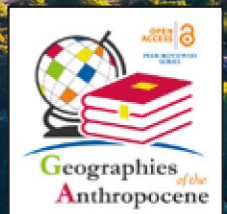


# HUMAN MOBILITY, MIGRATION & TOURISM IN THE ANTHROPOCENE

Gian Luigi Corinto, Glen Farrugia (Editors)

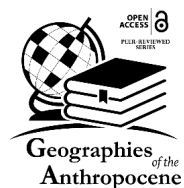
Foreword by Geoffrey Lipman

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# Human Mobility, Migration and Tourism in the Anthropocene

Gian Luigi Corinto, Glen Farrugia  
*Editors*



IL Sileno  
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*Human Mobility, Migration and Tourism in the Anthropocene*  
Gian Luigi Corinto, Glen Farrugia (Eds.)

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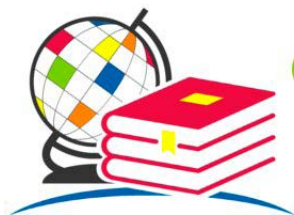


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## 7. Stakeholder Involvement in Tourism Education Design

*Simon Caruana<sup>1</sup>*

### **Abstract**

The identification and involvement of stakeholders in education design and development is often indicated as a means to ensure that educational programs truly fulfil the aims set for them. Tourism education is by no means exempt.

This study explores stakeholder involvement in a Bachelor program (EQF Level 6) in Tourism. The main stakeholders identified were asked for their views about the degree of involvement of both their stakeholder group but also other identified stakeholder groups. Data was collected through a series of focus groups and followed up by in-depth interviews.

The outcome indicates clearly that all the key stakeholders need to be involved in order to have a successful learning environment. It also highlights the need for the different stakeholders to interact and exchange views in this respect. On the other hand, there is a high element of mistrust when it comes to having one group working with another. This is in contrast to what is envisaged to ensure that the proposed is a successful one, namely that all stakeholders need to be able to work together.

To do so, one has to identify the stakeholders and identifying the attitudes held by each group. Subsequently one has to establish proper communication between the parties and diffuse any conflict situations that may arise. Only then would it be possible to move towards intercultural reflection and finally achieve constructive interaction between all the stakeholders involved.

### **Keywords:**

Stakeholders, Tourism Education, Intercultural Competence, Soft Skills

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<sup>1</sup> Senior Manager (Academia), Institute of Tourism Studies (ITS), Aviation Park, Aviation Avenue, Hal Luqa LQA 9023, Malta. Email: [simon.caruana@its.edu.mt](mailto:simon.caruana@its.edu.mt)



## 1. Introduction

Much research has been carried out about the acquisition of employability skills by school leavers, higher education students and other lifelong learners; however, the old debate still rages about what constitutes the right skill set. John Dewey was one of the first to explore this issue over a hundred years ago (Dewey, 1916). Closer to our times, and in particular in the aftermath of last decade's economic crisis together with the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic a re-assessment of the ideal type of graduate skill set took place at a quasi-global level.

Hargreaves (2003) asserts that preparing students to engage in the Learning Society is probably the biggest challenge that is currently facing higher education. The rate at which modern society changes is making this challenge even more difficult to face. This was already identified by Borges (2007). In his attempt to describe what he referred to as the 'virtual environment student', he quoted the 2001-2005 U.S. Secretary of Education:

*"We still educate our students based on an agricultural timetable, in an industrial setting, but tell them they live in a digital age."*

Rod Paige, U.S. Secretary of Education, (in Borges, 2007, p.1)

This implies enabling people to learn in collaboration, at a distance, throughout their livelihood, acquire the right attitudes and have the necessary skills and abilities to be able to manage information (Borges, 2007). Therefore, although there seems to be a general consensus within both academia and industry sectors regarding the importance of "transferable skills" for graduates, it also appears that employers, higher education providers, and young people do not necessarily understand the same thing by this term (Succi and Canovi, 2019).

