

# The Future of Tourism: A Training Needs Analysis

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## The Future of Tourism: A Training Needs Analysis

Manuel Au-Yong-Oliveira, Ana Palma-Moreira, Matilde Macedo, Cicero Eduardo Walter, Theodoros Grassos

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# The Authors

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**Manuel Au-Yong-Oliveira** was born in the UK but now resides in Porto, in Portugal, where he has two step-children (twins) and two daughters. Manuel worked in industry as a practitioner for 20 years, including for several multinationals, before joining academia. While working for global management consultancy firm Accenture, as well as for Worthington Cylinders Europe and for Waterco Europe, valuable experience was gained, and much is hence shared in class with students. Though considered to be an out-of-the-box lecturer Manuel is regularly highly graded by his students as adding value in the classroom. Manuel is currently an Associate Professor with Habilitation (in Management - Marketing) at the University of Aveiro (DEGEIT) where he has lectured at the undergraduate, master's and doctoral levels on marketing, innovation, strategy and research methods. Before lecturing full-time at the University of Aveiro Manuel also lectured for a number of years at the University of Porto - FEUP (Business Construction Project, on the Master's in Innovation and Technological Entrepreneurship), where he has also supervised a number of master's dissertations. Manuel has won numerous prizes for his work including an honourable mention, in 2023 at the annual researcher awards at the University of Aveiro (Social Sciences area). Manuel currently heads several European-funded projects at the University of Aveiro, including VirtuEU where Manuel acts as consortium leader.



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**Theodor Grassos** serves as the Secretary General of the European Association of Institutes for Vocational Training (EVBB) and Director of AKMI International, the Dept for Internationalization of AKMI, the largest private vocational training provider of Greece, and Metropolitan College. With a strong academic foundation in social sciences, he contributes to the innovation of the tourism industry through high-quality education and international partnerships. He has participated in the UNESCO-UNEVOC Working Group on Tourism under the framework of the Bridging Innovation and Learning in TVET (BILT) project, an initiative aiming to innovate TVET across sectors through global collaboration. Always in the context of EU-level collaboration, Mr. Grassos has undertaken a pioneering approach in leading the tourism-oriented EU initiative 'Pact for Skills for Tourism' with the EVBB, a 80+ community committed to reskilling adults across the industry. Regarding high-quality education, Mr. Grassos has successfully led numerous international cooperation and EU- and national funded projects. Among his many contributions, Mr. Grassos has taken on leadership roles in the TOUR-X project—a flagship Center of Vocational Excellence (CoVE) initiative in the Tourism Industry—where he serves as the Director, advancing innovative strategies and practices to strengthen vocational training and enhance the sector's competitiveness.

# Foreword

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In an ever-evolving tourism landscape, adaptability and foresight are essential for success. *The Future of Tourism: A Training Needs Analysis* addresses these challenges by examining the changing skill requirements for tourism professionals in response to the complexities of the industry and the dynamics of the market.

This publication is the culmination of extensive research conducted under the Erasmus+ co-funded Partnership for Excellence - CoVEs (Centres of Vocational Excellence) for the Tourism Industry. It brings together an international consortium of 23 partners from Belgium, China, Greece, Germany, Italy, Portugal, and Spain. Led by AKMI SA, the largest Vocational Education and Training (VET) provider in Greece, the TourX initiative (Project No: 101056184) aims to cultivate a bottom-up approach to excellence in the tourism sector, empowering partnering educational providers (VET and Higher Education Institutions) to enhance their capacity to swiftly adapt skills provision to the evolving economic and social landscape.

Through a comprehensive research methodology that includes a literature review, this analysis identifies key challenges, such as the development of upskilling and reskilling training programs, the urgent necessity to diversify and strengthen the resilience of the tourism economy, and the need for smart investment mechanisms that promote fairer and more sustainable models of tourism development in alignment with the EU and national agendas within the framework of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

This report provides a forward-looking analysis of skills development, which is crucial for maintaining a competitive advantage in the tourism industry. Its objective is not only to address current challenges but also to anticipate future needs, ensuring that tourism professionals are equipped with the competencies required to navigate potential disruptions and enhance the sector's resilience.

Drawing from my extensive experience in tourism and Blue Economy initiatives, I have had the opportunity to engage in projects that support blue career prospects across EU countries. These initiatives have included the development of mentoring programs for young individuals aspiring to pursue careers in the Blue Economy, the creation of skills validation tools to ensure alignment with requisite qualifications, and the organization of mobility exchanges through study visits that offer practical experience in various sectors of the Blue Economy. In my efforts to support these projects, I collaborated with experts from both the Blue Economy and youth

organizations to exchange insights on skills needs, career paths, open job opportunities, and existing training programs.

I am confident that *The Future of Tourism: A Training Needs Analysis* offers invaluable insights and a comprehensive framework for Vocational Education and Training (VET) providers and tourism industry stakeholders. This report stands as a critical resource for the development of educational programs that prioritize sustainability, resilience, and innovation - factors indispensable for the future of the tourism sector.

As a coordinator and project manager of multiple tourism and Blue Economy projects, I firmly believe this report will foster continued dialogue and collaboration among stakeholders. Together, we can work towards building a more resilient, sustainable future for the tourism industry.

***Marievi Grets***

Tourism Project Coordinator  
Certified Blue Growth Mentor  
Researcher in Intercultural and Religious Diversity  
AKMI S.A.



# Chapter 1

## Introduction

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### **Introduction - Background**

TourX is a project which was approved by the EU as a consequence of the disastrous reduction in tourism triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic. The EU decided to invest in the TourX project to avoid future crises and to provide reskilling and upskilling – in terms of competences – to ensure tourism does not in future get into trouble again. Due to COVID-19 a lot of workers exited the industry to work in other industries and just did not return... Poor salaries and long working hours, including over the weekends, are challenges that many people do not want. What competences are needed in the future to ensure the success of the tourism industry? This is one of the main reasons that TourX was approved - to define, following field work (in this case 11 focus groups and 58 interviews), what tourism course and curricula would be most suited to prepare tourism workers for their expected or not so expected futures. Digital skills, sustainability skills, transversal and soft skills are seen to be a major part of the future in tourism, an industry often called the industry of relationships.

### **A project of 23 international partners**

The TourX project involves 23 international partners, from Europe (Italy, Spain, Belgium, Germany, Belgium, Portugal – some with multiple partners), except for China, which was included due to its expertise in the area and their prominence in tourism and on the worldwide stage.

The methodology chosen was entirely qualitative – and indications were given to partners on how to proceed – regarding the field work and primary data collection effort. How to proceed ethically, as well as regarding the questions to be asked (interview scripts and focus group / research group scripts).

What does the tourism industry need to do to sustain itself in time and in face of negative events (such as pandemics) which may occur? This is the research question we herein have sought to answer.

In a world of work that is constantly changing, requiring different skills from those needed today, the labour force has to be retrained.

### **Constant change**

This constant change in the world of work has created a feeling among employees that they may be facing the possible loss of their contractual



relationship and that, in addition to this, they will find it difficult to find a new labour situation, since the market, although limited, is looking for workers with new professional skills. For Lee and Bruvold (2003), the search for skills, or their updating, is becoming a central point in the dynamics of keeping a job or looking for an alternative if necessary. In this context, organisations have made the use of flexibility a priority, resorting to different types of employment contracts (Chambel, 2012), as well as becoming receptive and multi-skilled in order to achieve and sustain a competitive advantage (Lazarova & Taylor, 2009). From the perspective of Prahalad and Hamel (1990), the pursuit of a policy of constant development of the professional skills of their employees has become a key factor of competitiveness for organisations. When an organisation manages to develop and implement practices that promote the skills of its employees, based on the Human Capital Theory (Schultz, 1961), it is creating means (human capital) that differentiate it from others, making it more competitive.

Alongside this crisis, organisations today face another serious problem, which is high turnover and the consequent loss of highly experienced employees who represent high replacement costs (Reiche, 2008).

It has become important for both employees and organisations for Human Resources Management to re-evaluate and readjust organisational skills development practices, as they have become a driving force behind good organisational performance, minimising job insecurity and intentions to leave the organisation. However, Whitner (2001) warns us that the organisation should be concerned about whether employees perceive these practices as the organisation would like them to, because according to the author, the biggest problem lies in the fact that employees often don't perceive them as the organisation would like them to.

### **Skills development methodologies**

These are the main reasons why the subject of skills development methodologies has been of growing interest to organisations and their human resources managers. In addition to traditional skills development policies, of which training is one of the main examples, other organisational practices geared towards skills development, such as functional rotation, coaching or mentoring, have been implemented with increasing frequency (De Vos et al., 2011).

It is known that organisational skills development practices have a direct effect on employee attitudes and behaviour (Paauwe & Richardson, 1997). Thus, according to Arthur (1994), as well as Wood and Menezes (1998), organisations must adapt their practices and create working conditions that lead to positive attitudes and behaviours on the part of employees, which reinforce their emotional ties to the organisation, so that they work hard to



## *Introduction*

achieve the organisation's objectives, increasing its effectiveness. When an organisation invests in its employees by developing their skills, this investment is associated with social exchange relationships that create feelings of obligation on the part of the employee towards the organisation (Shore et al., 2006). From this perspective, the impact of the perception of these practices on employee attitudes and behaviour is considered to be significant, based on the premise of social exchange and the norm of reciprocity. According to the social exchange theory developed by Blau (1964), employees establish mutual and contingent exchanges with the organisation, which will determine the beginning, maintenance and end of a relationship. On the other hand, the norm of reciprocity previously developed by Gouldner (1960) tells us that the employee responds to a positive action on the part of the organisation with another positive action, thus developing a win-win dynamic.

For Meyer and Allen (1997), organisational skills development practices contribute to an increase in organisational commitment, especially those linked to an increase in the organisation's support for its employees. Affective commitment to the organisation on the part of employees is related to both perceived and actual practices, including internal promotion, training opportunities and job security (Gaertner & Nollen, 1989). There are, however, authors such as Guzzo and Noonan (1994) who claim that affective commitment may be more influenced by the message that skills development practices convey to employees than by the practices themselves.

### **Skills development programmes that increase value**

One of the concerns of the Human Resources Management of organisations should be to develop practices aimed at promoting the employability of their employees. By designing internal skills development programmes that increase their value to the organisation, you are also improving the individual's perception of the degree of internal employability (Cesário et al., 2012). It is also creating diversity and preventing employees from leaving, which, according to the resource-based view, will make them competitive by creating resources (human capital) that are difficult to imitate (Afiouni, 2007; Barney, 1991). According to Barney (1991), this theory makes it possible to determine which human resources are available in an organisation and can be considered strategic resources so that it can obtain a sustainable competitive advantage. From the perspective of Wittekind et al. (2010), one of the main antecedents of the employee's perception of internal employability is their perception of good organisational skills development practices, since the perception of employability is centred on the individual (Fugate et al., 2004).

### *The Future of Tourism: A Training Needs Analysis*

The perception of internal employability will provide employees with dynamic stability, which in today's context can contribute to job security. Staying in the job market will be the essence of a new labour world where quality of work can be considered a consequence of employability (Forrier & Sels, 2003a). Along these lines, Fugate and Kinicki (2008), as well as Inkson and King (2010) and Hallier (2009) suggest that job security is being replaced by the perception of internal employability. In turn, a greater perception of internal employability will boost the employee's emotional commitment to the organisation (De Cuyper & De Witte, 2011). If employees perceive that even if their job is terminated they will be able to take up another position within the same organisation (perception of internal employability), because the skills they have acquired will facilitate job rotation, and they feel that they are of value to the organisation, then they will feel a greater emotional attachment to it, which will make intentions to leave less attractive (Meyer & Allen, 1991).

# Chapter 2

## Literature Review

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### Introduction

The importance of competences – having the right competences – is paramount. Tourism is an industry which is tremendously complex, if one considers who contributes and gains from the industry. From providers to tourists themselves to those organizing the trips – ingoing and outgoing. This book is for those professionals who may need assistance in defining and knowing where to invest regarding future competences in order to ensure their livelihoods are secure. Hence, the following literature review starts with definitions of competences, what they are - as a source of value for the individual and the organization (Fleury & Fleury, 2006).

Reskilling and upskilling are big and important words in tourism. What new skills do we need to acquire? What current skills do we need to improve? The TourX project includes vocational education and training (VET) providers as well as higher education institutions whose mission is to educate and prepare young and not so young individuals for their futures. What better than to invest in science and in research to accomplish this mission – to unite forces internationally towards the goal of efficient and effective reskilling and upskilling? Our thanks are due to the EU for their vision and for investing in us. We at TourX are committed to education, in all its forms, and to better preparing for the education we will need to administer. What skills will be needed in the future? No one really knows for sure the answer to that question but herein we shall attempt to provide a research-based answer, following field-based as well as desk-based research on the theme. For sure what is best for tourism and tourism education will emerge over time – the needs that need to be met to satisfy all of the stakeholders involved – our deliberate plan aimed at the future of tourism education, our cross-sectional research effort, will we hope bring benefits to tourism professionals interested in where we are headed and what they will need to know to be prepared – for what is an uncertain future, given external events (such as wars and pandemics) and given the evolution of technology (not the least of which being artificial intelligence, or AI).

Subsequently, the following literature review or desk-based research seeks to answer and provide a theoretical basis towards our ultimate aim - What does the tourism industry need to do to prepare itself in view of an uncertain future? What does it need to consider? We hope to touch on the

main points and then to discuss these theoretical points raised in chapter 5, in light of the field work.

## **Competences**

It was McClelland (1973) who started the debate among psychologists and administrators in the United States about "competences". However, there is still no consensus on the definition of competences. According to Ceitil (2016), the concept of competences is broad and differs from author to author. Table 1 shows some definitions of competences.

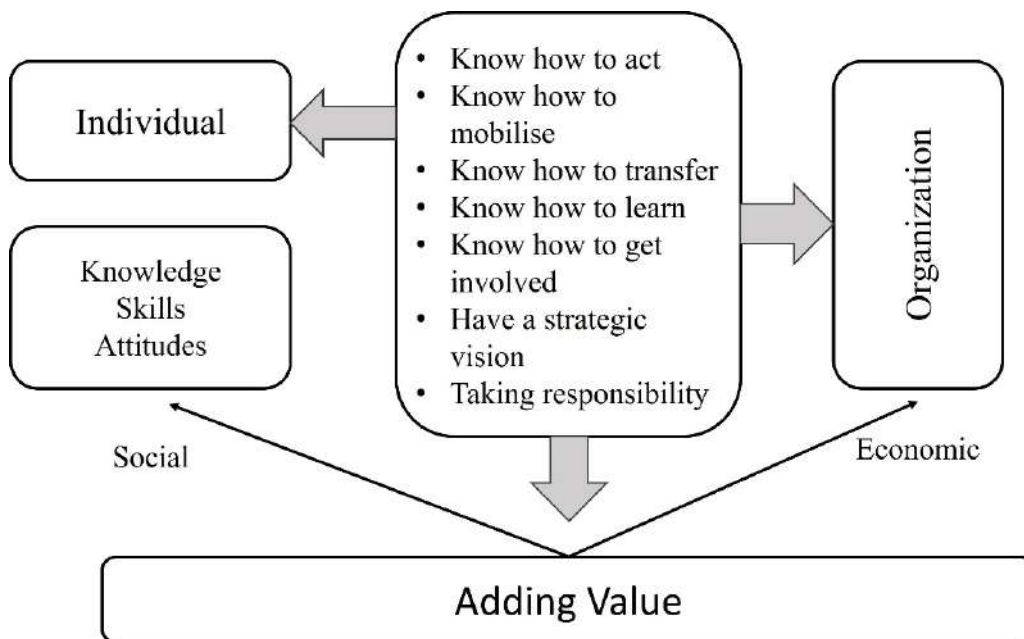
**Table 1 - Competence definitions**

Author	Definition
McClelland (1973)	It is an underlying characteristic of a person that is related to superior performance in carrying out a task or in a given situation.
Levy-Leboyer (1997)	Sets of behaviours that some people and organisations master and that make them stand out from others in specific contexts.
Lopes et al. (1999)	Set of knowledge, skills and attitudes that enable the individual to successfully achieve the desired objectives.
Fleury and Fleury (2000)	Responsible and recognised know-how that involves mobilising, integrating and transferring knowledge, resources and skills that add economic value to the organisation and social value to the employee.
Perrenaud (2000)	The ability to mobilise various cognitive resources to deal with a given situation.
Jackson and Schuler (2003)	<i>Skills</i> , knowledge and other characteristics that someone needs to fulfil a particular task.
Mulder et al. (2007)	They help to describe the strengths and capabilities that make an organisation stand out from the rest and thus create a competitive advantage.

## Literature Review

Author	Definition
Heyse et al. (2015)	A higher-order capacity to act in a creative and self-organised way in unexpected and often chaotic situations.

Based on their definition of competence, Fleury and Fleury (2006) constructed the model shown in figure 1.



**Figure 1 - Competences as a source of value for the individual and the organisation (Fleury & Fleury, 2006).**

According to this model, when people know how to act, mobilise and transfer (knowledge or information), are willing to learn and get involved in their work, have a strategic vision and take responsibility, both on the part of the employee and the organisation, the conditions are in place to add value for both parties. For the employee, this is a social value because they will acquire knowledge and skills that will lead them to have more positive attitudes and behaviours towards the organisation. For the organisation, this value is economic, as the employee acquires more knowledge, better skills and positive attitudes and behaviours towards the organisation, which will benefit it economically.

Competences can be approached in different ways, such as attributions, qualifications, personal traits or characteristics, and behaviours or actions (Ceitil, 2016). Competences as attributions are not related to the personal characteristics or performance of each individual, but rather to the positions held, and are seen as "an element external to the person" (Ceitil, 2016).

## *The Future of Tourism: A Training Needs Analysis*

Competences as qualifications, like the previous ones, are also external to individuals and are acquired formally. As for competences as personal traits or characteristics, these are considered to be intrinsic to the individual (Ceitil, 2016). Finally, in the approach to competences as behaviours or actions, it is argued that the person is only assumed to have the existing competence when it is put into practice (Ceitil, 2016).

Competences can be transversal or specific. Soft skills are skills that should be present in all employees of an organisation, depending on its objectives. Specific competences, on the other hand, are directly related to the professional activity and make it possible to distinguish the best performing employees (Ceitil, 2016).

For Königová et al. (2012), "competence" is a term used to designate the affirmation of people's labour potential in their activities. For these authors, there are two meanings on which individual definitions of competences are based. Firstly, competences are characterised by power, i.e. the authority associated with a particular person or organisation. Secondly, competences have the meaning of ability, i.e. the aptitude to carry out a certain activity, to have certain general and specific characteristics and skills, to be qualified in a certain field. In this second case, the definition of competences refers to a set of specific knowledge, skills, aptitudes, traits, motivations, attitudes and values that are essential both for personal development and within the scope of their professional occupation in an organisation, in order to achieve the level of performance required by the table (Königová et al., 2012).

Schäfer (2006) classifies competences as follows:

- a) Professional skills
- b) Methodological skills
- c) Social skills
- d) Own competences

Professional competences are those considered necessary for solving problems typical of the profession, and as such are linked to specialised knowledge. Methodological competences also include the ability to solve problems or acquire knowledge. Social competences are related to social interaction, among which communication and conflict management competences are of great importance. As for self-skills. These are competences that individuals have in order to reflect themselves: values, attitudes and self-perception.

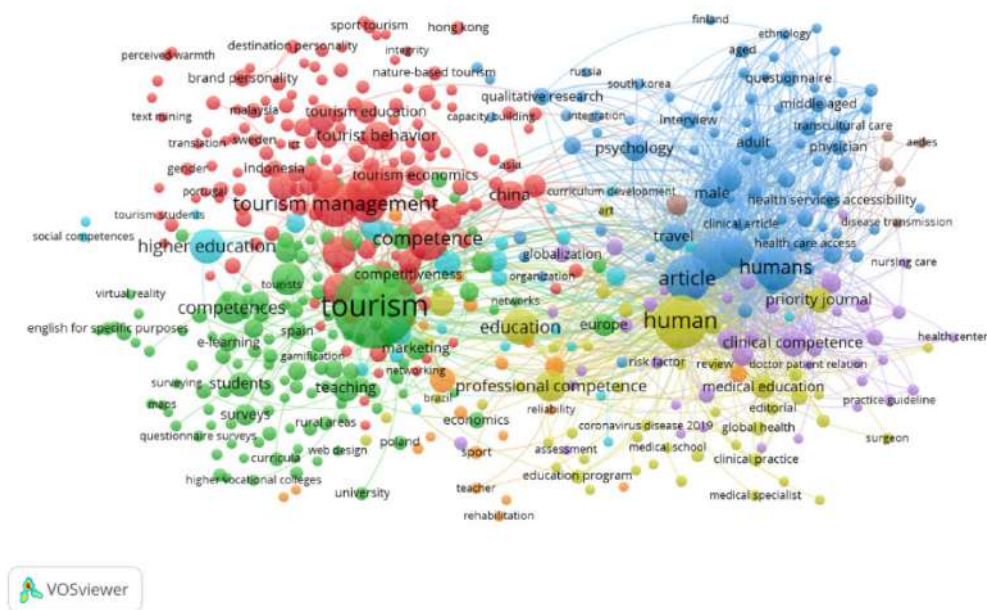
It should be noted that professional competences are part of methodological competences and are directly related to work. Social competences, on the other hand, establish one's own competences, referring



to people and how to lead them (Bach & Sulikova, 2019). When it becomes necessary to act in a creative and self-organised way, all four types of competences are required, i.e. the use of all available resources (Bach & Sulikova, 2019).

According to Prahalad and Hamel (1990), an organisation's success depends on its core competencies. Core competencies can then be understood as important capabilities that organisations can acquire by improving and using their learning processes (Prahalad & Hamel, 1990).

Figure 2 shows a VOSviewer depiction of a Scopus search done on 01-10-2024 with the keywords competences AND tourism. A total of 965 documents were found in Scopus. Figure 2 is a VOSviewer network visualization – co-occurrence – all keywords – full counting method. The human aspect of tourism is very visible as is the need for tourism management, education and professional competence, in an ever more globalized and increasingly connected and networked world.



## What skills will be needed in the future?

In the 1980s, with the Cold War, we entered the so-called VUCA world (volatile, uncertain, complex, ambiguous). After the COVID-19 pandemic, the VUCA world lost its meaning and became inadequate for today's reality, evolving into the BANI world (brittle, anxious, non-linear, incomprehensible). What can people do to be better prepared to deal with the unpredictability, complexity, irrationality and incomprehensibility of the world we live in?

According to the report, there are ten essential competences that we should have in order to be better prepared to deal with the BANI world: Analytical thinking and innovation; Active learning and learning strategies ; Complex problem-solving ; Critical thinking and analysis; Creativity, originality and initiative; Leadership and social influence; Technology use, monitoring and control; Technology design and programming; Resilience, stress tolerance and flexibility; Reasoning, problem-solving and ideation. Among these competences, critical thinking and problem-solving are at the top of the list.

### **Analytical thinking and innovation**

According to Sternberg (1985), analytical thinking is intelligence, and analytical intelligence is one of the foundations of success. Analytical intelligence refers to the ability to analyse, evaluate, judge, or compare and contrast any information (Sternberg, 2005). In a study of students, Schumacher and Ifenthaler (2018) concluded that analytical thinking skills help to optimise everyday problem-solving in long-term life. Yulina et al. (2019) consider that analytical thinking skills should be taught to students, as they help to elaborate a concept in detail and explain the relationship between indicators. Darmawan (2020) conducted a study with primary school students and concluded that analytical thinking skills help students explain the various decisions they make when investigating a problem, because they critically distinguish problem indicators, organise problems comprehensively and are rational in their relationship with problem indicators.

Analytical thinking skills need to be taught to students (Yulina et al., 2019), because analytical thinking skills help someone to elaborate a concept into more detailed sections and to be able to explain the relationship between indicators (Laksono et al., 2017; Hasyim, 2018) or to be able to identify the real intention and conclusion relationship between concepts, descriptions or other forms of representation to express beliefs, reasons, information (Prawita et al., 2019). Darmawan's (2020) findings prove that students' analytical thinking skills can be identified through the clarity of algorithms, chronological reasoning, valid arguments and practical steps. As a result, analytical thinking skills will help students explain the various decisions they make when investigating a problem, because they critically distinguish problem indicators, organise problems comprehensively and are rational in their relationship with problem indicators. As a result, according to Mayarni & Nopiyanti (2021), analysis is an essential indicator in the development of critical thinking skills.

Innovation can be understood as the creation of new ideas, methods, knowledge, tools, protocols and products that did not exist before, or the



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improvement and modification of existing items to improve their quality. Innovation contributes to adding value in social, economic, local community, health, environmental, political, technological and informational aspects, which are all linked to achieving success on the basis of established objectives and improving the efficiency and utilisation of labour (Hughes, 2003).

Innovation can be disruptive or radical. Disruptive innovation is usually aimed at emerging customers, as it introduces a new feature that is relevant to the emerging market rather than the mainstream market. Radical product innovation is based on a substantially new technology and can initially be aimed at either a conventional or an emerging market. Disruptive innovation, on the other hand, although aimed at emerging customers, may not involve the latest technology. The trajectory of disruptive innovation is from emerging markets to mainstream markets, as it initially satisfies the emerging market, but as the technology improves, its performance becomes sufficient to attract the mainstream market.

In a study by Govindarajan et al. (2011), the authors studied the consequences of emerging customer orientation and traditional customer orientation on disruptive innovation and radical innovation. The results obtained by these authors indicate that traditional customer orientation has a positive and significant effect on the introduction of radical innovations, but a negative and significant effect on the introduction of disruptive innovations. Emerging customer orientation has a positive and significant effect on disruptive innovation, but its effect on radical innovation is not significant. In turn, technology scouting is positively and significantly correlated with radical innovation, but not significantly correlated with disruptive innovation, which indicates that disruptive innovation may not require new technologies.

## **Digitalization**

Digitalization is a very significant topic in current times including linked to tourism and one may say that the digitalization felt in the tourism sector has completely changed how things occur and are performed and processed. Namely, consumers and tourists have become more autonomous - including due to cheap and low-cost airlines (such as Ryanair and EasyJet) but also due to low-cost companies such as Airbnb and their accommodation supply. Zhao and Li (2024, p.1) ask the following: “Does digitalization always benefit cultural, sports, and tourism enterprises quality?” Anyone who perhaps has had their low-cost flight cancelled or experienced inferior service and quality in their accommodation option may have an answer to the question already. The authors go further and discuss “the inverted U-shaped relationship from a resource and capability perspective” (Zhao & Li,

2024, p.1). Indeed, their findings reveal that: “(1) There is an inverted U-shaped association between digitalization and high-quality development, initially promoting then hindering progress, with a persistent pattern over time and robustness against instrumental variable regression and endogeneity tests. Additionally, the majority of cultural, sports, and tourism enterprises fall within a moderate range, indicating a positive impact on high-quality development. (2) Human capital and enterprise innovation are mediators of the inverted U-shaped relationship between digitalization and high-quality development. (3) The influence of digitalization on high-quality development significantly varies depending on the enterprise’s geographical location, life cycle, and risk tolerance.” (Zhao & Li, 2024, p.1).

According to Lyu (2024, p.1) their empirical study indicates, relative to Covid-19, “that digital transformation significantly reduces financing constraints during the pandemic. Heterogeneity analysis shows that the mitigating effect of digital transformation on financing constraints during the pandemic is mainly evident in large-scale enterprises and those with a higher proportion of institutional investors.” This may not come as a surprise as most activity during the pandemic occurred at a distance and online, with physical contact having been severely limited and even completely blocked by governmental measures in many locations worldwide.

Lyu (2024, p.5) is very detailed in their description, namely that the tourism industry is “a vast and diverse ecosystem, encompassing a range of micro-entities including travel agencies, hotels, airlines, online travel platforms, destination management organizations, tourism technology companies, activity providers, transportation services, and insurance companies, among others.” The degree of digitalization at each level and step in the value chain varies greatly and from firm to firm. Albeit as tools such as artificial intelligence greatly enhance productivity in what is often a low specialized competence-based industry technology offers benefits which firms cannot turn their backs on and must capitalize on to survive. Traditional tourism firms such as Thomas Cooke and others have suffered tremendously from the transition and have closed down in many cases.

