

Soft Skills: Expectations and Needs in Tourism

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Abstract : The recent political, economic, social technological and employment changes significantly affect the tourism organizations and consequently the changing nature of the employment experience of the tourism workforce. Such scene leads several researchers and labor analysts to reflect about what kinds of jobs, knowledge and competences are need to ensure the success to teach, to learning and to work on this sector. In recent years the competency-based approach in high education level has become of significant interest. On the one hand, this approach could leads to the forming of the key students' competences which contribute their better preparation to the professional future and on the other hand could answer better to practical demands from tourism job market. The goals of this paper are (1) to understand the expectations of university tourism students in relation to the present and future tourism competences demands, (2) to identify the importance put on the soft skills, (3) to know the importance of high qualification to their future professional activity and (4) to explore the students perception about present and future tourist sector specificities. To this proposal, a questionnaire was designed and distributed to every students who participate on classes of Hospitality Management under degree and master from one public Portuguese university. All participants were invited, during December 2014 and September 2015, to answer the questionnaire at the moment and on presence of one researcher of this study. Fulfilled the questionnaire 202 students (72, 35,6% male and 130, 64.4% female), the mean age was 21,64 (SD=5,27), 91% (n=86) were undergraduate and 18 (9%) were master students. 80% (n=162) of our participants refers as a possibility to look for a job outside the country.42% (n=85) prefers to work in a medium-sized tourism units (with 50-249 employees). According to our participants the most valued skills in tourism are the domain of foreign languages (87.6%, n=177), the ability to work as a team (85%), the personal persistence (83%, n=168), the knowledge of the product/services provided (73.8%, n=149), and assertiveness (66.3%, n=134). 65% (n=131) refers the availability to look for a job in a home distance of 1000 kilometers and 59% (n=119) do not consider the possibility to work in another area than tourism. From the results of this study we are in the position of confirming the need for universities to maintain a better link with the professional tourism companies and to rethink some competences into their learning course model. Based on our results students, universities and companies could understand more deeply the motivations, expectations and competences need to build the future career who study and work on the tourism sector.

Keywords : human capital, employability, students' competencies perceptions, soft skills, tourism

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