 2011). According to Leask (2011), we cannot internationalise the curriculum without paying attention to the finer details of teaching, learning and assessment. It is clear that simply switching the medium of instruction to English for an international group of students does not constitute an internationalised curriculum (European Parliament, 2015). A truly international curriculum embraces a global outlook (Jordan, 2008). Therefore, the whole curriculum has to be designed with the needs of international students in mind as well as in terms of valuing diversity of experience and practice (Haigh, 2002; Das, 2005).

Boosting tourism business growth through education in the central Baltic area

To support the development of the central Baltic area as a common tourism destination, a relevant skillset needed in the future jobs will be identified in Finland, Estonia and Latvia, and the necessary skills will be translated into a joint curriculum. This curriculum will then be implemented as a professional higher education study programme provided online in English. This is a joint incentive of six leading higher education institutions providing professional tourism and hospitality education in the central Baltic area.

These six institutions are universities and universities of applied sciences, of which two are situated in Finland, two in Estonia and two in Latvia. The institutions are currently providing bachelor's and master's degrees in Tourism and Hospitality Management, Tourism and Hotel Management, Tourism and Catering Management and International Tourism Events Management. Thus, the tourism industry is defined very broadly in this case. It includes various sectors, i.e. the hospitality and restaurant sector, travel agencies and tour operators, and the events and adventure tourism sector. The common element of the curriculum provides advanced tourism business-development skills to all these sectors. Business-development skills refer to professional, subject-specific

skills necessary for meeting the challenges of growth and competitiveness in the tourism industry.

The novelty of the curriculum is in a jointly designed study programme with three states involved. National borders are blurred and the curriculum and the study programme are truly an initiative of the three countries. In this case, collaborative, online courses allow students to interact with students and teachers in the whole central Baltic area. Thus, the internationalisation of education is advanced by creating joint methods of virtual pedagogy.

The curriculum and the study programme have a significant impact on the regional development in the Baltic Sea. They are developed and implemented together with the tourism industry, higher educational institutions, SMEs and local, regional and national tourism authorities. This supports the development of the industry and enhances the integration of learning with tourism enterprises. For example, SMEs provide cases to the courses, which are jointly solved. As a result, the SMEs in these three countries network, share ideas and get innovative solutions to their business problems. In addition, they get new knowledge for developing their business.

Figure 2 shows the curriculum design and its implementation in three stages which are described in the following sections.

Identifying joint competencies

International tourism education has always had a strong professional focus, with curricula including training in specific skills vital in the work (Zehrer & Mössenlechner, 2009). Therefore, the first phase is to identify relevant and mutual skills needed in future jobs in the area to be included in the curriculum. In practice, research is conducted in three countries with data collected from each country on the necessary skills by using different sources. The studies examine the professional profiles of tourism sector workers and the curricula of higher education institutions providing tourism education. Also, two focus group discussions are conducted in each country. The aim is to find out the needs of the tourism industry from the SMEs and tourism authorities. In addition, it is important to identify significant themes of tourism development in the Baltic Sea and national and regional tourism strategies. The data are then analysed and each country delivers a report on the results. Finally, the mutual skills are identified on the basis of the reports from these three countries.

At the end of this first phase, SMEs, local, regional and national tourism authorities are informed of the mutual skills identified. Cooperation is initiated with the SMEs, and they are recruited to the study programme as case providers. They are also informed of the opportunity to study in the programme through Open University. The research results are shared with other higher education institutions as well as with vocational education institutions providing tourism education in the central Baltic area.
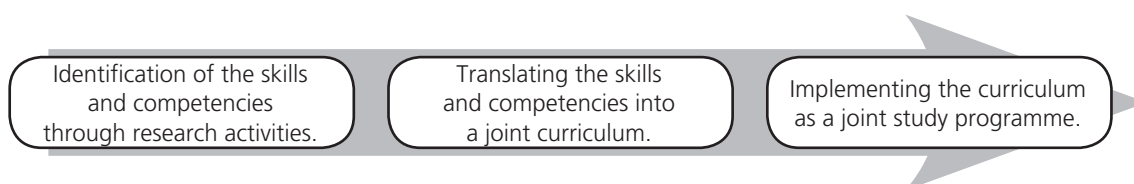
Designing the curriculum

In the second phase, the identified skills are used as a basis of the curriculum design. This will take place during the academic year of 2017–2018. The skills are translated into the curriculum and courses of advanced knowledge in tourism business development. The aim of the curriculum is to prepare students for international tourism business development professions. Accordingly, the studies will lead to internationally recognised professional qualifications in tourism business development. In this case, the internationalisation of the curriculum is a process which will produce a product, an internationalised curriculum, which develops tourism business and the competitiveness of the graduates as well as the central Baltic area purposefully.