It is undeniable that, in the digital era, digitalization has become a central issue in the economy (Tian & Weng, 2024).

The digitalization felt in the tourism industry is not consensual and, contrary to other studies, Cardoso et al. (2024, p.1) “highlight the role of digital technologies in modernizing and improving tourism processes, thereby creating innovative services for digitally connected consumers.

### **Active learning and learning strategies**

Active learning focuses on developing students' skills rather than simply transmitting information, requiring them to carry out activities that require higher-order thinking, i.e. critical thinking (Michael, 2006). These types of methodologies have been seen as a hope for changing education at different levels, from passive learning to active learning (Rossi et al., 2021). Active learning is based on research, projects and problems (Stefanou et al. 2013). In the case of project-based learning, learning is organised around a project, which involves challenging questions and problems that involve proposing solutions, formulating hypotheses and research activities (Stefanou et al. 2013).

Rossi et al. (2021) carried out a study whose participants were mostly postgraduate students. The strategies used were active learning, problem-based research and the design of research projects. The results indicated that involvement in active learning projects improved performance in both technical and transversal competences. When activities require the interaction of information, prediction and reasoning, student participation becomes more relevant.

### **Complex problem-solving**

Solving complex problems reduces the barrier between an initial state and a goal state to be achieved, with the help of cognitive and behavioural activities. Between the initial state and the goal state there are barriers that change dynamically over time and which can be partially intransparent, since at the beginning of the problem solution the exact characteristics of the initial state, the goal state and the barriers are unknown. It should be emphasised that there must be effective interaction between the person solving the problem and the situational conditions that depend on the task, requiring the use of cognitive, emotional and social resources, as well as knowledge (Frensch and Funke 1995).

According to Funke (2003), complex problems have five characteristics:

1. **Complexity of the problematic situation:** complexity is defined on the basis of the number of variables in the system in question. The person solving the problem must minimise the number of variables involved in order to simplify it.
2. **Connectivity between the variables involved:** in addition to the number of variables, the connectivity between them is an extremely important factor for the problem solver's workload. You can have many variables, but each of them is simply associated with another variable, and the connectivity is less than if you have fewer variables, but they are all associated with each other. To make the

mutual associations understandable, the problem solver needs a connectivity model.

3. **Dynamics of the situation:** interventions in a complex, networked system can activate processes whose impact was possibly not intended. In many cases, the problem doesn't wait for the problem solver and their decisions, but the situation changes itself over time, requiring the problem solver to take the "time" factor into account.
4. **Intransparency regarding the variables involved and the definition of the objective:** this refers to the fact that not all the necessary information is given about the variables and possible objectives, requiring the problem solver to actively acquire information.
5. **Polyvalence:** In a complex situation, achieving objectives can be complicated, with more than one objective to take into account. The presence of conflicting objectives leads to conflicts that require compromises and prioritisation.

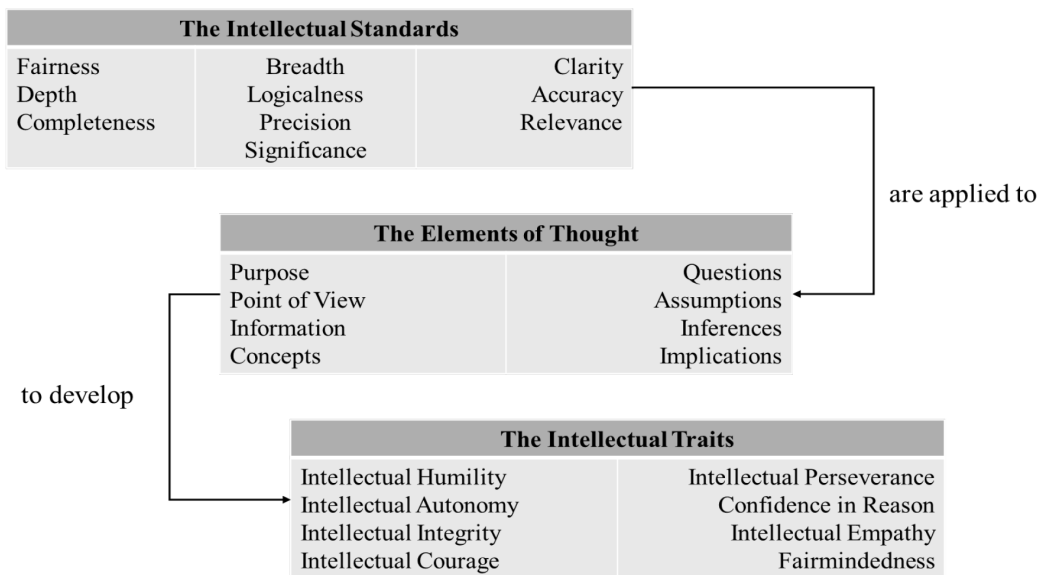
Intelligence has often been associated with complex problem solving and is one of its best indicators. Wenke et al. (2005) carried out a study investigating the empirical link between intelligence and the ability to solve complex problems, i.e. to what extent individual differences in complex problem-solving skills can be associated, both theoretically and empirically, with individual differences in overall intelligence. The results concluded that there is no empirical evidence to support the existence of an association between intelligence and the ability to solve complex problems.

### **Critical thinking and analysis**

Critical thinking involves analysis, reflection, evaluation, interpretation and inference to synthesise information obtained through reading, observation, communication or experience to answer a question (Nelson & Crow, 2014). Critical thinking can further be defined as: "A well-cultivated critical thinker - raises vital questions and problems, formulating them clearly and precisely - gathers and evaluates relevant information, using abstract ideas to interpret it effectively - reaches well-founded conclusions and solutions, testing them against relevant criteria and standards - thinks openly about alternative systems of thought, recognising and evaluating, if necessary, their assumptions, implications and practical consequences, and - communicates effectively with others to find solutions to complex problems" (Paul & Elder, 2009; p. 2). According to these authors, critical thinking has a formal structure and is a discipline-neutral scheme. Figure 3 shows critical thinking according to Paul and Elder (2009), which is described through the application of individual intellectual standards to the evaluation of typical thinking elements with the aim of developing certain essential intellectual traits in the thinker.

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Active learning exercises work as a strategy to make students more powerful thinkers and easier to argue with (Bean, 2011). Nelson and Crow (2014) conducted a study in which the participants were physical education and athletic training teachers who were taking an in-service learning course in teaching methods. The study investigated the effect of active learning strategies on critical thinking skills. The results revealed that learning strategies significantly improve critical thinking skills.



**Figure 3 - The Paul-Elder Critical Thinking Framework, Adapted from Paul and Elder (2009).**

### Creativity, originality and initiative

Creativity is still a complex construct for which there is no universal definition, which is a disadvantage (Simonton, 2012).

Acar et al. (2017) investigated the usefulness of four major creativity factors (originality, value, surprise and aesthetics) in the context of three types of results (ideas, everyday products and socially recognised products). The results indicated that originality, value and surprise explained a very significant percentage of the variability in creativity. Creative workers strive to achieve success and influence by producing original results (Borowiecki & Mauri, 2024).

In a study carried out in four- and five-star hotels in Cyprus by Karatepe et al. (2014), whose participants were receptionists, cooks, bar staff, waiters and public relations staff, as well as their supervisors, the authors concluded that job security, rewards, empowerment and training are indicators of High-Performance Work Practices and have a significant effect on performance related to service recovery and creative performance. According to Hon et al. (2013), creative performance is one of the most important aspects of



frontline service jobs and has not received the necessary attention in the hotel industry, as these employees can provide new ideas for improving service and help the organisation find potential solutions to customer complaints.

### **Leadership and social influence**

Leadership can be considered as a process of social influence in organisations that has developed over time (Ferris et al., 2017) or as an interactive process of social influence based on relationships (Contreras et al., 2020). A true leader must actively influence their followers. For this to happen, the leader must adopt a transformational leadership style. The transformational leadership style leads to greater interaction between leaders and followers, which increases organisational commitment and reduces employee turnover (Martins et al., 2023). A true leader influences their followers, creating trust within the organisational network. Leadership and social influence are dynamic processes that get other group members to voluntarily dedicate themselves to carrying out the group's tasks or objectives.

### **Technology use, monitoring and control**

Nowadays, with globalisation and technological advances, the risks to organisations have become higher, such as fraud, alterations and irregularities, making it essential to maintain effective internal controls to protect against these threats (Damdinsuren et al. 2024).

In this case, employees must have the skills to use technology, so that they can monitor their performance and control:

1. **Technology use:** nowadays, the use of a variety of software, tools and technological platforms is present in all sectors, making it necessary for employees to know how to use these tools effectively. Organisations' demands of candidates go beyond basic digital skills, requiring them to be able to use specialised technology, such as programming devices or designing systems.
2. **Monitoring:** This refers to the fact that an employee can actively monitor key performance indicators, identify system problems and continuously improve processes. An employee who can monitor their performance will progress faster in their career, especially in technology-oriented organisations.
3. **Control:** in most industries, routine tasks are automated, but technology doesn't work alone. You need employees with the skills to be able to control these systems in an interventional way to deal with extreme cases, adjust to new realities and guarantee optimum results. Often, in addition to knowledge of the technology, they must have critical thinking to guide them in making the right decisions. The acceleration of technological change means that the workforce

must remain agile, proactively assessing situations and exercising flexible control, rather than just reacting. Organisations need to have sound internal controls to maintain financial integrity, promote ethical values and transparency throughout the organisation, as control helps to identify risks and reduce them to an acceptable level (Stavropoulos et al., 2013).

### **Technology design and programming**

In modern societies, the demand for software professionals has become increasing, due to the fact that software development is a complex process, which means that the quality of its results is influenced by the skills and competences of professionals in this field (Colomo-Palacios et al., 2013). As industries become more digital, technology design and programming are moving from niche skills to fundamental literacies needed in all functions. For Manawadu et al. (2015) the skills of these software professionals should be identified as core competences, as they are the key to successful software project management.

### **Resilience, stress tolerance and flexibility**

1. **Resilience:** resilience can be interpreted as a dynamic process of adaptively overcoming stress and adversity, so that the individual maintains normal psychological and physical functioning (Rutten et al. 2013). According to Faria Anjos et al. (2019), as an individual characteristic, resilience can be influenced by external variables such as adequate social support, reducing the impact of stress-related mental disorders as it acts as a buffer to the impact of stress.
2. **Stress tolerance:** occupational stress results from the reaction to the perceived lack of resources to resolve a given situation (Jiang et al., 2022). Occupational stress, as an emotional state, is part of the stress issues that impact on the working population and has gained enormous importance, as well as being one of the biggest mental health problems (Bicho & Pereira, 2007). One of the serious consequences of occupational stress is burnout (Freitas et al., 2024). In a study carried out by Klinoff (2018), in which the participants were prison guards, the authors concluded that hope, optimism and social support resilience have a negative and significant effect on burnout levels and that resilience is the mechanism that explains this relationship.
3. **Flexibility:** Flexibility has thus become a central aspect of organisations in the management of work and workers' qualifications, and is a critical point in today's management, which seeks to find the desirable combination between production factors and the ability to generate value through its human resources

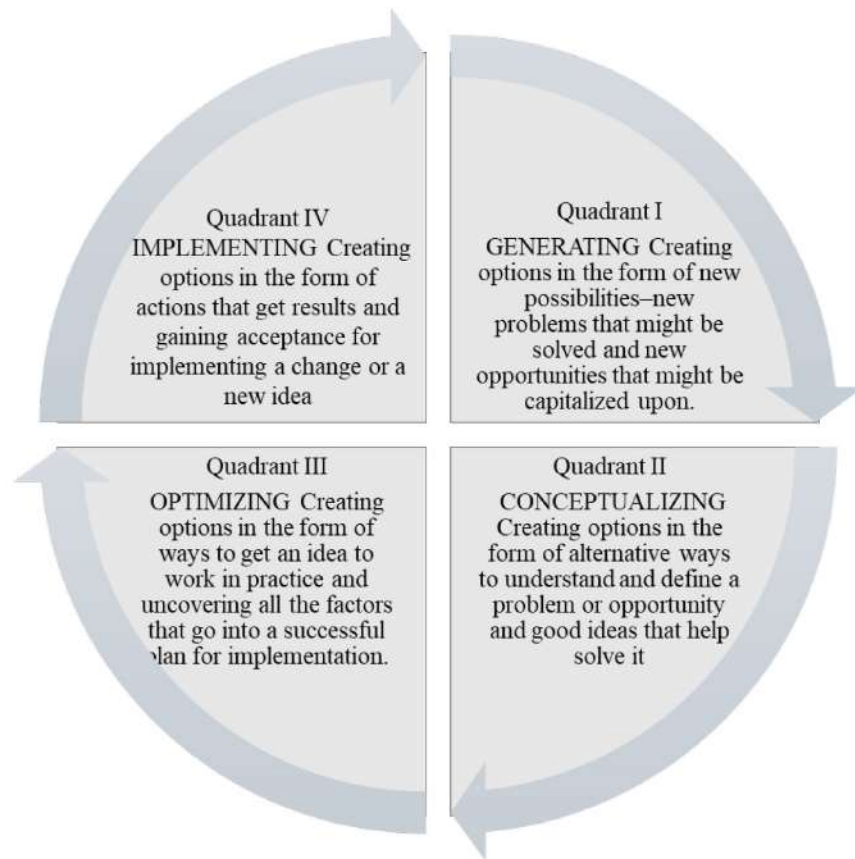
(Sequeira, 2008). Among the various types of flexibility, functional flexibility makes it possible to reduce the levels of division and fragmentation of labour, facilitating the development of multidisciplinary tasks, as well as the multi-skilling of employees (Thompson et al., 2007).

### **Reasoning, problem-solving and ideation**

1. Reasoning: reasoning is the ability of an individual to move from hypothesis to conclusion in a logical way. Reasoning is a fundamental aspect of human intelligence, whose function is to play a relevant role in activities such as problem-solving, decision-making and critical thinking, involving the use of evidence, arguments and logic to reach conclusions or make judgements (Chan, 2024).
2. Problem-solving: Problem-solving requires the ability to correctly define a problem and find a solution to it.
3. Ideation: Ideation is often thought of as creativity, the ability to come up with new ideas and ways of acting, to test ideas and thus solve problems. Ideation is understood as a set of activities related to the creation and development of ideas aimed at a goal (Reinig et al. 2007). For Cash & Štorga (2015, p.391) it is a competence "central to the innovation process".

Basadur and Gelade (2006) proposed that creative problem solving could consist of four phases: the generation, conceptualisation and resolution of important problems and the implementation of valuable new solutions (figure 4). Each of these phases involves a different type of cognitive activity. In the first phase, generation, physical contact and involvement in real-world activities alert the individual to inconsistencies and difficulties, which are used to suggest new problem areas, to identify opportunities for improvement and innovation and to propose projects to carry out. Problems and opportunities are recognised, but not yet clearly articulated or understood. In the second phase, Conceptualisation, the problem is analysed to create a comprehensive conceptualisation or model of the problem domain. This conceptual knowledge is then used as the basis for ideation, through which one or more solutions to the problem are developed. In the third phase, optimisation, the conceptualisations from the previous phase are analysed in the light of real-world constraints to identify practical difficulties. The fourth phase, implementation, completes the creative process.





**Figure 4 - The four stages of the creative problem-solving process, Adapted from Basadur and Gelade (2006)**

### Grouping skills

These ten skills are grouped into four categories:

1. Problem-solving - where the five most essential skills are found: analytical thinking and innovation, complex problem-solving, critical thinking and analysis, creativity, originality and initiative, reasoning, problem-solving, and ideation.
2. Self-management - where resilience and active learning skills are found.
3. Working with people - where leadership and social influence skills are found.
4. Technology use and development - where the skills of technology use, monitoring, and control as well as technology design and programming will play a massive role in the future of any industry.

### Skills development

Competence development means "a process of expanding, restructuring and updating a person's professional, methodical, social and personal action options" (Erpenbeck & Sauer, 2001, p. 294). In their view, the knowledge and skills taught in training programmes are prerequisites for successful

competence development, but competence development does not emerge from them.

The development of competences can be considered a strategic tool for Human Resources Management to deal with the labour market (Nyhan, 1998). These skills, according to Hill and Jones (2004), can improve the organisation's efficiency, the quality of its products or services, make it innovative and able to respond quickly and adequately to the customer, reducing costs, creating value and profitability (Hill & Jones, 2004). In a competitive and ever-changing market, organisations are beginning to invest in developing the skills of their employees, as this is the key to competitive advantage, as well as a strategy for improving both individual and organisational performance, taking into account that it creates knowledge for all levels of the organisation, making the identification of the skills to be developed one of the main stages (Hoffmann, 1999).

The development of competences can be divided into three main phases: the first phase consists of individual competencies (Carroll & McCrackin, 1997; McClelland, 1973; Spencer & Spencer, 1993); the second phase is based on the possibility of managing competencies in an organisation through competency models (McLagan, 1997; Rothwell & Lindholm, 1999); the third phase refers to the identification of core competences, a sum of the organisation's key organisational competences that can be exploited to gain competitive advantage (Delamare & Wintertone, 2005; Prahalad & Hamel, 1990; Rothwell & Lindholm, 1999).

### **Organisational Skills Development Practices**

Organisational competence development practices are the result of developing a human resources strategy aimed at designing a human resources management system.

What are organisational competence development practices? For Schneider et al. (1996) they are organisational support practices that are perceived by employees as contributing to their professional development. From the employees' perspective, their importance is due to the fact that they contribute to increasing their skills and specific knowledge, which boost their performance and have a positive effect on their perception of employability (Campion et al., 1994). Kuvaas (2008) also defines the employee's perception of organisational competence development practices as the degree to which they perceive that Human Resource Management supports their development needs.

De Vos et al. (2011, p. 440) present a slightly broader definition of organisational competence development practices: "all activities carried out

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by the organisation and the employee in order to maintain or improve their functional performance, learning and competences".

Training is one of the most important organisational practices for developing competences. According to Ceitil (2007), training is an intentional and systematic process designed to develop individuals' attitudes, behaviours and competences in the workplace. Its importance is justified by the fact that it is a strategic practice, since it is associated with the development of competences that will lead to competitive advantage. However, for Markowitsch et al. (2001), skills development, in addition to the more traditional forms of training, also includes initiatives to improve on-the-job learning and initiatives for career development, since organisational learning environments must be created where employees take the initiative, cooperate, learn and share knowledge. For some authors, including Levy-Leboyer (1997), on-the-job training is superior to any other because the experiences gained through action, taking on real responsibilities and facing concrete problems provide us with competences that formal education cannot provide. While classical training offers a certain amount of knowledge or competence, in on-the-job training the main focus is practice, aimed at the effective application of what has been learnt (Bach & Sulikova, 2019). The main problem with classical training is that it is not always obvious where and how they will apply the knowledge they have acquired, i.e. the lack of practical relevance. It should be emphasised that theory is necessary, as there must be interaction between theory and practice (Bach & Sulikova, 2019).

Nowadays, organisations use various forms of skills development in addition to the traditional ones, such as implementing coaching and mentoring programmes or through functional rotation opportunities.

In the mentoring programme, advice is given by a senior member of staff (mentor) who is assigned to help with any career issues that may arise. For Blau (1988), in addition to this help with the employee's career development, the mentor also has psychosocial functions such as role modelling, acceptance and confirmation, counselling and friendship, which can lead the employee to a better development of skills, greater confidence and effectiveness. From the perspective of Terrion and Leonard (2007), this mentor should be: a good communicator; a good support for the new employee to help them with any issue; a person they can trust; easily empathise with other employees; a positive and enthusiastic person; flexible. If the mentor has all these characteristics, or at least most of them, they will certainly be able to instil confidence in the new employee, who will have support within the organisation, answering any questions they may have, helping them solve problems, making them feel integrated and in a position to improve their performance.

## *The Future of Tourism: A Training Needs Analysis*

Business coaching, according to Hamlin et al. (2008), is a process designed to improve existing skills, competences and performance, but also, in general terms, to achieve personal growth. Although it is sometimes seen as a solution to poor performance, coaching in fact incorporates a broader perspective of development and empowerment, to the point of being recognised as an organisational development intervention. Thus, in line with other initiatives in the field of HRD, it aims to develop individuals, groups and organisations (Carter et al., 2017; Hamlin et al., 2008). The coaching programme is designed to develop employees' goal-oriented skills in order to improve not only their performance but also their quality of life within the organisation (Brock, 2006). By fulfilling these psychosocial functions, the learner can more quickly develop a sense of competence, confidence and effectiveness.

Finally, a successful skills development programme should help employees transfer the knowledge they have acquired in theory into practice (Bach & Sulikova, 2019).

### **Tourism**

For Mathieson and Wall (1982), tourism is the temporary movement of people to destinations outside their usual places of work and residence, the activities carried out during their stay at these destinations and the facilities created to satisfy their needs.

In recent times, changes in the tourism sector have been rapid due to economic, social and environmental factors (Więckowski & Saarinen, 2019). For these authors, these changes are also occurring in tourist spaces, destinations and places, especially with regard to their sense of place and identity. Müller (2018) considers that tourist destinations are products that are constantly changing and that this change includes a combination of social, economic and political schemes that undergo changes based on space and time. Tourist destinations are no longer simply geographical locations waiting to be explored, but rather a reflection of consumer perceptions and choices (Więckowski & Saarinen, 2019). In addition to the various transitions that have taken place over the last few decades in the tourism sector, the COVID-19 pandemic has changed the paradigm in consumer behaviour (Rasool et al., 2021). The tourism and hospitality sectors have suffered the most from the COVID-19 pandemic, because while other sectors have relied on digital technologies to survive, these sectors, as they depend on physical interaction and are the most labour-intensive, have been hit the hardest (Sharma et al., 2021). Compared to 2019, tourism activity decreased by 85% in 2020 and 80% in 2021 (WTTC, 2021). Millions of people lost their jobs and revenues fell dramatically, affecting many emerging economies that depended on tourism (Sharma et al., 2021). These authors

believe that a scheme that includes government support, investment in innovative technologies, local support and the involvement of consumers and employees can support the sector in future crises.

### **Tourism and economic development**

The determinants and importance of tourism growth have been extensively studied in advanced, emerging and developing markets (Martin, 2015). The tourism sector is an extremely important sector in economic development, as it is responsible for millions of jobs, contributes to the inflow of foreign currency, improves household income and the country's revenues, creates a multiplier effect in sectors such as transport, food and beverages and entertainment (Ohlan, 2015).

For both policymakers and investors, an important macroeconomic question is whether international tourism leads to economic growth (Du et al., 2016). There is no consensus in the literature, as there are different perspectives. For some authors it is tourism development that leads to economic development (Brida et al., 2020; Nunkoo et al., 2020), while for others it is economic development that leads to tourism development (Lin et al., 2019; Suryandaru, 2020). There are also authors who claim that there is reciprocity between tourism development and economic development (Pulido-Fernandez and Cardenas-Garcia, 2020), as well as those who claim that there is no relationship between the economic and tourism sectors (Paramati et al., 2016). In a study by Arslanturk et al. (2011), the authors concluded that GDP is not a significant predictor of tourism receipts, but tourism receipts have been a positive and significant predictor of GDP since the early 1980s.

Growth in the tourism industry has been rapid, with the exception of the 2008 economic crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic (Sokhanvar et al., 2018). Despite the recession due to the pandemic, tourism revenue in Portugal in 2023 exceeded the 2019 figures. This growth has brought significant benefits, both economically and socially, contributing to an improvement in the population's income (Adu-Ampong, 2018), helping to reduce poverty (Gnangnon, 2020), promoting the development of other industries related directly or indirectly to tourism (Wang et al, 2022), stimulating investment in infrastructure, human capital and technology (Shahzad et al., 2017).

For a destination to reach a certain level of economic and tourism development, it must have certain conditions, such as adequate infrastructure and security (Pulido-Fernandez and Cardenas-Garcia, 2020). It should be noted that countries with greater economic development and investment capacity (Antonakakis et al., 2019; Sokhanvar et al, 2018; Wu and Wu 2018) are more competitive and can offer a tourism product with all the conditions required by tourists. However, countries with a lower level of economic



development, by making appropriate and efficient use of their territory's resources, can also achieve optimum levels of competitiveness that lead to the development of tourism (Pulido-Fernandez & Rodríguez-Díaz, 2016).

The Enabling Environment includes various competitiveness factors such as the business environment, safety and security, human resources and the labour market and ICT readiness, which are considered to be determining factors in tourism competitiveness (Kumar & Kumar, 2020; Uyar et al., 2022). From the perspective of Durán-Román et al. (2023), natural and cultural resources are also considered to be important factors of attractiveness for a given destination, conditioning its position in international tourism markets. Travel and tourism search engines that include the pillars related to natural and cultural factors are fundamental to the development of tourism (Durán-Román et al., 2023). However, for these authors, in this process of tourism development, there are increasing problems related to the inefficient use of resources and low-quality tourism development.

### **Higher education in tourism**

For the tourism sector to function optimally, the workforce must be flexible and prepared for all the rapid changes that have taken place in recent times. This sector is labour-intensive and requires a great deal of social interaction when providing services (Azza & Norchene, 2017). In this sense, the skills of employees are essential for improving the quality of service, which gives them a competitive advantage, increasing the performance and productivity of all those involved in the sector (Cooper & Shepherd, 1999). In this sense, investing in the education and training of tourism students is important if they are to achieve excellent performance, which will increase productivity.

Due to the constant changes in this sector, often driven by crises, market dynamics and the emergence of new technologies, professionals and academics have to be proactive and concern themselves with creating new scenarios that can ensure that course curricula keep pace with these changes (Zenker & Kock, 2020). However, tourism education has been heavily influenced by sector management and market capitalism with very market-orientated education methods, suppressing critical thinking and creativity (Mínguez et al., 2021). According to Slocum et al. (2019), curricula only include professional competences that can satisfy the employer's preferences and expectations, forgetting important factors such as cultural influence and the dynamic change of the market, which causes a mismatch between future market prospects and current curricula. In the current context, it is important to create sustainable education in the tourism sector, using simulation practices that include sustainable tourism principles, so that students are prepared to deal with the dynamic changes in their market (McGrath, et al.,

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2020). From Bayona's perspective (2021), there should be a lifelong education methodology to help students think more about the challenges of the future than the current needs of the market and businesses, creating a learning environment driven by critical thinking, which could allow the emergence of young leaders who focus on the future of tourism. For Cotterell et al. (2019), this is the only way for the tourism industry to become literate in sustainability-related issues and be able to meet the UN's Sustainable Development Goals, ensuring the growth and prosperity of this industry, as the planet can no longer accommodate "moderate" sustainability.

In a study carried out by Abdallah and Ninov (2023), the participants considered that tourism teaching programmes should be given greater attention, with students and stakeholders in the sector encouraged to take part in designing the programmes, as well as collaboration between the public and private sectors. For professionals in the academic sector, the constant change in curricula must be carefully managed so that disruption to the educational scheme is not excessive.

Cesário et al. (2022), carried out a study, whose participants were higher education students from the tourism course, based on the intersection between Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 "Quality Education" and SDG 8 "Decent Work and Economic Growth", with the main objective of identifying the relationship between the factors that motivate students to pursue a career in the hospitality and tourism industry and the commitment to the University and the programme, ensuring a more sustainable career. The results indicated that students seemed to be optimistic about the tourism industry, with this optimism being justified by the growing boom in tourism and the constant demand for employees. These authors believe that career opportunities in the tourism sector need to be promoted and aligned with students' expectations, and that universities and the sector should work together to define what a career in tourism is and what skills students need to have and develop, and to what level they can expect to reach in terms of promotions.

### **Skills in the tourism sector**

One of the most important sources of income for many countries is the tourism industry, contributing to the inflow of foreign currency, the balance of payments and creating a multiplier effect for other sectors, as it has a major impact on other sectors of the economy (Fouzel, 2016). It is a very labour-intensive, communication-intensive and intercultural industry (Summak 2014). Because it is so labour-intensive, it is also one of the main job-creating industries, and is often seen as one of the industries that contributes most to reducing employment (El Azyzy, & El Hourmi, 2022). This is due to three factors: it is a diversified regional industry that generates employment

opportunities in various fields; it facilitates employment opportunities for groups vulnerable to unemployment; and it is a labour-intensive sector that uses a wide range of skills.

