

HOSPITALITY AND TOURISM RESEARCH IN SWISS HOTEL SCHOOLS:
A CASE STUDY OF RESEARCH PRACTICES AT ECOLE HÔTELIÈRE DE LAUSANNE

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the institutional and regulatory obstacles to hospitality and tourism research in Switzerland and explains why scientific research is underdeveloped in Swiss hotel and tourism management schools. A case study approach is adopted to analyze the research practices pursued by Ecole hôtelière de Lausanne as a solution to combat the regulatory constraints in Swiss higher education. This study shows that the EHL experience can be an example for other Swiss hotel schools to follow, through developing academic research and innovation to consolidate hospitality and tourism education in the era of the experience economy.

Key Words: research, higher education, hospitality and tourism, Swiss

INTRODUCTION

Swiss hospitality education is grounded in the tradition of professional education, from which various hospitality and tourism programs have emerged. This has been exemplified by the intensive study of practical arts on campus and in internships off campus (Chen & Dellea, 2015; Formica, 1996). As with the majority of Swiss hospitality programs, professional education is a key feature of hospitality education programs across Switzerland and is exported to other countries where the development of the tourism industry depends on high-qualified professionals. For instance, Ecole hôtelière de Lausanne (EHL), the world's first hotel management school, has established a worldwide education network that currently consists of eight schools abroad and exports its educational model and philosophy to China, India, the Middle East and Africa. These endeavors include delivering courses, training teachers and industrial professionals and certifying hospitality management schools abroad.

Swiss hospitality education is characterized by a blend of arts, sciences and applying theory to practical situations (Chen & Dellea, 2015). This educational strategy reflects changes in the industry and contributes to the development of the industry in the experience economy (Chen & Dellea, 2015; Formica, 1996). What the hospitality industry really needs in future decades is to shift from providing services to creating experiences. The orthodox hospitality industry today is also gradually expanding to include not only hotels and restaurants but also airlines, casinos, cruises and all businesses covered by the experience economy. The hospitality industry is a pioneer in delivering services compared to traditional manufacturing industries. And today it has set a benchmark (also a pioneer) in creating enjoyable and pleasant experiences and moments that tourists (i.e. consumers) will cherish for years to come. It is therefore not surprising that the Swiss watchmaking industry—a traditional manufacturing sector—seeks to explore the essence of hospitality in order to create luxury experiences for its customers.

Despite the fact that the reputation of Swiss hospitality education has been well acknowledged and the education mode has been seen as one of the competitive advantages of Swiss higher education (Becker & Kolster, 2012), scientific research has long been underdeveloped in Swiss hotel schools. A lack of research endeavors becomes strikingly evident when the ranking of tourism and hospitality schools/programs is based on research outputs rather than educational fame in the industry. Swiss hotel schools have barely appeared in various rankings that are based on tourism and hospitality scholarship (Jogarathnam, 2005a, b; McKercher, 2007, 2008; Severt et al., 2009). Despite being the world's first and one of the best hotel management schools, EHL was not ranked top 100 best schools based on research outputs (Severt et al., 2009), not to mention the vast majority of other Swiss hotel and tourism schools. While published research is not the sole measure of the quality of institutions and programs, it is one of the more important and visible methods used to rate academic programs (Jogarathnam, 2005b). In addition, academic research can lead the intellectual development of tourism and hospitality as a field of academic endeavor and consolidate quality teaching as well (Crouch & Perdue, 2015; Frechtling, 2004; Hall, 2005). This study thus proceeds to explore the factors that may have impeded Swiss hotel schools to pursue research and outline the research practices at EHL as a solution to increase research outputs in tourism and hospitality.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Hospitality and Tourism Research and Scholarship

