

Editor's Foreword

This book is the result of my attempts to counter a major challenge faced by tourism educators. Namely: How to prepare students for a fast-evolving business sector within a formal educational institution?

Given the temporary nature of knowledge and the fast evolving tourism-cruise industry, there is arguably little value at passing over information and facts, descriptive case studies and personal wisdoms. For a graduate to survive and be successful in a competitive and complex tourism/cruise industry, they need to be critical, innovative and systematic in the way they approach new tasks or projects. In line to my experience, the tourism industry is traditionally quite 'un-academic' and 'front-office' experience remains decisive. Formal qualifications are not as highly regarded as in other industries and this makes it very difficult for young tourism professionals to climb up the career ladder. Soft skills and intercultural competence are fairly self-understood and wide-spread amongst tourism professionals. In other words, basic knowledge and social competences are not an exceptional value-added of the formal education programmes, but an absolute minimum. Thus, a competitive advantage (in terms of career development) in such a context is the ability to ask the right questions, clearly express thoughts, substantiate arguments and do this consistently over time. This is especially the case in larger companies - tourism is highly concentrated - where 'political' reputation is the key to top management.

According to my opinion, our current education system in Germany does not sufficiently encourage independent and critical thinking. Our economic and political development, as reflected in the introduction of, and experiences with, compact bachelor programmes, ultimately aims at producing functional members of society, cost-effective workers and team-players. Nonetheless, professional success requires social-shapers, effective managers and leaders. This may well be the price of mass-education.

Colourfully stated:

"The mere consumption of knowledge produces consumers, not knowers"

"Conformity and standards lead do not trigger creativity, but simply strengthen its monopolisation"

Therefore the question posed here is: How can we nurture and educate our students in becoming motivated, critical, and independent thinkers? And how can it be done within the resource restrictions present. In order to help our students develop those meta-skills, I utilised the scientific process / research as a teaching method:

Research-Based Learning (see table 0 below):

	Research Coaching	Traditional Lecturing
Thematic Scope	Specific (Depth focus)	General (Width focus)
Student Role	Active / Creative	Passive / Receptive
Professor Role	Coaching / Supportive	Explaining / Directive
Teaching Method	One-to-One Sessions / Idea Exchange / Discussion	Group Lecturing / Questioning
Learning Process	Question → Application → Understanding → Description → Reflection	Description → Understanding → Question → Application → Reflection
Critical Success Factors	Motivation / Trust / Emotional Support	Content / Structure / Rhetoric / Entertainment factor
Evaluation / Feedback	Colloquium feedback in person + detailed thesis evaluation report	Written Exam / Presentation / Essay / report grade + comments
Desired Outcome	Experience with a Knowledge Domain	Knowledge within an Experience Domain

Table 0: Research-Based Learning vs. Traditional Lecturing

Thus, this book can be seen as a cumulative research effort, aimed at understanding the development dynamics of tour operating and shedding light on some of its key questions. The research team, comprising of undergraduate tourism students, systematically examined 20 case-studies, and documented their results. Apart from the insights provided, this documented effort also serves as a demonstration of applying research-based-learning and its usefulness; not just for students, but for the academic community as a whole.

Finally, it is my hope that this book will encourage a wider integration of students in empirical research and knowledge creation. After all, at least where the tourism knowledge domain is concerned, we can only be students.

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