As changes in the tourism sector are constant and very rapid, professionals in this sector must be prepared to act, think and plan differently in order to be able to adapt to changes and their impacts. In this respect, universities must provide students with adequate training to enable them to be prepared for these sudden changes, often caused by crises (Zenker & Kock, 2020). Tourism training should include different pedagogical approaches that lead to the development of competences, skills and values, so that students become professionals who are able to adapt to a professional world as dynamic, fragile and vulnerable as this sector (Gossling et al., 2020).

Working in the tourism sector requires a balance between two types of skills: technical skills and transversal skills.

### **Technical skills**

Hard skills are technical or cognitive competences that can be taught (Sisson & Adams 2013). Among the hard-skills is digital technology, which has become a priority, requiring employees to have diverse digital skills:

### **Digital Skills**

Digital technologies allow us to expand the possibilities of generating knowledge, sharing it and disseminating it in spaces that promote digital empowerment. One of the European Commission's strategic objectives in the field of education and training is to encourage the acquisition of digital competences for all citizens (García et al., 2020).

Digital competences are technical competences, such as the ability to use digital technologies meaningfully for work, study and everyday life, the ability to critically evaluate digital technologies and the motivation to engage in a digital culture (Ilomäki et al., 2016).

Due to the disastrous impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the tourism sector, the hospitality sector in particular has turned to analysing large volumes of data in order to reduce uncertainty and offer a better product to customers, as this can be a valuable tool for senior management in this sector, improving their understanding of the business and making better decisions (Khalil et al., 2023). By analysing large volumes of data, organisations promote innovation and efficiency in business operations, ensuring long-term economic sustainability (Lee et al., 2020).

Big data analytics can be defined as the application of analytical tools, data mining, statistics, artificial intelligence and machine learning to generate meaningful patterns from the analysed data (Abbott, 2014).



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Data analysis is a multidisciplinary field that uses computer science, data science, statistics and mathematical models to methodically collect and evaluate data (Jeble et al., 2018).

The analysis of large volumes of data requires the inclusion of various resources, such as tangible resources (data, technology, basic resources), intangible resources (data-driven culture and organisational learning) and human skills (technical skills and management skills) (Ciampi et al., 2021; Ferrari et al., 2019).

Analysing large volumes of data requires digital skills, among other things.

### **Soft skills**

When we talk about soft skills, we are referring to personal characteristics that become necessary in order to apply technical knowledge, such as personal interpersonal or behavioural skills (Weber et al. 2013). Soft skills can be defined as a combination of personal qualities, abilities, attitudes and habits that enable us to face the challenges of the profession and everyday life (Hurrell, 2016). Nowadays, soft skills are highly valued and appreciated qualities, as tourism is a people-based industry that encompasses many service providers (Youssef, 2017).

The soft skills needed in the tourism sector include:

### *Communication*

Communication is one of the skills needed in the world of work, and in the tourism sector it is of great importance, as it is more than just communicating a message (Wesley et al., 2017). Employees in this sector, especially those who are in contact with customers, must be carefully recruited and receive ongoing training, because for interaction with customers to be positive, one of the important indicators is their communication skills. Communication skills improve personal and business relationships, employee motivation, the organisation's image, employee satisfaction and customer satisfaction (Cuic Tankovic et al., 2022). Communication skills are associated with better performance and employees with better communication skills are often chosen as leaders (Succi & Canovi 2019).

Often, when they finish their tourism training, new professionals have few communication skills, which makes it extremely important to develop this type of skill in students (Lim et al. 2016).

### *Autonomy*

According to the theory of Job Design developed by Hackman and Oldham (1980), autonomy is the level of independence in planning the work and how

it is carried out, i.e. the degree to which the job provides substantial freedom, independence and discretion in planning the work and determining the procedures to be used in carrying it out. This control over the work situation can be a determining factor in its quality (Brey, 1999).

In the tourism sector, employee autonomy is due to both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (Gagne and Deci, 2005). Intrinsic motivation is represented by the pride that the employee has in working for that organisation, since pride represents a pure internal behaviour, which allows us to understand how employees choose to act in a certain way when the level of autonomy is different (Jitpaiboon et al., 2019). As for extrinsic motivation, this is related to top management's support for employee autonomy (Jitpaiboon et al., 2019).

In order for an employee to have autonomy, they have to be able to have autonomy, i.e. they have to have this competence. Improving student autonomy is one of the critical objectives in the learning process (Tsai 2021). For Benson (2011), a student's autonomy refers to their ability to take control of their learning.

### *Flexibility*

One of the most important characteristics of the changes in work organisation in recent decades is the use of flexible forms of work. Flexibility can be defined as the ability of companies to adapt to new circumstances, to new competitive realities, to innovate and implement technology, ready to respond quickly to market demands (Atkinson 1988). In order to respond more adequately to current challenges, organisations are looking for other solutions, resorting to flexibility (Sequeira 2008). This growing trend towards flexibility is inevitable due to the impact of globalisation on the labour market and its involvement in collective aggregation in the search for answers to competitiveness in the workplace (Rebelo, 2005). Functional flexibility can be considered one of the strategies that makes it possible to reduce the levels of division and fragmentation of labour, enabling both the development of multidisciplinary tasks and multi-skilling (Gerling & Aptel, 2014). Employees with high levels of flexibility can perform different tasks, act, think, act, plan strategically and innovate to solve new problems, possessing differentiating characteristics that allow them to perform multiple tasks or functions (Sequeira 2008).

In the tourism industry, in order to cope with the uncertainty of demand in the sector, which makes it difficult for managers to adjust staffing and can lead to higher costs and lower quality of work, labour flexibility can become a key strategic tool (Kesavan et al., 2014). In labour-intensive sectors, labour flexibility becomes essential (Tan and Netessine, 2014).

## **Creativity and Innovation**

Innovation is a complex phenomenon because it is a set of skills, a different way of organising, synthesising and expressing knowledge, perceiving the world and creating new ideas, perspectives, reactions and products, which requires the existence of creative processes (Altshuller, 1986). As such, creativity can be considered a source of innovation, the development of which is fostered by an organisational culture of innovation that accepts the right to make mistakes and is ready to take risks related to the creation of new ideas, perspectives, reactions or products (Kopera et al., 2013).

Creativity is not the phenomenon of individuals working alone, but a social system in which actors interact and affect each other (Uzzi & Spiro, 2005). It is the relationship between actors that facilitates the flow of information and knowledge, stimulating creativity (Bauer et al., 2002). Employees in the tourism sector can exchange information between themselves (within the company) or they can seek out information and knowledge accumulated in the external environment, making it necessary to link knowledge from different institutions (Kowalski, 2010).

In order to develop their creativity skills, employees, especially those who are more competent and have greater capacity for development, should be motivated to improve their qualifications through continuous training. An entrepreneurial mindset must be creative and innovative, assuming a special value in tourism companies due to the need to survive in a global market full of competitive players, dynamism and volatility of preferences in consumer attitudes (Magadán & Rivas, 2018). Employers and the education system should feel the need to develop certain conditions in which human creativity can be moulded, understood as a system that allows us to adapt to a constantly changing environment and risk applying new solutions to specific problems (Kopera et al., 2013).

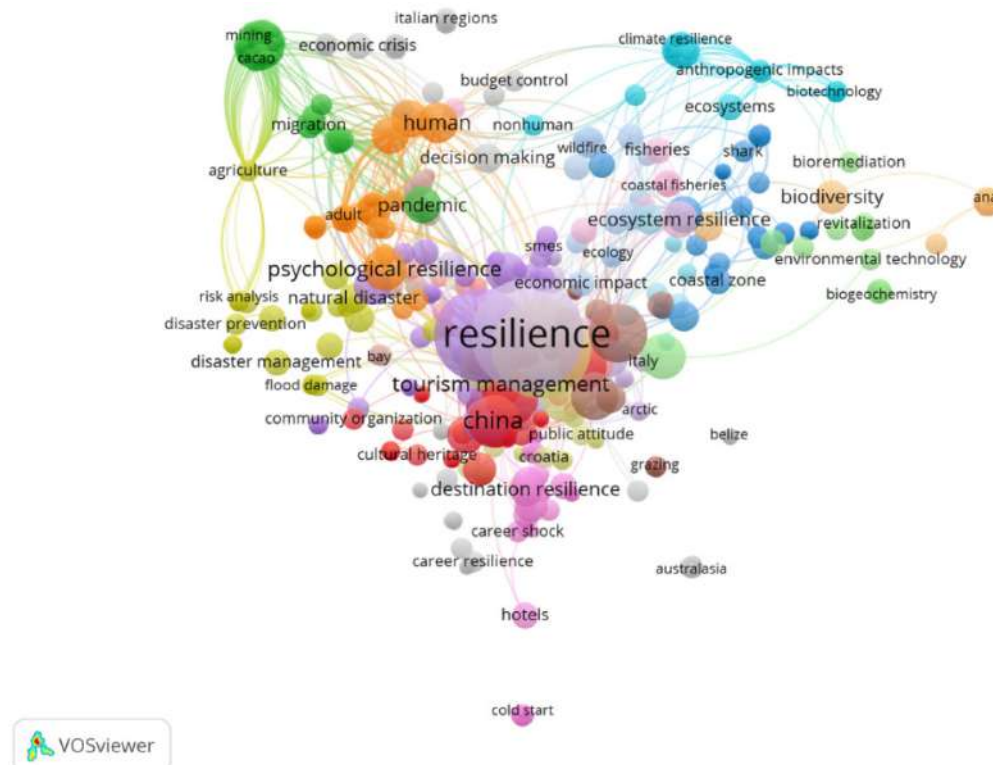
## **Resilience**

Figure 5 shows a VOSviewer depiction of a Scopus search done on 01-10-2024 with the keywords tourism AND resilience AND individual. A total of 183 documents were found in Scopus. Figure 5 is a VOSviewer network visualization – co-occurrence – all keywords – full counting method. There are many facets to resilience including destination resilience, psychological resilience, climate resilience, ecosystem resilience and career resilience (figure 5).

Resilience can indeed be described in two ways: as a dynamic process or as an individual characteristic. As a dynamic process, we refer to the adaptive overcoming of stress and adversity in order to maintain normal psychological and physical functioning (Faria Anjos et al., 2019). As an individual characteristic, it is considered that resilience can be influenced by external

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variables, such as adequate social support, which reduce the risk of stress-related mental disorders by cushioning the impact of stress (Faria Anjos et al., 2019).



**Figure 5 – a VOSviewer depiction of a Scopus search done on 01-10-2024 with the keywords tourism AND resilience AND individual**

For several authors, resilience is a multidimensional characteristic that varies according to context, time, age, gender and cultural origin, as well as within an individual subjected to different life circumstances (Garmezy and Rutter, 1985; Rutter et al., 1985; Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; Werner and Smith, 1992). Thus, resilience can also be seen as a measure of the successful ability to cope with disruptions caused by stress, both internal and external (Klinoff et al. 2018).

The concept of resilience, which originated in the physical sciences, has been transposed to the social sciences [11,12], and has aroused growing interest among researchers in the tourism sector [8,13-18], especially after the COVID-19 pandemic, due to the impact it has had on this sector.

Osório et al. (2023) define resilience as the ability to counteract a risk or return to a state of stability after having experienced it, or as a process of interaction between the elements of prevention and the different risks. A structure capable of distinguishing itself by its ability to absorb, recover and adapt to different known and unknown risks gives rise to a resilient system (Wieczorek-Kosmala, 2022). In the tourism sector, we can define resilience

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as the sector's ability to deal diligently with disasters and crises in order to maintain stability while ensuring the flexibility and diversity necessary for innovation and future development (Kaushal & Srivastava, 2021).

Most studies on resilience in the tourism sector are related to the concept of sustainability. However, we can also have resilience related to livelihoods and community resilience.

As for resilience related to sustainability, Sharma et al. (2021) consider that resilience to various risks, disasters and pandemics has a direct and indirect effect on the development of sustainable tourism. Resilience can be considered as a mode of adaptation, giving rise to innovative planning techniques that lead to more sustainable lifestyles for its inhabitants, such as the creation of alternative products, the enrichment of local knowledge and the improvement of the destination's image, whenever tourist destinations are faced with undesirable risks (Jiménez-Medina et al., 2021).

Livelihood resilience refers to the ability of individuals to adapt and take advantage of disruptions in order to improve their situation and preserve their way of life, requiring requirements such as the capacity for human action, empowerment, independence and access to resources (Holland et al., 2022). After all the changes in recent years, such as the COVID-19 pandemic or wars, the resilience of livelihoods is of concern not only to tourism professionals but also to researchers (Chen et al., 2020).

Finally, let's talk about community resilience. Once again, it should be noted that the COVID-19 pandemic has been very destructive for international tourism, affecting destinations, organisations and local communities (Adams et al., 2021). Community resilience can be defined as the mobilisation of community resources to thrive in an environment marked by uncertainty, change, risk and surprise (Noorashid & Chin, 2021). Community tourism has also been greatly affected, leading local communities to reflect on strategies to strengthen their resilience (Lamhour et al., 2023). Community tourism is based on community involvement and participation, community control and empowerment, conservation and its contribution to community well-being and development (Gabriel-Campos et al., 2021).

### **Environmental management**

Nowadays, it is becoming increasingly urgent to promote an improvement in the interaction between man and the environment, be it land, sea, water or air (Davy et al. 2017). The UN Secretary-General himself has drawn attention to the need for proper environmental management. Many individuals, environmental groups, local communities and governments have taken action to make environmental management a reality.



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For Bennett et al. (2018), local environmental management can be understood as actions taken by individuals, groups or networks of actors, with different motivations and levels of capacity, to protect, care for and use the environment responsibly, with the aim of achieving environmental and/or social results in diverse socio-ecological contexts. These environmental management actions can arise informally, they can result from formal decision-making processes, they can result from top-down processes or mandatory government requirements, and they can occur on different scales, with greater or lesser complexity. Environmental management actions depend on three elements: actors, motivation and capacity. These three elements vary depending on the socio-ecological context, which can be defined as a broad set of social, cultural, economic, political and biophysical factors.

It is environmental managers who carry out these environmental management actions and they can be individuals, groups or networks of actors (Bodin 2017). These management actions can involve many actors, such as civil society organisations, funding bodies, NGOs and local communities, which must have the capacity to manage resources (Romolini et al. 2016). This capacity to manage resources is influenced positively or negatively by the resources of the local community and wider governance factors.

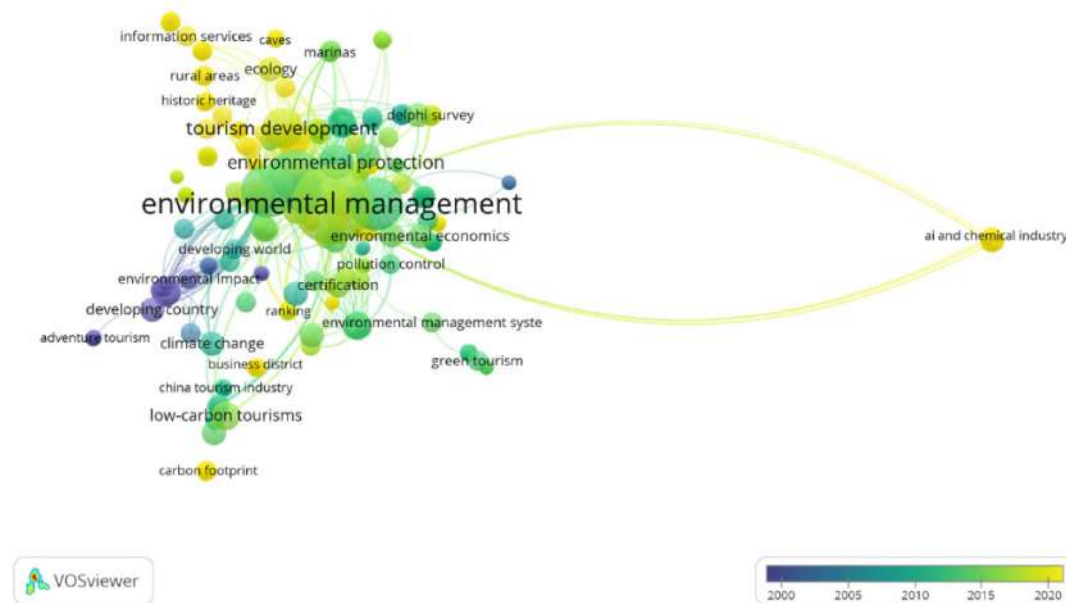
In addition to the necessary capacity, actors must feel motivated to take action to protect the environment. This motivation can be intrinsic or extrinsic. In the context of environmental management, Bennett et al. (2018) suggest two categories of intrinsic motivation: ethics, morals, values and underlying beliefs; self-determination and self-realisation. Extrinsic motivation can be social or economic in nature and can be seen as: the perceived balance between the direct costs and benefits of managing natural resources; external rewards or sanctions which can be economic, social, physical or legal.

Bennett et al. (2018) conclude that environmental management is one of the ways in which individuals get involved in promoting sustainable practices. These authors recommend using a common language for the elements of environmental management in order to promote greater involvement by everyone, including researchers.

Figure 6 shows a VOSviewer depiction of a Scopus search done on 01-10-2024 with the keywords tourism AND “environmental management” AND promotion. A total of 53 documents were found in Scopus. Figure 6 is a VOSviewer overlay visualization – co-occurrence – all keywords – full counting method. The yellow connections and circles represent more recent

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research and include tourism development, information services, ecological environments and artificial intelligence (figure 6).



**Figure 6 – a VOSviewer depiction of a Scopus search done on 01-10-2024 with the keywords tourism AND “environmental management” AND promotion**

### Green Human Resource Management Practices

Due to all the environmental issues, it is becoming urgent for organisations to adopt sustainable strategies, with climate change becoming a growing concern for governments, organisations and society in general (Paillé et al., 2014).

The United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development presents 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Among these 17 SDGs, the 13th SDG focuses on climate change, proposing the adoption of urgent measures to combat its impacts.

In recent years the subject of ecological human resource management has attracted the attention and interest of academics in the field of human resource management. Organisations are increasingly aiming for sustainable development. According to the sustainability model, organisations should focus on three pillars: people, profit and the environment (Ramicilovic-Suominen & Pulzl, 2018). According to these authors, the three pillars lead to the existence of a culture of concern and responsibility for sustainable results, as well as for the environmental effects caused by their organisation, relying especially on the role of human resource management to make change possible.

Green human resource management relates to all the activities involved in the development, implementation and ongoing maintenance of a system that aims to focus on a broader ecological agenda and make an organisation's



employees more environmentally oriented, making it a branch of Human Resource Management that is concerned with transforming and changing the mindset and behaviours of its employees in order to achieve the organisation's environmental goals which, in turn, will contribute significantly to environmental sustainability (Arulrajah et al., 2015; Jain & D'Lima, 2018). We can define green human resource management practices as the alignment of human resource management practices (training, performance management, recruitment and the selection and involvement of employees) with environmental management practices in an organisation (Renwick et al., 2016). Green human resource management can bring numerous benefits, such as empowering green employees (Yusliza et al., 2017), sustainable procurement (Aragão and Jabbour, 2017) and facilitating green supply chain management (Teixeira et al., 2016).

This interest in green human resource management (GHRM) practices has led to a lot of scientific research in recent years. Table 2 shows some of the studies carried out.

**Table 2 - Studies carried out on green human resource management (GHRM) practices**

Authors	Conclusions
Saeed et al. (2018)	HRM practices positively affect employees' pro-environmental behaviour and employees' environmental knowledge moderates the effect of HRM practices on pro-environmental behaviour.
Ghouri et al. (2020)	GHRM has a significant association with environmental performance and business performance
(Shoaib et al., 2021)	The GHRM develops employees' green skills and knowledge, which in turn will increase their organisational commitment
(Muisyo et al., 2022)	GHRM practices considerably improve the achievement of green competitive advantages through differentiation, cost reduction and the building of an environmental reputation.
(Hameed et al., 2020)	HRM strategies can have a positive impact on the voluntary and collective pro-environmental behaviour of employees, thus orienting organisations and their business practices towards environmental sustainability

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Authors	Conclusions
Hameed et al. (2022)	Perceived green organisational support (GPOS) plays a mediating role between HRM and employees' green creativity. In addition, green transformational leadership moderates the relationship between HRM practices and GPOS.
Ali et al. (2022)	GHRM is substantially affected by green relational capital, green human capital and green structural capital, which shows that the implementation of such practices has proved beneficial for workers and the organisation, as well as for the environment.
Ismail et al. (2022)	The GHRM has a positive impact on organisational pride and citizenship behaviour through visionary leadership.
Wen et al. (2022)	The results show that HRM practices have a positive impact on environmental sustainability through the social responsibility of organisations, suggesting the emergence of a green economy thanks to HRM.
Muisyo et al. (2022)	GHRM functions, such as the creation of green talent, green motivation and green opportunities, contribute to the development of a green culture.
Bhatti et al. (2022)	Individual factors, such as innovative environmental behaviour, and organisational factors, such as perceived organisational support, establish the link between GHRM and environmental performance.
Cesário et al. (2022)	The perception of GHRV practices has a positive and significant effect on PO-Fit and this relationship is moderated by high Personal Environmental Commitment.
Li et al. (2023)	Green HRM practices have a positive effect on employees' green behaviour. Psychological green climate mediates the relationship between green HRM practices and employees' green behaviour.

Authors	Conclusions
Coelho et al. (2024)	Organisations in Portugal implement environmental practices that fall within the scope of GHRM. However, the perceived benefits are conditioned by the specific characteristics of the Portuguese business context, which results in obstacles to the implementation and success of HRM practices.

Green human resource management practices, in addition to promoting change and the development of sustainability strategies in the organisation, also have an impact on the development and incorporation of individual and collective competences that promote environmentally-oriented behaviour, commitment and motivation (Guerci & Carollo, 2016).

In a study carried out by Coelho et al. (2022) to find out whether organisations that publish job advertisements alluding to sustainable culture and ecological concerns are perceived as more attractive and generate greater application intentions. The results indicated that application intentions were significantly higher when job advertisements contained pro-environmental messages and that individuals with greater individual environmental responsibility and pro-environmental behavioural intentions have a greater intention to apply when faced with green job advertisements.

Green human resource management practices can help to attract, select and retain workers who are highly committed to environmental protection, providing workers with the appropriate training and development to implement sustainable practices, helping to create an organisational culture that values environmental responsibility (Martins et al., 2021). The results of this study indicate that green recruitment has a positive and significant effect on environmental performance, economic performance and social performance. The authors also concluded that ecological performance management mediates the relationship between green recruitment and the sustainable performance of organisations.

### **Green Human Resources Management Practices in the tourism sector**

As in other sectors, there is also a need to invest in the training and development of human resources in order to achieve good performance, as this performance is the central objective of environmental management. Green human resource management practices in the tourism sector can help with more sustainable purchasing decisions (Aragão & Jabbour, 2017), support for eco-innovation (Neto et al., 2014) and active environmental strategies (Vidal-Salazar et al., 2012).

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Tourism initiatives that exploit the experiences offered by the environment are currently facing serious problems related to the deterioration of the ecosystem and its capacity to support tourism, and it is necessary to raise awareness of the environment in order to maintain the sustainability of tourism potential (Utami et al., 2016). In this sense, tourism development must be environmentally sustainable, based on initiatives capable of empowering individuals on a social, economic and cultural level, through integrated management that uses an ecosystem approach to planning, implementation, supervision and evaluation (Utami et al., 2016).

Cabral et al. (2020) carried out a study whose participants were professionals from the tourism sector in India. These authors decided to carry out the study because this country is experiencing numerous problems in the tourism sector caused by the increase in environmental pollution (Chowdhury and Maiti, 2016), the negative effects related to social factors (Mahapatra et al., 2012) and the lack of environmental education (Lyngdoh et al., 2017). The decision to carry out this research in a specialised area was aimed at broadening existing theoretical knowledge and providing new guidelines related to green human resource management practices for managers in the sector. The results of the study indicated that there is a positive and significant relationship between green training and environmental performance and that this relationship is mediated by green competences and proactive environmental management maturity. The relationship between green training and environmental performance is further moderated by environmental commitment. Cabral et al. (2020) suggest that managers consider green training as an investment rather than a cost and that they invest in training in this area so that employees assimilate ecological knowledge, ecological awareness and ecological competences so that they are competent in environmental management. Another recommendation refers to creating an organisational culture that motivates employees to get involved in environmental protection, reinforcing the maturity of proactive environmental management and environmental conservation activities.

In another study carried out in Indonesia, Hadi et al. (2023), the authors highlight the need to develop and apply green human resource management practices to the needs and challenges of this very specific context, as the results obtained suggested that training and development programmes may be more effective than skills in motivating employees to adopt green practices.

Table 3 shows the results of some studies carried out on green human resource management practices in the tourism sector.

**Table 3 – Results of some studies carried out on green human resource management (GHRM) practices in the tourism sector**

Author	Country	Results
Hameed et al. (2020)	Pakistan	Green human resource management has a significant indirect effect on green organisational citizenship behaviours through the empowerment of green employees. Individual green values moderated the positive relationship between green employee empowerment and green organisational citizenship behaviours.
Pham et al. (2020)	Taiwan	A group of hotel chains has a significantly higher average energy efficiency and brand value than a group of independent operators when considering the holistic reduction of carbon emissions.
Ribeiro et al. (2022)	Portugal	The implementation of green HRM practices in tourism organisations has a positive impact on employees' ecological behaviour and organisational identification, the latter mediating the relationship between green human resource management and employees' ecological behaviour.
Tandon et al. (2023)	United Kingdom	Green human resource management practices are positively and significantly associated with all employee outcomes. Narcissism proved to have a significant moderating effect on the relationship between green human resource management practices and green and non-green behaviours (task performance).
Gupta and Arora (2024)	India	Green human resource management practices reinforce employees' organisational citizenship behaviours, leading to sustainability and inclusion.

Although the adjustment of green human resource management practices in the tourism sector is not yet sufficient, the business world is beginning to

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change its exploitative mentality, making it more sustainable (Labella-Fernández & Martínez-del-Río, 2020).





# Chapter 3

## Methodological Concerns for the Field Work

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### **Introduction**

This chapter addresses the possible approaches which could have been taken to answer the research question addressed in this research. It outlines the method actually taken and explains why this was used and the advantages of this approach.

### **The research questions and objectives**

The TourX project and the research done herein seek to answer the following research questions:

1. What does the tourism industry need to do to sustain itself over time and in face of negative events (such as pandemics) which may occur?
2. What does the tourism industry need to consider in order to prepare itself for an uncertain future and given the evolution of technology (not the least of which being artificial intelligence (AI))?
3. What skills will be needed in the tourism industry in the future given the change in consumer preferences (consumers have become more sustainability-oriented after COVID-19)?

The objectives, once we have answered the research questions above, are to develop an adequate future-oriented tourism course to be administered to tourism students and professionals who are interested in being better prepared as regards the tourism industry in the post-COVID-19 era.

### **Ways the research questions could be answered**

There are two basic approaches to addressing research such as posed in this research project. These are a quantitative and a qualitative approach and both of these are discussed here.

Qualitative research is “research which primarily uses words and images as the primary data source” (Remenyi, 2017, p.177). Quantitative research, on the other hand, is “an approach to research which is primarily based on the acquisition of numeric data and the analysis thereof with mathematical or statistical tools” (Remenyi, 2017, p.177). Qualitative research generally involves smaller samples and quantitative research normally relies on larger samples as larger samples are less likely to stray (Tversky & Kahneman,

1974). Indeed, small samples should not be trusted in quantitative research as they may not be as replicable as one may think and inadequately sized samples may lead to the wrong conclusions (Tversky & Kahneman, 1974).

The research methodology used herein was that of qualitative research, based on the selection of adequate (knowledgeable) informants and research participants who would help answer the research questions. Purposive samples were hence used for the interviews and focus groups held in different countries including Spain, Italy, Germany, Greece, Belgium and China. Purposive sampling is frequently used non-probability sampling (when one lacks a complete list of the population) and involves the purposive selection of participants (Saunders & Lewis, 2018).

