Tourism Education and Global Concerns: The Perception of Tourism Academicians and Industry Professionals

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ABSTRACT

Globally, national and international agencies promote tourism education as a critical tool to achieve sustainable development, environmental conservation, economic development, national image building, and international peace. Thus, Tourism education can have a vital role in achieving these goals as it positively influences the local culture, environment, infrastructure, employment, quality of life, social mobility, etc. Similarly, the United Nations World Tourism Organization promotes and guides sustainable tourism practices among practitioners and travellers to ensure the growth and progress of the tourism industry worldwide.

The researchers conducted an online survey to investigate the perception of the tourism academicians and industry professionals on the relevance of tourism education for the various international concerns. The finding reveals that most respondents acknowledge that tourism education is highly essential for economic development, followed by environment conservation, sustainable development, national image building, and international peace. Similarly, they perceived tourism education as highly relevant for economic development but ironically questionable towards international peace. Thus, the necessary amendment in the tourism education curriculum, promoting inter-sartorial networking, and bridging the gap between tourism academicians and industry professionals can address the practical challenges of the above-said issues.

Keywords: *Tourism education, tourism academicians& industry professionals, sustainable development, environment conservation, economic development, national image building, international peace.*

Introduction: The world tourism market is proliferating in terms of increased numbers of tourists, a significant contribution of gross domestic product, and providing employment opportunities worldwide (Poon, 2008; Adeleke, 2008a; Seidahmetov, 2014; Sofronov, 2018; Khan et al., 2020), which leads most countries to invest more in the human capital and physical infrastructure of tourism destinations. Similarly, in 2019, the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) reveals that international tourist arrival reached 1461 million globally, with 4 percent of growth than 2018. Similarly, India hosted nearly 17.4 million international tourists with a receipt of 28.6 billion USD during 2018 (Why Tourism? UNWTO, 2019). During this time, India's tourism sector was tagged as a "champion" to achieve a five trillion dollar economy by 2025. Meanwhile, the government identified twenty new tourism destinations for development and planned five-time growth from this sector via public-private partnership (Screwvala, 2019).

Tourism brings prosperity and wealth along with undesirable conditions or circumstances, including xenophobia (Adeleke, 2008b), destination consumerism, and over-tourism (Koens et al., 2018; Namberger et al., 2019) around the world. These situations, including tourism as opportunity or problem, can be tapped and efficiently addressed through tourism education. According to United Nations Environment Programme & World Tourism Organization (2005) the tourism education can boost the change among the tourist's behavior resulting in development of the tourism destinations.

Similarly, in Europe, the educational programs like "Erasmus Mundus European Master in Tourism Management" (EMTM) are primarily framed to study the Tourism Product Development and Destination Management at the University of Girona, Sustainable Tourism Development program at University of Southern Denmark, and Tourism Policy Design, Tourism Environment Management, and Economics at University of Ljubljana, (European Master in Tourism Management, n.d.). This EMTM curriculum strengthens and enhances tourism professional's capability, including their sustainable decision-making, understanding cultural diversity, and adequate information of future environmental issues.

The global agencies, including United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) and United Nations Environment Program (UNEP), promote sustainable development goals to develop sustainable tourism worldwide. Sustainable tourism ensures the economic, environmental, and socio-cultural balance of the destination. Furthermore, it promotes the optimal use or conservation of nature concerning the host communities and increases the profits share of the stakeholders (UNEP, & WTO, 2005).

LITERATURE REVIEW: The following section discusses the various studies concerning to the sustainable development, economic development, environment conservation, peace, and national image building.

Tourism Education and Sustainability: The education plays important role in sensitization of the communities towards the sharing

and implementation of the ideas (Piekarz and Callanan, 2013). In every field, the trained human capital is seen as a keystone to achieving the country's economic independence (Halimyar, 2018). Thus, experienced, talented, and skilled human resources are very crucial for the success of the tourism industry. Tourism generates thousands of jobs in various professions; specifically, in the tourism industry, career avenues are divided into multiple categories, including lodging, food services, entertainment, travel services, etc. (BCJ, 2015). Thus, tourism is an essential tool for the economic development of the global south (Moscardo, 2015).

