

Training references in higher education. Area of knowledge: tourism

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Abstract

Tourism is an economic sector that thrusts up the world economy; in Europe it is considered as the second largest sector after trade and distribution. For countries like Mexico, tourism has become as the main economic activity, turning into the preferred destination worldwide. In the case of Colombia, tourism is also considered a world-class industry, there are good prospects for development of this sector and its contribution to the national economy. Thus, in response to this dynamic tourism sector, education institutions are providing academic programs with particular characteristics. This situation proposes an analytical comparison of training in the area of Higher Education Tourism in countries like Mexico, Spain, Cuba and Colombia, taking as variables for analysis, those competences to be developed in the students, formation level at which training is provided, and the structure of academic plans of programs in this area. A documentary research was carried out based on data collection from various sources, systematically reflecting on tourism formation reality, in order to establish references to be used in designing new academic programs in the area of tourism. It has been evidenced that in the case of analyzed countries, formation is oriented to convergence of four basic dimensions: being, thinking, doing and knowledge, which are combined with experience and practice-based knowledge, clearly oriented toward development of competences.

Key words: training, skills, training levels, curriculum structure, curricula, tourism.

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Introduction

Higher education institutions are undergoing great changes, surged, among other factors, from market globalization and technology and communications progress; such changes encourage the offer of pertinent academic programs aimed a meeting the needs of an academic population, which in turn becomes diverse, with different ways of learning, creating complexity in education systems.

Taking into consideration this complexity of education systems, there is concern for improving and ensuring higher education quality, which involve great effort to achieve proper definition, measurement and evaluation. Then, recognized systems of institutional evaluation and accreditation have been incorporated, expecting to achieve academic efficacy and efficiency.

For the Colombian case, the Ministry of National Education, has established regulations in order to ensure higher education quality; Law 1188, 2008 and its regulating Decree 1295 – April, 2010, being the one which regulates the Qualified Registry as a requirement to provide and develop any Academic Program. For the other countries approached in the analysis, regulations on education quality are also plentiful; it is worth to mention such great progress of Mexico and Spain on regulation of formation and development of human resources oriented to touristic companies. Mexico operates the Touristic National Council of Educative Participation –CONATUVE (Spanish abbreviation); and Spain runs the White Book of Degree Studies un Tourism as the orientation rule on designing academic plans, which consider development of competences along the formation process as fundamental.

The Colombian legislation includes a series of conditions to be complied by higher education institutions in order to demonstrate quality of their academic programs; they include a justification in support of the program offer, prepared based on an analysis of current status of formation in the area of knowledge of the proposed program in domestic and international scope.

For such purpose, the study of international references in the area of tourism is proposed, supported and documented on a series of investigations performed by national and internationally recognized entities, including the Colombian Ministry of National Education.

It is proposed an analytical comparison of higher education formation in the area of tourism in Spain, Cuba, Mexico and Colombia, as recognized countries for their touristic and academic development in this discipline, taking as variables in a first instance, those competences expected to be developed in the students of tourism; it is researched on features of academic plans, as a group of specifications to provide courses, and finally, the formation levels at which such training is provided.

Literature review

To begin the research, first of all, the concept of competence and its orientation within processes of curricular design were clarified, going back to the origin; the concept of competences surges in the ambit of structural North American Psychology in the study for business purposes. The basic structure of the concept of competences surged from the *Study of Human Motivation* by David McClelland in the second half of XX Century.

Labor competence strongly surged in the 80s in some developed countries, especially those where there was a major difference between the offer of qualifications provided by the education system and needs of productive system. It was necessary to adapt labor formation to a new and increasingly complex context. The answer was oriented to the concept of labor competences, as an integral approach of formation which from its design intends a direct connection between the labor market and the education system. (Metens, 1996). Competence of individuals derives from their possession of a series of attributes, (skills, values, abilities and attitudes), used on combined basis to perform the job (Gonczi, 1996).

In the European Union (E. Asensio, Y. Cerezo, C. Valbuena, Y. Rodriguez, 2009), claim that the growing interest in education competences is the result of influence of their use in labor market, and more concretely is the result of evaluations made by the International Association for Educational Achievement –IEA., of the United States, and PISA evaluations in the OCDE. The result has been generalization of the curriculum by competences, both in compulsory education and higher education, as well as in permanent training.

In the Latin American case, it was forced by way of the World Bank, to introduce the competences

in the education ambit, since the early 90s. In Mexico the CONOCER was formed, which embraced England, France, Australia, etc., models, and the skills were standardized. Those named 'technical standards of labor competence' are just standards of skills re-baptized as competence standards. (Ortega, 2009).