Our research may also be deemed to be exploratory research in so far as it seeks new perspectives and insights by asking probing questions and hence assessing themes from a new angle (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). A quantitative research approach may well follow, after this study is finished and this book is written and published. The reason a quantitative study has not been done to date is that it will involve a great many people in different countries gathering data from what is already a saturated population, quite weary of such data collection efforts from various quarters and national and international tourism projects.

### **The chosen way and why**

Therefore, we chose to follow the qualitative researching path, which is mainly interpretivist in its approach, attempting to solve an “intellectual puzzle” (Mason, 2002, p.8). How the social world is interpreted, understood and experienced (Mason, 2002) was the main concern. Note that we were systematic and formal (rather than casual) in our approach used in this study (Mason, 2002).

According to Mason (2002) qualitative research is a way to explore the social environment surrounding us, which is rich in meaning and in depth, though often being complex and requiring true expertise to interpret events correctly. The experience in the author’s team was seen to be essential to the success of the study. As the research questions involve future and uncertain situations and scenarios, the qualitative research informants chosen were seen to be of utmost importance, namely informants with a good deal of expertise and decision-making power to make things happen as we have, together, envisioned.

Qualitative research is extremely time-consuming and the research we undertook was no exception to the rule. Individual interviews can take around one hour and then a further eight hours to transcribe that single hour of interaction. Add to this the need to travel and one may see how expensive

### ***Methodological Concerns for the Field Work***

the whole process may become. Thankfully, tools such as Zoom, and Microsoft Teams have improved on this and are an additional option to consider, to save transport costs and time.

Quantitative surveys may be misleading if respondents are too tired to respond correctly and with the due attention required; and if care is not taken to do a pilot study and calculate Cronbach's Alpha (for the Likert scale questions) in a way that is, in the end, satisfactory to all.

### **How the data was captured**

Different research teams worked in different countries to collect the primary data analysed herein (chapter 4). Hence data was collected in Germany, Spain, Italy, Greece, Portugal, Belgium and China.

The qualitative field work involved interviews (semi-structured and using an interview schedule) and focus groups. These interactions were mostly audio recorded and transcribed in full. All of the qualitative material gathered was based on asking the same questions in different countries, by different project partners. The work contained herein is thus quite unique as well as extensive. The TourX project required a Training Needs Analysis (TNA) and so we performed a literature review and the aforementioned field work to produce the TNA. The TourX project involves 23 international partners, and their joint data-collecting effort was the input for part of this book. The authors would like to thank all of our international partners for their time and effort in providing some of the raw material which was subsequently worked upon to produce a TNA as seen in this document.

The results will first be presented by country, followed by a discussion, in chapter 5. In total 11 focus groups were conducted, with a total of 107 participants from China, Germany, Italy, Portugal, Spain; and from Belgium. The professions of the participants vary, from tourism specialists (such as managers of vocational education and training schools, company CEOs, representatives of public organizations, among others), students, tourism trainers (teachers), tourism professionals (cooks, receptionists, among others). The country analyses are detailed in the sections for each country and a comprehensive thematic analysis is provided per country.

A total of 58 interviews were performed – in China, Germany, Greece, Spain, Italy, Portugal and also in Belgium.

Each research team (in each country) was given instructions on how to proceed with the data gathering. For example,

### **Focus groups**

- The role of the [experienced and skilled] moderator is essential to the discussion that is developed in each focus group.
- The focus groups are to gather opinions and perceptions from a small, diverse group of individuals about a specific topic.
- Typically, the moderator leads the group discussion, asking open-ended questions to encourage participants to share their thoughts, feelings, and experiences.
- Focus groups are one of the most tried-and-true methods for gathering qualitative data. A good focus group can elicit nuanced, complex responses from participants.
- Focus groups are often used to test new products or ideas, gather feedback on existing products or services, or to explore consumer behaviour and attitudes (Krueger & Casey, 2014).
- It is recommended to compose each of the focus groups with a number between 6 and 15 members.
- These members should be representatives of the target groups of the project, in addition to key players that may have important contributions regarding the topics.

Other considerations discussed in the protocol document circulated among partners:

- It is first recommended to define if the focus group will be conducted online or in a face-to-face model, as this may condition the type of strategies, moderation, and tools used during the process.
- In this case, the topic is to characterise the current conditions and future needs in terms of digital, green, and social needs for tourism workers and businesses.
- Make sure participants fill out consent forms.

Topics and questions to be considered:

### *Skills*

- What are the most important skills to have today as a tourism worker?
- Which green / digital / social skills are important for you / in your company today? And in 2030?
- How are you preparing yourself / your company for this?
- Do you know any good practices about processes of teaching/learning green, digital, and social skills that can be used as benchmarking cases for this project?

### *Methodological Concerns for the Field Work*

- What role for artificial intelligence (AI) do you foresee in tourism in the near future [e.g., next five years]?
- How will tourism human resources be affected by AI?
- Do you currently use Chat GPT in your organisation?
- How should we train tourism human resources for an AI-dominated future?

### *Upskilling and reskilling*

- How can we better support upskilling and reskilling efforts in the tourism industry to meet the evolving needs of the workforce?
- What specific programs or initiatives do you believe would be most effective in facilitating the acquisition of new skills and competencies?
- What strategies or partnerships can be established to ensure that upskilling and reskilling initiatives align with the evolving demands of the sector?
- What specific barriers or challenges do you / your organization face when attempting to engage in upskilling or reskilling opportunities within the tourism industry?
- How can VET providers address these obstacles and create more accessible and tailored programs to meet the needs?

### *Competence-based curricula*

- How can we enhance the design of competence-based curricula to ensure they align with the current and future needs of the tourism industry?
- What key competencies or skills should be prioritized in these curricula, and how can they be effectively assessed?
- How can we incorporate innovative teaching methodologies and technologies into competence-based curricula to enhance the learning experience for students, effectively develop practical skills and industry-relevant knowledge?

### *Graduate tracking system*

- How can an effective graduate tracking mechanism be developed to gather data and assess the long-term outcomes of tourism education and training programs?
- What specific metrics or indicators should be included in this tracking system to measure the success and impact of graduates in the industry?

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- How can a robust graduate tracking mechanism benefit students in terms of career opportunities and employers in terms of identifying skilled talent within the tourism sector?

### *Funding*

- What are the main challenges companies face in securing funding for initiatives aimed at upskilling and reskilling in the tourism sector?
- What are the main challenges VET providers face in securing funding for initiatives aimed at enhancing the quality of tourism education and training?
- What types of funding opportunities would be most beneficial for individuals and companies seeking to invest in their professional development?
- How can funding mechanisms be improved or diversified to better support these efforts?

### *Internationalization*

- In what ways international exposure and experiences can enhance the competitiveness and employability of individuals in the tourism sector?
- How can internationalization efforts be effectively integrated into tourism education and training to enhance students' global perspectives and competencies?
- What strategies or partnerships could be established to facilitate collaboration among VET providers?
- What strategies can be implemented to foster international exchange programs within the curricula?

Regarding the interviews – the following definitions were given to research partners:

- “Interview - A meeting between a researcher and a knowledgeable informant whereby the researcher seeks to obtain data related to the research question.” (Remenyi, 2017, p.113)
- “Interview schedule – a list of questions which will be used during an interview with an informant.” (Remenyi, 2017, p.114)
- “Semi-structured interview – an interview which is based around a series of issues on which the researcher asks the informant to supply information, comments or remarks. A semi-structured interview normally employs an interview schedule... The researcher will normally pose these issues in the form of open-ended questions.” (Remenyi, 2017, p.207)



## ***Methodological Concerns for the Field Work***

General objectives and research questions:

- What competencies and skills for tourism education advancement should we focus on in the present?
- What competencies and skills for tourism education advancement should we focus on in the future?
- How may we secure a more sustainable path, in future, for the tourism industry?
- Following the COVID-19 pandemic, which made evident some frailties and need for change in the tourism industry, the tourism scenario has evolved, and a great deal of upskilling and reskilling is now necessary.
- Consumer attitudes have altered and are now more focused on sustainable tourism and other such related themes. This study is an attempt to shed light on competencies and skills for tourism education advancement – whether by universities or by VET.

The topics and questions to be considered were otherwise similar to those in the focus groups, as mentioned above (on skills, upskilling and reskilling, competence-based curricula, graduate tracking system, funding, internationalization). Albeit we did add the following:

### *Apps / Applications and innovation*

- What industry-specific applications do you currently use at your organization?
- What end-user applications do you currently use at your organization?
- What strategy-focused applications do you currently use at your organization?
- What role will artificial intelligence play in the tourism sector?
- What other disruptive innovations do you foresee in the tourism sector?

## **How the data was analysed**

Raw data does not assist in answering a research question. Therefore, careful analysis of the data was required and this was performed using thematic analysis.

A thematic analysis – “A technique used to analyse qualitative data that involves the search for themes, or patterns, occurring across a data set” (Saunders et al., 2019, p.819) - was performed on the qualitative data gathered (- see the relevant tables and discussion in chapter 4). In some cases qualitative data analysis software was used (e.g., webQDA software) and in other cases the analysis was based on the researchers’ interpretation.

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Researchers were satisfied that data saturation was reached in each country. That means that more respondents were no longer necessary as respondents were starting to repeat perspectives supplied by others – nothing new was being added at a certain point. Hence, the data collection came to a stop.

#### **Ethical issues**

Informant information sheets were supplied to all informants and they were asked to confirm their agreement to participate in this study and they were advised that they could withdraw from it at any point they wished.

All informants and participants were asked to sign a consent form. Please see appendices A and B.

# Chapter 4

## The Field Work

### Focus groups - The samples and project partner contributions

#### China

China is a major tourist destination and has a very highly respected position in the global tourism industry. In China a total of four focus groups were performed. Table 4 shows the mix of participants who took part in the four focus groups. Different stakeholders in the sector took part, from teachers to students in the field. The focus groups were performed on-site except for one which was performed online and on-site – all in February and March 2024. The resulting four documents summarizing the four interactions each had a list of the participants, the date and address of the venue, as well as photos of the interactions. Each participant's contribution was documented and according to subject area. From the focus groups in China some topics can be highlighted after the thematic analysis (table 5).

Table 4 - Presentation of the China focus group sample

Position in the sector	Number of participants
Teacher	7
Rector	2
Directors/ Managers	17
Staff	3
Experts	10
Students	4

Table 5 - China - Thematic analysis of the focus group material

Keywords
Current tourism situation and future trends
Challenges

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Keywords
Skills in the tourism sector
Training in tourism
Course content
The impact of technologies

### **Results of the focus groups - Discussion**

#### *Current tourism situation and future trends*

The Hotel tourism industry is currently in a rapid development stage, with a constantly expanding market size and increasingly fierce competition. The hotel industry continues to innovate and attract consumers by improving service quality, innovating facilities, and optimizing customer experience. Meanwhile, with the development of technology, the hotel industry is actively embracing digital transformation, improving operational efficiency and service levels.

Experts believe that, in the future, the hotel tourism industry will present the following development trends: firstly, green environmental protection and low-carbon development will become important directions for the hotel industry; secondly, customized and personalized services will increasingly be favoured by consumers, thirdly the integration and development of hotels with tourism, culture, technology and other industries will accelerate; lastly that hotel branding and chain operation will become mainstream.

China's tourism marketing is constantly improving, but compared to the international level there may be a need to increase efforts in innovation and specialization. In China, although tourism management regulations are constantly improving, compared to some European countries, there may still be a need to further strengthen their standardization and rigor.

Artificial intelligence will play an increasingly important role in the hotel and tourism industry in the future, promoting the digital transformation and innovative development of the industry. However, at the same time, it is also necessary to pay attention to and address related challenges and issues to ensure the healthy and sustainable development of artificial intelligence technology.

### *Challenges*

When discussing the challenges faced by the Hotel Tourism industry, participants generally stated that the biggest problems currently faced are rising labour costs and intensified market competition. In addition, with the diversification of consumer needs, how to meet personalized needs and improve customer experience is also a problem that the hotel industry needs to solve. Meanwhile, the issues of information security and privacy protection brought about by digital transformation cannot be ignored.

To address these challenges, the Tourism and Hotel industry needs to start from multiple aspects, improve service quality, innovate facility equipment, optimize customer experience, and actively embrace digital transformation.

They propose the following suggestions:

1. **Strengthen talent cultivation and introduction:** The Tourism and Hotel industry should increase efforts to cultivate and introduce talents, and improve the professional competence and service level of employees. At the same time, cooperation will be strengthened with universities, training institutions, and other organizations to cultivate more hotel talents with professional skills and innovative awareness.
2. **Innovative service models and products:** The Tourism and Hotel industry should pay attention to changes in consumer demand, continuously innovate service models and products, and provide personalized and customized services. For example, themed guest rooms, specialty dining, cultural experiences, and other products can be launched to attract more consumers.
3. **Strengthen brand building and promotion:** The Hotel Industry should attach importance to brand building and promotion and enhance brand awareness and reputation. By strengthening brand marketing and conducting online and offline activities, the aim is to enhance brand influence and competitiveness.
4. **Intensify digital transformation efforts:** The Hotel Industry should actively embrace digital transformation and use technologies such as big data and artificial intelligence to improve operational efficiency and service levels. At the same time, they should strengthen information security and privacy protection to ensure customer information security.

The development of artificial intelligence in the Hotel and Tourism Industry also faces some challenges. Data privacy and security issues, for example, need to be taken seriously and guaranteed. Enterprises need to invest many resources and funds to introduce and train artificial intelligence-related technologies and talents.

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### *Skills in the tourism sector*

Participants believe that firstly it is important that employees have solid professional knowledge and skills, which are the foundation for completing their work. Social skills are enhanced as essential, namely good communication skills, teamwork spirit, problem-solving ability and the ability to continuously learn and adapt to change. Professional skills are also important as well as work experience. Employees with innovative abilities and adaptability are more likely to seize opportunities in the face of change and achieve common growth for both individuals. These also add value to employment skills and to employees' personal growth.

In today's rapidly changing market environment, the innovation ability and adaptability of employees are particularly important. Innovation ability is important to drive the continuous development and progress of the company and helps employees to solve problems and drive work progress. Employees with innovative abilities can break free from conventional thinking, propose novel ideas and solutions, thereby bringing new opportunities and competitive advantages to the company.

With the continuous progress of technology and changes in the market, enterprises need to constantly adjust their strategies and business models to adapt to new environments. Adaptability enables employees to quickly adapt to new work environments, technologies, and task requirements, while maintaining competitiveness. It is an important ability for employees to face changes. Employees with adaptability skills can seize opportunities, respond to challenges, and create more value for the enterprise in the face of change.

The rapid development of China's Hotel Industry means a large demand for hotel management professionals, but often requires applicants to have rich practical experience and good foreign language skills. Enterprises should provide employees with a good working environment and learning opportunities, encouraging them to continuously learn and innovate, and improving their employment skills.

### *Training in tourism*

Most participants believe that updating and training employee skills is crucial. With the continuous progress of technology and rapid changes in the industry, employees need to constantly learn new knowledge and master new skills to keep up with the pace of the times.

Employees should maintain a learning attitude and continuously improve their skills through participating in training courses and industry exchanges, and by reading professional books. A strong support will be provided by actions such as regularly organizing internal training, inviting industry experts to give lectures, providing external training opportunities and



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encouraging employees to participate in cross departmental collaboration and project practice to broaden their horizons and accumulate experience.

Employees should always maintain passion and curiosity for learning, constantly seeking new knowledge and skills. Employees can continuously improve their professional abilities by participating in training courses, reading industry information, participating in project practices, among others.

China compared to foreign countries has some differences in terms of education. In Europe, in hotel management education, practical operations play an important role: “For example, in Switzerland, hotel management education emphasizes the cultivation of practical skills, with students taking half of the time for classes and half for paid internships”. In China hotel management majors tend to focus more on theoretical teaching, resulting in relatively poor hands-on abilities and weaker adaptability to job positions.

### *Course content*

It is important to consider the needs and trends of the industry to ensure that the course content is closely linked to practical applications. It is also important to pay attention to the interests and foundations of students, making the course both profound and broad. Some participants consider it important to combine advanced tourism hotel management concepts and practical cases at home and abroad, introduce cutting-edge knowledge, and enable students to be exposed to the latest industry dynamics and development trends. The course content must also include ways of cultivating students' innovative and practical abilities.

### *The impact of technologies*

The introduction of innovative technologies is a way to improve the production efficiency of enterprises, reduce operating costs, but also promote product upgrades and meet the diverse needs of the market. One participant considered that “By introducing new technologies, enterprises can develop more competitive products in the market and enhance their brand image”. The integration of technology is also a way of enterprises achieving green production and sustainable development. Therefore innovative technology is an important support for promoting sustainable development in the industry. Some examples presented by participants were facial recognition self-service check-in systems, which allow guests to quickly complete check-in procedures through facial recognition, greatly improving the check-in experience; virtual reality (VR) technology has also brought new experiences to tourists; intelligent room control systems are also a major innovation in the Chinese hotel industry; in terms of tourism services, big data analysis has also played an important role. By analysing the behaviour and needs of

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tourists, tourism companies can develop more precise marketing strategies and provide more personalized services.

Artificial intelligence technology will be more deeply integrated into various aspects of the hotel and tourism industry. Artificial intelligence will play an important role in everything from booking, check-in, room service, to tourism route planning, attraction recommendations, and more. For example, through intelligent voice assistants, tourists can easily query travel information, book hotels and air tickets; Intelligent robot tour guides can provide personalized guidance services for tourists and enhance their travel experience. Artificial intelligence will drive the digital transformation of the hotel and tourism industries. Through big data analysis, enterprises can more accurately grasp the needs and behavioural patterns of tourists, thereby formulating more precise marketing strategies. At the same time, intelligent management systems will help enterprises optimize resource allocation, reduce costs, and improve efficiency.

### **Germany**

Germany is a main tourist destination in Europe. The German contingent performed one focus group (in November 2023). A breakdown of the focus group sample can be seen in table 6, whereby eight professionals attended. Important note: there were people among the participants who did not consent to audio recording and the use of photos. Six pages of notes were still sent after the two-hour physical focus group. From the focus groups in Germany some topics are highlighted after the thematic analysis (table 7).

**Table 6 - Presentation of the German focus group sample**

<b>Position in the sector</b>	<b>Number of participants</b>
Cook	6
Lecturer	2

**Table 7 - Germany - Thematic analysis of the focus group material**

<b>Keywords</b>
Skills in the tourism sector
Training programs
Future-oriented education
Graduate tracking mechanism

Keywords
Funding systems

## **Results from the focus group – Discussion**

### *Skills in the tourism sector*

Participants considered it important to have excellent communication skills, so employees can effectively serve customers and guests, and manage complaints in a different way. Communication skills are also essential to create positive customer experiences. The tourism sector is an ever-changing industry, so it is essential that professionals can adapt to unexpected situations. It is also important that they are flexible and adapt to new market trends. Social skills are identified as crucial in the sector, especially because it needs people that know how to work in a team and that are empathetic with guests and colleagues. Intercultural competences are also pointed out as crucial in the coming years.

Digitalisation is increasingly having an impact on tourism, and it is taking over several tasks, so it is important that students and professionals can learn continuously and hence adapt to the technological evolution. Despite this, the participants believe that social interaction should not be lost and that it is important for the service provided to guests to be of high quality and for employees to have certain social skills. Both lecturers considered that social skills must be a focus in the coming years, such as the promotion of an inclusive and diversified work culture.

Companies must also invest in training for their employees, so they are aligned with the latest trends in the market, for example, regarding sustainable resource management and environmental awareness.

### *Training programs*

In order to effectively align training programs with current and future needs, participants consider it is important to focus on digital skills, such as dealing with online booking systems and social media marketing, because they are essential in the modern tourism industry; to focus on social skills, e.g., in the area of customer service and conflict resolution; to focus on excellent customer services, which also include managing customer complaints. One participant considered: “Soft skills should become more important in the future, as personal contact is quickly lost due to digitalization”. Intercultural skills were also highlighted as an aspect of training in the future, as considered by one of the participants: “It will be crucial to prioritize this in

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our curricula to ensure that our graduates can work effectively with a global customer base”.

### *Future-oriented education*

A future-oriented education must also include sustainable tourism management, as there is an increasing demand for environmentally conscious travel options and tourism offers. This trend relates to digital skills, as digitalization can help to reduce resource consumption.

### *Graduate tracking mechanism*

To improve education, it is considered important to have a tool that enables teachers and rectors to know the impact of their course programs in training tourism professionals. A digital platform on which graduates can post their professional developments and experiences would bring great added value. This would allow graduates to publish data on their career paths and ultimately collect data on the effectiveness of the curricula. A network could also be an option, as it would evaluate long-term results of education and training programs in tourism. Surveys and face-to-face meetings would also allow to get continuous feedback. One participant considered: “An evaluation of the training programs can lead to long-term success via such a mechanism”. A mentoring system in which students are networked could enable valuable feedback to be obtained and applied in course curricula in the real working environment.

### *Funding systems*

State-funded education vouchers or upskilling programs can be beneficial for individuals and companies looking to invest in their professional development, allowing individuals to finance specific courses or training programs that improve their professional skills and career opportunities. Other participants considered it important to focus on small and medium-sized enterprises, as stated: “Funding programs or subsidies for companies that provide further training for their own employees could offer promising support to promote professional development”.

Participants consider that companies have the duty to support their employees, that are their best assets. A mixture of programs for companies and individuals may be the best solution. One example presented was: “Low-interest educational loans that are specifically designed for vocational training. They could be an accessible financing option for individuals who want to invest in their professional development.”

### **Italy**

Italy is very popular tourist destination in Europe. Two focus groups were performed in Italy and a breakdown of the sample may be seen in table 8. One focus group was held with fourteen students (January 2024, for one-and-a-half hours) and the second focus group (in February 2024, for two hours) was attended by eleven experts from the sector (table 8). From the focus groups in Italy some topics can be highlighted after the thematic analysis (table 9).

**Table 8 - Presentation of the Italy focus group sample**

<b>Position in the sector</b>	<b>Number of participants</b>
Student	14
CEO	1
Specialist	10

**Table 9 - Italy - Thematic analysis of the focus group material**

<b>Keywords</b>
Training
Digital skills
The environment
Inclusion
Skills to focus on in the future
Access to vocational training
Funds

### **Results from the focus groups – Discussion**

#### *Training*

The first focus group included catering students and tourism students. Participants considered that during their courses they acquire different skills, including marketing skills, such as making a business plan or planning events. It was mentioned that they had classroom hours and in-company

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hours. They also can attend an internship and therefore gain more work experience and to gradually enter the world of work.

Participants showed interest in preparing itineraries for trips and learning how to organize their work and to be autonomous. Some also showed interest in the development of the socio-economic part and what impact it has on current affairs. Language learning is also identified as important, particularly English and German. In this sector it is also considered important the way people present themselves. People must be conscious that frequently they are the business card of the places where they work. The participants were interested in the management and marketing aspects. Creativity and teamwork skills are highlighted as important skills. Digital skills, including creation of websites, are identified as a trend.

### *Digital skills*

Digital skills, including the creation of websites, are identified as an area of interest. During the focus group, it was considered that digital skills are also relevant for analysing and comparing information. Social networks were also identified as an important communication tool, allowing immediate feedback. Digitalisation is also important, including for registering orders and sending them directly to the kitchen. Online booking sites are also an opportunity to record more reservations.

Digital skills can help to make the offer more competitive when the customer perceives the possibility of using these tools e.g., for bookings.

### *The Environment*

The digital transition is substantially under way, while the ecological transition is still more difficult. In fact, the low cultural predisposition towards this transition was underlined, accompanied by a lack of sensitivity, especially towards targets with special needs, as well as a lack of specific skills.

The transition is strongly underway on all these fronts: customers express a desire for a slow tourism experience that is nevertheless easily accessible through digital tools, especially when searching for and choosing a place to visit. This is not a short transition that requires investment. This is reflected in the effective implementation of concrete measures to make the transition a reality. A critical element is the size of the tourism enterprises (predominantly small or micro enterprises), as it greatly affects the ability to invest.

Environmental concern allows us to obtain more genuine products. Environmental sustainability is important for both agricultural and animal products. One way to contribute to this is through better livestock



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management. Respect for the environment can be understood as respect for the product, since the quality of one improves the quality of the other. This relates to health. Handling tourists in urban contexts, especially in large cities may be a challenge in sustainable tourism. People are looking for comfort and organizing a route and identifying transport can be a challenge. Participants presented some examples of good practices that companies that they contacted with adopted to improve their environmental impact: circular cooking practices: “For example, meat scraps and animal bones were used to create other recipes. Or the oil from the fryer was disposed of in a conscientious way”; reusable crockery and cutlery; collective shuttle vans to transport guests; instruments to calculate the temperature of the rooms in the hotel and adjust it automatically; the use of water bottles given to customers to reduce the use of plastic; detection sensors to dispense light; reused paper.

Global Sustainable Tourism Council - GSTC certification is noteworthy: it is an important signal, although not sufficient to guarantee a real commitment that translates into concrete actions.

## *Inclusion*

With respect to the issue of inclusion of clients who fall into the category of 'fragile', what is most lacking is precisely a sensitivity, a lack of knowledge of the problems and needs related to fragility. It is therefore necessary to invest in more accurate training of qualified personnel on the needs of the most fragile customers and subjects, especially disabled tourists who have a hindrance in traveling due to the scarcity of adequate services and facilities; this attention must be paid to all subjects belonging to categories with specific needs and/or peculiar sensitivities (both from an intercultural point of view and also for categories such as LGBTQ+, singles as well as families, pets, etc.).

## *Skills to focus on in the future*

Participants indicate that more than specific skills (e.g., those for improving digital processes), what is needed is a 'cultural' change that makes operators realize the importance of acquiring skills at a professional level. The most relevant skills for the digital component are those for a) marketing, communication and promotion of the offer (social media, website, etc.); b) reception, check-in, and facilities management. It was emphasized that although there is already a general knowledge of technologies and various tools available on the part of tourism operators and businesses, what is perhaps still lacking is awareness of their actual usefulness and potential. They should not be abused, but rather adapted and used in the best possible way so that they translate into a factor of competitiveness and simplification/better accessibility of services.

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On the other hand, regarding the key competences supporting the ecological transition, it is necessary to educate and orientate tour operators and businesses, especially in the hospitality sector, to adopt sustainable solutions/options, thus paying attention to e.g., plastic reduction, separate waste collection and the choice of suppliers and materials, favouring recycled or recyclable ones.

More generally, it is necessary to develop a greater culture of hospitality and 'empathy' towards the customer; listening and communication are perhaps the most important soft skills to ensure greater inclusion. Storytelling skills, based on authenticity, and cultural mediation skills are also presented as fundamental to a good service.

An established trend is that of experiential tourism to which more attention should be paid as it is now an integral part of the tourist offer. As emerging themes, participants emphasize the increasing importance of new types of tourism (experiential, food and wine, etc.) that require new figures, such as mindfulness coaches, environmental hiking guides, environmental interpreters, and outdoor tourism guides.

### *Access to vocational training*

In general, it was emphasized that the tourism sector is no longer attractive to the new generations, for reasons related to the type of work, seasonality and its rhythms; this leads to a shortage even of 'classic' profiles such as tourist guides, reception profiles, cleaning services, cooks, and waiters. In this sense, the participants complain of a lack of basic training offerings as well as a lack of attractiveness of the tourism sector which affects the choice of those entering the labour market.

### *Funds*

It was considered that accessing funds is not difficult. The bureaucratic aspects are not very complex; if anything, interest and motivation are needed. There are possibilities for funded training and tools to customize training to the needs of individual companies. However, it is difficult to involve large groups of employees for reasons that are essentially organizational and related to the management of day-to-day activities, meaning that many resources cannot be committed to training needs at the same time.

### **Portugal**

Portugal, which is becoming increasingly popular as a touristic destination, performed two focus groups (one in person, at a VET school, in Fátima, in February 2024; and one online, in April 2024). The total number of participants may be seen in table 10. These focus groups were audio recorded and attended by students and experts in the field, as well as vocational

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education teachers and university professors/researchers (table 10). From the focus groups in Portugal some topics can be highlighted after the thematic analysis (table 11).