## 2. A demand for skills and competences in today's learning society

Redecker et al. (2011) listed globalisation and immigration as two issues affecting Europe. Burn (2011) illustrates how globalisation is bringing different cultures in close proximity to an extent never witnessed before. This is changing the nature of workforce composition in organisations. As a result, for a person to thrive in modern organisations, one has to be creative and innovative, but s/he must also be able to operate within a multicultural

work environment. Moreover, French (2010) argues that as a consequence of globalisation, there has been, within the business research community, an emphasis on how to enter new national markets and engage in international strategic alliances. He also argues that ‘labour flow’ (his term) has been tackled to a much lesser extent globally (French, 2010).

The phenomenon of workers having to work in a culturally diverse environment is by no means new. If one looks at the last one hundred years in Western Europe, this has been witnessed in the different countries making up that part of the continent since the 1960s — particularly with the influx of immigrants hailing from different countries within this region and those from the former colonies of the same European countries (Hoskins and Sallah, 2011). In more recent times, one can observe a steady flow of persons between countries found within the European Union. This is the result of legislation that permits freedom of movement as the ‘Schengen Agreement’ (EUR-Lex, 2009). With this freedom it is much easier for people to move from one region of the European Union to another in the hope of better prospects in terms of employment, career progression, the future, etc. (Cedefop, 2016).

The European Commission recognised that one of the issues this could present is the recognition of the various qualification frameworks upheld by the different countries making up the union. This led to the development of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), (EC, 2017b). It is worth noting that one of the key aspects of the EQF is the focus on learning outcomes: in other words, what knowledge, skills, and competences would have been acquired when the learning process has been completed (EC, 2017b).

While the documentation does not make a specific reference to culture-related skills and competences, it is possible to observe a number of references to EU-based documentation. Reference is made to the eight key competences identified by the European Commission as being fundamental for lifelong learning (EUR-Lex, 2006). These are summarised as follows:

1. Communication in the mother tongue. The ability to express and interpret concepts, thoughts, feelings, facts and opinions in both oral and written form and to interact linguistically in an appropriate and creative way in a full range of societal and cultural contexts;
2. Communication in foreign languages. It involves mediation and intercultural understanding;

3. Mathematical competence and basic competences in science and technology. Mathematical competence is the ability to develop and apply mathematical thinking in order to solve a range of problems in everyday situations, with emphasis being placed on process, activity and knowledge. Basic competences in science and technology refer to the mastery, use and application of knowledge and methodologies that explain the natural world;
4. Digital competence. This involves the confident and critical use of information society technology (IST) and thus basic skills in information and communication technology (ICT);
5. Learning to learn. The ability to pursue and organise one's own learning, either individually or in groups and in accordance with one's own needs. It also includes awareness of methods and opportunities;
6. Social and civic competences. Social competence refers to personal, interpersonal and intercultural competence, and all forms of behaviour that equip individuals to participate in an effective and constructive way in social and working life. Civic competence — and particularly knowledge of social and political concepts and structures (democracy, justice, equality, citizenship and civil rights) — equips individuals to engage in active and democratic participation;
7. Sense of initiative and entrepreneurship. This is the ability to turn ideas into action. It involves creativity, innovation and risk-taking, as well as the ability to plan and manage projects in order to achieve objectives;
8. Cultural awareness and expression. Involves appreciation of the importance of the creative expression of ideas, experiences and emotions in a range of media (music, performing arts, literature, and the visual arts). (Adapted from EUR-Lex, 2006)

Many of these competences are treated in various studies that look at soft skill requirements by students who will then enter the world of employment. (Cedefop, 2016; Redecker et al, 2011; Silva, 2009; Suto, 2013).

However, there is evidence suggesting that these competences are not being acquitted by students. Lowden et al.'s (2011) study, carried out in Scotland, looks at the employers' and HEI representatives' perceptions of the employability skills of new graduates. The employers' views may be summarised in the following list:

1. Team working
2. Problem solving
3. Self-management
4. Knowledge of the business
5. Literacy and numeracy skills relevant to the job post
6. ICT knowledge
7. Good interpersonal and communication skills
8. Ability to use own initiative, but also follow instructions
9. Leadership skills where necessary

Representatives of HEIs came up with another list of skills and attributes that in their view would enhance graduates' job prospects (Lowden et al., 2011):

1. Communication and presentation skills
2. Ability to work on their own initiative and independently
3. Assuming responsibility
4. Problem solving and creativity
5. Time management
6. Ability to work as part of a team and lead when appropriate
7. Ability to network
8. Knowledge of the industry and work readiness
9. Willingness to learn and take responsibility for their own development
10. Ability to be reflective about themselves and what they want from the job
11. Motivation and enthusiasm
12. Self-confidence

There are many congruent points. They suggest that ways have to be found in order to incorporate these skills and attributes across HE programs. Moreover, work placements would allow students to demonstrate their skills to their prospective employers. However, all of this may be futile unless there is what Lowden et al. (2011) refer to as 'meaningful employer participation on HEI committees'.