The Ministry of Trade (2005, cites Bunk), a true worker, as well as an user speaking his language, should perform in different roles, scenarios and situations based on some technical, methodological, social, and cooperative techniques, included in some cognitive, motor, affective, objectives, of participation, responsibility and ethic commitment. He defines competences as follows:

- Bears technical competence the one who masters, as an expert, tasks and contents of his labor ambit, and knowledge and skills necessary for such purpose.
- Bears methodological competence the one who knows how to react applying proper procedure to assigned tasks and to surged irregularities. The one who, on independent basis finds resolution ways, and properly transfers acquired experience to other job problems.
- Performance of social competence. Bears social competence the one who knows how to cooperate with others, on communicative and constructive basis, and shows group-oriented behavior, and interpersonal understanding.
- Bears participative competence the one who knows how to effectively at in organizations, capable of deciding, and ready to assume responsibility.

Men performance shows or demonstrates development and acquisition of any competence, that is, men are the ones who bear competences, but not business organizations. Thus, competences sought to be developed in the students are defined as a group of attitudes, values, knowledge and skills. (personal, interpersonal, professional, organization), which empower individuals to properly perform in front of life and work (Ministry of Trade, Industry and Tourism (Mincomercio, 2005).

At intending to understand professional competences, these ones should be seen as the event of not only possessing cognitive insulated qualifications, which determine professional success in specific labor scenarios, but also transcend toward a personal and dynamic approach where the professional builds, moves and integrates his motivation and cognitive qualifications, by efficiently performing in heterogeneous and diverse labor scenarios. In this manner, Le Boterf (2001), states that a competent individual is the one who knows how to act, on pertinent basis, in a particular context, by selecting and moving a double equipping of resources: personal resources, (skills, know how to do, qualifications, culture, emotional resources, etc.), and network resources (data banks, document networks, specialized experience networks, etc.)

Curricular design and organization is a task which requires commitment and responsibility by those in charge of its design, because it is the back bone of the didactic strategies of classroom training activities.

Material and methods

The investigation was performed under two types of study: documental investigation, which concentrates on information collection from various documental sources, observing and systematically reflecting on training reality in the area of tourism; and, descriptive investigation, which led to analyze those aspects involved in analysis of *on-line* documents and web sites of selected universities and institutions, taking into account criterions of quality, tradition, and recognition by the academic community.

The group of studied units used to re-build information in function of the topic, becomes the support to produce the results of the research. Selected analysis units are represented by academic programs in the area of tourism provided by Spain, Cuba, Mexico and Colombia, studies, and regulations governing Higher Education aimed at preparing human resources on tourism.

Results

It was then investigated through searchers, using as key words the variables to be investigated, competences to be developed in the students, formation levels and curricular structure. Likewise, a search of academic programs was made in the area or tourism in Mexico, Spain, Cuba and Colombia. Some points of reference were established at the time of designing and re-

designing academic programs for human resources formation in the touristic area.

Competences

Mexico

At the university of Guadalajara, a committee of teachers performed a job of curricular reorganization in order to provide training for a Master's Degree of Tourism, using the model by competences, after a series of academic discussions, they established that the trend is to merge skills on touristic development, (specially alternative tourism with variations, such as ecotourism, rural tourism, and adventure tourism), with operating skills on hotel services, food and beverages, and travel agency.

In this manner, the discussion regarding skills that individuals graduated in the area of tourism, for a proper profession exercise includes the following:

To developing strategies, analyze risk situations, manage and resolve problems and conflicts, complex and multi-disciplinary thought, team work, leadership, literacy in information and communication technology, intelligence development, (analytical, creative, and practical), proficiency of at least one foreign language, critical judgment, and auto-critical (Gomez, 2010.147).

The graduated individuals should also have developed communication competences and skills, interpersonal relationships, decision making, adaptability and flexibility, learn to learn, preparation and management of projects, and a scientific attitude. It is worth to mention that professionals of tourism should specially develop competences to interact with others, taking into account that they are going to relate and deal with individual of different cultures, customs and languages. Gomez states in its article:

That in addition to urgently requiring transformation of academic plans, toward curriculums that privilege formation by competences, it is required changes to be made in evaluation models, where memory and non-critical evaluations are no longer used, but reflection is encouraged; likewise, the organization structure of university institutions should be transformed and turn from student attention offices into intellectual centers (Gomez, 2010).

In drew the attention the fact that universities in Mexico require the students an enrolment profile for tourism areas, such as a minimum score of 7.5 in

administrative areas, besides special characteristics of their personality, such as empathy, creativity, extroverted. Applicants should demonstrate a great interest in history, cultural patrimony, economy, languages, particular enjoyment for traveling, administration and marketing. Finally, demonstrate skills on administrative process, oral and written expression, and a great disposition for service, tolerance and ethic. (Mincomercio, 2005).