**Table 10 - Presentation of the Portugal focus group samples**

<b>Position in the sector</b>	<b>Number of participants</b>
Expert	6
Researcher	2
Teacher	4
Student	4

**Table 11 – Portugal – Thematic analysis of the focus group material**

<b>Keywords</b>
Soft Skills
Languages
Sector
Education
Green skills
Digital skills
The future of tourism
Funding opportunities

### **Results from the focus groups - Discussion**

#### *Soft Skills*

In addition to the more technical skills, namely knowledge of foreign languages, there are also soft skills that are essential that trainers in tourism schools try to work on, which have to do with the ability to work in groups, in teams, for example. This is a sector of people, so it is important that students know how to work in a team and know how to deal with people. Since the tourism sector is strongly associated with variable working hours,

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people who work in the sector also need to be resilient and capable of adapting.

Students are well prepared in terms of hard skills. Regarding soft skills, there should be more investment in terms of teaching, specifically about knowing how to be, how to serve and the attitude towards clients, as well as in terms of time management, task management and teamwork issues, leadership, and knowing how to be led.

### *Languages*

Almost every student has a good command of English or, if they do not, they communicate well in English, but when there is the need to communicate fluently in German or French, it is very difficult to get students who can do it. In Portugal there are a lot of French groups and it is very difficult to find someone who has a command of French. The Germans can easily speak English, but the French are not so predisposed to it and so it is a current gap, the need for more people to master French. On the other hand, some participants also consider that it is difficult to find people who speak English well. Students agree that learning different languages is very important.

### *Sector*

Some participants consider that the tourism sector is unattractive as one said: “As far as hospitality is concerned, only those with “a screw loose” go into hospitality these days, because we are dealing with people and people, unfortunately, are increasingly difficult to deal with”. Students have a lack of resilience; they do not know how to act when something unexpected happens.

Participants consider that nowadays young people look for projects instead of long-time positions. Some consider they are not up for the job: “they do not wear the company shirt”. So, it is necessary to manage that.

In Portugal job positions are being filled by immigrants who come to Portugal, and they work harder and invest more hours. They are more willing to “wear the company shirt”.

Companies are investing more and more in their own employee training, in terms of culture, so even in a specific function in relation to culture, which includes ethics, posture, trying to work on wearing the company shirt, etc. In Portugal and in tourism they say it is the industry of relationships, so soft skills must be very important.

Participants still consider personal contact as essential when receiving someone in hospitality. Some participants considered: “I do not think there is anything like a personal experience, of welcoming the client and being

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with them”; “for me nothing replaces a person opening the door and giving me a smile and making me feel welcome”. However, participants also consider that in 5 years virtual check-in will increase drastically.

To create courses adapted to tourism reality it is important that a close relationship exists between companies and schools, so programs are adjusted to real sector needs. Otherwise, there will always exist a gap. So, there must exist an integrated vision that involves the academy and the sector.

There has been difficulty in attracting professionals to the sector, partly due to low salaries. If salaries do not increase in the sector, young people will continue emigrating, particularly to work in hotels in Switzerland, which has more attractive conditions. To keep a group of operatives who work on minimum wage and to be able to increase salaries for managers and middle managers, which is what will happen, immigrant labour is the only option, because they accept to work shifts at weekends and, therefore, only they will sustain this way of being. With the integration of immigrants, it is increasingly important to know how to interact with people from different cultures. The dimension of intercultural relations, of customer service and relations with the public is increasingly important.

One participant considered that the question of raising salaries must be aligned with a government's strategic vision: “If tourism is a major economic driver, alongside other major industries, even traditional industries, then we have to start valuing our human resources more and more”. In tourism schools there has been a decrease in the number of students since the pandemic. That is one of the impacts of pandemics in the sector, also due to the conditions that the sector offers.

In Portugal there is still the idea that a receptionist or a restaurant waiter should have a lower salary than an engineer, for example. In Portugal, workers in the sector are often seen as people who are there to serve, but it is more than that. One participant mentioned that the decision to work in a certain position is almost 100% related with the salary: “everything is linked to salaries, but also to personal satisfaction and enjoying what you do”.

Working in tourism can be very stressful, especially for those who contact people directly: “It was recently proven that the jobs with the most stress and the most pressure were the receptionists and waiters, because they deal with dissatisfaction, with customer complaints, they have to be able, as I say, to manage the customer, they cannot be rude, they have to be calm at all times.”. Some participants gave examples of tough situations that employees had to deal with, including some that required calling the police because the employee was being threatened by the customer.

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In Fátima there are still people who return year after year to the same hotels because of the people who work there: “they can buy rooms in any of the units, but they will not meet the person they know, with whom they share experiences, vent a little, in other words, artificial intelligence could eliminate this and in my opinion it is probably the main factor in the hotel and restaurant industry”. This example shows the importance of human relations in this industry. Since the pandemic, accommodations with automatic and autonomous check-in have grown, reducing human contact. This change is also due to the reduction of tourism professionals. In Fátima, tourism is mostly religious, so there is also a strong emotional and relationship side to it, which is why human contact remains important and AI solutions are not so well received. Currently, due to the shortage of professionals in the sector, students who want to enter the industry will have no difficulty, with almost 100% employability.

The pandemic has had a huge impact on tourism professionals. Firstly, because they were the first to have to leave their jobs and then it gave them a different perspective on work, they started to value having time off, not working weekends, among other things. This new perspective drove many people away from the sector. It has become more difficult for tourism schools to attract people to work in the sector; 5/6 years ago, they had around 400 students in this school, today [2024] they have 170. During the pandemic, teaching went online and in practical courses, such as those in tourism, it became very challenging. Teaching students' culinary practices at a distance does not allow for the same level of quality as face-to-face teaching.

### *Education*

Participants notice a decrease in the quality of elementary education. Tourism schools need to be aware of sector trends and offer training on emerging technologies so that students are better prepared to enter the sector.

Some participants consider that students know the theory well, they have hard skills, but they have difficulty when dealing with real context and customers. So, maybe students should have more contact with the real world of work during education training.

It is necessary to go in more depth in terms of sustainability matters. Many schools offer complementary training that is free for students, and it is a good opportunity to develop soft skills and other technical skills.

Although digitalization is a growing trend, schools must be prepared to continue working on the basics: soft skills, relationship management skills, languages, because humans will still have a major importance in the sector. Digital marketing is also increasingly important in course curriculums. For



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those working in the sector, it is also important to have conflict management skills, so they can handle daily problems that may arise.

Participants also considered that it is important for employees to have lifelong learning, as the sector is constantly changing.

One obstacle identified in teaching sustainable practices is legal constraints. Tourism vocational schools usually have budgets to buy the products they use in practical classes. Sometimes they would prefer to buy local products, to reduce the value chain as much as possible, but the rules and budget restrictions do not always allow this.

Some trainers avoid talking about ChatGPT because they consider it important to develop in students the ability to think, to summarize, to be creative. And this type of tool makes the process easier for students and does not force them to think, to research.

The pandemic led to a general increase in technological knowledge. This period has also seen a reduction in students' critical thinking skills and writing skills.

### *Green skills*

It is important to have a green mentality and green skills. Sustainability matters are still pushed aside because of the hustle and bustle of everyday life. Participants consider that the new generation has more strength because they are much more aware of the cause, with much more willpower to take this cause forward. Sustainability is strongly associated with nature tourism.

In research sustainability is a buzzword. One participant stated: “I have a much more critical opinion, a negative criticism of the use of sustainability in research, because it gives visibility, but then, in practical terms, it is very superficial, it is not so concrete”. It is important to clarify what people consider when they talk about sustainability so there is not a misunderstanding.

In Portugal there has been some return to nature, to the countryside, to the landscape, so today there is a lot of talk about sustainability. In Portugal there is the interior region, which has a great capacity for transforming the territory. In fact, during the Covid pandemic people stopped going to the beach and returned to the countryside where they felt safer. During Covid and after Covid too. In tourism education, sustainability issues are still in an embryonic phase. However, it is increasingly clear that after graduating students will probably work in accommodations with these practices and located in inland regions of the country, which at first did not seem to be obvious locations to have accommodations.

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### *Digital skills*

We are experiencing a technological shock in terms of artificial intelligence. The large volumes of information that need to be analysed, the massive use of application technologies and this technological shock have been experienced in stages. However, right now, after the pandemic, it is tremendous and will lead to business models adjusting and changing, some at one speed, others at another. Tourism will continue to be an industry of people to people, and some functions cannot be digitized as some problems can only be solved by humans.

In terms of using artificial intelligence, some trainers do not use it in their classes, as one considered: “We're talking about a relationship industry, as soon as we put Tourism may not be an eminently technological sector; however, technology will have an increasing impact, there will be a strong evolution, albeit participants consider that tourism will always be associated with people. So, there will always be jobs exclusively for humans.

ChatGPT is starting to be used as a work tool for students, researchers and other tourism professionals. Some students still use raw information that comes from it, so it is necessary to teach how to use the tools. Participants consider that artificial intelligence can and should be used for good. A tourism professional considers that AI is still barely used in the hotel where she works. They are still not investing a lot on that, just in digitisation of processes. In the sector of events artificial intelligence is being very used, especially in the creation of virtual characters to host the event instead of being a person. In restaurants we are starting to also see waiters that are robots, that bring the food to the table.

artificial intelligence in place of emotions and relationships, it does not make any sense”. Some participants believe that the use of AI could change relations in the sector, moving from relations between people to relations between people and machines.

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Participants consider that languages, soft and digital marketing are the most important skills in this sector. Participants noticed that for students it is very easy to use the tools, make a reel, make posts, but there is a difference between knowing how to use tools daily and knowing how to apply them. For example, one thing is digital marketing from the point of view of the user, another thing is digital marketing from the point of view of the programmer, the manager, or someone who wants to make campaigns.

Sustainability is a trend in the sector. In Portugal, environmental practices are still at an early stage, as one participant considered that most hotels are

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still not aware of the need to transform their work methodologies and their own equipment and infrastructures to adapt to these issues.

### *Funding opportunities*

Tourism schools are often funded by public support, which covers various expenses associated with teaching these courses. Often this support limits teaching, because the budget set is not enough to buy all the materials that would be suitable for teaching. Some courses take up a larger part of the available budget than others and it is often necessary to structure public tenders to meet material needs, which means that it is not possible to use local suppliers.

## **Spain**

Spain, a major tourism destination in Europe, performed one focus group, in January 2024, in Las Palmas (table 12). This physical focus group was attended by towns/island councils and a promotor of tourism (table 12). A group photo was taken. From the focus group in Spain some topics can be highlighted after the thematic analysis (table 13).

**Table 12 - Presentation of the Spanish focus group sample**

<b>Position in the sector</b>	<b>Number of participants</b>
Town/ island Council	6
Promotor tourism	1

**Table 13 - Spain - Thematic analysis of the focus group material**

<b>Keywords</b>
Skills a tourism worker must have
Training
New skills
Metrics to measure success in tourism
Challenges in tourism
International exposure and experiences

## **Results from the focus groups - Discussion**

### *Skills a tourism worker must have*

It is essential to develop training and internship programs to improve the skills and qualifications of workers in the tourism sector, focusing on areas such as sustainable tourism, destination management and tourism technology.

Participants consider that tourism workers must have knowledge in different areas:

- Knowledge of sustainable tourism: They should understand their principles and how to apply them in their daily work to minimize the environmental and social impact of tourism activities.
- Languages: Given the international nature of tourism, it is essential that workers can communicate effectively in at least one or two foreign languages, such as English, German or French, in addition to Spanish.
- Tourism destination management: They should cover the key aspects of tourism destination management, including tourism planning, promotion, visitor management and preservation of cultural and natural heritage.
- Technology and social media skills: They should be familiar with the technological tools used in the tourism industry, such as online booking systems, mobile travel apps and social media, to promote tourism destinations effectively.
- Customer service skills: It is essential that tourism workers are friendly, courteous and able to provide exceptional customer service to ensure a positive experience for visitors.
- Urban planning and tourism development: They should integrate urban and development policies and tourism considerations into their study plans to ensure orderly and sustainable tourism growth, avoiding overexploitation of natural resources and congestion in tourist areas.

### *Training*

It is important for accommodation providers and companies in the sector to help their employees acquire new skills:

- Specific training programs: Local administrations are collaborating with educational institutions and relevant bodies to design specific training programs for tourism workers. These programs address key topics such as sustainable tourism, destination management, languages, customer service and the use of tourism technology.

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- Partnerships with the private sector: Local governments are establishing partnerships with local tourism businesses to offer internship programs that give workers the opportunity to gain practical experience in the sector.
- Incentives for continuous training: Incentives and scholarship programs are being implemented to motivate tourism workers to participate in continuous training and professional development activities. This may include specialization courses, seminars and workshops on topics relevant to tourism and sustainable excellence.
- Certifications and accreditations: Local administrations are promoting internationally recognized certifications and accreditations in key areas of the tourism sector, Certificates of professionalism Levels 1, 2, and 3.

### *New skills*

The world is constantly changing, and the tourism sector is evolving rapidly. It is essential that workers keep up with this trend. Some of the skills to focus on are:

- Tourism technology: With the increasing digitisation of the industry, tourism workers need to use emerging technologies such as mobile apps, virtual reality, artificial intelligence and data analytics to improve the customer experience and optimize destination management.
- Sustainability: In line with Fuerteventura's focus on sustainable tourism, workers in the sector need to understand the principles of sustainability and how to apply them in their daily activities. This involves knowledge of environmental management practices, renewable energies, waste reduction and conservation of natural and cultural heritage.
- Personalized customer experience: With increased competition in the tourism sector, it is essential that workers develop skills in creating memorable experiences for visitors. This includes the ability to understand the needs and preferences of customers and offer services tailored to their individual interests.

### *Metrics to measure success in tourism*

It is crucial to establish specific metrics and indicators to assess the impact of the implemented actions, including the employment rate in the tourism sector, the level of worker satisfaction, the level of qualification of the workforce and the fulfilment of sustainability objectives.

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Tourism establishments can use certain metrics to measure their performance, such as:

- **Employment rate in the tourism sector:** This metric would provide a direct measure of the impact of training programs on employment generation in the tourism sector in Fuerteventura.
- **Level of employee satisfaction:** Regular surveys are conducted to measure employee satisfaction with the training and professional development programs offered by local administrations.
- **Skill level of the workforce:** The proportion of workers in the tourism sector who have completed specific training programs or obtained relevant certifications in three areas such as sustainable tourism, destination management and customer service are measured.
- **Tourism competitiveness index:** This indicator evaluates Fuerteventura's position in comparison with other tourist destinations in terms of quality of services, environmental sustainability, tourist infrastructure and visitor satisfaction.
- **Participation in training programs:** The participation of workers in the tourism sector in training and professional development programs offered by local governments, as well as their completion rate.
- **Economic impact of tourism:** This analyses economic data related to tourism, such as tourism expenditure, income generated by the sector and the impact on job creation and economic development on the island.
- **Meeting sustainability objectives:** Specific indicators have been established to assess progress towards sustainability objectives, such as reducing the consumption of natural resources, minimizing waste and conserving cultural and natural heritage.
- **Visitor feedback:** Visitor satisfaction surveys are carried out to obtain visitors' opinions on the quality of tourism services offered in Fuerteventura, including aspects such as hospitality, cleanliness, safety and respect for the environment.

### *Challenges in tourism*

The implementation of in-company training, and internship programs requires significant investments of financial and human resources. The limited availability of funds and personnel represents an obstacle to carrying out these initiatives in an effective and expansive manner.

Ensuring that the training programs offered are relevant and up to date with the latest trends and technologies in the tourism sector can be a



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challenge. Identifying and training trainers with appropriate experience and expertise is a major challenge at present due to the lack of such trainers.

The active collaboration and commitment of local tourism enterprises is essential for the success of training and internship programs. However, some companies show resistance or lack of interest in participating in these initiatives due to time or resource constraints.

### *International exposure and experiences*

Internationalization and exposure to international experiences can significantly improve the competitiveness and employability of tourism enterprises, facilitating knowledge exchange, innovation and the establishment of global business relationships.

International experiences make it possible to improve the competitiveness of tourism companies. This type of experience allows:

- **Broadening of perspective:** Exposure to different cultures, business practices and management approaches in international environments can broaden the perspective of tourism businesses. This allows them to better understand the needs and preferences of international tourists and to tailor their products and services more effectively.
- **Acquisition of knowledge and skills:** International experiences provide tourism businesses and administrations with the opportunity to acquire new knowledge and skills that can be applied in their daily operations. This can include innovative management practices, advanced marketing techniques and customer service strategies adapted to different markets.
- **Networking and collaboration:** Participation in international events, trade fairs and business exchange programs facilitate networking and collaboration with companies and professionals from all over the world. These connections can open new business opportunities, strategic alliances and cooperation projects that strengthen the competitive position of tourism companies.
- **Innovation and creativity:** Exposure to new ideas and innovative approaches abroad can stimulate creativity and innovation within tourism enterprises. This can lead to the development of new products, services or processes that differentiate the company in the market and improve its competitiveness.
- **International reputation:** Participation in international events and collaboration with foreign partners can increase the visibility and reputation of tourism companies internationally. A strong international reputation can attract more international customers and increase demand for the company's products and services.

### **EVBB - Belgium**

EVBB, in Belgium, held one online focus group with 12 experts, in March 2024 (table 14). After a short presentation of the TourX project by the moderator Antonio, the participants were able to share their experience and their opinions via a few questions. A group photo was taken. From the focus group organized by EVBB some topics can be highlighted after the thematic analysis (table 15).

**Table 14 - Presentation of EVBB's focus group sample**

<b>Position in the sector</b>	<b>Number of participants</b>
Expert	12

**Table 15 - EVBB - Thematic analysis of the focus group material**

<b>Keywords</b>
Skills
Role in an RSP (Regional Skills Partnership)

### **Results of the focus groups - Discussion**

#### *Skills*

It is important for schools and countries to analyse the stage they are at in comparison to others. Projects aimed at developing digital skills and sustainability are starting to emerge more.

In industry, there is a difficulty in establishing relationships between industry and schools.

#### *Role in an RSP – Regional Skills Partnership*

Presentation of the situation about the Skills partnership already established at the national level, in 7 countries (10 planned) as part of the PANTOUR project, with more than 200 stakeholders. Every national or regional skills partnership can have a flexible approach in the wide variety of options on the internal organization level, in the forms of membership in the creation of dramatic and working groups, and in the development of annual or periodic activity plans. It is based on the following three types of activities: skills intelligence, analysis of training needed and evaluation and testing of Blueprint project outputs. Therefore, it is very similar to the functions of the Regional Skills Partnership under the TourX project. But they have a great difficulty in finding a key tourism player, so they call some national

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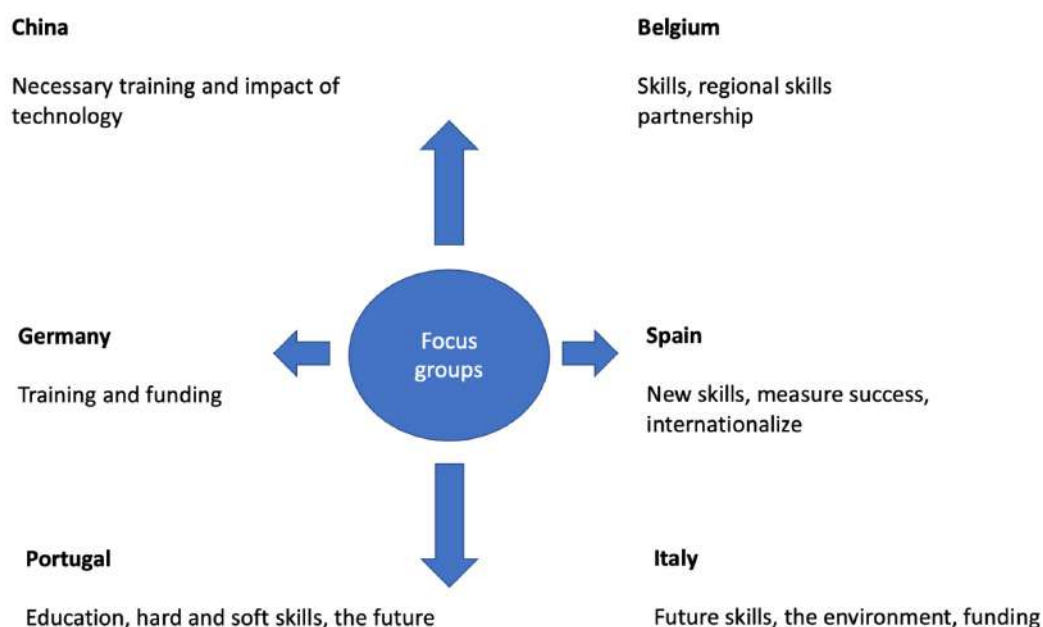
champions able to start, drive and manage the processes of the creation of the Skills Partnership.

It is important to have a standard or a basic level of skills to create real jobs and to promote the tourism sector as a career path.

It is important to collaborate with associations linked to tourism in their region, to create some experiences that are very useful to students. It is very useful for their school to create some cooperation with other schools or associations in Europe to analyse other types of approaches.

### **Summary of the focus group interactions by country**

Figure 7 shows a summary of the focus group interactions – by country - in diagrammatic fashion. Skills and training, for hard and soft skills, show the current preoccupations regarding the future. The environment, technology and funding are also concerns, according to figure 7.



**Figure 7 - A summary of the focus group interactions by country**

## **Interviews**

### *China*

China performed a total of 19 interviews (please see table 16). Through the questions and answers of the interviews, it is possible to gain a comprehensive understanding of the views and measures of schools and travel agency employers in recruitment, employee career development and work life balance, employee training and benefits, etc. From the interviews in China some topics can be highlighted after the thematic analysis (table 17).

**Table 16 - Presentation of China's interview sample**

<b>Position in the sector</b>	<b>Number of participants</b>
Employees	3
Employers	3
Trainers	6
Experts	3
Students	4

19 interviews were carried out by the Chinese research group. Workers, employers, trainees, specialists and tourism students took part in these interviews (table 16).

**Table 17 - China - Thematic analysis of the interview material**

<b>Keywords</b>
Tourism training
Professional Qualities
Career development and planning of hotel professionals
Sector
The development and management of tourism destinations
Challenges in the industry
The future of tourism

## **Results of the interviews - Discussion**

### *Tourism training*

The students interviewed shared the motivations that led them to study tourism: interest in tourism culture, geography, and history; to have a deeper understanding of the industry; to provide tourists with a high-quality travel experience in the future, while also taking the opportunity to explore the

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beautiful scenery around the world; interest in hotel operations, management, and service processes.

Participants showed satisfaction with the courses they took, as one stated: “During the learning process, I was very impressed by the course on tourism marketing. Through this course, I have learned how to analyse the tourism market, develop marketing strategies, and promote tourism products. These knowledge and skills are very important for my future career development”. The practical stage was highlighted as an opportunity to interact with big hotels. Through internships, participants have gained a deeper understanding of various aspects of hotel management, including front desk reception, room management, and catering services. This practical experience has made them more familiar with the workflow and operational standards of the hotel industry and has also honed their communication and collaboration skills.

One participant also shared the experience of participating in a simulation practice project in hotel front desk reception, which made the participant appreciate the importance and complexity of hotel services, to learn how to effectively communicate with guests, solve their needs and problems.

Regarding future objectives, one participant said: “I hope to work in a well-known tourism company in the future, starting from the grassroots level, continuously accumulating experience, and gradually improving my professional abilities.”.

### *Professional Qualities*

Employees need to have good communication skills and teamwork skills. They need to work closely with colleagues from different departments and positions to ensure the smooth operation of the hotel. Meanwhile, effective communication with customers is also the key to improving service quality. Hotel employees must first possess professional service awareness and attitude. They need to treat every guest sincerely and warmly, ensuring that they enjoy a homey experience. In addition, meticulous observation and adaptability are also crucial to meet the various needs of customers in a timely manner.

Employees should also possess a high sense of responsibility and professionalism. They need to constantly pay attention to the needs and feelings of customers, ensuring service quality and customer satisfaction. Meanwhile, constantly learning and improving one's profession.

In the recruitment process, employers first pay attention to the candidate's professional background and academic performance to ensure that they have the basic knowledge and skills related to the position. Secondly, they value the practical experience and skills of applicants to see if they can solve

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practical problems. In addition, the candidate's communication skills, teamwork spirit, and innovation ability are also factors that are considered.

When recruiting, the professional skills and knowledge of the tourism industry of the applicants are important. The service attitude and communication skills of job applicants are also important. The tourism industry is a service-oriented industry, and the service attitude and communication ability of employees directly affect customer satisfaction and the image of the company. The tourism industry requires teamwork to address various challenges, and innovation capability is also an important factor in driving industry development.

#### *Career development and planning of hotel professionals*

Hotel professionals first need to clarify their career goals and development direction, and then formulate specific career plans. At work, one should constantly learn new knowledge, master new skills, and improve their professional competence. At the same time, one should actively participate in industry exchanges and training activities, broaden one's horizons and network resources. Employers also need to focus on cultivating their leadership and management abilities. It is also important to pay attention to industry development trends and market changes, constantly adjust one's career planning and direction, and ensure that one is always at the forefront of career development.

It is important that employers provide systematic training courses for employees, including knowledge of tourism business, customer service skills, industry regulations, and other related content. Through training, employees can continuously improve their professional skills and industry literacy. Another way to promote new knowledge is through rotation: “We will also arrange for employees to rotate and practice in different positions, so that they can have a more comprehensive understanding of various aspects of the tourism industry, cultivate cross-border thinking and comprehensive abilities”, an employer stated.

Through personalized training programs, they can stimulate employees' potential and enable them to better cope with work challenges. At the same time, coaches also need to pay attention to the psychological state of employees, provide necessary psychological counselling and support, and help them establish a positive work attitude and team spirit. Trainers adopt different methods during training. Some of them are case analysis, role-playing, scenario simulation, etc.



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### *Sector*

The hotel management industry is facing fierce competition and constantly changing market demands. However, with the prosperity of the tourism industry and people's pursuit of high-quality accommodation experiences, the hotel industry still has enormous development potential.

The tourism industry is constantly innovating and transforming, with many new formats and models emerging, such as smart tourism and green tourism. In addition, the internationalization level of the tourism industry is constantly improving, and cross-border tourism cooperation and exchanges are becoming increasingly frequent.

Participants believe that an employee's benefits are important means for companies to attract and retain talent, such as competitive salary benefits; comprehensive welfare systems based on employee performance and market conditions; promotion opportunities and career development paths to help them realize their personal value; create a positive and harmonious working atmosphere, so that employees can feel the care and support of the company.

Guaranteeing work-life balance of employees is crucial. Employers can do it by arranging work hours and task assignments reasonably to avoid employees overworking, by providing flexible working hours and remote work benefits to facilitate employees to better arrange their lives and work. It is also important to pay attention to the physical and mental health of employees and provide necessary health protection and care. The work life balance of employees has a significant impact on work efficiency and employee loyalty.

It was stated that "Training is crucial for the development of the hotel and tourism industries". With the intensification of market competition and the diversification of consumer demand, enterprises need to continuously improve service quality and employee quality to gain market share.

### *The development and management of tourism destinations*

The development and management of tourist destinations is a complex and systematic project that requires the comprehensive consideration of multiple factors such as resources, environment, culture, and market. Participants suggest conducting in-depth market research and demand analysis to firstly clarify the target market and customer needs. Another participant considered it important to pay attention to the protection and sustainable use of resources, avoiding excessive development and environmental damage. At the same time, it is necessary to strengthen cultural excavation and inheritance and enhance the cultural connotation and attractiveness of tourist destinations.

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### *Challenges in the industry*

The challenges in the hotel industry mainly include fierce market competition, constantly changing customer demands, and technological updates. Practitioners need to constantly adapt to these changes and enhance their competitiveness. The opportunity lies in the sustained development of the industry and the continuous expansion of the tourism market, providing more career development opportunities and space for practitioners.

Employees also face challenges in improving service quality and customer experience. With the upgrading of consumer demand, hotels need to constantly innovate and improve their service methods to meet the expectations of guests. At the same time, the internationalization trend of the hotel industry also provides practitioners with a broader development platform.