Although tourism and sustainability are closely connected, tourism academics and practitioners still have varied opinions about the same (Moscardo, 2015b). Tourism education provides the conceptualization of how a tourist destination trains the human resources to work in a professional manner (Malihah and Setiyorini 2014). Similarly, it plays a significant role in preparing graduates to acquire practical and professional skills required for the tourism industry (Saner et al., 2016). Additionally, the foremost challenge of tourism education is to train the graduates in order to work in complex, social, and political situations where they can vigorously contribute to the developing forms of tourism and promote sustainable development goals alongside (Dredge & Jenkins, 2012). Though the 2005-2016 year was celebrated as the "*United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development*", but it was not justified as planned (Moscardo, 2015). Thus, Jenkins (2013) suggested the vital need for tourism education to the various stakeholders to ensure and implement sustainable tourism

practices. He argues that tourists should be educated on niche tourism and "tourist test", especially when they enter in eco-sensitive destinations.

Better tourism education is associated with quality services, and it can be observed in South Africa, which has implemented national qualification certification for all sub-sectors of the tourism industry.

Tourism as "Buffer Zone" and sustainable practices: Various studies have shown that tourism is bedrock to fulfill sustainable development goals through community participation, environment conservation, economic development, innovative infrastructure, peace building, rural development, and quality education. Sustainable tourism can reconstruct the failed destinations and restore the community expectations through sustainable practices. A similar approach was used by the various communities, including Parkstad Limburg (Netherlands), who has adopted tourism as a "solution where other industries have failed" (Elzerman & Bontje, 2015) and the Expeditionary Sierra Norte community of Oaxaca City (Mexico) who projected ecotourism as "a force for good" for the community (World Travel & Tourism Council, 2016). Similarly, In India, the Govardhan Eco-village of Maharashtra has proven that sustainable tourism works as a catalyst for the rural economy. Further, they have established a School of Sustainability to promote sustainability among visitors (School of Sustainability, n.d.).

Therefore, sustainable tourism development refers to the lifelong stability between people, planet, and their profit, including the socio-

cultural, environmental, and economic achievements as core concerns. This highlighted the crucial need for tourism education to make tourism solution-oriented, where other industries have failed to achieve the economic independence of the region, bacon of peace, environment conservation, and image building of the destination globally.

Peace with Sustainable Tourism: Peace ensures human survival. It is not just antithesis to conflict (WTTC, 2016) but ensuring social harmony among the peoples. Most of the Middle East and North African countries reported bad scores for peace on Global Peace Index (GPI) due to continuous conflicts. GPI assesses various domains such as social safety and security, ongoing conflicts (internal and external), and country's militarization level (Global Peace Index 2021 Briefing, 2021). Similarly, the countries, including Mexico and Rwanda who shown a low level of peace on the GPI index, adopted tourism as a tool to establish peace in the country via initiating numerous measures, including strengthening the socio-economic foundation, reconciliation and justice, security, politics, and cooperative tourism policies (Alluri, 2009).

Therefore, peaceful countries attract more visitors (Dermody, 2020) who provide training to different stakeholders and enhance the community perception (UNEP & WTO, 2005) toward sustainable tourism practices. They have three times higher per capita growth than countries with a low level of peace (Institute for Economics Peace, 2018). Thus, it is evident that the peace brings more tourists,

positivity, image building, and consequently economic development of the destination.

Tourism Education& Sustainable Development in India: In India, the Ministry of Tourism is the sole authority to promote the tourism education programs among the affiliated institutes, Center & State universities, and private universities. Similarly, the ministry has specified Sustainable Tourism criteria and indicators for the tour operators concerning the accommodations and beach tourism practices. Further, the ministry has covered various activities under the sustainable tourism practices, including eco-tourism, adventure, medical, wellness, golf, polo, cruise, spiritual travel, film tourism, and Meetings Incentives Conferences and Exhibitions (MICE). "Training of Trainers for Sustainable Tourism through institutional arrangements" is the key initiative of the ministry of tourism to practice and promote sustainable tourism in the country (Ministry of Tourism, n.d.).

The above-cited literature shows the higher significance of tourism in various fields, including sustainable development, economic development, peace, national image, and environmental conservation. Still, the perspective of tourism industry professionals and academicians has not gained significant importance in existing studies. Hence, this study attempts to access both tourism industry professional's and academician's perceptions of the relevance of tourism education towards sustainable development, economic development, environment conservation, national image building, and international peace.