Spain

Spanish Education system attends a transformation process, parting from Bologna Declaration in 1999, where the objective was to center the teaching learning process on the students. The important thing is no longer what teachers teach, but the fundamental piece are the students, and what they are able to learn, acquired and developed competences, and what they will be able to place into practice on the field. (Garcia and Perez, 2009); everything attending to labor market needs.

The Real Decree 1393/2007, provides that academic plans leading to a degree, should include in the center of their objectives acquisition of competences by the students, expanding without excluding, the traditional approach based on contents and academic hours (Real Decree 1393/2007, October 30, p. 44037).

According to the study on analysis of competences performed by Garcia and Perez (2009), touristic sector performance in Spain has been positive, causing an important impact on employment figures, and on the economic development of the country in general. However, touristic industry requires new strategies aimed at meeting needs of this sector. It is required in impact on human resources of the sector and on required professional competences, Technology of Information and Communications –TIC and linguistic competences being those seeming to be the most demanded by employers. It was established that university institutions should fundamentally improve mother language communication, communication in foreign languages, which in addition implies mediation and intercultural comprehension; mathematic competence, and basic competence in science and technology, digital competence, learning to learn; social and civic competences, sense of initiative and business spirit, conscience, and cultural expressions.

Cuba

The Ministry of Tourism in Cuba in 2009, created a perfecting program of academic plans, which established professional competences that should be demonstrated by touristic sector, which include:

Communication competences, seeking that professionals communicate correctly based on a general and integral culture which reveals their oral and linguistic expression skills, as well as personal relationships, governed by the strength of ethical principles and political convictions. Implant and control regulations governing gastronomic services in their various modes, types and methods. Advise and supervise administration, and subordinated personnel respectively, in the various aspects of provision of gastronomic services. Control and implant technical-organization steps in order to improve service quality. Host clients in such a manner that they feel welcomed and attended according to protocol standards. Evidence and supervise preparation of products and services according to their definition and required techniques. (Garcia, 2009).

Colombia

The Colombian National Ministry of Education regulates a public Policy on higher education per cycles and competences parting from the concept of competence as “an element which integrates aspects involving skills, knowledge, attitudes and values. That is, it includes cognitive aspects and meta-cognitive, procedural and attitude, and a number of inter-related values in search of socially productive performance regarding citizens, as well as working environment associated to a concrete labor field” (Ministry of National Education, (Mineducacion 2010).

Colombia has established types of basic competences, general or transversal (instrumental, inter-personal, and systemic), and some specific competences required to perform any labor, related to functions of work sites, either in a profession or a labor activity.

A search was performed in the web site of Externado de Colombia University, and its program of Touristic Management taking into account its status as recognized as program accredited by the Ministry of National Education –CNA, and the unique program internationally certified by the World Organization of Tourism. Upon a review of its orientation in terms of competences the Academic Project showed that it develops two types of competences: General

competences, and specific competences. The first ones include cognitive, communicative, contextual, valuation, and researching competences. Specific competences, include the following:

Guides and manages, on competitive basis, public organizations and private, in general and in particular those with emphasis on tourism.

Guides and effectively manages touristic destinations, value chains of this activity, and organizations composing it.

Understands and acts in domestic and international touristic sector, in an assertive manner, creative, proactive and innovating, with social and ethic responsibility.

Understands, prepares, manages and executes public policies related to sustainable development of tourism, in response to current and future needs.

Faces business and organization challenges and an entrepreneur attitude (Uexternado, 2012:22).

Training levels

Mexico

According to the General Law of Education 1993 in Mexico, the system is composed of six education levels: Initial, preschool, primary, secondary, higher middle, and higher. In addition, it provides special education service, training for labor, adult education, native education or bilingual-bicultural.

Higher education is the maximum level of studies. It includes bachelor's degree, and graduate in normal education, college, and technological. In order to take a bachelor's degree course, and normal school, applicants should complete higher school, or its equivalent training; to take a master a bachelor's degree is necessary; doctorate studies require a master degree, or equivalent academic merits.

The General Law of Education in its article 13 provides that:

Presentation of academic plans and programs proposed by any private person, should include and state the following criterions:

I. For a degree of associated professional or college superior technician, the academic plan should be oriented to develop skills and knowledge related to any specific professional activity.

Proposals of academic plans for these options should include 180 credits as a minimum.

II. In the bachelor's degree, the fundamental objective will be development of skills, attitudes, aptitudes, skills and work methods for performance of a profession. Such academic plans should be composed of 300 credits as minimum.