While the competence of tourism and hotel schools has been well recognized by the quality of educational programs, research outputs have been playing a crucial role in determining the reputation of the schools (Jogarathnam, 2005a, b; McKercher, 2007, 2008; Severt et al., 2009). A 2009 study ranked top 100 best tourism and hospitality programs/schools based on research performance (Severt et al., 2009). It evidenced the predominance of the university-level hotel and hospitality schools in North America, succeeded by their counterparts in Asia and Australia (Severt et al., 2009). While the UK-based schools have stood out in Europe with considerable research outputs over the past decades (Page, 2003; Severt et al., 2009), the rest of European schools with well-established hospitality and tourism programs rarely appeared in the lists. One of the reasons is that these schools are featured by vocational training and professional education, lacking the endeavor of practicing research (Formica, 1996; Page, 2003). However, when tourism and hospitality programs have been expanded to include postgraduate education, pursuing research objectives has become a strategy for hotel schools to keep competitive in higher education as well as to meet the needs of the industry (Horng & Lee, 2005, McKercher, 2002; Rivera & Upchurch, 2008).

The evolution of tourism and hospitality programs from the vocational level to university level stimulates research production. This is true especially for those countries with well-established programs at the vocational level. For instance, Australia saw establishing university-level tourism and hospitality education as part of national policy

(McKercher, 2002). Most senior Australian tourism academics believed that postgraduate programs could be a catalyst to rejuvenate tourism and hospitality education, which saw an unstable growth in student demand (McKercher, 2002). According to Horng and Lee (2005), one of the reasons that hospitality and tourism research was strengthened in Taiwan was the transformation of a vast majority of vocational schools into universities. This transformation helped reposition hotel and tourism schools by incorporating comprehensive curriculum, advancing collaboration and strengthening tourism and hospitality research (Horng & Lee, 2005). In addition to having a huge number of university-level/postgraduate programs, the academic leadership of the United States in tourism and hospitality can be attributed to the dominance of the US-based academics (Law, Leung, & Buhalis, 2010). It is concluded that the largest share of academic journal editors and editorial board members evidenced the country's academic leadership in tourism and hospitality scholarship (Law et al., 2010).

Institutional Characteristics and Research Performance

At the institutional level, research productivity in tourism and hospitality can be largely explained by a wide range of characteristics from education system, faculty composition, to the availability of doctoral research (Hall, 2005; Jogaratnam, 2005a, b; Lee & Law, 2011; Severt et al., 2009). Lee and Law's (2011) study revealed that research productive in tourism and hospitality was positively related to faculty size, a higher composition of senior researchers, the number of supporting staff as well as the availability of a doctoral program. Therefore, a lack of research faculty and doctoral programs in most European hotel schools can explain why these schools have far lagged behind in the race for research outputs and excellence. On the other hand, evidence from mainland China and Taiwan has shown that research outputs have been gradually increasing when tourism and hospitality programs are offered at the postgraduate level (Horng & Lee, 2005; Huang & Hsu, 2008; Tsang & Hsu, 2011). These programs help establish a research community in an institution to strengthen research capability and disseminate knowledge to the industry.

The largest growth in research outputs over the period 1992 to 2006 in Asia is largely because an increasing number of universities have established research teams and faculty in tourism and hospitality (Severt et al., 2009). This is accompanied by a quick transition from professional education to university-level and even PhD level education (Horng & Lee, 2005). This conclusion is consistent with Lee and Law's (2011) argument that an institution's autonomy of offering hospitality and tourism programs can boost its research productivity. As the research community within an institution expands due to the increasing number of programs and faculty members, cross-institutional collaboration has also been consolidated (Ye, Li, & Law, 2013; Ye, Song, & Li, 2012). Over the past two decades, tourism and hospitality research has been increasingly dominated by multi-author, multi-university studies, and for this reason research productivity is significantly associated with the breadth and depth of research collaboration between institutions (Ye et al., 2012, 2013).

Education Modes and Research Performance

A number of challenges have been constantly raised by researchers regarding how to position tourism and hospitality programs and revolutionize the education modes by incorporating scientific research (Jayawardena, 2001; McKercher, 2002; Morgan, 2004; Sigala & Baum, 2003). Scientific research is necessary not only for tourism and hospitality educators to consolidate existing programs but also for the industry to fulfil the managerial objectives in the era of the experience economy (Hall, 2005; Morgan, 2004). Yet the traditional vocational ethos and professional education philosophy in tourism and hospitality education may have impeded most tourism and hospitality schools to pursue their research goals. Thus, scientific research in tourism and hospitality seems unnecessary because the knowledge is drawn from the industry and created by practitioners rather than from the disciplinary enquiries of academics (Morrison & O'Mahony, 2003). However, by the late 1990s international academics had advocated "the liberation of higher education in hospitality management from its vocational base and to explore the inclusion in the curriculum of a broader and more reflective orientation" (Morrison & O'Mahony, 2003, p. 38). The Australian experience in particular suggested that the development of research programs can be a driver for traditional tourism and hospitality programs to thrive (McKercher, 2002).