An international team of lecturers will examine the research results on the identified skills and decide the themes of the courses on the basis of the results. The curriculum will include eight courses in total that award credits according to the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS). Four core courses will award five ECTS and four specialisation courses three ECTS for the students. The design and implementation of the courses is divided equally between the universities. Outcome-based learning requirements and competence profiles are developed for the whole curriculum and for each course. This process involves the development of the content and syllabi of the courses. In addition, business cases are created to be explored in the courses and new material is produced for the eLearning platform. The internationalisation of the curriculum does not only involve, or even principally involve, teaching international students (Leask, 2011). Therefore, attention will also be paid to the details of teaching, learning and assessment.

The curriculum is introduced to all the higher education institutions providing tourism education in the central Baltic area. In addition, the universities will include the curriculum as a module in their tourism and hospitality degree programmes. It is possible for all higher education institutions to adopt the curriculum and integrate it as a module into their existing curricula and degree programmes.

Implementing the study programme

The third phase involves the implementation of the curriculum as an online study programme during the academic year 2018–2019. At this point, four courses of five ECTS and four courses of three ECTS are organised. These courses are implemented fully online except one course of three ECTS which is organised as an innovation camp. Altogether, 150 students from three countries will participate in the programme during the first year. The second- or third-year tourism and hospitality students and SME workers will participate in joint courses from each university. It is also possible for exchange students studying in the universities to participate. Each university can provide the courses and students can participate

| Identification of the skills and competencies through research activities. | Translating the skills and competencies into a joint curriculum. | Implementing the curriculum as a joint study programme. |

Figure 2: Development of a joint tourism business programme

in each course from all six universities. Quality assurance, evaluation and reviews are carried out by collecting feedback from the students and SMEs.

Conclusion

In the case of tourism, it is important to consider the geographical location of the destination and whether it is part of a larger entity. In the case of the Baltic Sea area, destination products with theme routes and multi-country vacations are growing in importance. Tourists visit many of the highlights along the Baltic seashore during their trip. The Baltic Sea area is increasingly regarded as a coherent tourism destination. Thus, tourism education without borders should also be promoted in this area.

This curriculum and the study programme of tourism business development, as an incentive of three countries, contribute to these goals. They strengthen quality of education and foster cooperation. Jointly developed courses will increase awareness and visibility of education and appeal to students both nationally and internationally. In addition, eLearning courses based on the aligned needs of the tourism industry are a great tool for virtual mobility of international students. The pedagogical material will benefit the education system as such, because of different pedagogical practices and experiences in the participating countries.

According to Zehrer and Mössenlechner (2009), there is often a considerable gap between what educational institutions offer and what is needed and required by the industry. The joint curriculum and study programme reduce this gap by addressing the development of tourism and its challenges. In addition, it has a significant professional focus because the curriculum and the study programme are designed and implemented in close cooperation with the industry. The joint curriculum and the study programme enhance competitiveness of higher education in tourism, as well as the central Baltic area, by matching education with skills needed in the industry.

The cooperation in education between many different universities and countries also poses challenges. Teaching teams are the primary architects of the curriculum. They control the curriculum by defining its formal aspects, by selecting content and by designing and managing teaching, learning and assessment arrangements (Leask, 2011; Leask & Bridge, 2013). It is hard to envisage effective development of truly international curriculum content without internationalised teaching staff (Black, 2004). De Wit and Hunter (2015) emphasise that while growing importance is being placed on incorporating an international dimension into the curriculum, operationalisation within the institutions remains a challenge. It is not always clear to the staff what the internationalisation of the curriculum means. Therefore, it is difficult to know whether the staff possess an ability to internationalise the curriculum by paying attention to the details of teaching, learning and assessment.

The introduction of ICT into teaching brings about substantial changes to the learning process. However, the most important change probably involves changes in teaching (Alvarez et al., 2009). Online teaching and learning requirements are not only limited to a set of knowledge and experience, but the challenges a teacher faces are closely linked to the particularities of interacting and communicating online

(Alvarez et al., 2009). Thus, it is probable that practices and the use of ICT in teaching vary in different universities. In addition, eLearning and the role of the teacher can be understood in different ways in online courses. Therefore, in addition to the skills needed in delivering the international curriculum, the teachers should have similar, aligned ICT skills to provide virtual courses successfully.

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