III. The purpose of graduate studies is to expand skills on a specific field, and in addition should:

a) In the case of majors:

1. Be aimed at formation of individuals trained for the study and treatment of specific problems of a particular area of a profession; they may refer to skills and abilities of a basis discipline or specific activities of a determined profession.

2. Have as an academic background a licentiate degree, or having covered all credits of the licentiate, when taken as degree option of such licentiate.

3. Be composed of a minimal of 45 credits

b) In the case of masteries:

1. Be aimed at training individuals prepared to participate in analyses, adaptation and incorporation to practice of advancements of a specific area of a profession or discipline.

2. Have as an academic background a licentiate degree, or having covered all credits of the licentiate, when taken as degree option of such licentiate

3. Be composed as a minimal by 75 credits, after the licentiate, or 30 after a major.

In provision of each academic plan for a mastery oriented to research, the particular should have as a minimum with a full time academic, active on research, for each 25 students.

c) In the case of a doctoral:

1. Be aimed at training individuals trained for teaching and research, with a dominion of particular topics of an area. Graduated individuals should be able to produce new knowledge on independent basis, or, apply such knowledge on original and innovative basis.

2. Have as an academic background a licentiate degree, or having covered all credits of the licentiate, when taken as degree option of such licentiate

3. Be composed of by 150 credits as a minimum, after the licentiate, 105 after the major, or 75 after the mastery.

In providing each doctorate academic plan, the institution should have as a minimum a full time academic, active in research, per each 10 students.

Formation levels specifically in the area of tourism are since the technical level through the level of major and doctorate.

Spain

The Ministry of Education of Spain establishes Professional Formation of Middle Degree, taken by students after 16 years age having graduated from Compulsory Secondary Education. It leads to access to Professional Formation (FP), higher Degree of Professional Formation.

Real Decree 55, 2005, sets forth the structure of university teaching in undergraduate and graduate programs. The first level, or undergraduate, comprises first cycle university teaching, and its purpose is to train the students to directly integrate in the European labor ambit, with proper professional qualification. The second level, which comprises Graduate teaching, integrates the second cycle of study, dedicated to advanced formation leading to a Master degree; and, the third cycle, leading to a Doctorate degree, which represents the highest level of higher education". (Perez del Blanco, 2006:11).

Studies are composed of various university cycles: First cycle (short Cycle): This cycle entitles the student to a diplomat degree, technical engineer, or technical architect. It is also the first formation term of a licentiate degree or an engineering, and it lasts for two or three years. First and second university cycle (Long cycle): These are studies leading to a licentiate degree, engineer of architect. It lasts for four or five years, depending on the academic plan (6 years for Medicine). The second university cycle: it takes two years. To enroll this cycle it is necessary holding another career, or a diploma (or first cycle of a career). Third University cycle: This cycle leads to a doctorate degree.

At researching on the particular case of training on Tourism, from the bottom, the levels are: Professional formation which includes Formation Cycles of Middle Degree, and Formative Cycles of Higher Degree. College education, in the first cycle, leading to an official degree of Diploma in Tourism. Since the class 2008/09, the new system of college teaching allows to take in some universities the Graduation Degree... offers for master and doctorate in tourism are also a reality in college touristic training. These are the new degrees established in the European Space of Higher Education (ESHE). (Ceballos, Arias, Ruiz, Sanz and Vasquez, 2010).

Cuba

According to consultation made in the web of the Cuban Ministry of Education (EcuRed), the basis of Cuban legislation is contained in Resolutions Nr. 210, April 23, 1975; Nr. 654, October 21, 1976; Nr. 656 October 21, 1976; Nr. 160, March 17, 1981; and Nr. 430, July 24, 1981, on education.

The Cuban National Education System is conceived as a group of Subsystems organically articulated on all levels and types of training. The Subsystems composing the Education National System are: Preschool, General, Poly-technical and Labor. Primary Education, General Middle Education, Pre-university; Basic Education is a part of compulsory education; Pre-university Education, and Technical Education, and Professional. (Ministry of Education, EcuRed, 2011).

In Higher Education, the mission is to train higher level specialists for the various spheres of the society. This type of education includes three types of courses:

Day courses are provided for students coming from the National System of Education, once completed the Higher Middle level, with no labor link, and having accumulated a good performance in Higher Middle level, and who in addition, pass the corresponding admission tests for the selected major. Regular courses for workers are mainly organized on the basis of the social interest, according to needs for graduated individuals included in the plans for qualified manpower of the country, existing possibilities for each academic course, and established requisites. These courses are organized in vespertine or evening schedules, and by the system of periodical encounters. Guided courses, also known as free training, are fundamentally based on work and self-study/training. (Ministry of Education, EcuRed, 2011).