Methodology: A descriptive study was carried out across Indian academic institutes providing tourism education and 'travel and trade' sector organizations. The study included 258 respondents, including an equal number of tourism academicians and industry professionals. The convenient sampling technique was used to recruit the sample population and administer the self-designed online questionnaire to record their responses on the relevance of tourism education. The present study mainly deals with two objectives, including the perception of academicians and industry professionals on **1)***Relevance* and **2)***Importance* of tourism education to achieve sustainable development, international peace, national image building, economic development, and environmental conservation.

RESULTS

Participant's opinion on the relevance of tourism education for the various domains is given below: The result shows the significant differences among the tourism academicians and industry professional's opinions on the relevance of tourism education to achieve Sustainable Development, International Peace, National Image Building, Economic Development, and Environment Conservation. The options for both categories were recorded on a Likert scale ranging from very low to very high.

Sustainable Development (SD): The majority of the respondents from both categories, including tourism academicians (39.5) and industry professionals (43.4), perceived very-high relevance of tourism education for sustainable development. It was followed by the
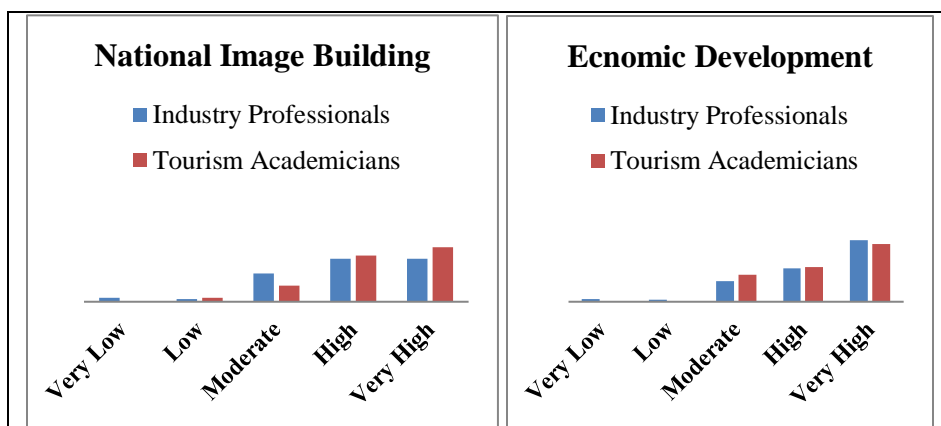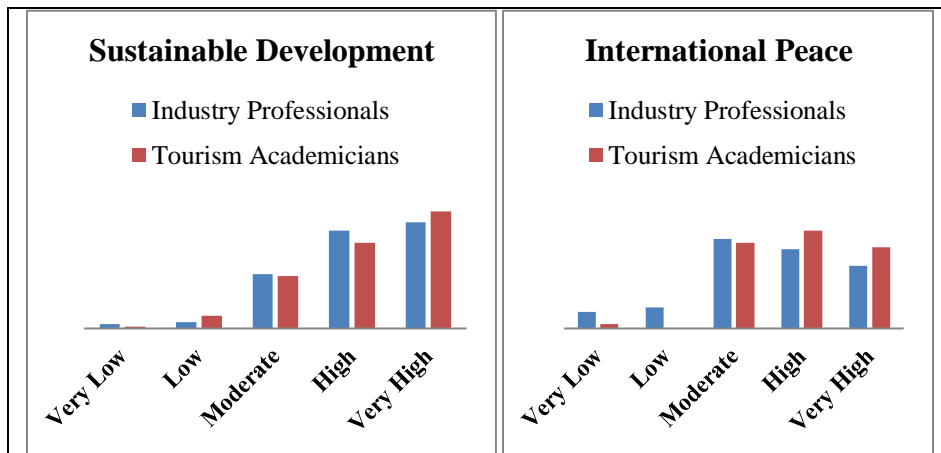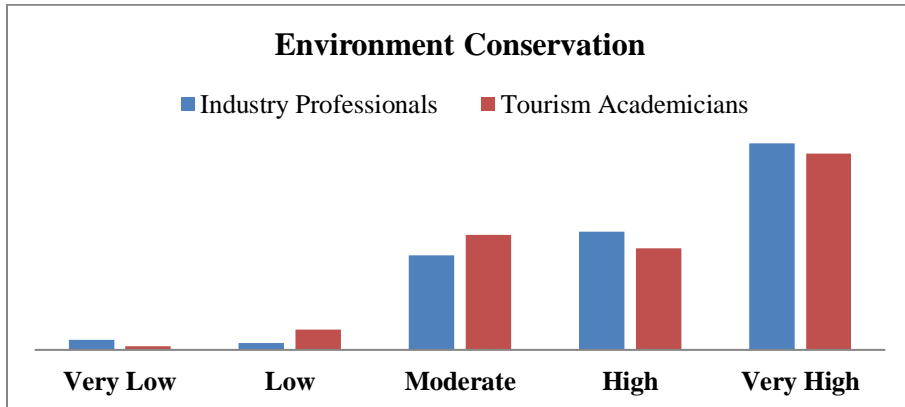
moderate and high relevance of tourism education in the same categories (Figure no 1). For both categories, the majority's responses range between moderate-to-very.