Similar questions are posed by Chamorro-Premuriz, and Frankiewicz (2019) whereby employers point out to the gap between what students learn and what skills and competences they actually have to be 'job-ready'. They argue that the biggest difference between what universities and employers

look for lies in ‘people skills’. Today’s employers look for resilience, empathy and integrity. They argue that universities rarely look for, let alone nurture these attributes. They go on to contend that the rise of Artificial Intelligence and disruptive technologies at the workplace makes these attributes even more valuable in people as they are still difficult for machines to emulate (Chamorro-Premuriz, and Frankiewicz, 2019).

This is a global phenomenon, as studies by Hyasat (2022) and Kimeto (2021) indicate. In his analysis of Jordanian tourism and hospitality curricula, Hyasat (2022), arrives to similar conclusions. That is, that there is a gap between the set curricula and the employer’s curricula and that part of the solution is to involve the industry when it comes to tourism and hospitality curricular development. Kimeto’s study suggest that the skill set with which tourism graduates in Kenya are being equipped is not matching the industry’s requirements and that, closer collaboration between the two sectors is required to redress this situation (Kimeto, 2021).

The notion that some stakeholder feel that their contribution is ignored is therefore not new. This paper attempts to redress this issue. The study by Caruana (2019) looked at implementing a blended learning environment to teach and assess soft skills in tourism education. But in doing so, it had to explore ways by which stakeholders are first identified and subsequently involved.

### **3. Determing the key stakeholders**

Freeman (1994) defines stakeholders as groups or individuals that may affect or are themselves affected by the achievement of an organisation’s objectives. Mead and Andrews (2011) discuss stakeholders as being fundamental towards successfully implementing a strategy. They quote David’s (1993) definition which describes stakeholders as individuals and groups of persons who have a special stake or claim on the company.

Maric (2013) makes a direct reference to the role stakeholders may play in affecting HE. Getting to know the stakeholders’ perspective is an essential to ensure that universities are able to fulfil their mission.

Caruana’s (2019) study looked at an undergraduate program run by the Institute of Tourism, Travel and Culture (ITTC, 2010) forming part of

the University of Malta (UoM). All the relevant documentation regarding the governance of the ITTC was carried out in order to identify the main stakeholders that may have an interest (and possibly have an influence) on the ITTC curriculum. This first step was to look at all the potential stakeholders and classify them into two broad categories: external and internal (Lewis, 2006).

For the purposes of this research study, external Stakeholders are those not ‘residing’ within the UoM and the ITTC. While it is unlikely that they have a direct involvement in the development of the ITTC’s strategies and policies (ITTC, 2010), they would be affected by the decisions taken within the ITTC. These stakeholders were:

1. Malta Tourism Authority (MTA) — the principal government agency involved in the development of Malta’s tourism strategies, policy planning, legislation and enforcement, etc.
2. Heritage Malta — the government agency entrusted with the running and management of various heritage sites.
3. Malta Hotels and Restaurants Association (MHRA) — representing the vast majority of operators/employers in the Maltese tourism and hospitality sector.
4. Institute of Tourism Studies (ITS) — students from ITS may further their education at the ITTC.
5. The tourists visiting the Maltese Islands.

On the other hand, internal stakeholders are found within the UoM. Although not all of these are directly involved with the planning and development of the ITTC curriculum, their influence and power wielding is determined by the administrative and managerial roles that they may occupy within the ITTC and other UoM entities. They are therefore in a position to determine whether a proposed curricular change would be approved, amended, and ultimately implemented. The following internal stakeholders were identified:

1. ITTC Director
2. ITTC Academic Staff
3. ITTC Board Members
4. Other UoM Academic Staff
5. ITTC Students
6. UoM IT Services.