On-line courses are also provided (EAD), with an out-campus regime, it is compulsory to appear to take in-person tests, as required in the academic plan.

Law 1307, 1976, article 3, establishes that the types of centers of the higher education network are University, in charge of training specialists in areas of natural sciences and exact, social studies and humanistic, and economic sciences. Polytechnical Higher Institute, for training specialists on technical sciences. Higher Institute, trains specialists in any specific field, and corresponding to any concrete branch of development of the country. University Center, with a transitory character.

University careers in Cuba include a minimal duration of five academic courses, divided into terms which may be semesters, quarters, of blocks.

Regarding tourism, there are university careers within economic sciences, such as a licentiate degree in Tourism, at Matanzas University in La Habana, Holguin University, Central University of las Villas, de Oriente University, and Ciego de Avila University. In terms of graduate major programs, programs such as Tourism Accounting Management, High Direction of Tourism, Accounting and Financial Management in Tourism, and Hotel Management are provided.

Colombia

In Colombia the education formal system (Law 30, 1992, and Law 115, 1994), and the named "Education for labor and human development" (Law 1064, 2006), participate in training for labor, especially with middle education, and higher education (in the formal system), and through the various institutions and modes of education for labor and human development. Free skills and spontaneously acquired are also recognized (non-formal education).

Higher education includes undergraduate and graduate. Undergraduate includes three training modes leading to three types of degrees: professional technical formation; technological formation; and university professional formation. Graduate includes: Specialization, Master, and Doctorate.

Undergraduate is attended by those holding academic high school diploma, and have taken and passed the Exam to Enter Higher Education administered by the Colombian Institute for Promotion of Higher Education –ICFES. Under special regulation, those individuals having taken and passed the Secondary Basic Cycle (grade 9th, H.S.), are admitted to take professional technical programs.

Taken into account its importance, it becomes necessary to specifically mention, the Colombian proposal of “Programs Organized per Propedeutic Cycles,” (Mineducacion, 2010), each of which should provide integral formation tailored for the respective cycle, in order to award such degree that enables its holder for the corresponding professional exercise, and, in addition, allows the student to continue taking the next cycle.

In Colombia, according to data provided by the National System of Higher Education Information SNIES, 66 professional technical programs are provided, 6 of which through on-line methodology, traditional, and three under virtual methodology.

Regarding technological programs, in the area of tourism, the SNIES reports a total of 98 programs nationwide.

At professional level, the report of academic programs includes 38, 2 of which hold high quality registry.

Structure of training programs on Tourism

Mexico

Guidance to propose academic plans and programs in Mexico are established by the Law of Higher Education, chapter III, articles 12 to 17, which set forth requisites, and criterions on objectives of each level, academic credits, and mode.

For the case of Mexico, taking into account its excellent development in matters of touristic higher education, the National Council for Quality of Touristic Education –CONAET has been consolidated as the agency in charge of the process of accreditation of academic programs. In this manner, a series of recommendable essential standards and criterions have been established in design of curriculums and training plans, leading to quality and continuous improvement of such programs.

Likewise, it was found that through Conatuve, Mexico seeks to improve the level of touristic education through a Committee of Curricular Design which supports higher education institutions by reviewing their academic plans and programs, parting from a new document containing recommendations for curricular design of careers involving the touristic sector. This council established common minimal contents that should be included in academic plans, by establishing for areas of training, as follows: basic area, instrumental, specific and specialized.

An important development of this discipline has been observed during the last ten years, as well as a wide diversification of markets, and therefore, labor expectations. As a result, the Committee for Curricular Design considers that there are five predominant professional profiles, as follows: Management of Service Institutions; Gastronomy; Business Management; Planning and Development, Recreation and Free Time (Conatuve, 2004:13).

In Mexico, in the area of tourism programs such as Tourism Business Administration, and Gastronomic Business Administration, with emphasis on administrative and economic area, are provided.

Specific courses are divided into classes of general knowledge, and operating labor in touristic sector such as geography, national and international patrimony, and operation of business establishments. As a complement, the students are provided with classes on computer science, humanities, culture and arts.

A second great branch within touristic programs in Mexico is included in gastronomic business management; its curriculum is integrated in areas such as food preparation by developing culinary techniques, decorative art, and gastronomic management. The students are also provided with training on marketing and sales, finance, preparation of optimization survey, and direction of each process, purchasing and supply management.

In this manner, curriculums for training on gastronomic business management include an administrative line, with emphasis on development of the gastronomic sector, such as operation and handling food stuffs and beverages; and as complement, the financial area, humanistic and language are included.