METHODS

We adopted a case study approach to analyze the obstacles that Swiss hotel schools are facing in pursuing research in general and the research practices undertaken by EHL in particular. EHL was selected as a case for three reasons. First, EHL is the first hotel school specialized in hospitality education in Switzerland and also a pioneer of hospitality education in the world. Its education mode has been adopted by other hotel schools in Switzerland. Also,

a limited number of specialized hotel schools in Switzerland make the school-level quantitative analysis difficult. Second, EHL has long been cited as a world reference for hospitality education, making the analysis of EHL comparable to hospitality education at the global level. This also helps identify regulatory and governance differences of higher education between Switzerland and the rest of the world. Third, EHL has established a comprehensive programs ranging from higher diploma, bachelors, Masters to EMBA, which make it the first hotel school in Switzerland to develop research programs and practice research and innovation.

Despite being criticized for lacking theoretical underpinning, methodological rigor, and data reliability and validity in most studies (Seuring, 2006), the case study approach best suited this study because of its exploratory nature. By using the case study approach, EHL can be seen as a lens through which we can foresee the strategies that other Swiss hotel schools may take to advance research in the future. The data collected to accompany the case study approach consisted of semi-structured interviews at EHL, a content analysis of brochures that depicted tourism and hospitality programs offered by 22 Swiss hotel schools, and various governmental documents and statistics that depicted the status quo of Swiss higher education in tourism and hospitality. In particular, the semi-structured interviews were conducted with EHL faculty, staff, students and alumni, particularly for collecting information regarding EHL's research practices over the past decade. The interviews focused on three issues, namely the status quo of research at EHL, research practices undertaken at EHL, and why advancing research in traditional hotel schools might be a strategy to keep the school more competitive in hospitality education. The data were collected between June and September, 2015.

This study proceeds to outline the institutional and regulatory landscape that fundamentally determines why hospitality and tourism research is underdeveloped in Swiss hotel schools. This remains one of the obstacles to undertaking scientific research in Swiss hotel schools despite an escalating demand from the industry that needs innovation as well as from students who want to pursue a PhD in tourism and hospitality. Then, the case of EHL is used to illustrate the institutional and regulatory obstacles on the one hand and, on the other hand, set an example for other hotel and tourism schools to pursue scientific research under the regulatory constraints.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Governance of Swiss Hospitality and Tourism Education

Education governance in Switzerland is an institutional obstacle to conducting academic research in hospitality and tourism schools. According to the International Standard Classification of Education¹, higher education in Switzerland consists of two main categories (Figure 1). One is classified as "5A," incorporating universities offering degree-granting programs. The second is classified as "5B," incorporating schools or institutions offering professional education, which includes hospitality and tourism education. The doctoral level education, classified as "6A," can only be offered by public universities at the Swiss federal or cantonal level². Since 2015, all the tertiary "A" institutions³ have been regulated and coordinated at the federal level by the newly passed Higher Education Funding and Coordination Act (HEdA)⁴. This act sets the constitution of the Swiss Accreditation Council and the Swiss Accreditation Agency, aiming to ensure the education quality of all tertiary "A" institutions. The tertiary "B" level comprises about 150 public and private professional education training (PET) schools, which are comprised of most hospitality and tourism schools, all of which are legally authorized and regulated at the cantonal level. However, the PET schools are also subject to a common management framework at the federal level regulated by the Federal Act on Vocational and Professional Education and Training.

¹ www.uis.unesco.org

² Switzerland, officially called the Swiss Confederation, consists of 26 cantons. The federal government delegates considerable authority regarding education regulations to the cantons, which makes the governance of the Swiss higher education highly decentralized and diverse.

