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## Future Proofing: Changing Tourism Education to Change Business Practices

Maria Della Lucia Ph.D.  
*University of Trento, maria.dellalucia@unitn.it*

Frederic Dimanche Ph.D.  
*Ryerson University, fdimanche@ryerson.ca*

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## **Future proofing: Changing tourism education to change business practices**

### **Introduction:**

This paper addresses the TTRA Canada conference sub-theme “Future-Proofing: Learning from Today to Build Back Tomorrow.” The pandemic has accelerated discussion about the socioeconomic and environmental impacts of tourism, social equity, workers’ dignity, as well as the long-term climate crisis. Tourism and the pandemic have led to a series of discussions about whether tourism can indeed be sustainable (e.g., Benjamin et al., 2020). The fact that the tourism industry has been the economic activity that was the most affected by the pandemic feeds this discussion (Della Lucia, Giudici, & Dimanche, 2021) . The sector has shown that it was vulnerable, not only with respect to the pandemic resulting in border closings and numerous, often changing travel restrictions, but also, more recently, with respect to the difficulties experienced by businesses in bringing back employees and hiring new ones. On the other hand, the pandemic has given pause for people to reflect on the status of tourism and to imagine a better or different tourism future, one that will be more respectful of nature and community stakeholders, and one that will address other critical challenges such as climate change. The purpose of this paper is to argue that tourism cannot change for the better if tourism management education does not change. We take humanistic management as a conceptual framework to explain how tourism higher education should evolve to prepare future leaders to be able to regenerate and manage tourism towards a better future. Two educational cases serve to illustrate what humanistic tourism management education could do to positively affect business practice.

### **Literature:**

The COVID-19 international health crisis has led to significant debates about the future of tourism. The industry associations (e.g., UNWTO, WTTC, as well as national tourism associations) are calling for action from governments to restart tourism and to provide support for the travel sector and its recovery and (re)growth towards pre-pandemic levels. On the other hand, many academics are calling for a change in the way we manage tourism, asking for humanistic tourism, regenerative tourism, social tourism, and de-growth (e.g., Della Lucia and Giudici, 2021a; Gössling et al., 2020; Higgins-Desbiolles et al., 2021; Lew et al. 2020). Those two perspectives are discussed by Butcher (2021) and Higgins-Desbiolles (2020) who don’t hesitate to call this debate a “war on tourism.” Few scholars have addressed the need for change from an educational perspective because higher (university) education is at the heart of management practices. However the current neoliberalism perspectives in universities endangers the ability to change and reach the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (Slocum et al., 2019). To empower students to lead change towards sustainable tourism in the post-pandemic era (Mínguez et al. 2021), a different educational approach is needed. Some authors have started to address tourism challenges from an education perspective relying on a values-based approach (e.g., Della Lucia & Giudici, 2021b; Della Lucia, Giudici, & Secchi, 2021; Sheldon et al. 2008).

This paper proposes a humanistic management approach to change tourism education (Della Lucia et al., 2021), by putting human beings and their dignity at the core of the transformation of the current paradigm towards humanizing business, the economy, and society (Melé 2016).

### **Method:**

The paper discusses the humanistic management perspective as a conceptual basis for change in tourism higher education through two university courses that are used as illustrative and descriptive cases (Yin, 2009): (1) *Field Studies in Hospitality and Tourism* of the Bachelor of Commerce in Hospitality and Tourism Management at Ryerson University, Canada. This course takes place in a third place (e.g., Cuba, Jamaica, or indigenous communities in the Northwest Territories). (2) *Economy of Culture and Tourism* of the MA program in Linguistic Mediation, Tourism and Cultures at the University of Trento, Italy. The courses are investigated to address learning objectives, content, and pedagogy.

### **Findings:**

The cases illustrate new pathways on how to prepare future tourism leaders to innovate tourism management practices by changing the learning outcomes, the related contents, and the pedagogical strategies. The development of an understanding of the pillars of humanistic management in the context of tourism and culture management needs to blend traditional tourism topics with humanistic management values (dignity, ethics) and combine theoretical, practical, and contextualized knowledge. To pursue these outcomes, education strategies must be based on diverse dialogue-based methodology, engaging tools, and be experienced both in the classroom and third places to allow the co-creation of knowledge and the activation of diverse facets of our humanity. Through these teaching-learning experiences students improve the relevance of the knowledge required to manage humanistically and responsibly, and acquire the reflective capacity to be agents of positive change and to make an impact on society.

**Conclusion:** The cases demonstrate how universities in different countries are beginning to change their tourism programs leveraging on a values-based perspective inspired by humanistic management values (dignity, ethics, and legitimacy). These cases represent early attempts by individual faculty members to find new experiential-learning educational pathways and it is hoped that those initiatives will infiltrate curricula to become foundations for tourism management education, at a time when tourism needs, more than ever, to be managed differently.

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