Planning and preparation of a curriculum respond to analysis of social, institutional and business needs. The National Council for Quality of Touristic Training A.C., takes as a reference to evaluate academic plans in touristic area, the document named “Guide of Recommendations for Curricular Design” prepared by Virginia Navarrete Sosa and Jose Model Bello. This guide describes the five graduation profiles composing the structure and training offer in the area of Tourism in Mexico, as follows: Planning and touristic development; touristic business management; management of service institutions (hospitality); gastronomy, recreation and free time.

Spain

In the European Union, the European Credit Transfer System has been established.

Credits represent the work burden to be performed to pass each course, through assignation of a numerical value (1 to 60), to each unit. They express the work burden required by each unit as related to the total work burden necessary to complete one year of study at the training center, that is, magisterial lessons, practical work, seminars, training practice periods, field work, personal work – either at the library or at home, as well as tests, or any other suitable evaluation methods. Therefore, the ECTS is based on the total work burden that the student should perform to achieve the projected training (skills and competences), and it is not exclusively limited to class attendance hours (Perez del Blanco, 2006:56).

In the ECTS system, the work of one year is represented in 60 credits, 30 credits in the semester, and 20 credits in a quarter of study. For the student it is represented in 40 hours per week, 1600 hour per academic course (forty weeks), 26 hours per credit in average.

Education for hotel and tourism business, is produced from schools of tourism at universities, the professional training degree is ranked as diplomat. The administrative area of this career is composed of curses such as: law, marketing, human resources management, and business organization and management; emphasis is made on courses related to this sector, where the students expand on sectors such as travel agencies, hotels, together with expanded skills on tourism parting from knowledge on: cultural patrimony, animation in tourism ambit, tourism economics, geography, museums, and cultural spaces. Foreign language learning is an outstanding issue, which includes three languages: English, German and French.

Regarding guidelines for graduation Degrees, such as the case of training on Tourism, the Real Decree provides that: The plans shall include 240 credits, containing all theoretic and practical information that the student should acquire: basic aspects of the branch of knowledge, compulsory courses or optional; seminars, external training practice; guide projects, graduation Projects, and other training activities. (Real Decree 1393, October 30, 2007, p 44040).

In the design of tourism surveys (Ministral, 2000 b:27) “It is important to highlight the practical feature of classes, the students are trained through practice in the sector, in order to develop their skills during the formation term previously to enter in the labor market.”

Regarding academic plans, they should include within their core objectives acquisition of competences by the students for professional development in the touristic sector, expanding, without excluding, the traditional approach based on contents and academic hours. Emphasis should be made on learning methods of such competences, as well as on evaluation procedures (Ceballos et al, 2010).

Cuba

The academic plan in Cuba is a compulsory state document which contains planning and organization (design of the career), and the most general characteristics of development of studies corresponding to the degree. The total hours they include is between 4.000 and 5.000. These plans and programs include training, research and labor components, within specific periods of time, and center their attention on an integral approach to develop the education labor in the training process of such professionals, which ensures not only their training, but also, their integral education, especially through formation of social, professional and personal values (Organization of American States-OAS, 2006:18).

Training programs are established by disciplines or systemic groups of contents, and such groups in turn by courses.

Cuban Higher Education plans are characterized by developing a professional bearing a wide profile, provided with a deep basic formation, capable or resolving, in the base link of his profession, the most general and frequent problems surged within his job. He training process is based on three dimensions: Training, which takes into account skills and ability; educative, based on education on values; and the one developing capabilities. They involve as ideas or rector principles the unity between training and education in search for integration of cognitive aspects to significant ones, aware of social signification, and study-work link. (Armas and Espi. S.F.3).

Cuban Higher Education plans include 5,700 hours in average, which is equal to five or six years, which most percentage is dedicated to practical classes,

laboratory, conferences, and at least a thirty per cent of the total time is dedicated to research-labor practice.

Perez del Blanco (2006) claims that continuous improving of academic plans of the careers have entered into a new phase, and it is expected a decrease of on-campus level of the students by improving such methods which make it possible meaningful learning and developer of general and specific competences of each profession. It is also expected introduction of the “credit” in the higher education system, not as equivalent to a number of academic hours, but the dominion of determined competences achieved in the balance of on-campus and remote activities performed by the students, and integration of contents of several courses (p.8)

Regarding tourism education in Cuba, effective 2003 it is implemented the bachelor’s degree of Tourism at Matanzas University, Ciegos de Avila and Holguin in La Habana. For four years and a half, the students are trained on disciplines such as Marxism-Leninism, tourism, direction, accounting, applied mathematics, and other elective courses.

There is a National System of Professional Formation on Tourism (Formatur), which integrates 19 schools in the whole Cuban territory. Formatur idea is based on the most advanced of didactics on conceptions and methods.