³ At the tertiary "A" level, there are two Federal Institutes of Technology, ten public universities, two higher education institutes, seven public Universities of Applied Sciences (UAS), two private independent Universities of Applied Sciences and 17 Universities of Teacher Education. Only the two institutes of technology are regulated by the federal government under the Federal Act on the Federal Institutes of Technology. Universities and other higher education institutions are primarily regulated by the cantonal authorities under cantonal laws.

⁴ <https://www.admin.ch/opc/en/classified-compilation/20070429/index.html>

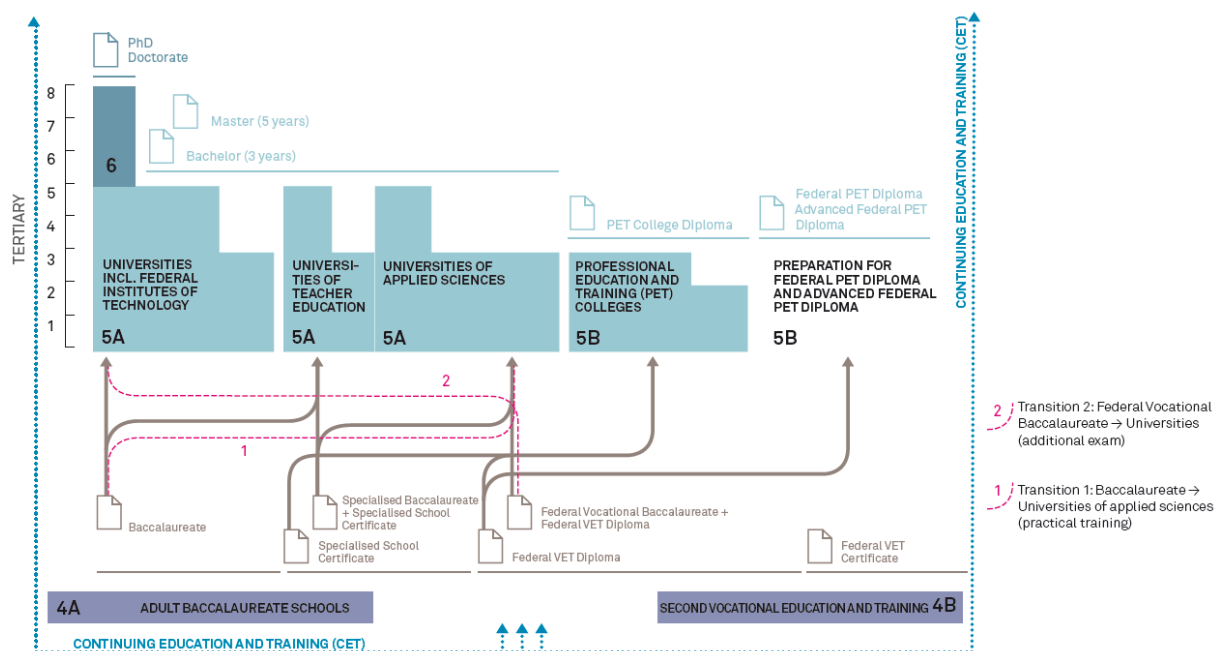


Figure 1 The Swiss education system

Source: Swiss Conference of Cantonal Ministers of Education (EDK).⁵

We identify a total of 45 institutions in Switzerland which offer hotel or tourism management programs. These schools differ substantially in terms of governance and the quality of their programs. For further investigation, we only consider 22 specialized hotel and tourism management schools that are either recognized by the Swiss authorities, accredited by a trustworthy accreditation agency or members of the Swiss Association of Hotel Schools (ASEH⁶). All 22 schools are regulated at the tertiary “B” level or above, offering a wide range of diplomas (higher diploma to postgraduate diploma) and degree-granting programs (bachelors, masters and MBA) (Table 1). Of the 22 schools, eleven are professional education and training schools in hospitality⁷ and tourism management recognized by the Swiss authorities and, in addition, five private schools offering higher diplomas (“5B” level)⁸. At the tertiary “A” level, there is one University of Applied Sciences in hospitality management (EHL), two in tourism (Institute of tourism HTW Chur & School of Management & Tourism HES-SO Valais-Wallis), and two private schools (Glion and Les Roches) owned by the American group *Laureate International Universities* as well as the recently implemented French private school Vatel. Finally, Les Roches-Gruyère is currently recognized as a private independent University of Applied Sciences, but its authorization will be ceased by 2018 at the latest.

