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Is There a Role for a Lifelong Tourism Education Model in the 21st Century?

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Title: Is There a Role for a Lifelong Tourism Education Model in the 21st Century?

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Abstract:

The need for a critical turn in tourism studies has been a core theme of debate in the general academic literature in the last few decades (Bianchi, 2009). In the specific area of tourism education, there has been a call for more reflexivity, a balance between vocational and liberal education, and the adoption of much more critical methodologies and approaches. Meanwhile, in the UK, the government has an invested political interest in the implementation of widening access and increased participation in its education provision agenda.

The impact of globalisation and ongoing advances in international travel and technology necessitate tourism education frameworks and programmes that are versatile and efficient in addressing the demands of an ever evolving industry. As such, matters of employability take on new meaning far beyond mere vocational and instrumental learning.

According to the British Council (2012), the increasingly competitive external environment has called for continuous improvement of countries' quality assurance standards and the development of international criteria for their education systems. The council further suggests that, in order to maintain global relevance, internationalisation of both teaching and research have become critical objectives for most tertiary institutions. Improvements and advances in science and technology, a swiftly shifting geo-political environment, increased flow and mobility between continents and within countries, plus increasing changing demographics all dictate an immediate and robust response by education providers that seek to remain relevant in the changing face of the education sector.

The onset of the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) in the UK brings to the fore the pertinent refocus on the value and importance of the teaching and learning process. In its 'Success as a Knowledge Economy: Teaching Excellence, Social Mobility, and Student Choice' 2016 white paper, there is a clear call for flexible, innovative, and 'lifetime' learning—providing the best options for students that suit their individual circumstances—in addressing 21st century education demands (The Secretary of State for Business, Innovation, and Skills, 2016).

With these shifts comes the need for continuous improvement in teaching and learning within an adaptable and dynamic education system. It has been argued by Scott (2015) in a paper prepared for UNESCO, that formal education must be transformed to enable new forms of learning that are needed to tackle complex global challenges. Further, it remains pertinent to explore pedagogies and learning environments that may contribute to the development and mastery of twenty-first century competencies and skills, and advance the quality of learning.

Arguably, lifelong education offers an avenue for delivering on the required needs of the learner, the educational institution, and industry. Cuffy et al. (2012), and later Su (2015), explore the role of a lifelong learning approach for tourism. For its significance, this agenda was again revisited by UNWTO at its 2015 conference on Talent Development and Education in Tourism. This paper further advances these concepts and strongly advocates for a lifelong tourism education model in the 21st century.