Practitioners also need to respond to changes in industry regulations and policies. In terms of opportunities, with the development of technology, the application of technologies such as intelligence and digitisation has brought new development opportunities to the hotel industry. Practitioners can actively embrace these changes, improve their professional skills and competitiveness.

Some of the main challenges facing the current tourism industry include fierce market competition, increased pressure on resources and environment, and increased safety risks. To address these challenges, participants consider it is necessary to, first, strengthen industry cooperation and collaboration, and form a joint force to cope with market competition; Secondly, promote the transformation, upgrading, and innovative development of the tourism industry, improving product quality and service level. At the same time, it is necessary to strengthen safety management and risk prevention to ensure the safety and rights of tourists.

In the process of their apprenticeship and internship, some of the students who were interviewed noted that this is a very competitive industry, which requires rich knowledge and practical experience to stand out.

### *The future of tourism*

Participants consider that the future of the tourism industry will be more diversified and personalized, and the needs of tourists will be more diverse and refined. Meanwhile, with the continuous progress and application of technology, the tourism industry will achieve more intelligent and convenient development. In addition, the tourism industry will pay more attention to sustainable development and environmental protection, promoting the green transformation and sustainable development of the tourism industry.

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With the improvement of people's living standards and the continuous growth of tourism demand, the tourism industry will continue to maintain a strong development momentum. A participant considered that: “I believe that as long as we continuously innovate and improve service quality, we can achieve success in this industry”.

The hotel management industry is facing increasing challenges and opportunities. With the development of technology and the diversification of consumer demand, the hotel industry needs to constantly innovate and improve service quality. One of the future trends in the hotel industry is an increasing focus on personalized and differentiated services to meet the needs of different guests.

### **Germany**

Germany performed four interviews (table 18). From the interviews in Germany some topics can be highlighted after the thematic analysis (table 19).

**Table 18 - Presentation of the German interview sample**

<b>Position in the sector</b>	<b>Number of participants</b>
Student	2
Trainers	1
Experts	1

**Table 19 - Germany - Thematic analysis of the interview material**

<b>Keywords</b>
Skills
Training
Sustainability
Digitalisation
The curriculum framework
The future
Challenges in tourism

## **Results from the interviews - Discussion**

### *Skills*

One of the participants was attending a cooking course. The course taught social, digital and green skills. As a cook, the participant considers it important to be aware of trends and this means trying to integrate these skills into his kitchen practices. Interviews with students show that there is good preparation for the development of green skills. However, when it comes to digital skills, there is still a need to reinforce the content and learning imparted so that students feel more capable in this area. In general, participants considered that social and green skills already play a major role during the vocational training program.

In general, the participants consider it important for professionals in the field to have the following skills: ability to work in a team, strong communication skills, flexibility, resilience, creativity, knowledge of the handling of social media.

### *Training*

Digitalisation, environment and climate as well as sustainable travel and slow tourism are among the most important trend topics. A course prepares you well, it lays the foundations. However, a profession implies lifelong learning and that means continuous training.

Participants consider it important to develop social, green and digital skills. Special social skills are also required when interacting with guests, which students learn during training and then develop personally.

### *Sustainability*

The values of guests are increasingly changing. Awareness of sustainability is becoming greater, and people are willing to pay more money for sustainability. The willingness to invest in sustainability is the key to the future. The environmental seals are becoming increasingly important when making travel decisions and can be an opportunity for tourist-oriented companies to examine internal processes and to test them.

A sustainable orientation of tourism means preservation of species diversity and biodiversity, economic viability, targeted dealing with the shortage of young talent and skilled workers, the creation of attractive working conditions for employees, as well as the preservation of regional identity and quality of life. In today's world of work, green skills play an essential role. As a first step, trainers consider it necessary to raise awareness of sustainability at all levels and then develop this with knowledge and skills. A large part of the work involves conveying environmental awareness in all

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areas of work and supporting it with practical applications, for example in using resources, water, food and regional products. This has and will become more important in the future.

In the area of social skills, all trainers prioritize intercultural skills and very strong communication skills, which will also play a significant role in the future. Many people of different nationalities work in teams of hospitality businesses and the origins of guests visiting the Brandenburg region will become even more diverse in the years to come. Future professionals should be able to adapt to more international guests to fulfil their diverse requirements. To master these challenges, skills such as people skills, initiative, enthusiasm and a sense of responsibility are also essential.

In relation to sustainability, the most important thing is to create an understanding of the use of finite resources and to develop an awareness of regional products. Another important aspect should be an understanding of the changes in the environment and the challenges that arise from them.

## *Digitalisation*

Trainees are growing up in a digital world. They handle this topic very naturally. It is necessary to expand this knowledge to be able to work with it in the professional world. The handling and development of digital content for various apps and programs such as Twitter, Facebook or Instagram, for example, must be learnt professionally. However, an understanding of and flexibility in using a wide variety of digital systems and AI-supported applications are also crucial skills. In the context of digitalization, applications with AI will develop rapidly over the next few years. It will be a major task to incorporate this rapid development into the fixed framework curricula in Germany. It is very important that the skilled workers of tomorrow are prepared for this to be able to cope with the opportunities that arise. It is necessary for skilled workers to be able to adapt to more international guests in the future to fulfil their diverse requirements.

## *The curriculum framework*

The curriculum framework in Germany is not very flexible and sometimes unable to respond to current trends and changes. Participants suggested that as a VET provider and as a trainer, people can respond to this by using different teaching methods. Experience has shown that creating practical learning situations is one of the best methods for mastering current challenges and trying them out. Working in groups to promote social skills and develop learning outcomes together is also considered valuable. Trainers also see many advantages in home schooling. This allows trainees to complete tasks based on their own responsibility and work on content

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independently. A mixture of the teaching methods prepares trainees well for the real world of work.

During the interviews, it was considered that in Germany, the framework curriculum provides a wide range of content during training that focuses on green and social skills. In the area of digital skills, more varied programs that address current topics are desirable for trainees. Currently, the national framework curriculum offers little scope for familiarizing trainees with new technologies and applications. In Germany, vocational training is organized in the dual system. Vocational schools teach according to the framework curriculum, which is decided by the Conference of Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs. The professions in tourism were revised in 2022. Topics such as the digitalized world of work and environmental protection/sustainability were addressed. However, the changes, especially in digitalization, are so fast-moving that the latest trends cannot be incorporated into the framework curriculum.

#### *The future*

Regarding the skills to focus on in the future, the participants considered it important to focus on professional competence, media and digital skills, social competence and competences in sustainability.

#### *Challenges in tourism*

One of the biggest problems identified was the shortage of skilled workers and succession planning, so that gaps in supply arise, especially in rural areas. The uncertain political framework contributes to the fact that entrepreneurs will only hesitantly approach or implement new investments. Especially in rural regions, a lack of a welcoming culture can lead to little or no staff coming from abroad. The lack of mobility in terms of public transport also plays a major role in the skilled worker problem.

In Germany, participants identify a problem related to the fact that everything will be regulated by political guidelines.

#### **Greece**

Focusing on tourism in ancient, historic and modern Greece, eight interviews were held with experts, employers and teachers in the sector (table 20). From the interviews in Greece some topics can be highlighted after the thematic analysis (table 21).



**Table 20 - Presentation of Greece's interview sample**

<b>Position in the sector</b>	<b>Number of participants</b>
Employer	2
Teachers/Trainers	4
Experts	2

**Table 21 - Greece - Thematic analysis of the interview material**

<b>Keywords</b>
Skills
Digital skills
Green skills
Training
The future
Challenges

## **Results from the interviews – Discussion**

### *Skills*

The important skills for someone who works in tourism today are soft skills, such as teamwork, communication skills (interpersonal, foreign languages, kindness, and so on), time management, problem solving, flexibility, empathy, flexibility and intercultural openness, openness in learning, and change of habits. These competencies can be effectively assessed through the systematic monitoring of the performance of the staff, after having set common goals and common principles and priorities.

The use of social skills, such as common sense and empathy from the part of the staff are a primary factor, to proceed in these everyday activities. Time management is also a very crucial factor.

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### *Digital skills*

The necessary digital skills are those which allow for the search and the sharing of information and data, the elaboration of data, the use of platforms and digital communication and collaboration. Digital skills are a necessary parameter for a hotel company to work in a sustainable way. Digital skills are not necessary in every job position, both in hotels or in restaurants. It is essential in travel agencies. Digital skills are relevant for reservations, data keeping, communication with customers and platforms, invoicing are all essential for the management staff at the level of the User. Skills related with the transaction's digital security and the use of data, are essential too, but refer to a higher level than the simple user.

### *Green skills*

Enterprises cannot ignore sustainable practices in the Tourism Industry, whether they are familiar with them or not. Either the enterprises feel the need for sustainable practices due to the competition or they must follow these practices as a (marketing) trend; in both cases they must comply and be harmonized with them.

Before someone goes in depth with green skills, other infrastructure problems must be solved regionally, such as waste collection, stable voltage at 220V. The term “green skills” sounds vague and lies in a wide range of interpretations from the part of small entrepreneurs. The necessary green skills are the conceptual approach of green thinking and the promotion of this attitude to the clients/visitors, and other more specific skills such as the viable use of the natural sources and recycling.

### *Training*

Participants believe that training should be free for employees in the sector. The enterprises cannot invest in the training of the staff, because the staff can change employers seasonally. Different learning methods can be used to help workers learn, such as storytelling, focusing on certain cases, problems and/or challenges, and is an easier and more efficient way for the transferring of knowledge.

Given that they are familiar with digital learning platforms, the business owners are also very willing to participate (along with the staff) in an upskilling and a reskilling process.

The VET providers should be aligned with the requirements of the quality assurance systems that are involved in the tourist product, they must design short programs, focused on certain topics, to be flexible with online asynchronous and in site synchronous training and to combine the theory with the practical application. The currently available training programs are

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not sufficient, as they focus on specific job positions and not in horizontal green and digital skills that are horizontally required. Relevant programs with a holistic quality approach are necessary.

Regarding the enhancement of the competence-based curricula, both for the current and the future needs of the tourism industry, the answer is the ad hoc involvement of the key persons from every sector. The strategic aspects have to include: The forecast of the future trends, the integration of the future skills, focusing on practical skills and real-life scenarios, continuous review and updating and the promotion of the lifelong learning.

The most critical trends and challenges that training programs should address in the coming years are the continuous change of the framework of tourism through the development of advanced technologies (Metaverse, AI), the increasing demand for more sustainable tourist experiences and the personalization in services provided.

Regarding the graduate tracking mechanism, and the specific indicators for them to pursue a fruitful career, in favour of them and of their employers, the replies are towards a monitoring system of the graduates, that follows their professional and their reskilling track. A parallel big data system which follows their employment and their positioning within the map of the sector and the map of the pool of relevant personnel is necessary.

### *The future*

The enterprises respond to public policies, since they are enforced by the legislation. Sometimes the green policies are not very clear (in terms of their goals). A more understandable approach from the local or central government must take place.

The government, with its central policy, decides about the allocation of the funds regarding the training of the staff in the tourism sector. Other sectoral entities such as confederations, federations, unions, and so on, cannot finance such activity. Occasionally, the regional governments can finance programs for training and reskilling the tourism sector, but it must be strong in these regions.

### *Challenges*

The cost of reskilling the staff is a barrier, due to the frequent changing in job positions each season. Thus, the cost of training and reskilling must be free of charge for the enterprises.

## **Spain**

Focusing on tourism in Spain, seven interviews were held with experts, employers and employees in the sector (table 22). From the interviews in Spain some topics can be highlighted after the thematic analysis (table 23).

**Table 22 - Presentation of Spain's interview sample**

<b>Position in the sector</b>	<b>Number of participants</b>
Employer	2
Expert	3
Employee	2

**Table 23 - Spain - Thematic analysis of the interview material**

<b>Keywords</b>
Skills
Digitalisation
Sustainability
Training
Challenges
Future trends

## **Results from the interviews - Discussion**

### *Skills*

The most desired competencies include a positive attitude, strong soft skills, proactivity, and motivation. Some individuals may have impressive academic credentials but lack practical and soft skills, and they are crucial. Some of the most important skills and the basics of the sector and work must be there, but this knowledge can be built over time. Skills such as communication, empathy, patience, flexibility and similar others must be developed. Language training (a participant considered it important to know at least three different languages), training in new technologies and know-how in each department in relation to customers was also highlighted, as well as administrative skills.

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Basic digital skills are beginning to be a requirement for employees. Continuous training is also presented as important in this regard, and there is always the possibility of taking courses in different areas. With AI, for example, it is important to take advantage of this tool, but also to guarantee the personalization of the content that can be created.

## *Digitalisation*

The participants consider that digital skills are needed in almost 90% of the tasks of the professionals most focused on the administrative areas of tourism. Procedures and formalities related to the functions are handled through programs.

The participants were comfortable with technological tools and the use of new programs, but they did not rule out the importance of training to feel comfortable with the subject. One participant considered: “e-learning something new and using new tools is always beneficial”.

Digital skills can improve employees' work and customer service. If employees have good knowledge and training on how to use certain technological tools in their day-to-day work, it will be possible to improve operations and streamline processes, affecting the well-being of the employee and the customer, who will have more information about their stay in advance and be able to have a better experience.

AI is being integrated as a way of enhancing visitors' experiences. Some participants consider that there is a gap in digital competences among generations, which reinforces the importance of training. This seems like a contradiction, but people are very skilled at using technologies in their free time but are not able to apply these skills at a professional level. They are lacking the same skills as the older generations are.

Another benefit associated with the use of technology is the speed in obtaining global information. Without technology, companies would be isolated in their environment and would not be able to identify certain trends and potential in the sector.

For small businesses, digitalization and sustainability are still difficult topics to implement and assimilate.

## *Sustainability*

The issue of sustainability has been linked to digitalization, insofar as the use of technological tools to operate also reduces the use of paper, generating less pollution. Digital programs also make it possible to pay more attention to the customer and provide a faster service. One participant said: “To say

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that nowadays sustainability is the mother of all science, no type of policy, no type of strategy is proposed that does not include the term sustainability”.

The topic of sustainability is still very vague. Companies define strategies that include environmental and sustainability issues, but there is some difficulty in implementing and developing these issues. One participant said: “Everyone has it in their plans, in their strategies, but are they really developing it? Or do they really know what they want to develop? Develop, I doubt it”. One participant believes that hotels will not proactively adopt sustainable measures. Environmental issues are often used as a marketing element, to say: “I am a sustainable hotel”.

Some employees already prefer a digital working environment to one where paper is used, and where tasks are less automated. The latter is associated with more waste, inferior management and control of information and physical storage.

The client from a single source, such as their cell phone, which everyone has in their pocket today, will not have to be managing paper maps, of enormous size, to be with a lot of sheets of paper, brochures, to access information that in any case would be limited, since in the brochure it fits what it fits and, in a map, it fits what it fits. This also improves the experience.

In the case of Fuerteventura, there is a growing commitment on the part of entrepreneurs to sustainability issues. European funds are also an incentive to design more sustainable hotels, which use renewable energies, with the proper utilization of the water cycle and water purification for the better use of water. In this specific case, there is a public effort to improve environmental policies, but there is still a long way to go. The Spanish government has implemented plans that address aspects such as the circular economy, the water cycle and decarbonization: “These steps are significant and deserve our recognition. Steps are being taken, but not in the accelerated manner that is needed”. As one participant highlighted, many of the tourists who come to Fuerteventura expect certain environmental practices, so it is important that local businesses and hotels start adopting practices that meet their customers' expectations.

In the organization of events, sustainable practices are already integrated, through sourcing from eco-friendly suppliers, and adhering to quality seals related to sustainability. This approach not only resonates well with clients but also contributes to environmental conservation efforts. However, participants have considered it to be disheartening when public administrations fail to follow through on sustainability commitments: “If we organize an event, we sort out the trash in different recycle bins but later



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when the cleaning service arrives, they put everything in the same trash. Those are big incoherences which must be changed as soon as possible”.

In terms of sustainability, another concern was the preservation of the territory's identity. One participant considered: “We believe very much in taking care of the island of Fuerteventura, respecting the environment, because the damage that is done to the environment is damage that remains”. One concept presented, in the case of Fuerteventura, are the stores selling zero-kilometre products, handicraft products, which reflect the concern for environmental issues and the demand to sell local products. Some examples of sustainable investments applied by companies are technologies that are efficient in terms of energy production, reduction of plastic, food waste, organic waste, etc.

It is also important for tourists to be responsible when they travel and to respect the environment, the people and the culture of the workers. On the island of Fuerteventura, it is also considered important to provide visitors with information on regulations, such as how to take out the rubbish, and how to look after the sea, for example. Tourism is not just about the beach, but also the culture, because with a very open mind when you visit a place different from where you live, you learn a lot of things and the first thing to learn is to respect the people who live there.

### *Training*

The training was interpreted as a mechanism to give trainees a global view of the sector and a more detailed view by segment. It improves skills at a technical and relationship level. One participant felt that the future of his company would involve investing in effective training that creates practical results for employees.

It was concluded that employees highly value training opportunities, whether formal or informal. They also value training that takes place during working hours or that allows them to reconcile their professional and personal lives. The fact that training interferes with employees' daily routines may be a factor that generates less motivation to attend. One employee felt that: “in such a changing environment as the tourism industry, with new technologies, with artificial intelligence, everything is changing very fast, we are always grateful for any training that you can provide us with”. It was also pointed out that funded training would also be a strong incentive for employees to attend more training and continue to improve their skills and abilities. The introduction of trainees also makes it possible to present process improvements and is an opportunity for employees to learn and grow.

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In terms of training needs, some of those identified were artificial intelligence, in document and process management software, customer service. A trained employee who has the tools, the latest technology, artificial intelligence and information management programs will be able to provide the customer with as much information as possible in the shortest possible time, which regulates a positive customer experience. If each employee in their area of competence has constant training, it will translate into a better performance of their functions, avoiding unpleasant customer experiences or complaints they may have.

In addition to the direct benefits that training provides, the importance of networking and interacting with other people in the sector, providing learning experiences, was also highlighted.

To promote the upgrading of the sector, it is essential to ensure that both workers and employers are aware of the latest sustainable practices, environmental management techniques and the skills needed to adapt to the new demands of the tourism market. This information should be accessible and available to all involved in the sector, enabling effective implementation of improvements and greater preparedness for future challenges.

### *Challenges*

The costs associated with adopting sustainable practices are identified as one of the constraints on investment in the environmental area. One of the challenges identified in obtaining funding is the bureaucracy associated with these processes, so they need to be simplified. One suggestion for professional development was public-private funding. In addition to bureaucracy, another identified challenge in obtaining funds is the lack of knowledge about the support available to companies in the tourism sector.

It is felt that training provided in the private sector will have an impact on the public sector. The issue of practical training is being promoted from the beginning, which is positive, but it is also true that it must have the support of the employer. Knowledge of languages is also considered essential, but in Fuerteventura there is not yet full recognition of their importance, so this is a challenge faced by the tourism sector in the region. Erasmus programs are an opportunity in this regard and can lead to the development of new languages by teachers and students.

Economic constraints, particularly liquidity issues and delays in payment, are also identified as challenges in tourism.

Sustainability was also identified as a challenge. The Administration seeks a concept of sustainability, very broad technological development, and the entrepreneurs complain that they have the obstacle of the Administration to implement it, but although it is real that this obstacle exists, they also have

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the obstacle of the entrepreneurs who are not able to assimilate the new concepts. Thus, the two parties need to be more aligned. In tourism, there are very small businesses and accommodations that still operate in the traditional way, with little use of technology. As they work in a different way, it is difficult for them to adopt certain technological solutions, as they have never done so before.

Participants consider that there are various supports available for training, energy efficiency, technology implementation, among others, however the bureaucracy involved ends up being a barrier for companies. To improve the processes for obtaining support, one suggestion put forward was decentralization, which has already been tested in Spain with the decentralization of Next Generation European funds, in which government, seeing that it was unable to manage these funds, transferred them to the autonomous communities, bringing them a little closer to the citizens.

## *Future trends*

The future of tourism lies in quality, less quantity, with the integration of technological solutions.

One of the trends in tourism for tour guides is podcasts. They therefore need to have the right skills in programs to create audio tourism experiences. Social skills are seen as essential, namely: flexibility, in terms of working hours, interacting with clients, adapting content, as well as creativity, empathy and organizational skills.

Social inclusion is also a key issue in tourism. One participant noted: “We specialize in providing agency services adapted to the needs of travellers with disabilities, offering adapted routes and accommodation to ensure inclusion. We try to adapt and organize everything, as much as possible, to the individual needs of a client, but of course, sometimes it is difficult. But of course, sometimes the city or certain facilities have some limitations.”

Engaging with international clients, from diverse backgrounds, enhances cultural competency and broadens perspectives of workers.

For one of the participants, the future of tourism presupposes: “we recognize the importance of embracing emerging trends such as podcasting and digital platforms in our industry. We prioritize digital training to equip our team with the necessary skills to thrive in a rapidly evolving market. Additionally, we are proactive in addressing skill gaps, ensuring that our workforce remains adaptable and capable of meeting future challenges head-on. Additionally, we recognize the importance of providing guidance and support to interns and employees to foster enthusiasm and professional growth”.

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International experiences were also presented as a way of improving people's competitiveness in the tourism sector, as it helps to understand what is done in other countries and identifies practices that can be improved and adopted. Basically, the importance of benchmarking was identified.

### **EVBB**

Three interviews were held with experts in the sector by EVBB (table 24). From the interviews held by EVBB some topics can be highlighted after the thematic analysis (table 25).

**Table 24 - Presentation of the EVBB interview sample**

<b>Position in the sector</b>	<b>Number of participants</b>
Business representative	2
VET	1

**Table 25 - EVBB - Thematic analysis of the interview material**

<b>Keywords</b>
Sector
Skills
Sustainability
Needs for change in hospitality after Covid-19
The future
Key competencies or skills that should be prioritized in the curricula
Funding opportunities

### **Results of the interviews – Discussion**

#### *Sector*

The discussions underscore the multifaceted challenges and innovative strategies within the realms of education, sustainability, and vocational training. Initiatives such as zero waste practices, sustainable food culture, and green cuisine highlight a commitment to environmental consciousness in culinary and tourism domains. However, the acquisition of funding for

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educational institutions remains highly complex, involving considerations of government and private funds, EU support, and the role of networks. The importance of information dissemination, the active involvement of newcomers, and the utility of online webinars have been emphasized as integral components for progress. Moreover, the need for a framework agreement for consistent funding, particularly in national projects, serves as a practical solution for sustained support. Overall, the varied insights in this thread collectively emphasize the importance of adaptability, collaboration, and a forward-thinking approach in addressing contemporary challenges across diverse sectors.

## *Skills*

The need for digital upskilling among employees is underscored by the call for continuous updates and reinforcement. Recognizing the diverse global landscape, there is a pressing demand for a tailored approach. Digital skills encompass a spectrum ranging from fundamental MS Office proficiency (e.g., Word) to specialized software for booking in domains like hotel and restaurant management. Notably, managerial roles demand a nuanced focus on disruptive technologies, with a spotlight on artificial intelligence. Collaboration in digital environments is paramount, emphasizing enhanced networking through social media platforms for the exchange of best practices. Green skills necessitate a cultural approach, particularly in the hospitality sector. Rather than isolated professional development, the emphasis lies on implementing a vision of green practices throughout the hospitality industry. Examples include the adoption of green building techniques and sustainable measures to combat food waste.

## *Sustainability*

Securing additional funds is crucial to pilot innovative practices, fostering a dynamic environment for experimentation and growth. A regional approach is central, emphasizing the need for tailored training programs and business solutions that cater to the specific nuances of each locality. Strengthening collaboration between VET institutions and SMEs, or Chambers of Commerce, is imperative. This symbiotic relationship ensures that educational initiatives align with the practical needs of businesses, enhancing the employability of individuals. Furthermore, organizing events and conferences on specific topics becomes a catalyst for knowledge exchange and networking, facilitating a platform for stakeholders to engage, share insights, and collectively contribute to advancements in their respective fields.

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### *Needs for change in hospitality after Covid-19*

There is a consensus among interviewees, although their approaches differ due to evolving circumstances. Notably, activities underwent changes over time, with a common challenge being the suspension of mobilities, leading to the exploration of alternatives such as postponements. The interruption extended to training programs, where digital alternatives were not readily available, resulting in a complete halt for many. Online events helped with solving the situation, although with limited progress and networking opportunities. Rather than proactively adapting, there was a collective tendency to await clarity. Resilience emerged as a key factor, underscored by the importance of creating networks among schools or businesses. These networks facilitated the swift exchange of practices and information, particularly crucial in adapting to new COVID regulations.

### *The future*

Enhancing participation in more international projects and exchanges for idea-sharing stands out as a priority. The optimization of existing online training materials, such as Open Educational Resources (OER) or leveraging outcomes from programs like Erasmus+, are identified as valuable avenues for improvement. Strengthening networking initiatives emerges as a common theme for advancement. Interestingly, when queried about micro credentials, a knowledge gap was evident among respondents, despite its significant relevance for the European Union. The efficacy of work-based learning varies across countries. In Poland, success hinges on Chambers receiving financial support, without which opportunities are limited. Conversely, in Slovenia, a robust collaboration with local SMEs facilitates 800 hours of training over two years, although challenges persist as the network of VET schools primarily supports national agencies and not specific activities.

### *Key competencies or skills that should be prioritized in the curricula*

The commitment to sustainability is underscored by several key elements. Firstly, the pursuit of zero waste is a central focus, reflecting a conscientious effort to minimize environmental impact. Complementing this, there is a strong emphasis on fostering a sustainable food culture, encompassing both production and consumption. The integration of sustainable food recipes and recycling practices further solidifies the dedication to environmentally conscious culinary practices. Notably, a three-year program actively promotes green cuisine, aligning with a broader four-year initiative for tourism professionals. Additionally, key competencies in luxury hospitality, food and gastronomy, as well as eco-tourism and rural tourism, are highlighted as integral components of the overarching commitment to



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sustainable and responsible practices within the culinary and tourism domains.

### *Funding opportunities*

Securing funding for schools involves navigating a complex landscape shaped by various factors. Direct funding from governments or companies to schools presents challenges for businesses, grappling with the intricacies of accessing and understanding the rules of engagement. In dual VET systems, the focus often lies on support from Chambers of Commerce or businesses, adding a layer of complexity. Conversely, VET schools place significant emphasis on lobbying at the national level to garner crucial support. On a global scale, government funds are available, but private funds, particularly high-end ones, make a substantial difference. In the realm of EU funding, collaboration with more experienced partners becomes pivotal, especially for VET school networks, where consultants and other businesses may lack the necessary expertise. For large companies like Radisson, internal funding from revenues facilitates programs such as internal staff mobility. Another avenue is establishing partnerships with high-level schools, where payment is made for sending interns to work in hotels. Ensuring improved and regular dissemination of information and updates is crucial, with networks playing a pivotal role at various levels - be it national, European Union, or global. To enhance engagement, a strategy involves actively involving newcomers with a diverse mix of perspectives. The utility of online webinars is recognized, but their effectiveness hinges on addressing specific target groups, tailoring content to their needs and interests. Additionally, the establishment of a framework agreement for funding, as opposed to one-time applications, is advocated. This approach, particularly applicable to national framework projects, provides the advantage of consistent funding without the necessity of repeated applications, streamlining processes and fostering sustained support.

### **Italy**

Eight interviews were held with a diverse set of stakeholders in the sector, in Italy (table 26). From the interviews in Italy some topics can be highlighted after the thematic analysis (table 27).

**Table 26 - Presentation of Italy's interview sample**

<b>Position in the sector</b>	<b>Number of participants</b>
Student	1
People Care and Lean Manager	1

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Position in the sector	Number of participants
Trainer	2
Police Maker	1
Director of Human Resources	1
Employer	2

Table 27 - Italy - Thematic analysis of the interview material

Keywords
Skills
Sustainability
Digitalisation
Training
Challenges
The future

### **Results from the interviews – Discussion**

#### *Skills*

A person who works in recruitment considers that the main skills and characteristics they are looking for are related to behaviour and attitude and not so much to technical skills which can be acquired by working directly within hospitality facilities. Hotels are a service business, constantly dealing with people. Therefore, employees must be empathetic, proactive, pay attention to how they interact and have a welcoming and positive attitude. This is often the result of past experiences and how they have dealt with them. Other skills seen as essential are problem-solving, creative thinking, finding new ways to solve old problems, the ability to continually improve, to find new ways of doing things, and the willingness to grow, learn and keep up to date. Equally important is the ability to manage feedback, both external and internal, and to manage conflicts (including with colleagues). The alignment of human resources with the company's values was also considered essential.