Despite the fact that most renowned hotel and tourism management schools are either public or legally authorized, many independent schools are exclusively privately owned and can operate in Switzerland without formal authorization from either the federal or cantonal authorities. These private schools are only subject to laws and regulations pertaining to business activities and do not have any obligation related to education quality assurance. In particular, these private schools are not subject to any control or regulation from either the federal or cantonal government, nor are their diplomas or degrees recognized by the federal or cantonal authorities⁹. This legal loophole could undermine the reputation of Swiss hospitality education, and quality can vary dramatically from one school to another. While these private schools contribute significantly to the Swiss economy by recruiting international students, they can be detrimental for the export of Swiss hospitality education in the long run. Therefore, stricter regulations of private hospitality and tourism education would benefit Switzerland and further enhance the competitiveness of Swiss hospitality education.

⁵ <http://www.edk.ch/dyn/16833.php>

⁶ <http://www.aseh.ch/>

⁷ <http://www.c-es.ch/>

⁸ We only discuss private schools that are members of the Swiss Association of Hotel Schools. Source: <http://www.aseh.ch/>

⁹ For public institutions or institutions recognized by the Swiss authorities, degrees are protected by Federal Law. The Swiss authorities also ensure the transferability of these degrees through bilateral agreements with other governments.

Table 1 An overview of 22 specialized hotel and tourism management schools

No.	School	Founded	Governance	Affiliation or other important accreditations	Major programs
1	Ecole hôtelière de Lausanne (EHL)	1893	Federal and cantonal	HES-SO, AAQ, NEASC, hotelleriesuisse	BSc, MSc, EMBA
2	School of Management and Tourism (HES-SO Valais-Wallis)	1997	Federal and cantonal	HES-SO	BSc, EMBA, MAS
3	Institute of Tourism (HTW Chur)	1963	Federal and cantonal	FHO	BSc, MSc, EMBA, CAS, DAS MAS
4	Glion Institute of Higher Education	1962	Private	NEASC	BSc, MSc, MBA, Further education (postgraduate diplomas)
5	Les Roches International School of Hotel Management (Bluch & Gruyère)	1954	Private, Federal (Gruyère)	NEASC, Private UAS (Gruyère Campus)	Diploma, BSc, MSc, MBA, MAS, Postgraduate Diploma
6	Vatel Martigny	2010	French Government	CNCP, ASEH	BSc, MSc
7	Ecole hôtelière de Genève	1914	Cantonal	K-HF, ASEH, EDUQUA, Gastrosuisse	PET Diploma
8	Hotelfachschule Thun	1986	Cantonal	K-HF, ASEH	PET Diploma
9	Schweiz Hotelfachschule Luzern (SHL)	1909	Cantonal	K-HF, ASEH, EDUQUA, hotelleriesuisse	PET Diploma
10	Swiss School of Tourism and Hospitality (SSTH ¹⁰)	1966	Cantonal	K-HF, ASEH, EDUQUA, hotelleriesuisse	PET Diploma
11	Hotelfachschule Belvoir-park	1925	Cantonal	K-HF, ASEH, EDUQUA, Gastrosuisse	PET Diploma
12	Scuola superiore alberghiera e del tourimo (SSAT)	1993	Cantonal	K-HF, ASEH	PET Diploma
13	Berufs-, Fach- und Fort-bildungsschule (BFF)	1888 ¹¹	Cantonal	K-HF, EDUQUA	PET Diploma
14	Luzern AG Höhere Fachschule für Tourismus (HFT)	2013	Cantonal	K-HF	PET Diploma
15	Internationale Schule für Touristik (IST)	1994	Cantonal	K-HF, EDUQUA	PET Diploma
16	Academia Engiadina	1995	Cantonal	K-HF	PET Diploma
17	International School of Tourism	1997	Federal and cantonal	K-HF, EDUQUA	PET Diploma
18	Hotel Institute Montreux (HIM)	1985	Private	ASEH, NEASC ¹² , EDUQUA, THE-ICE	Swiss Higher Diploma, BSc*, Postgraduate Diploma, Master ¹³
19	Swiss Hotel Management School Caux, Leysin (SHMS)	1992	Private	ASEH, EDUQUA	Swiss Higher Diploma, BSc*, MSc*, Postgraduate Diploma, Master ¹⁴
20	School of Hotel Management Neuchâtel (IHNTI)	1986	Private	ASEH, EDUQUA	Swiss Higher Diploma, BSc*, Postgraduate Diploma, Master ¹⁵
21	César Ritz Colleges Switzerland	1982	Private	ASEH, EDUQUA, tedQual	Swiss Higher Diploma, BSc*, MSc*, MA*
22	Culinary Arts Academy Switzerland	1997	Private	ASEH, THE-ICE	Swiss Higher Diploma, BSc*, Postgraduate Diploma, Master ¹⁶

