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"Anyone could do that"

Nordic perspectives on competence in tourism

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Abstract

In academic reasoning, as well as policy rhetoric, much attention has been drawn to the low thresholds to employment and entrepreneurship in tourism. The purpose of this thesis is to go beyond the simplified images and examine the educational characteristics of the tourism workforce in a way that includes both a geographical and work task related aspect. By employing a sequential mix of methods, two perspectives on competence in tourism are presented. First, the actual presence of formal education within the workforce is mapped and discussed based on descriptive analyses of register data. Thereafter, thematic analyses of interviews are used to allow for a discussion on underlying reasoning of recruitment. The theoretical point of departure is that the workforce is a crucial input factor of the production process in labour intense service sectors such as tourism. However, the access to a suitable workforce differs between destinations. It is therefore imperative to scrutinize its characteristics in order to set relevant strategies for development, as well as education. The thesis contains four individual papers and an introductory section. The first two papers are based on register data on the Swedish national workforce in the years 2000, 2005 and 2010. The results show that the general level of formal education is not exceptionally low in tourism and that it is rather linked to geography than occupational sector. There was also confirmed to be a mismatch between tourism-specific education and work in tourism. In the second part of the thesis, focus is turned to the managerial segment within destination development. The geographical scope includes the northern region of Sweden and one case study area each in Norway and Finland. The empirical material shows that tourism-specific education was not prioritized when recruiting for destination management.

The empirical findings are brought together in the concluding discussion of the thesis. It is there suggested that reasoning on the educational characteristics of the tourism workforce needs to include the diversity of local preconditions and needs relating to geography and work tasks.

Keywords

tourism, education, workforce, competence, destination management, destination development, recruitment, Sweden, Finland, Norway

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