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Some other essential skills highlighted were: Knowing how to communicate sociably, respectfully, clearly, favouring transparency and teamwork in both communication and ordinary actions, and having the right leadership within the kitchen brigade. Soft skills are often seen as competencies that people have or do not have, however one participant considered that: “in initial training, young people can be trained a lot in developing skills such as relationship and communication, which are crucial in this job”.

Regarding interpersonal skills, specifically, the trainer in the restaurant industry must be able to grasp how relationships are changing in trainees and in trainers, taking into consideration the various ways in which people relate. Relationships are the basis of working in the restaurant industry; it is all about relationships, whether they are within the brigade or outside it. This concept needs to be conveyed by trainers to students. Language proficiency also holds great importance for students and trainers, especially since the professional training is increasingly multicultural. In education, foreign languages are still not given the importance they deserve, sometimes they are put in the same cauldron with other subjects. While the purely professional skills can be deepened on the job, during the internship experience, knowledge of languages is required by companies right away when they start the internship.

In the tourism sector there is a difficulty in integrating people with cognitive impairment, since it is an industry of customer relations and contact. The difficulty is greater than in integrating people with physical disabilities. In back-office jobs, people with both types of disabilities can adapt.

Technical skills are acquired on the job, through hands-on experience, as training is done in-house within the hotel's facilities to acquire certain knowledge and hard skills. What is somewhat lacking is support for young people to understand their career path, which is difficult for everyone, even those with some years of experience. Therefore, training for young people who want to work in this sector should be consultative and coaching-based to guide them and help them understand the path to take and choose the most suitable position. It is equally important to focus on developing soft skills, as well as practical training on the main tools used by hotels. Training on cybersecurity and the related tools and measures that can be implemented, with many practical examples of various risk scenarios and dangers, is also crucial, given that hotels deal with guests' sensitive data. Continuous updating of skills in digital marketing is also necessary. It is equally useful to provide training on tools and platforms for remote event and conference management, in online or blended modes. Additionally, training on artificial intelligence, augmented reality, and other technologies that can enhance the

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guest experience, even before their arrival at the hotel, is desirable. As such, training on the use of the latest 5.0 technologies to promote and enhance the experiential aspect for the guests is essential.

### *Sustainability*

One student showed interest in working in a sustainable environment: “I would love to work in an environment that promotes eco-sustainability, whether it is working in the mountains or at the seaside, if there are concrete initiatives to preserve the environment”. Participants mentioned that during the training they were encouraged to be curious and to seek out and explore different topics. They also addressed issues related to geography and nature tourism. They also felt that there had been some preparation and transmission of the idea that there are people with different needs and that it is necessary to know how to deal with these situations and come up with appropriate solutions.

In terms of transportation, it is considered that there are different more sustainable options, such as bicycles or buses, but for people with special needs there is not much inclusion in the available offers. Therefore, to ensure an inclusive experience it may be necessary to have more suitable alternatives for the customer.

It was clear that there is a transition to sustainability. Sustainability has become one of the main interests and driving forces in the sector, including hotels. Even in promotional events attended by various representatives of the hospitality industry, there is significant interest in the topic. The aspect of sustainability is particularly evident in how hotels present themselves online, emphasizing and highlighting the theme. In this regard, recent research by booking.com highlighted how much people are willing to pay a little more to stay in hotels that define themselves as sustainable. People are certainly seeing more and more accommodation facilities that define themselves as sustainable and are trying to do something about sustainability. Therefore, a sustainable transition is underway, but there is also a lot of greenwashing.

Increasingly in hotels it is important to have sustainability specialists, due to the growing environmental certification. One challenge sometimes faced is communicating the sustainability measures adopted to the outside world. It is also a challenge to create awareness among customers. Communication is considered a very important aspect of the new sustainability competencies. Companies include environmental practices in their vision and strategy, but in practice there is still little evidence. One participant felt that this was related to a lack of skills in this area, so that more training in this field would make a big difference on the practical side. There are several funding opportunities from the state and the European Union for works in favour of

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environmental sustainability, but often these opportunities are not known by operators in the sector.

The willingness to change things, particularly in favour of environmental sustainability, exists and is seen as perceptible. But it needs to be supported by various actors, especially those who have some acknowledgement in the field. In addition, to make the change happen it is important to find the right ways to get certain messages across based on positive, real-world experiences in the restaurant industry. At the level of policy makers, the focus is also on the digital and sustainable transformation of the tourism sector. These include the development of modalities and technologies for integrated systems in agribusiness, tourism and ecology. Regarding tourism enhancement, the development of technologies and virtual realities to promote the artistic and cultural heritage of the region is envisaged. It also aims to develop technological solutions to enhance sustainable hospitality opportunities in nature areas and to foster digitalization to increase the interaction of tourism demand by exploiting Big Data in the sector. A participant explained that the technological trajectories were partly codified by the Tourism Directorate, which is responsible for the strategy for the sector. The role of the Training Directorate was to develop specific guidelines and projects, i.e., actual directives, which provided the necessary tools to develop the skills to achieve these goals. One example given was the 'Competences for the transition to new models of tourism development' (DGR 1645 of 19 December 2022), an initiative aimed at enhancing the skills of workers, entrepreneurs and managers in the tourism sector, with a focus on the digital and green transition. Thus, the development of the skills of operators and workers in the sector was pursued through this instrument.

## *Digitalisation*

Contrary to expectations, some students still prefer to use physical media such as paper to work. However, they consider themselves adapted to this new trend and capable of integrating technology into their tasks. Digitalization has several advantages, allowing access to more information and generating knowledge. However, it is important to be able to distinguish between reliable and less reliable sources of information.

Regarding digitalization, there is a digital transition underway. More and more services, internal activities, and work processes are being optimized and streamlined using computer tools. It was considered important to be familiar with Property Management Systems (PMS), which handle customer management and all the portals that help bookings enter the management system, as well as various interfaces, booking engine systems, or managing booking extranets and all Online Travel Agencies (OTAs). Familiarity and the ability to interface within this world, with these systems and devices, are

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required, especially for front office profiles rather than booking or event management. Familiarity with the whole world of messaging is also required. The use of various technological devices helps facilitate the work of managers, improve organization, streamline processes, and reduce costs, but they must go hand in hand with people's empathy, which is lacking in machines. There is still a lot of ignorance and little knowledge of the digital world. As it was explained, in big hotel chains customer communication occurs via Chatbots, dedicated chat systems for customers to contact. Therefore, communication no longer relies on emails but directly on a continuously active chat. Equally important is the knowledge of various review sites where customers can leave reviews and manage them (e.g., how to find them, how to interpret them, how to respond, etc.). It is also necessary to have knowledge and skills related to home automation and all those technologies and software that rooms or conference centres are equipped with. Equally crucial is the ability to manage and master social media for the hotel's external communication, as well as the ability to create QR codes (e.g., all menus are online, so how to create a menu, how to constantly update it when introducing new dishes or updating prices, etc.) and proficiency in various apps. Even for more operational staff in the kitchen or maintenance, it is very important to know how to use certain tools: for example, in the kitchen, the use of vacuum sealing or new low-temperature cooking technologies, so being updated and trained on all new technologies serving the catering industry.

Participants consider that regarding digital skills there is more awareness and more concreteness, also because there is a greater economic return. Digital is extremely linked to economic gain, to increasing sales, or to saving time. As “time is money”, there is clearly more awareness and therefore digital skills are in demand in the sector.

The importance of Lean Management, which helps to analyse processes, and to streamline them also through technology is also an opportunity: "For instance, floor maids have tablets connected to our operating system that allows them to provide real-time information on the cleaning status of each room; they can use them to make reports, maintenance requests, take photos, and effectively communicate the room's cleanliness to proceed more quickly. Then, of course, there is oversight from the housekeeper, but by doing this, you anticipate the times a little, and even the front office is more aware of the state of the rooms, the preparation times to provide information to the customer. So, communication is more effective. Streamlining internal processes and procedures saves time that can be dedicated to pampering the customer and offering them ever better services. In this regard, technology is certainly helpful". Participants also think that excessive reliance on



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technology can make it more impersonal and, therefore, may not convey the sense of excellence that customers expect.

Some examples of digitalization already adopted or planned by hotel chains are robots to handle room service and conference halls; automated information services about the property's features in a sort of chatbot, through which customers can request various information before entering the property.

## *Training*

In terms of education, some of the constraints identified were problems in the classroom, which limited learning for some students, and the fact that to take extra courses they had to pay a fee and not everyone was willing to do so, which prevented them from taking them. It was considered important to develop geographical knowledge and explore the reality of different regions during the training. Companies use interprofessional funds dedicated to the sector to invest in training and to drive forward innovation projects. They also allocate funds for staff training and the development of soft skills. In internal training the feedback is used as a method to train teams in each working opportunity. In language teaching, participants consider experiences outside the classroom to be beneficial, such as exchange activities and projects, Erasmus mobility, to give them good practise opportunities. Another example given was the project MOVE: “If we want to mention a special feature of our regional programming, we can mention the MOVE projects for the development of language skills. These projects enable a significant number of young people each year to improve their language skills through an experience abroad. Approximately 85% of the participating young people benefit from this English language strengthening experience and return to Italy prepared for the language certification exam.”

In the process of upskilling and reskilling, time is one of the biggest challenges. In hotels, it is necessary to guarantee the operationalization of the service, so it is difficult to involve the entire team in training processes. One participant explained: “In my opinion, the main obstacle is dedicating time and involving more people in training. It is quicker to train supervisors. It is quicker to train supervisors because they are less operational, so we can detach them a bit more from operational tasks. However, the aim is to try to give everyone comprehensive training on certain topics that are important to the company”.

Some areas of training considered relevant in any role in the tourism sector were conflict management and problem solving, cross-sectional training on feedback; technical training in digital skills. The future of training should also focus on coaching, especially in the human resources

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department, as mentioned: “In other words, a personalized coaching program would be very useful to understand how the Human Resource department can support the life of the company”. Training in data analysis could also be one of the bets for the future. Workers, professionals, consultants, and trainers in the restaurant industry should be more open to new things, such as the concepts of environmental sustainability and digitalization. They should also be open-minded and have an inclusive approach. This is an aptitude that needs to be passed on, by those who are already able to acquire information – such as trainers and others who hold some leading role in professional training. This facilitates knowledge transfer from, for example, a chief trainer to the students. So, starting with the skills enhancement on environmental sustainability and digitalization of trainers it can be cascaded down to the learners.

In terms of skills, one of the needs of travel agencies is specific digital knowledge, for example, in GDS, which is more difficult to pass on to VETs due to its complexity and the fact that they are systems with an associated value. It is also important to invest in knowledge of geography, knowing destinations and what they have to offer. In tourism, trainers need to constantly and independently update themselves to pass on current information.

In the restaurant industry, a number of needs were highlighted: growing need for qualified personnel; growing need for enhanced professional readiness to be achieved in the vocational training schools, to facilitate subsequent entry into the companies; increased attention of policy makers to vocational training and needs detected in a specific local area which has interesting tourism features; need to make the sector more attractive, through the inclusion of new professional figures most attractive to young people. Vocational schools have an important role to play in responding to the needs of the sector, and they must be attentive to the market and adapt their curricula.

A participant considered that tourism courses should be led and organized by fewer trainers, but by more workers with experience in the sector. Alternatively, a preliminary work among the trainers should be carried out first, possibly including practical cases, so they can compare and structure a more useful course for those intending to enter the tourism industry.

### *Challenges*

From the interviews it was concluded that the most challenging professional profiles to find are those involved in manual work: kitchen staff, waitstaff, and maintenance workers. Front office and office staff are easier to come by. What penalizes the sector is shift work: some people, after several years of

working certain jobs with shifts, may seek to leave the sector or move horizontally to other departments they are not required to work on weekends. Seasonality is also a factor, as some people only want to work seasonally. Nonetheless, there are still those who seek permanent positions and a certain stability. Despite the challenges, it is considered possible to build a career in the tourism sector, because there is the possibility of horizontal growth, of moving from hotel to hotel within the same group.

The analysis shows that there is no employability problem in the sector; those with the right skills can easily find work, as supply is greater than demand. An example given was: “In Veneto, for example, 87% of young people attending ITS enter the labour market within six months of completing the course. Therefore, discussing employability in this context is of little significance considering these considerations. The remaining 13% either changed sectors or continued their studies. We are living in a period of *de facto* zero unemployment”.

One participant reflected on attracting human resources to the sector and considered: “We live in an era where the lack of human capital is a crucial problem. The drama of our social system is precisely the absence of this human capital. The need is not only for skills, although these are always important. What we really need are people. The real goal is to attract human capital from other territories, from cultural, linguistic, and historical contexts like ours. To ensure a future not only for the tourism industry, but for the entire economic and socio-economic system of our territory, we must focus on attracting human capital”.

In terms of sustainability, participants consider that the price is still a challenge. Despite growing awareness of environmental issues, customers still do not make this a requirement, also because it is usually associated with a higher cost. Considering the economic aspect, the price has a significant impact on travellers' decisions. With the increasing costs, including fuel, coffee, and other consumer goods, families are forced to carefully evaluate how much they spend on vacations. Faced with the choice between a more expensive green holiday and a more affordable option, it is understandable that most opt for the less expensive one. Therefore, it is important to use strategies that take these financial considerations into account, such as offering economic incentives like a holiday bonus. This type of incentive, which provides immediate discounts to customers, can be beneficial for the clients and businesses, which subsequently recover the costs through tax breaks.

*The future*

The future of training courses is: focus on soft skills; targeted courses for trainers, based on the needs identified, which can be the same needs expressed by the companies; courses held by different trainers (such as consultants or others), not just by trainers working in the technical skills development area; provide trainers and training developers with more opportunities to present and discuss the actual status of skills acquisition and the capacity of meeting training needs.

**Portugal**

Nine interviews were held with various stakeholders in the sector, in Portugal (table 28). From the interviews in Portugal some topics can be highlighted after the thematic analysis (table 29).

**Table 28 - Presentation of Portugal's interview sample**

<b>Position in the sector</b>	<b>Number of participants</b>
Student	1
Former student	1
Employer	2
Expert	3
Student	1
Former student	1

**Table 29 - Portugal - Thematic analysis of the interview material**

<b>Keywords</b>
Skills
Training
Digitalization
Sustainability
Sector
Funding

Keywords
Future trends
Challenges

## **Results of the interviews – Discussion**

### *Skills*

In Portugal there are many small accommodations, so it is important for professionals in the field to have skills in different areas, and to have the ability to multitask. It is considered important for students to acquire general knowledge in different areas. Often, they may not master the topics, but they should have a basic understanding.

Tourism is a people industry and involves contact with different people. It is therefore considered important for professionals to be friendly, approachable and communicative. It is also important to have knowledge of different languages and to be competent; being professional is not enough, it is crucial to be friendly. One participant considered: “You may not be a 100% professional, but if you can work on it, or with training, whatever, you can work on it. But someone who is not nice, you cannot work with, no matter how much they do”.

It is important to encourage the acquisition of technical skills that are not, therefore, specific to the area of tourism, but also stimulate transversal skills, namely regarding communication, socialization, which are very important for a professional in the sector. These are also important for working in other areas, perhaps in tourism these skills stand out more because there is interaction and visitor satisfaction is often strongly related to it. Therefore, it is necessary that these communication skills and socialization are stimulated in students: knowing how to be and how to communicate are considered very important elements. In terms of soft skills, flexibility (both in terms of working hours, as many tourism workers work shifts or long hours, and in terms of operations, i.e., they must be able to carry out several tasks at the same time), the ability to approach the customers, involving them in activities, and knowing how to welcome someone with a smile were highlighted. Language skills were also considered important in the sector. Knowing the English language is considered essential: a tourism professional cannot, for example, just master technology, they must have a good knowledge of English to progress. It is becoming increasingly important for professionals to be able to speak languages other than English, such as French and Spanish. Digital marketing was also presented as an important skill to have, because it touches on the website, social networks and

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applications, and therefore campaigns, content production. In terms of teaching, one of the aspects mentioned was the teachers: to teach digital marketing, it was considered that teachers cannot just study the subject, they must have more practical experience.

The tourism sector is transversal and involves knowledge in different areas. In addition to soft skills and technical knowledge, it is important for students to have general culture, knowledge of the arts, culture, nature (regarding biology and natural habitat). Participants consider that getting good grades does not make for good professionals, it is necessary to be empathetic, sympathetic and able to deal with difficult situations. As said: "We can prepare them, let us say train them in the knowledge that these situations require, I can give first aid training, among others, but it is only the moment that will make the person know how they are going to react to that situation".

One challenge presented by an employer was the writing skills of people entering the job market. Many use ChatGPT but end up using the content as it comes out and not as a tool to help develop a topic better.

Participants consider that it is important to be professional and passionate about work: "I think that any professional who is passionate about what they do, who is interested in making sure that people leave as enlightened and satisfied as possible, and that we visit the most beautiful places and the right places, is a big benefit".

In general, participants considered that tourism professionals must have a lot of soft skills, a lot of patience, pleasantness, and must be able to solve problems quickly.

### *Training*

Upskilling in tourism and in general is essential so that people do not get stuck in a reality that does not represent the present or the future. Training in tourism is seen as essential and must be continuous, regardless of the years of experience people have.

One of the participants did an Erasmus mobility in Eastern Europe and felt a big difference in terms of teaching. Their conclusion was that teaching in Portugal is more developed and more intense. However, they consider it an important experience for personal growth. Comparing the course at the University of Aveiro with other courses, the fact that it has a management component related to tourism gives a completely different approach and a much more advanced level of learning and development than at other universities. The fact that at the University of Aveiro the course offers the possibility of doing an internship at the end of the degree also adds value. One of the students interviewed felt that the course prepared students well



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for the job market. During the pandemic, there has been a great deal of adaptability on the part of teachers, in trying to make lessons more suitable for the students, in the content taught and in adopting technologies to improve the teaching process. The teaching of tourism during and after Covid ended up being closely linked to the theme of the adaptation of accommodation and tourism services to a pandemic.

In Portugal there are tourism courses that already have subjects such as technology laboratory subjects, which focus on technological solutions in the tourism sector. A student from the University of Aveiro believes that during the course they work with various programs and software in different disciplines. The participant considered this knowledge to be an asset when entering the job market. Some of the software used during the course focused on reversals, statistics and data analysis. The course attended was in line with the market. This is only possible through periodic reviews of academic curricula.

Both students and teachers consider that the integration of Erasmus students in classes improves the teaching experience, and there is the possibility of exchanging experiences.

There is a big difference between technology from the point of view of the user and knowing how to use technology in the work context. Younger people may be more so inclined, but they also must learn how to apply existing solutions to the reality of the sector.

Internships are described as a way for students to challenge themselves and get out of their comfort zone. One example given was a student who studied and lived in Aveiro and was selected to do an internship on the island of Madeira in cultural animation, an area that would be a challenge for them as they were a more introverted type of person. However, they said they loved the experience. One participant considered: “I think that without a practical component, the course does not make sense”. Often, in higher education, tourism courses do not have an internship included in the curriculum. This is considered an important form of learning.

Nowadays it is more complicated to capture students' attention, so the methodologies adopted by teachers have been changing. Students do not react as well to more theoretical moments and discussions of concepts. One participant said: “But we cannot limit our teaching to this component alone, so it is also necessary to acquire other skills, other competences that often must be transmitted in the classroom through more expository methodologies, reflection, and critical analysis”. In general, it is considered that a practical approach is the best way to learn; more practical activities help you learn better and not just memorize content. As an example, a student had to give a guided tour of a monument in the city where they were studying

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to a group of Erasmus students. Another interesting method highlighted is role-playing, in which students are in a context close to the real world and must adopt roles. Internships are also considered important in learning; however, they are often unpaid, and this can demotivate students. In internships, trainees often do the same tasks as the other employees, so there is a perception of unfairness.

One participant receives trainees from the University of Aveiro and considers that the students are well prepared for the area in which his company operates, which is more of a business area: “Training given at the University of Aveiro is excellent”. It is important that universities tell students about the various alternatives they can pursue in tourism, so that they do not think they can only go to a hotel or restaurant. As well as studying tourism, in this area it is important for students to have activities outside the course, to do internships, to volunteer at tourist sites, to work in restaurants. These experiences allow them to develop diverse knowledge and give them a more holistic understanding of the sector.

Bachelor's degrees in Portugal are three years long and that may not be enough in tourism. It is considered important for students to continue their studies to specialize.

### *Digitalization*

Tourism is one of the areas where technological development and technology are most present and can make the difference. The adoption of technology is seen as a constantly growing issue in tourism. This transition is happening, but gradually. One participant said: “Tourism touches on all human issues, on our needs, to feed ourselves, to sleep, to rest, to contact, to get to know new realities, the human element. I think I am going to die without seeing this great revolution in which the human element is not relevant”. There was some “fear” about adopting too much technology, as it could jeopardize certain jobs. Participants believe there should be a balance. Despite the evolution, with online check-in, among others, the human factor remains essential in the sector. Services in tourism are still considered to be the most important point; service and attention are identified as the aspects that differentiate hotels, agencies and restaurants. The adoption of robots and automated solutions may not work in this respect. Creating valuable tourism experiences is essential for spaces and services to stand out. In this line of thought, in the tourism sector, artificial intelligence will have more potential if applied in the back office: “I do not think face-to-face can ever be replaced by a robot, because I think you lose a lot of the tourist experience and the quality of the experience. I think I am also a bit against making everything too technological. I think there still needs to be the essence of face-to-face and of connections and relationships. I think it is very important that this

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continues to be present”. On the other hand, one participant believes that artificial intelligence is very good at placing marketing content on websites and that it is already replacing people in this task: “It is already replacing humans and I think that is where the future lies, not having people doing things that a machine can do or think about (...) Artificial intelligence is here to stay, it would be like denying the existence of the Internet”. In the end, companies will choose what is cheapest: “humans are very expensive. They get sick, they get paid anyway, they get distracted, they miss work”.

The self-check-in trend is becoming more and more common and ends up passing on some responsibilities from the receptionist to the customer. Tourist satisfaction with this new version of hospitality will depend on what they are looking for. If tourists are not just looking for the lowest price, they may want a more personalized welcome: “In my opinion, from the perspective of someone who has worked in reception and who has been on the other side, as a customer, I think there should be a choice, but it undoubtedly reduces the level of contact between the tourist and the hotel”. Some participants recognize the potential that artificial intelligence can have in tourism, however they feel that it would not be well received, as people are afraid of what the incorporation of AI could do. One participant was pleased about a future in which there are robots in a reception or restaurant but believes that there are several disadvantages for the various players. As they explained, when they did an internship in tourism, one of the most rewarding things was when tourists took time out of their vacation to say goodbye and ask if the person would be there the following year. And that would disappear with automation, since one of the factors that often leads people to return to the same hotel year after year is the people. AI could be more integrated into processes and not so much into interaction with people.

ChatGPT and other similar platforms are sometimes used for content marketing, but they still have a limited reach in the smaller lodgings.

During the pandemic, people have lost the habit of going to city tourist offices to ask for suggestions of restaurants, places to visit and to ask for information.

### *Sustainability*

Tourism is considered one of the main polluting activities worldwide, namely air transport, which is one of the biggest polluters, so there is a growing concern that tourism has these harmful environmental impacts. On the other hand, tourism breathes nature, environment, resources, many free resources, which do not have a market price and if tourism is not based on sustainable development principles, it can destroy them. So, in tourism, for several years, decades now, the issue of sustainability has been a hot topic

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and continues to be so. The environmental sustainability is very important, but there are also more and more issues related to social sustainability, namely community involvement and respect for host communities. Often what is happening in some destinations is that residents are almost considered foreigners in that area. In other words, they are basically the owners of those resources, and they are excluded from using them. In some cases, for example, the beaches are all concessioned and often they cannot go there, or they must pay high prices. There is an issue here (mass tourism, overtourism), which is calling into question, and is highlighting the importance of looking not only at sustainable development, at an environmental level, but also at a social level. Another increasingly addressed issue in tourism has to do with inclusion and diversity, because tourism, leisure and recreation are often considered a right, a right for everyone.

There has been a paradigm shift since Covid: people are looking for more sustainable institutions. In terms of the environment, some participants believe that companies communicate this concern to the outside world, but then internally they do not adopt practices in line with what they say they are doing [greenwashing]: “They advertise to the outside world the importance they attach to these environmental issues, for example, but from the inside they were not respectful in the sense that, for example, recycling was not done in the two hotels I stayed in”. Tourists are increasingly looking for hotels that adopt environmental practices. What we see is that in hotels in the city centre, by the sea, in hotels that do not identify/promote themselves as ecological, many tourists do not come due to the absence of this concern. Climate changes are a trendy topic, it is considered very important and there is a large slice of tourists who value it and are looking for accommodation and places that respect these beliefs. The younger population is very aware of these issues and values the introduction of environmental practices in the places where they stay.

Covid has, in a way, given strength to sustainability issues. Hotels are paying more and more attention to this issue because customers are increasingly aware and familiar with it. The younger generation sees it as important during their stay. For some participants, sea and beach tourism may lose its prominence in the future, and people may look more towards cultural, nature and novelty tourism.

Despite having taken the course almost a decade ago, one of the participants mentioned that sustainability issues were already being addressed then. In Portugal, nature tourism, focused on preserving the natural state of things, has also been around for a few years.

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It was considered that a sustainability challenge for the younger generation is transportation. Cars are no longer seen as the only means of transportation and people are looking for more sustainable alternatives, such as public transport. One accommodation owner believes that environmental concerns will continue to be a point that can make a space stand out in the future.

### *Sector*

One participant considered it essential for tourism venues/businesses to adapt their offer to their segment also, as mentioned: "If our niche market is senior tourism, we cannot have a hotel full of technology and online things".

In terms of technology integration, different guests will have different preferences. A business traveller may be more predisposed to a more undifferentiated service, with little or no human interaction, and the space is only for sleeping. A family on vacation, on the other hand, may want a warmer welcome and more support. One participant believes: "A personal experience, personal attention, a warmth when you arrive can and undoubtedly does add something to the experience, even if it is just for one night". Artificial intelligence and the integration of technology are growing trends, but: "I think nothing beats the human warmth, the friendliness of a person who is in front of us".

Right now, a revolution is happening in Portugal and other countries have already seen it. In Switzerland there are many immigrants guaranteeing hotel services. Today in Portugal this is happening more and more, many restaurants and hotels would close if they did not have immigrants. If you do not have the ability to understand other people, you can always have that perspective: "They are here, they have to adapt to us, but you as a manager have to get people to do their jobs, to optimize their processes and their tasks".

There are currently two types of tourists: those who arrive, check-in and go to their room without interacting (they often prefer to check in online) and those who want personalized service, asking for recommendations of places to visit and restaurants in the area.

The perspective of some participants is that the growing use of technology has affected the travel agency sector. It is considered that these companies must adapt to technological evolution. However, one participant who works with travel agencies considers that demand has been growing since the Covid-19 pandemic, also due to the uncertainty that this period has brought. During this period, travel agents ended up being responsible for helping many people return to Portugal, and the idea of safety associated with this service was reinforced. Travel agencies are a people-to-people business and



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have the resources and IT systems to help customers when problems arise on the other side of the world. The opinion of someone involved in travel agencies is that younger people are also starting to use this service more.

One reflection left by one participant: "At the end of the day, in 20, 30 years' time, the truth is that we will remember much more and with good memories a personalized activity or for a few people than a pavilion full of people we do not know and who basically mean nothing to us".

Some participants believe that good professionals are those who like what they are doing: "The first thing about being in tourism is that you must like it, because if you do not, you cannot do it. You cannot create. Secondly, you must create empathy with the client, when the client arrives, they must feel that they are welcomed and that people like having them here". As an example, the situation of a person was presented who started working late in the sector, with no training in the area, but whose passion for it led them to the sector.