The training proposal of the School of Higher Studies of Hotel and Tourism (EAEHT), is the flag school of the National System of Professional Formation for Tourism –FORMATUR, which academic offers respond to the conception of the Modular Pyramidal System. In order to be admitted in this type of courses, it is necessary to be graduated from the preceding level, except in those corresponding to the first level, where the applicants may enter through a convoking.

Colombia

Regarding academic credits, it was found that the Ministry of National Education established that one academic credit is the unit which measures the estimated time of academic activity dedicated by the student in function of professional and academic competences, expected to be developed by the program. One credit represents 48 hours of work by the student, including teacher-guided hours, and the other hours to be dedicated on independent basis, as necessary to achieve learning goals.

For programs of professional formation in the field of tourism, the Ministry of Education through Resolution Nr. 2767, 2003, defined the special characteristics of quality for undergraduate Programs on administration, including training programs on tourism; article first determines the denomination by academic activity, where programs of touristic and hotel administration are included.

Such resolution defines fundamental areas and components in preparation of training programs including the area of basic formation, professional formation, including organization administration, economics and finance, production and operations, marketing, computer science, and personnel management, and the area of socio-humanistic formation, as well.

In performance of the analysis of the structure and training plans provided in Colombia, the undergraduate program of Administration of Touristic Companies and Hotel, of Externado de Colombia University were taken. According to information collected from the web site of the university, the training program is provided in nine on-campus semesters, and one semester of exclusive dedication to business training practice. This extracurricular training practice provides the students with access to the labor world and apply theoretical skills acquired along the career.

The training plan includes three large areas: Managerial, Touristic, and Humanistic formation. Such plan develops an expansion program divided into four modules: Management and Gastronomic Culture; Lodging Management; Planning and Destination Management; and Business Strategic and Tactical Management, which provide a global vision on operation of the touristic sector, and provide the students with solid tools to undertake their own company (Uexternado, 2013).

Training includes learning and practice of two foreign languages, English and French, in order to extend success possibilities of the graduated individual, at facing an increasingly globalized world. Field tours to touristic destinations, for students to interact with the various cultures of the country.

Development of training programs for senior management in the touristic sector a domestic and international level, which in addition contribute to strengthen and update academic contents of the undergraduate program.

Discussion of Results

The above has been a journey through the structure of education oriented toward higher education training for professionals of tourism, to find common issues, or at any extent, difference of studied criterions, such as competences, training levels, and structure of training plans; which reference points have served in design and/or preparation of training programs.

Using such elements, it is possible to look at offer of degrees which in any manner may be more easily compared, homologated or confirmed, thus contributing to expand articulation systems of higher education.

Three lines have been reviewed as reference points: general or specific competences; training levels; and the structure of academic plans of degrees provided in Mexico, Cuba, Spain and Colombia, oriented to training on tourism.

Regarding the first reference point, there are some common competences intended to be developed in individuals graduated on tourism; for the case of the analyzed countries, learning is achieved through convergence of four basic dimensions: being, thinking, doing, and knowing, which united to knowledge with meaning and experience, result in training by competences. Table 1 shows a summary of the main aspects pursued in each country in implementation of competences.

Table 1. Competences

Country	Competences
Mexico	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Merging of skills on touristic development (alternative tourism, ecotourism, rural, adventure), with operating skills (hotel services, food stuffs and beverages, travel agencies). -To develop strategies, analyze risk situations, managing and resolving problems and conflicts, complex thought and multidisciplinary, team work, leadership, literacy on information and communication technology, intelligence development (analytical, creative and practical), mastering at least one foreign language, critical judgment, and auto-critical. -Communication, interpersonal relations, decision making, adaptability and flexibility, learning to learn, project preparation and management, and a scientific attitude.
Spain	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Required competences being TIC competences, and linguistic those which seem to be the most demanded by employers. -Communication in mother language, communication in foreign languages, mediation and intercultural comprehension; mathematic skills, and basic competences on science and technology, digital competence, learning to learn; social and civil competences, the sense of initiative, and entrepreneur spirit, awareness, and cultural expression.
Cuba	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communication competence, oral and linguistic expression skills, interpersonal relations, ethic principles and political convictions. To implant and control regulations governing gastronomic services, advise and supervise administration and subordinated personnel providing gastronomic services. To implant and control technical- organization steps in order to improve service quality, protocol standards. Check and oversee preparation of products and services.
Colombia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -The Ministry of National Education enforces a public policy on higher education by cycles and by competences. -Basic competences, general or transversal (instrumental, interpersonal, and systemic), and specific competences required to perform in any job, relating to functions of work sites, either in a profession, or labor activity.