Notes: Some schools, which are not authorized to grant degrees by the Swiss federal or cantonal authorities or by their own governments and are not accredited by a reputable agency and are not a member of the Association of Swiss Hotel Schools (ASEH), are deliberately disregarded since there are serious doubts regarding the quality of their programs. Degrees granted by institutions indicated as *Private* are not protected by the federal or cantonal laws and there is no guarantee of the recognition of the degrees awarded by these schools. Degrees indicated with an asterisk (*) are not granted by the schools but by their partner universities abroad.

Among the most important institutions legally authorized to deliver hospitality education is the University of Applied Sciences and Arts Western Switzerland (French: HES-SO, Haute école spécialisée de Suisse occidentale). The HES-SO is one of the seven regional university associations that safeguard education quality for their affiliated

¹⁰ SSTH became a member of EHL Group in 2013.

¹¹ BFF was originally a sewing school founded in 1888. Its housekeeping program was inceptioned in 1938, making it a hospitality school.

¹² At the vocational level, by the Committee on Technical and Career Institutions (CTCI).

¹³ No official recognitions found pertaining to these degrees.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

schools and promote scientific research in applied sciences, which include hospitality and tourism research. EHL and Ecole Suisse de Tourisme (HES-SO Valais-Wallis), also in a French-speaking region focusing on tourism, are the only two hospitality/tourism management schools affiliated with the HES-SO. Being affiliated with the HES-SO indicates that hospitality and tourism education is regarded as part of the Swiss higher education system and these schools are authorized to grant academic degrees protected by Swiss federal laws¹⁷. The affiliation of these schools with the HES-SO ensures that hospitality and tourism programs stay up to date with other programs offered by public research universities. This affiliation thus sets them apart from most private hotel schools across Switzerland while strengthening the global reputation of hospitality programs offered in Switzerland.

Some hospitality and tourism schools also turn to seek a variety of domestic or international accreditations, not only to attest to the quality of their programs, but also to obtain the international recognition required for attracting international students. For instance, EHL, Glion and Les Roches have been accredited by the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education of the New England Association of Schools & Colleges, Inc. (CIHE-NEASC). At the national level, EHL's EMBA in Hospitality Administration has also been positively evaluated by the Swiss Agency of Accreditation and Quality Assurance (formerly OAQ)¹⁸. Other hotel management schools are following this trend, but since most of them are virtually at the "5B" level they do not have access to higher education accrediting agencies. For instance, the eduQua¹⁹ is typically an accreditation body for the "5B" level institutions and further professional education. Seeking partnerships with foreign universities is hence a strategy that such schools adopted in order to offer programs at the tertiary "A" level and attract international students. Nonetheless, the international partners of these schools are usually poorly ranked by a verity of university rankings²⁰.