International Peace (IP): More than one-third (36.4%) of the respondents from the tourism academicians reported that the role of tourism education in bringing international peace is high, followed by 31.8% and 30.2% of them who reported it as moderate and very high, respectively. Collectively, the majority of them (66.6%) reported high-to-very high relevance of tourism education. On the other hand, more than half (52.8%) of the industry professionals perceive high-to-very high relevance of the tourism education to bring international peace, followed by one-third (33.3%) of respondents who believe moderate relevance of tourism education to bring international peace. Thus, it is apparent from the figure (1) that tourism professional seems more ignorant about tourism education and its growing need for international peace.

National Image Building (NIB): Nearly half (45.0%) of the academicians believe that tourism education programs own very high significance for the national image building. At the same time, 35.7% and 35.7% of respondents from the tourism industry professional reported the high and very high relevance of tourism education for NIB, respectively. The overall comparison of both categories reveals that the higher proportion of the tourism academicians (83%) stressed the need for tourism education for the national image building from high-to-very high. In comparison, the proportion of the industry professionals for the same categories was 71.4%.

Economic Development (ED): It is the primary concern for both categories of the participants. The majority of both groups, including industry professionals (51.2%) and tourism academicians (48.1%), perceive the very high relevance of tourism education concerning the economic development of the tourism industry and destinations. Similarly, a slightly higher proportion of the industry professionals (79.1%) acknowledges the role of tourism education with economic development from high to very high than the tourism academicians (76.8%).

Figure no 1: Perception toward the relevance of tourism education

Environment Conservation (EC): Nearly half of the respondents from both tourism academicians (45.0%) and industry professionals (47.3%) mentioned that tourism education is highly relevant to protect the native environment and achieve the environmental conservation goal. The rest of the tourism academicians (moderate=26.4%, high=23.3%), and industry professionals (moderate=21.7%, high=27.1%) perceived the moderate-to-high relevance of tourism education to ensure environment conservation.

Ranking of the opinion of academicians and industry professionals

Table no 2 shows the ranking of "*relevance of tourism education*" for various domains, asserted through the "means of opinion" of tourism academicians and industry professionals. The finding shows a significant difference among the tourism academicians and industry professionals for the relevance of tourism education in attaining international peace.

Figure no 2; Mean ranking of opinions

■ Tourism Academicians   ■ Tourism Industry Professionals
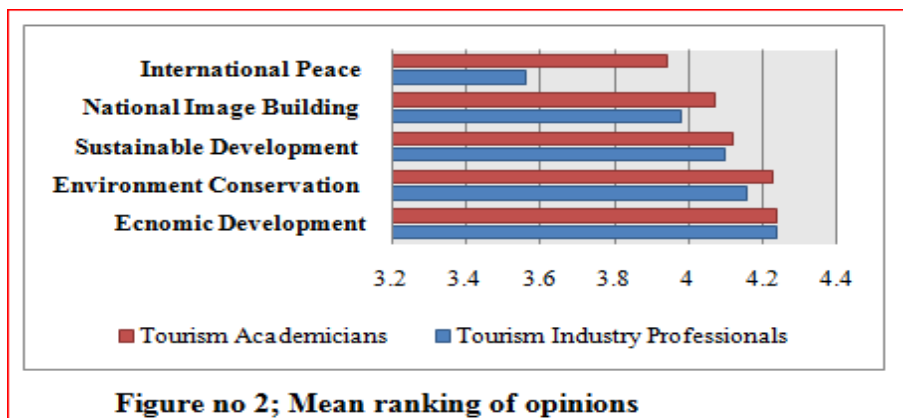
Similarly, the tourism academicians signified the higher importance of tourism education for national image buildings, sustainable development, and environmental conservation than the tourism industry professionals. The respondents from both groups reported equal weight age to tourism education with economic development. Hence, the chronology of the participant's opinions reveals that achieving economic development through tourism education is a top priority for both groups, followed by environment conservation, sustainable development, national image building, and international peace as least priority for them.

