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Educators' Perceptions and Incorporation of Critical Perspectives in Tourism Programs: The Case of Mexico

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Given the pressing issues of the 21st century and potential contribution of tourism to the Millennium Development Goals, tourism research is moving beyond discourses of sustainability to address critical issues related to climate change, race, ethnicity and gender, ethics, equity and justice, and disability, among others. At the same time, calls have been made for tourism programs to move from delivering theoretical and applied knowledge to develop reflection, analytical skills and critical thinking about such issues among its students.

However, while progress is noticeable in incorporating sustainable tourism and sustainability related topics to tourism curricula, little is known whether critical perspectives and issues are also being incorporated in tourism education, as they are in tourism research. Therefore, the purpose of our research was to explore if and how critical perspectives are being embedded in tourism programs in Mexico. Specifically, our research sought to answer the following questions: 1) What critical issues do tourism educators consider most relevant to teach in tourism programs? 2) What critical issues are currently being taught in tourism programs, and 3) What pedagogic practices are being used to teach critical issues in tourism? To accomplish our purpose, we conducted a content analysis of tourism curricula of accredited tourism programs in Mexico as well as a survey to the program directors and professor of these programs.

As Belhassen and Caton (2011) argue, a critical pedagogy in tourism education can result in positive outcomes for individuals, society and businesses. Through this study we can explore whether the critical turn in the social sciences is mirrored in the tourism educational space, establish how open and supportive tourism educators are to teaching critical issues in their classes, and identify current strategies undertaken to convey critical perspectives in the classroom.

References

Belhassen, Y. & Caton, K. (2011). On the need for critical pedagogy in tourism education. *Tourism Management* 32(6), 1389-1396.