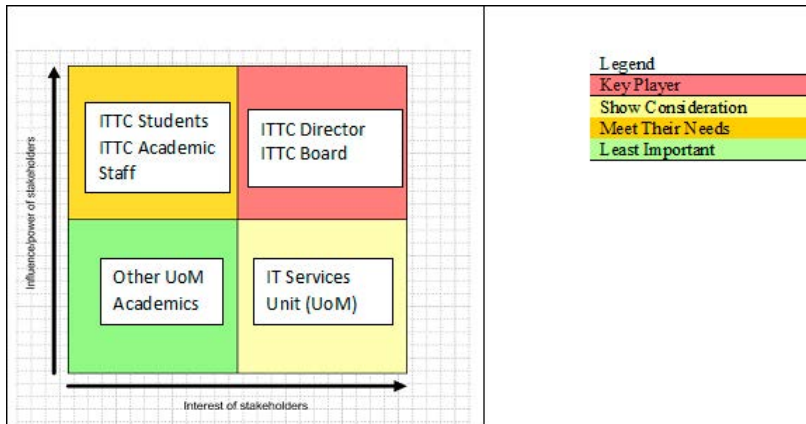


Figure 1 ITTC stakeholders' power and influence based on Bryson's (1995) Quadrant

In order to gain further understanding of the power and influence that internal stakeholders have over the ITTC, two informal discussions were carried out with two academic staff members of the ITTC. The first member was a relatively recent addition to the ITTC academic team as he came from a senior management background in tourism. Since the mid-1980s he has held various high-profile tourism management and consultancy positions and has over 30 years of experience within the Maltese tourism sector. The second member is an academic by profession since the mid-1990s who occupies various academic and administrative roles. He was on the University Council which is responsible for the general administration of the University (UOM, 2022) and is currently a member of the ITTC board (which, as indicated earlier, provides the Institute with academic direction as it determines the nature of the studies, teaching, and research carried out within the Institute).

The outcome of these discussions was the establishment that, when it comes to ITTC curriculum design and development, the key stakeholders within the ITTC are: the ITTC board and the ITTC Director (who ultimately sets the policies). Academic staff do have some influence and power due to the positions that they may occupy within the ITTC subcommittees, but the ultimate decision-making power belongs to the ITTC board. ITTC students are represented on some of the subcommittees and these may therefore air their views; however, these representatives are always in the minority. Therefore, while some aspects of the ITTC curriculum design would be of interest to these students, their degree of influence on the matter is limited.



However, when the idea of utilising ICT/e-learning for teaching and learning within the ITTC was broached, it was pointed out that any decisions taken in this regard are subject to approval by the UoM's IT Services. The current ITTC website was brought forward as an example, as this is hosted on the UoM IT Services servers. The website template and layout of the ITTC website was provided by UoM IT Services. Amendments to it are regularly made by the ITTC staff, but all the changes are subject to approval by the IT Services supervisory staff. Similarly, any e-learning-related initiative is subject to their approval. Therefore, although it is not on the ITTC board, the UoM IT Services unit has significant influence over curricular developments that involves ICT/e-learning.

From these discussions it may be concluded that, while it is clear that students will be the main participants in the exercise being proposed, it is vital to obtain information from the ITTC academic staff (some of which form part of the ITTC board) in relation to their views on intercultural competence and the use of a blended learning environment. Other members of ITTC staff who form part of the boards of studies, ethics, and dissertations, as well as other committees also need to have their say. Equally important is to try and obtain the views of at least a key figure in the UoM's IT Services section as this section is entrusted with the design, implementation, and maintenance of the e-learning platform.

External stakeholders would appear to be completely excluded, in clear contrast to Maric (2013) suggestions.

#### **4. Data collection methods**

Following the identification of the key stakeholders, the next phase is that to create the appropriate environment from which it would be possible to gather the required data in order to answer the queries posed with regards to stakeholder involvement.

The data was collected through a series of interviews. These were as follows:

1. Six student interviews. The seventh student participant was unable to do the final interview as she was no longer residing in Malta and declined to do it online.

2. Eight members of the ITTC academic staff
3. A senior manager within the UoM IT Services unit

To this, one has to add the workshop carried out with four representatives from the hospitality sector. Although, they can be defined as ‘external’ stakeholders, it was thought to get their views in response to Chamorro-Premuriz, and Frankiewicz (2019) argumentations. During the workshop there was quite a lively discussion which was actually transcribed and subsequently analysed.