Discussion: Even though tourism deals with two major areas, including accommodation & hospitality and travel & trade, however, understanding the traveler's issues, better tourism goods and services, social and physical factors, and the improved host-guest relationship (Jafari & Ritchie, 1981) comes under the broader domain of tourism education. The present study highlighted the substantial relevance of tourism education in achieving the various international concerns, including economic development, environment conservation,

sustainable development, national image building, and international peace.

More than half of the tourism academicians and industry professionals in this study perceived high-to-very high relevance of tourism education to attain sustainable development goals. Similarly, World Tourism Organization and United Nations Development Programme (2017) acknowledge that sustainable tourism practices and operations help policymakers to provide long-lasting benefits to the society in terms of financial growth and healthy competition among the concerned industries. Additionally, various studies suggested that sustainable tourism in rural areas can reduce poverty through green tourism. It has the potential to generate new opportunities for both hosts and travellers. Thus, we can achieve sustainable development (Furqan et al., 2010) and economic goals through green tourism. Though tourism and sustainability are discussed on different platforms, including business, academia, governmental, and policy formulation level, still tourism education needs more advancement to achieve sustainability (Moscardo, 2015).

The majority of the research participants reported economic development as a top priority for tourism education. Aynalem et al. (2016) study justified the above finding, revealing that in 2013 the global tourism industry had added significant contribution in GDP (9.5%) and total employment (8.9%). However, there is room for improvement and investment in human capital and physical infrastructure to enhance the tourism potential for the country's economic development. Tourism education has greater importance in

addressing these issues. Therefore, higher education and training in tourism are necessary to enhance human capacities and outputs concerning to economic development (Radcliffe, 2021).

Further, nearly half of the respondents from tourism academicians and industry professionals mentioned that tourism education is highly relevant to ensuring environment conservation and national image building. It can be achieved through the stakeholder's sensitization, including industries, destinations, and travellers, for their impact on host communities and the native environment (Mullis, 2017). Further, the agencies like destination management organizations in tourism destinations can contribute to the branding, image building, and healthy competitiveness among the stakeholders (Varghese, 2013).

In this study, most of the participants, including the tourism academician and industry professionals, believe that tourism education should be used as the tool for international peace (figure no 1), while ironically they chosen international peace as the least priority for tourism education (figure no 2) in the study. Similar results were observed by Ap & Var (1990), who found that mostly tourism is viewed as an economic activity rather than acknowledge as a significant contributor to international peace. Overall, the tourisms should be perceived as a real force for international peace, bringing the world next to our door, reducing social prejudices, enhancing individual's social relationships, and establishing a new bond of fraternity around the world (Var et al., 1989).

Conclusion and Recommendations: Tourism education can boost national image building, sustainable development, environment conservation, international peace, and economic development. However, keeping economic development at their top priority, while others such as international peace is in the least priority, may restrict the progress and growth of the tourism industry. Imagining the tourism without international peace is vague idea. Thus, the current research study suggested the following recommendations in order to enhance the relevance of tourism education vis-à-vis the quality of human resources produced by various institutions or universities.

- There is a solid need to amend tourism education curriculums to address "tourism and peace" challenges and restore global harmony.
- Create inter-sectorial networking, including educational institutions, sustainable development practitioners, and government, to review, execute and implement tourism education according to futuristic needs.
- Promotion of the frequent and continual interactions of tourism academicians and industry professionals that the tourism industry is not merely for economic, environmental, and destination development; it has myriad aspects, including the development of the culture of peace.
- Tourism education, training, and employment should be the core of national or international tourism policies. Similarly, provide stipends, scholarships, and internships to international scholars in order to create global harmony and peace.

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