Research Practices in Swiss Hotel Schools: The Case of EHL²¹

Recent decades have seen the creation of an increasing number of doctoral tourism and hospitality programs offered by various institutions across the world. One of the objectives is to legitimate tourism and hospitality as a field, or even a discipline, of scientific research. Yet executing academic research in Swiss hotel management schools is difficult. This is because these schools have a long tradition and commitment to training practitioners for the industry instead of researchers. It is difficult also because most hotel schools are private and excluded from the scheme of public research universities. All hotel management schools are teaching-based and the majority of them are outside of the university system. Despite the fact that tourism and hospitality warrants scientific attention, practicing research casts doubt among stakeholders on whether scientific research (including implementing PhD programs) is necessary for specialized hotel management schools in Switzerland.

The tourism and hospitality industry has also doubted whether a master student is superior to a bachelor when it comes to handling practical and management duties. If a master's program cannot sufficiently advance students' intellectual competences in translating theory into practice, the industry may probably question whether a master's degree, not to mention a PhD, is really necessary for the industry. This, in turn, causes students to rethink whether they should pursue a master's degree in hospitality and whether it is valuable for their career development. Since scientific research has rarely been the focus of Swiss hotel schools, in what follows we aim to introduce research and innovation practices pioneered by EHL.

Academic Research: How Industrial Practice Drives Research

Academic research in tourism and hospitality has been promoted by the regional university associations. One in Western Switzerland is the HES-SO, which has 28 affiliated schools that focus on applied research in various disciplines. EHL is the only hotel management school affiliated with the HES-SO, indicating that academic research implemented by hotel management schools themselves is extremely limited and restricted. For the vast majority of hotel schools outside of the HES-SO system, academic research is by no means necessary nor a strategy for advancing their existing educational programs. Given the practical nature of hospitality and tourism programs, academic research sponsored by the HES-SO is application-oriented, aiming at fostering the transfer of theoretical

¹⁷ This also ensures recognition within Europe through the Bologna agreements.

¹⁸ <http://aaq.ch/en/>

¹⁹ http://www.eduqua.ch/002alc_00_en.htm

²⁰ Some schools, for instance, offer degrees through the University of Derby: <http://www.derby.ac.uk/>

²¹ We discuss Swiss hospitality and tourism education programs by citing Ecole hôtelière de Lausanne (EHL) as an example. Therefore, the readers should caution that the EHL experience may not apply to other Swiss hospitality and tourism management schools, nor represent the *status quo* of the Swiss hospitality and tourism education as a whole. While citing EHL as an example, this article does not represent the views of the school but solely of the authors.

applications into industry. This constitutes one of the pillars of innovation in the Swiss economy, which not only encompasses manufacturing industries and technology but also includes services and education. Academic research is also supported by the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF) for encouraging innovation in the economy.

EHL commenced scientific research as an affiliated school of the HES-SO in 1998. Since Mr Michel Rochat, CEO of EHL, joined the school in 2010, research activities at EHL have been substantially reinforced. In December 2014, EHL established the Lausanne Hospitality Research Center (LHRC) as a concrete step to promote academic research in hospitality, tourism and business-related fields. The LHRC currently has 22 research fellows with diverse disciplinary backgrounds from economics, marketing, management, financing, accounting to tourism and hospitality. The LHRC aims to promote research that can penetrate into mainstream management disciplines, particularly marketing, strategy, management, economics, and finance and accounting. This research, which is rooted in mainstream management disciplines, should help to generate high-quality applied research for tourism and hospitality. Instead of seeing tourism and hospitality as a distinct discipline, we aim to advance applied hospitality and tourism research that can be a reference for mainstream business-related disciplines. The key to disentangling the longstanding debate of discipline or indiscipline of tourism and hospitality is to ground industry-specific research in mainstream disciplines. This helps to consolidate the theoretical foundation of tourism and hospitality research while leveraging it to a disciplinary level that can keep abreast of developments in mainstream management research.