Source. The author

Training increasingly more autonomous individuals, bearing particular skills and competences for each labor activity, or career to undertake is imperative, in this manner, it was seen that in Mexico, Spain, Cuba and Colombia, education entities have worked on formation by competences. Although, traditionally until several years ago, education was centered on teaching, today there is a clear trend to establish learning as a formation model. Now, the protagonist is the student, who requires that his process is carried out on autonomous basis, parting from experience and interaction with the other subjects and objects, in order to build his knowledge.

In the reviewed countries, the students of tourism areas, require that their formation process develops competences in the use and analysis of information and communication technology-TIC, and linguistic competences, as well as specific qualifications that professionals should bear such as image, communication ability (which implies mastering at least a second language), leadership, availability and customer-service oriented, problem solving ability, decision making ability in front of complex situations, and, of course, managing principles of tourism in such a manner which leads to manage, guide, and evaluate projects aimed at improving and strengthening the touristic sector.

Regarding training levels, there is a trend toward articulation between middle education and higher education, where the linking point is given by a formation for labor, and human development, through technical and technological training levels.

Table 2 is a summary of training levels provided by each reviewed country.

Table 2. Training levels

Country	Training levels
México	Higher education: it is the highest level of study. It includes licentiate degree, and graduate degree on normal education, university and technological.
Spain	There are three cycles of university teaching: Degree, Master and Doctoral.
Cuba	Higher education includes three types of courses: Day Regular Courses (CRD); Regular courses for Workers (CPT); Guided Courses; also known as “studies by the free”, and on-line courses (EAD)
Colombia	Higher education <u>is</u> provided as undergraduate, and graduate. Undergraduate includes three modes: Professional Technical Training; Technological Training; and University Professional Training. Graduate includes. Specialization, Master, and Doctoral.

Source. The author

Mexico, Cuba, Spain and Colombia provide training programs through tourism schools which award technical and technological degrees, in areas of lodging, gastronomy, hotel, guidance, travel, event organization, food stuffs and beverages, etc. Likewise, professional training provided by higher education institutions is mostly aimed at touristic management.

The third element of review is the structure of training plans, where programs include a strong administrative component, privileging areas of business management, marketing, accounting, undertaking, human resources management, and finance.

Table 3. Training Plans

Country	Structure of Training Plans
México	Academic credit system. The training plan emphasizes on the administrative area and economic, understanding the social environment, and political, together with human resources management, and some juridical elements; this area also includes specific courses on entrepreneur development, and business creation. The five predominant professional profiles are: Administration of service organizations; gastronomy; business management; planning and development, and recreation and free time.

España	<p>Academic credit system. Design of graduation degrees will contain 240 credits, which include all theoretic and practical training that the student should acquire. Plan design is characterized in the new training system by a major autonomy by the universities.</p> <p>Training programs contain a strong administrative component, such as: law, marketing, human resources management, and business organization and management; emphasis is made on travel agencies, hotels, together with extended learning about tourism, including cultural patrimony, animation in tourism ambit, geography, museums, and cultural spaces. Foreign language learning is an outstanding aspect; this area includes three languages: English, German, and French.</p>
Cuba	<p>Training offer respond to the conception of the Module Pyramidal System. To enroll in this type of courses it is necessary to graduate in the preceding level, except those corresponding to the first level (I), where applicants enroll through a convoking.</p>
Colombia	<p>Academic credit system. By semesters. Included within studies of Business Management.</p>

Source: The author

All programs include learning the mother language, and at least one second language. In Spain, students learn English, French and German, the students are required not only to communicate, but also acquire cultural elements which enable the professional to interact with tourists and peers of various places of the world. Training plans also include professional training practice, preferably international practice, for students to acquire experience on operating jobs of management and culture.

Conclusion

Regarding competences to be developed in human resource training, to take them as reference at the time of designing or re-designing programs in the area of tourism, it may be concluded that there is similarity in analyzed countries. Through such growing academic mobility, and globalization itself, higher education institutions are encouraged to standardize those competences to be developed, oriented toward development of general and specific competences, and emphasis is made on development of linguistic competences, which mean for the professional a higher level of competitiveness.

These results show that university institutions should work on integration processes, and establishment of strategic alliances which allow them academic mobility. Students and teachers of tourism require the experience of living and feeling new cultures, and customs which expand their interaction space, and a wider vision of the world.

As a recommendation, at speaking of training by competences, it is established the need of working together in transformation of evaluation models, thinking on learning processes.

Also, the model of competences development being common for the analyzed countries, it is necessary to pay attention for programs not to develop only operating skills but they should design curriculums that develop knowledge oriented toward progress of touristic sector, by encouraging investigation, and permanent discussion on proposals which lead, even to propose sector public policies which consider the touristic sector as a social and economic phenomenon.

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