### *Funding*

Smaller dwellings find it difficult to obtain financing, because of the bureaucracy involved and because investments often have very high minimum values, which cannot be achieved by them. In Portugal, public support is more geared towards larger companies with a different investment capacity.

### *Future trends*

One of the trends identified was that tourists are increasingly seen as users and not necessarily as customers.

One reflection of a participant in terms of the future was: "I think we should prepare people for a demanding activity and above all prepare people for a world in constant change, people who have an open mind, who are able to receive people from the most diverse backgrounds, with completely different ways of being in life and who, at the same time, have the ability to receive as a single person, as a guest".

Automation and AI are seen as major trends in the sector. One participant believes that in the future AI will be able to replicate emotions.

Regarding what tourists are looking for today, one participant's perception is: "I think that today tourists are increasingly looking for authentic, local experiences and convenience when booking, for example, how quickly you can book. Good access, of course, because I am generalizing, but Wi-Fi, sustainable practices that are increasingly important these days, personalized experiences, I think that is increasing a lot. We are



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moving from mass tourism to this more personalized side, which people want. They want some of their wishes fulfilled and there are certain businesses that make it possible to personalize these experiences. Of course, security, cleanliness of the room are very important and flexibility in booking and cancellation policies”.

Innovation in tourism also involves creating differentiating and unique experiences. AI can be used to provide access to a range of experiences that many people would not be able to do. It can be a form of social inclusion: “I will never be able to climb Kilimanjaro, because I cannot be at 6000m, so I can try to replicate that experience with virtual tourism and with virtual reality, I think it will replace it in a way, it is cheaper”.

## *Challenges*

One problem identified was the loss of identity of urban centres, which no longer have traditional stores due to high rent prices. There is also a high concentration of people there.

One challenge for teachers is in terms of the teaching methodologies adopted, since with YouTube and the growing availability of online content, students are less and less looking for purely theoretical lessons, as they have mechanisms at home that can help them develop this knowledge. Before, schools were not worried about training the teachers because the time frame was long, in other words, a person who was a specialist in economics was going to be a specialist with that knowledge for the next 10/20 years. They would do a master's degree, a doctorate, then a few more courses, but they were perfectly sufficient. A participant considered: "Today, I would say that, in all areas of knowledge, things are moving so fast, and universities cannot fire teachers, so we need to think about teacher training curricula. Is this a relevant issue?". To overcome these challenges, universities and teachers can invite experts from the sector to give some more practical lessons and pass on their experience. Universities must also adapt their curricula on a regular basis.

A participant considered: "Tourism is a very difficult area, there is little time off, the wages are not very good, there are difficult working hours, at weekends, etc. From what I have seen, people are abandoning tourism unless wages really increase".

In the area of travel agents, one challenge identified was the appearance of many travel agents online, on social networks, who sometimes are not qualified to do so. To overcome this challenge, there could be a kind of license, which would also provide some security for the client.

With Covid many professionals left the sector and went to sectors that offered similar salaries and better working hours. In the catering sector, there

is great difficulty in attracting people to work. Many people who work in catering end up having no training in the area and this is sometimes reflected in the service they supply.

### **Summary of the interviews by country**

Figure 8 shows a summary of the interviews. Note how there are common themes across national borders and even across continents. Tourism specialist China suggests that we:

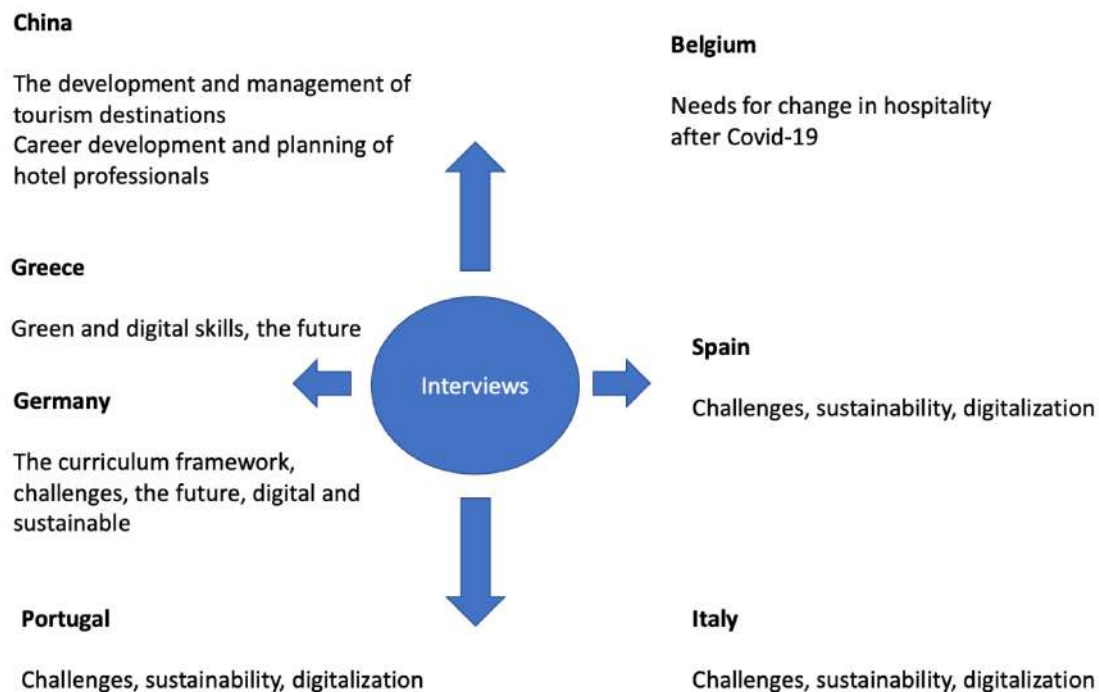
- Develop and manage tourism destinations
- Develop and plan careers of hotel professionals

Managing and Planning for tourism are apparent priorities in China.

EVBB (Belgium) is concerned with changes after COVID-19, including the consumer shift towards greater sustainability.

Germany is concerned with its local needs and with the curriculum framework, which in Germany is very expensive due to individual needs and copyright protection. Challenges in Germany, in the future, digital and should prove to be of first-tier importance.

The remaining countries – Italy, Portugal, Spain, Greece – show legitimate concerns about the future. Green and digital skills, the environment and sustainability, are real issues to prepare for, for example.



**Figure 8 – A summary of the interviews by country.**

# Chapter 5

## Discussion and Concluding Remarks

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An experiment was done regarding the future of AI and in this section. Namely, we asked ChatGPT to write 2,000 words to flesh out the ideas expressed in the following summary of ours:

This research has confirmed that the tourism industry is concerned about three key issues. These issues can be expressed as 1. Sustainability 2. Digitalization Technology 3. Management. There is much scope for training in these issues/concerns ranging from relatively simple skills for individuals' behaviour in conserving resources and acquiring the skill needed to use technology, to facilitating middle and senior management making better tactical and strategic decisions. The task is to use training in various communities in an accessible and affordable way to ensure each country optimizes the benefits which are achievable by a healthy and long-term tourist industry.

ChatGPT's summary gives an excellent idea of what message our book has (the ChatGPT text is within inverted commas):

### **“Key Challenges in the Tourism Industry: Sustainability, Digitalization, and Management**

In recent years, the tourism industry has faced significant shifts due to technological advances, changing consumer demands, and growing awareness of environmental issues. Among the most critical challenges are **sustainability**, **digitalization technology**, and **management**. These three areas not only reflect current industry priorities but will also shape its future. This book explores each of these areas and highlights how training can help address their challenges. By providing accessible, community-focused training, countries can maximize the benefits of a robust and sustainable tourism industry.

#### **1. Sustainability in Tourism**

##### **Demand for Sustainable Tourism**

Sustainability has become a major concern for the tourism sector, driven by travelers who are increasingly aware of environmental issues such as climate change, resource depletion, and biodiversity loss. Many tourists now seek eco-friendly travel options and want to engage in activities that do not harm

the environment. For example, responsible wildlife tourism, eco-lodges, and low-impact tours are all becoming more popular. However, balancing economic growth with sustainability remains challenging, especially in areas that depend heavily on tourism for their income.

Some regions, like small islands and coastal destinations, face an even more complex challenge. These places are often economically reliant on tourism but also more vulnerable to environmental degradation. For instance, coral reefs, beaches, and natural reserves may suffer from the pressures of overtourism, leading to a vicious cycle where environmental degradation reduces the attractiveness of the destination, which in turn harms the local economy.

### **Training for Sustainable Practices**

One of the most effective ways to address sustainability issues in tourism is through training programs designed to promote responsible practices. This could range from educating tourists and staff on energy and water conservation to offering businesses guidance on how to minimize waste or adopt renewable energy sources. For example, a hotel might train its employees to implement recycling programs, while a tour operator could introduce sustainable travel practices that encourage tourists to respect local cultures and ecosystems.

Local communities also benefit from sustainability training. For instance, local artisans or small-scale food producers could be trained in sustainable production methods that appeal to eco-conscious tourists. This not only provides income but also helps protect local traditions and resources. Training community leaders on resource management and sustainable development can ensure that tourism growth does not come at the expense of long-term environmental health.

## **2. Digitalization in Tourism**

### **How Technology is Shaping Tourism**

Digital technology has had a transformative impact on tourism. The way people book trips, experience destinations, and even make payments has changed drastically in the past decade. Online platforms like Airbnb, Booking.com, and TripAdvisor have made it easier for travelers to find accommodations and experiences, while digital marketing has given tourism businesses new ways to reach their audiences. Technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI), big data, and blockchain are increasingly influencing how businesses in the tourism industry operate.

## ***Discussion and Concluding Remarks***

The COVID-19 pandemic further accelerated the digital transformation of the tourism sector. With travel restrictions in place and social distancing measures becoming the norm, businesses adopted digital tools to stay afloat. Contactless check-ins, virtual tours, and remote customer service became common as tourism operators adapted to new expectations. Even now, digital solutions are helping the industry recover by making travel more seamless and safe.

However, not every business or community is equally equipped to take advantage of these technological advancements. Small businesses in particular often face challenges when trying to adopt new technologies, either due to a lack of resources or insufficient digital skills. This could potentially widen the gap between larger, more tech-savvy companies and smaller, locally-owned businesses.

### **Training for Digital Skills**

To stay competitive, tourism professionals at all levels need training in digital tools and technologies. Frontline staff, for instance, could benefit from training in digital booking platforms, customer service chatbots, and contactless payment systems. For management teams, training might focus on more advanced tools like data analytics to help them better understand consumer behavior, or blockchain for secure and transparent transactions.

Specialized digital skills training can also help businesses harness big data to personalize customer experiences. Hotels could use this data to offer tailored services, while tour operators could develop more targeted marketing campaigns. At the same time, training in digital marketing techniques such as social media engagement or search engine optimization (SEO) could help businesses attract more customers.

For communities, particularly those in remote areas, accessible and affordable digital training programs are essential. Governments and NGOs can play a key role by providing such training, ensuring that local businesses do not miss out on the opportunities that digitalization offers. These efforts will help bridge the gap between high-tech tourism operations and smaller, more traditional businesses.

## **3. Management in Tourism**

### **Modern Tourism Management Challenges**

The role of management in tourism has grown more complex due to the fast-paced changes in the industry. Managers now have to juggle several challenges: adapting to new technologies, managing shifts in consumer preferences, ensuring environmental sustainability, and navigating global events like pandemics or economic recessions. For any tourism business—

whether a small guesthouse or a large multinational chain—effective management is crucial for long-term success.

One of the toughest balancing acts for tourism managers is making decisions that serve both short-term profits and long-term sustainability. On the one hand, a business might focus on attracting more tourists to increase revenue, but this approach risks leading to overtourism, which can damage the local environment and culture, reducing the destination's attractiveness over time. Strategic planning, therefore, becomes vital in ensuring that growth does not come at the expense of the destination's natural and cultural resources.

### **Training for Better Management**

Training programs for tourism management need to focus on building skills in areas such as strategic planning, financial management, marketing, and human resources. Additionally, there is a growing need for management training that incorporates sustainability principles and digital strategies. For instance, managers could be trained on how to implement eco-friendly initiatives within their organizations or how to use digital tools to optimize business operations.

Leadership and change management are also crucial areas for development. In an industry that is constantly evolving, managers must be prepared to lead their teams through periods of transition, whether that is adapting to new technologies, responding to market shifts, or navigating crises like natural disasters or health emergencies. Developing strong leadership skills can help tourism businesses weather these storms more effectively.

Collaboration with local stakeholders is another area where management training can make a difference. Managers should be equipped to build partnerships with community groups, government agencies, and NGOs to ensure that tourism benefits everyone. By working together, businesses and communities can create tourism experiences that are both profitable and sustainable.

### **Making Training Accessible and Affordable**

A thriving tourism industry depends on well-trained professionals who understand the importance of sustainability, digitalization, and management. However, training must be made accessible and affordable for all tourism stakeholders, from small business owners to local guides. While large corporations often have the resources to invest in employee training, smaller businesses and individuals, particularly in rural or underdeveloped areas, may lack access to such opportunities.



## ***Discussion and Concluding Remarks***

One solution to this problem is the development of online learning platforms that offer affordable and flexible training options. These platforms allow tourism professionals to gain the necessary skills without having to travel or take time off work. For example, an employee in a remote hotel could complete a course on sustainable hospitality practices or digital marketing at their own pace.

Governments can also play a role by subsidizing training programs or offering incentives for businesses to invest in employee development. In regions where tourism is a major part of the economy, providing financial support for training can help local businesses stay competitive in a rapidly evolving market.

## **Conclusion**

Sustainability, digitalization, and management are critical areas that will shape the future of tourism. By focusing on training, countries and communities can ensure that their tourism sectors are well-prepared to meet these challenges. Accessible and affordable training will help individuals and businesses develop the skills needed to thrive in a changing industry, ensuring that tourism remains a sustainable and profitable economic driver for years to come.

Ultimately, tourism has the potential to create economic opportunities, protect the environment, and support local cultures, but only if the industry invests in the skills and knowledge necessary to manage these challenges effectively.”

## **A more traditional wrap-up**

Still, not feeling entirely satisfied with the concluding remarks, we also did a traditional wrap-up to the book, as follows below, and while citing major references from our literature review. We hence provide the best of both worlds – a conclusion section done based on AI and a conclusion section based on human intuition. We perceive that both approaches add to the depth of the discussion.

## **Discussion and Concluding Remarks**

The importance of the internal organizational environment and of having the right mix of competences cannot be underestimated. Tourism is an industry of complex relationships when one considers all of the industry’s stakeholders, including of course those relationships with often difficult and demanding customers – the tourists themselves. We hope with this book to provide guidance to the future as regards training needs. This book is for those tourism professionals who may need help in defining and knowing where to invest their time and resources in order to be better prepared and successful and sustainable over time.

## *The Future of Tourism: A Training Needs Analysis*

Reskilling and upskilling are increasingly more important words in tourism. What new skills do we need to acquire? What current skills do we need to improve? In view of consumer changes after COVID-19 – and with consumers now more aware of green issues and indeed demanding more environmentally caring institutions and organizations – linked to significant changes in the technology landscape – means that effective training is of paramount importance and cannot be neglected.

As mentioned above, the TourX project includes vocational education and training (VET) providers as well as higher education institutions whose mission is to educate and prepare young and not so young individuals for their futures. We have via the TourX project united forces internationally towards the goal of efficient and effective reskilling and upskilling. What skills will be needed in the future? This has been discussed herein. We have sought to supply a research-based answer, following field-based as well as desk-based research on the theme.

The research results show a predominance of certain keywords, such as Tourism, Training, Sustainability, Technology, Digitalization and Management.

As far as tourism is concerned, transversality can be exemplified according to its meaning and its economic impact. On the one hand, as mentioned above, tourism is the temporary movement of people (students or business people, with perhaps the exception of soldiers at war) to destinations outside their usual places of work and residence, the activities carried out during their stay at these destinations, and the facilities created to satisfy their needs (Mathieson & Wall, 1982). In addition, changes in the tourism sector have been rapid in recent times due to economic, social, and environmental factors (Więckowski & Saarinen, 2019). For these authors, these changes are also taking place in tourist spaces, destinations, and places, especially with regard to their sense of place and identity. Müller (2018) considers that tourist destinations are products that are constantly changing and that this change includes a combination of social, economic, and political schemes that undergo changes based on space and time. Tourist destinations are no longer simply geographical locations waiting to be explored, but rather a reflection of consumer perceptions and choices (Więckowski & Saarinen, 2019). On the other hand, as explained above, the tourism sector is an extremely important sector in economic development, as it is responsible for millions of jobs, contributes to the inflow of foreign currency, improves household income and the country's revenues, and creates a multiplier effect in sectors such as transportation, food and beverages and entertainment (Ohlan, 2015).

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More specifically, the growth of tourism has important economic and social impacts on nations. Examples include improving the population's income (Adu-Ampong, 2018), helping to reduce poverty (Gnangnon, 2020), promoting the development of other industries related directly or indirectly to tourism (Wang et al, 2022), stimulating investment in infrastructure, human capital, and technology (Shahzad et al., 2017).

Training, as one of the words that emerged the most, provides important evidence of the need to develop skills to work in the segment analyzed.

As mentioned above, skills development can be considered a strategic tool for Human Resource Management to deal with the labor market (Nyhan, 1998). These skills, according to Hill and Jones (2004), can improve the efficiency of the organization, and the quality of its products or services, make it innovative and capable of responding quickly and adequately to the customer, reducing costs, creating value and profitability (Hill & Jones, 2004).

In addition, from the worker's point of view, the search for skills, or their updating, is becoming a central point in the dynamics of keeping a job or looking for an alternative, if necessary (Lee & Bruvold (2003).

On the other hand, it is possible to state that training is becoming extremely important in order to achieve high levels of competitiveness. As explored above, from the perspective of Prahalad and Hamel (1990), pursuing a policy of constantly developing the professional skills of their employees has become a key factor in the competitiveness of organizations. When an organization manages to develop and implement practices that promote the skills of its employees, based on the Human Capital Theory (Schultz, 1961), it is creating means (human capital) that differentiate it from others, making it more competitive.

Nowadays, it is becoming increasingly urgent to promote an improvement in the interaction between man and the environment, be it land, sea, water, or air (Davy et al. 2017).

In this sense, the emergence of the word sustainability is a cross-cutting concern for the people investigated. This result finds support in the literature, since due to all the environmental issues, it is becoming urgent for organizations to adopt sustainable strategies, with climate change becoming a growing concern for governments, organizations, and society in general (Paillé et al., 2014).

Even more profoundly, sustainability, when analyzed in conjunction with the other keywords that have emerged, can give rise to the emergence of green human resource management, defined as the alignment of human resource management practices (training, performance management,

recruitment, and selection, and employee engagement) with environmental management practices in an organization (Renwick et al., 2016). Green human resource management can bring numerous benefits, such as training green employees (Yusliza et al., 2017), sustainable purchasing (Aragão and Jabbour, 2017), and facilitating green supply chain management (Teixeira et al., 2016).

As shown above, in recent years the topic of ecological human resource management has attracted the attention and interest of academics in the field of human resource management. Organizations are increasingly aiming for sustainable development. According to the sustainability model, organizations should focus on three pillars: people, profit, and the environment (Ramicilovic-Suominen & Pulzl, 2018). According to these authors, the three pillars lead to the existence of a culture of concern and responsibility for sustainable results, as well as for the environmental effects caused by their organization, relying especially on the role of human resource management to make change possible.

Green human resource management refers to all the activities involved in the development, implementation, and ongoing maintenance of a system that aims to focus on a broader ecological agenda and make an organization's employees more environmentally oriented, making it a branch of Human Resource Management that is concerned with transforming and changing the mindset and behaviors of its employees to achieve the organization's environmental goals which, in turn, will contribute significantly to environmental sustainability (Arulrajah et al., 2015; Jain & D'Lima, 2018).

Another keyword found that exemplifies the transversality between the nations analyzed is technology. As previously evidenced by the literature analyzed, with globalization and technological advances, the risks for organizations have become higher, such as fraud, alterations, and irregularities, making it essential to maintain effective internal controls to protect against these threats (Damdinsuren et al. 2024). In this case, employees must have the skills to use technology so that they can monitor their performance and control.

When we combine technology with other keywords that emerged from the analysis carried out, such as sustainability and training, it becomes clear that, as advocated by the literature in modern societies, the demand for software professionals has been increasing, due to the fact that software development is a complex process, which means that the quality of its results is influenced by the skills and competencies of professionals in this area (Colomo-Palacios et al, 2013). As industries become more digital, technological design and programming move from niche skills to fundamental literacies needed in all functions. For Manawadu et al. (2015),

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the skills of these software professionals should be identified as core competencies, as they are the key to successful software project management.

Another important element that emerged from the cross-cultural analysis was digitalization. Once again, evaluating this element with the others is imperative, especially in conjunction with technology, training, and tourism. It is undeniable that, in the digital era, digitalization has become a central issue in the economy (Tian & Weng, 2024). In addition, digitalization as a technology has an important role to play in modernizing and improving the processes that involve tourism, especially the creation of innovative services for connected consumers (Cardoso et al., 2024).

Finally, management was another keyword that emerged from the cross-cultural analysis. Once again, it is important to discuss the role of this word in conjunction with others, especially in terms of training, technology, and sustainability.

As pointed out in the literature analyzed, it is known that organizational competence development practices have a direct effect on the attitudes and behavior of employees (Paauwe & Richardson, 1997). Thus, according to Arthur (1994), as well as Wood and Menezes (1998), organizations must adapt their practices and create working conditions that lead to positive attitudes and behaviors on the part of employees, which strengthen their emotional ties with the organization, so that they strive to achieve the organization's objectives, increasing its effectiveness.

In this sense, the Human Resources Management of organizations must develop practices aimed at promoting the employability of their employees. By designing internal skills development programs that increase their value to the organization, you are also improving the individual's perception of the degree of internal employability (Cesário et al., 2012). They are also creating diversity and preventing employees from leaving, which, according to the resource-based view, will make them competitive by creating resources (human capital) that are difficult to imitate (Afiouni, 2007; Barney, 1991), and which will have implications for the appropriate use of technologies, awareness, development and implementation of actions aimed at achieving sustainable objectives.

But after all, what does the tourism industry need to do to prepare itself in view of an uncertain future? What does it need to consider?

For sure what is best for tourism and tourism education will emerge over time. We have attempted to account for and create certain scenarios for training according to the needs we have identified - given the evolution of



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technology, of consumer preferences (now greener), and of the need to continuously invest in transversal and soft skills.

Hence, the research carried out allows us to conclude that tourism, as an industry, will have a better chance of successfully facing complex challenges such as the COVID-19 pandemic by investing in the development of skills that take into account the widespread use of technology, especially digitalization, with sustainability as the primary foundation.

In other words, the tourism industry's ability to overcome obstacles essentially involves a paradigm shift or innovation, in which the physical and real world is continually replaced by virtual processes and experiences and, to this end, new digital skills must be developed.

Therefore, as future research, we suggest analyzing the current stage of digitalization in the tourism industry, as well as its impacts at the local, regional and national levels. In addition, we also suggest that a quantitative study (survey) be carried out with as large and representative sample as possible – even though we recognize that such an effort may take months to successfully implement – given the fatigue felt by stakeholders in the tourism industry regarding data collection efforts.

A final word on certain differences between countries and cultures regarding tourism readiness. In many environments, due to resource constraints, immigrants will be necessary to fill in for certain jobs which locals no longer want to fill. The long working hours and relatively low salaries in the tourism industry need to be an object of profound change. Only then will we be also able to attract the talent and high-quality human resources that the industry needs, and not only unqualified human resources in want of training. Tourism is about people and human interaction. However much the digitalization effect evolves human contact and the emotional and somewhat irrational enjoyment that travelling involves will remain ever present. It is up to us as tourism decision-makers and as interested parties to also fight for better conditions for those working in the industry. Tourism is a question of vocation – but it should not be solely so. Financial rewards and increased leisure time are more and more valued and a right for all. Let our study be a starting point for change in the desired direction. For a more sustainable, digital and humane tourism industry.



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# Appendix A

## Focus Group Consent Form

Logo of your organization



...between

Manuel Au-Yang Oliveira, as representative of the research team

...and

...referring the focus group taken within the context of the project “CoVEs for the Tourism Industry

– (TourX)”

The moderator thanks the focus group participant to share opinions as part of the mentioned research project. Ethical procedures for research along with legal provisions in our country and within the EU require that participants explicitly agree to being a focus group participant and on how the information collected will be used. This consent form is necessary to ensure that all parts understand the purpose of the focus group and that all agree to the conditions of participation.

By signing this consent form, both the moderator (and implicitly the research team), and the focus group participant agree to the following:

1. The focus group participant takes part voluntarily in the focus group.
2. The moderator can quote the name of the legal entity (organizations, enterprises, unions, etc.) represented by the focus group participant in the reports and publications that will be produced.
3. The name and personal data of the focus group participant will not be revealed to third parties and will not be published in the reports and publications that will be produced.
4. The focus group participant has the right to retreat from the focus group at any time and has full freedom to refuse providing details or to answer any question that he/she considers too personal or potentially harmful or non-disclosable.
5. The meeting will be recorded, and a transcript will be produced. The information collected from this recording will be solely used for the purposes of the Project and academic purposes.
6. Access to the focus group transcript will be limited to the moderator and the research teams of the consortium of the Project.
7. The focus group participant can ask any questions they might have and have the freedom to contact the moderator in the future with any questions related to the focus group.
8. The moderator can use quotations from the focus group, in the reports that will be produced within the context of the project – including academic products and in any type of report or publication, only after anonymization of the corresponding quotations.
9. The actual recording will be archived for 5 years and afterwards will be destroyed.
10. Any variation of the conditions above will only occur with your further explicit approval.

I am fully aware of the rights of the participant, and protection of the data provided prevails any other research goal.	I have read and understand the explanation provided to me. I have had all my questions answered to my satisfaction, and I voluntarily agree to participate in this research.
Manuel Au-Yang Oliveira	

Place, Escola Profissional de Hotelaria de Fátima, Portugal

Date, 16-02-2024

## Appendix B

### Interview Consent Form

Logo of your organization



...between

Name of interviewer, as representative of the research team

...and

Name of interviewee

...referring the interview taken within the context of the project "CoVEr for Tourism Industry

– (CoVEr)"

The interviewer thanks the interviewee to share opinions as part of the mentioned research project. Ethical procedures for research along with legal provisions in our country and within the EU require that participants explicitly agree to being interviewed and on how the information collected will be used. This consent form is necessary to ensure that all participants understand the purpose of the interview and that all agree to the conditions of participation.

By signing this consent form, both the interviewer (and implicitly the research team), and the interviewee agree to the following:

1. The interviewee takes part voluntarily in the interview.
2. The interviewer can quote the name of the legal entity (organizations, enterprises, unions, etc.) represented by the interviewee in the reports and publications that will be produced.
3. The name and personal data of the interviewee will not be revealed to third parties and will not be published in the reports and publications that will be produced.
4. The interviewee has the right to retreat from the interview at any time and has full freedom to refuse providing details or to answer any question that he/she considers too personal or potentially harmful or non-disclosable.
5. The meeting will be recorded, and a transcript will be produced. The information collected from this recording will be solely used for the purposes of the Project and academic purposes.
6. Access to the interview transcript will be limited to the interviewer and the research teams of the consortium of the Project.
7. The interviewee can ask any questions he might have and has the freedom to contact the interviewer in the future with any questions related to the interview.

8. The interviewer can use quotations from the interview, in the reports that will be produced within the context of the project academic products and in any type of report or publication, only after anonymization of the corresponding quotations.
9. The actual recording will be archived for 5 years and afterwards will be destroyed.
10. Any variation of the conditions above will only occur with your further explicit approval
- 11.

I am fully aware of the rights of the participant, and protection of the data provided prevails any other research goal.	I have read and understand the explanation provided to me. I have had all my questions answered to my satisfaction, and I voluntarily agree to participate in this research.
<u>Name of Interviewer</u>	<u>Name of interviewee</u>

Place,

Date,