Industrial Innovations: How Research Intelligence Fuels Industry Development

The academic endeavors at EHL are also manifested as a strategy of injecting research into its long-established teaching programs. Scientific research can help to address the lack of innovation and entrepreneurship in tourism and hospitality. It is difficult to practice innovation in service industries like hospitality and tourism. Therefore, applied research can fuel industry development by incubating innovative ideas in laboratories and turn these ideas into business solutions and entrepreneurship. In 2000, EHL established what is called Student Business Projects (SBP) as one example of cultivating innovation for the industry. These projects aim to facilitate transformation of business ideas from students and faculty to industrial practices. The concept of the SBP itself is also an innovation, which has created a new model of academia-industry collaboration. It was implemented because the hospitality and tourism industry requires various types of innovations ranging from service production to distribution management while the industry itself may not be able to generate this type of innovation.

The SBP concept works on a trilateral platform, comprised of clients, students and faculty. In order to integrate this concept into teaching and learning, the principal relationship is established between students, who provide innovative ideas and implement these ideas, and clients, who represent companies in a wide range of industries. Faculty members serve as supervisors and mentors in providing expertise and guiding students as they carry out their SBP mandate. Since faculty members are not directly involved in the project nor have direct contact with the clients, the SBP underscores the pivotal role of students as the main contributor of the innovation. A typical project works as follows. Clients suggest their problems and detail deliverables of solutions which they need. Students work in groups of 4-6 and select the problems and the client that interest them. It takes around 10 weeks for students to come up with a solution that can be implemented by the clients. A well-crafted and feasible solution requires students to clearly identify the problems, contact the clients on a regular basis and administer a series of market research studies.

SBPs are rewarding to students, the school, and the industry and count towards the bachelor's degree. The industry obtains solutions at a lower cost while quality is ensured by the school. SBPs have especially been popular with small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and startups in Switzerland, which often lack financial resources but have the same thirst for innovation as large corporations. Since 2000, the SBP concept has served 450 companies and generated a total of 750 solutions for a variety of industry sectors. This sort of innovation has grown in importance in recent decades, exemplified by new business models, such as booking.com, Uber, and Airbnb, which have redefined the landscape and the world economy. The origin of hospitality, referred to as crafting enjoyable relationships between the guest and the host, is also expanding to other industries for creating a holistic consumer experience. The Swiss watchmaking industry started to integrate the hospitality concept into its operations as it provides a luxurious experience to its customers. The role of research and innovation in facilitating such integration becomes enticing when innovators are students. Since students are prospective guests, consumers and users, they innovate today for themselves tomorrow.

CONCLUSION

The obstacles for Swiss hotel and tourism schools to practicing research is the governance of Swiss higher education that excludes these schools from the “6A” category. The high specialization of tourism and hospitality education indicates that programs are exclusively provided by hotel schools for advancing vocational training and professional education. This governance has impeded the development of research performances in Swiss hotel schools and also undermined the capability of these schools to compete with universities in North America, Australia and Asia. For elite institutions like EHL, the inclusion of scientific research in hospitality education is a means of corroborating teaching, and thereby upgrading hospitality education from the bachelor level to the postgraduate level. Academic research, including innovation as evidenced by EHL’s SBP concept, can unleash students’ curiosity regarding innovation that is useful to the industry and complements textbook-based learning. This does not only apply to master’s or doctoral students but also to a vast majority of undergraduates who can practice user-based innovation and research. By practicing research, students can be trained to be forward-looking and to lead the industry rather than simply to deal with operations. It is also a means for hotel schools to address what the industry needs in the fast-changing business environment.

For the leading hospitality schools, practicing academic research is a strategy of differentiation, helping them compete not only with their Swiss counterparts but also with the world’s prestigious hospitality and business schools. Hospitality education has been redefined over the past decade, shifting from the bachelor’s level to a more comprehensive package that incorporates PhD programs (Severt et al., 2009). Hospitality management schools compete to provide high-quality education programs that can provide students with various learning experiences. Academic research can increase hospitality schools’ profile, which is not easy to achieve by simply focusing on teaching and vocational training. In addition, competition for students occurs not only among tourism and hospitality schools but also between hospitality schools and traditional business schools. As the hospitality industry is becoming highly integrated, traditional business schools are tailoring their programs, in particular MBAs and the like, to capture the new trend and equip students with what they need in leading the industry. For this reason, it would be risky if hospitality schools overlooked or underestimated the importance of academic research.

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