## **5. Findings**

### *5.1. Preliminary preparation*

All the interviews were anonymized. They were given a code in a way that the code itself would reflect the ‘type’ of research participant. Hence ‘AC’ would imply an academic, SP was a student participant, ‘MN’ for management, ‘IT’ for IT services employee and SC referred to the researcher.

All the transcripts were then reviewed in order to determine whether data was indicating particular, recurring issues. These were coded. This resulted in a rather large set of data codes. Further analysis lead to observing that some of the codes were quite similar, even if derived from different research participant categories. These codes were subsequently clustered into wider-ranging code categories based upon common data patterns as proposed by Braun and Clarke (2013). This task was facilitated with the use of the pivot tables as it was then possible to attempt to cluster the coding into various categories.

The step to establish patterns along the codes was carried out both manually and using the pivot table. Data was regularly reviewed again to consolidate the knowledge of the data itself. This iterative process enabled to group the themes into larger conglomerates having a common characteristic or theme. Each theme was reviewed to ensure that the supporting evidence does back the proposed theme. The final set of themes was supported with evidence from both the transcripts and the literature reviewed earlier.

Initially, it appeared that there were two themes that would cluster the main codes. One seemed to indicate a general unwillingness to embrace blended learning in higher education and the other an element of mistrust. Trust issues

were referred to by all the main research participants albeit at times from very different view-points. Working online implies trust: trust in the system, trust in the individuals interacting with the system, and trust in the administration of the system. Stakeholder involvement is also conditional to trust. The theme of trust is hereunder analysed in detail.

### *5.2. Theme 1: A question of trust*

The students' historical lack of opportunities to peer-review exercises may lie behind their inclination towards retaining some distance between students and academics. Students were rather sceptical of giving themselves more say in the course design, the setting up of learning outcomes and, in particular, in issues related to assessment.

*The higher education, well I think the lecturer always is the, has to have the...*

*Final say if you like... (SC)*

*But the higher you go, the education level, I think yes, there should be more involvement by the students. (SP1)*

In spite of these reservations, they rated their involvement in this exercise positively. All the tasks were seen as both fair and meaningful (Herrington et al., 2010). This re-affirms the importance of having real-life situations included in the teaching and learning activities and the assessment tasks (Biggs and Tang, 2011; Herrington et al., 2010).

*I think it will need to be set because at least to be approved by I believe a board of lecturers, so I think the authority of lecturers and the higher management still needs to be there and present, but students it might help to involve them in certain areas to make them feel that they're...heard. (SP4)*

### *5.3. Theme 2: Stakeholder Involvement*

Academics had a rather lukewarm reaction to the inclusion of stakeholders in the assessment. Regardless of whether students, industry professionals, or other stakeholders were suggested, the response was a cautious one. While welcoming stakeholder involvement, the view upheld was that it should be limited to a consultative role, lest they take over with their own agenda.

*I mean getting persons in is always very good when it comes putting together courses. If you get feedback from the, industry that you're preparing courses for, it's always very valid. The problem you have..., there is a change in outcomes, between the needs of industry and the academic needs you know. (AC1)*

*Advisory I think... not more than advisory. Yes, because otherwise if they did go into more, then eventually they will be doing them (the learning outcomes) on their terms. (AC2)*

*If you're talking for example a training scheme you have to try to understand that there are certain agendas that are pushing and you know, their learning outcomes will be shaped very much by the management. So you have to do it with caution and with some intelligence. (AC7)*

A similar view was upheld by the IT Services representative. Control should be firmly in the hands of the academics.

*I think obviously with university should be very much in touch with, the requirements, I would say, not of the employers but really the requirements of society.*

*I don't want to use a strong word ... I don't want to have the agenda dictated by either the government over policies or lawyers. Because ultimately I see, the academic as having the expertise and being current with research elsewhere. They would have the foresight, probably more than the employers or the government. (IT)*

This unwillingness to open to external stakeholders may be due to how national entities have handled such involvement historically, often over-valuing the contributions of industry representatives at the expense of the recommendations from the academics (NCFHE, 2014, *ibid*, pp. 36-38).

Student participants had less rigid views, but some of the students did remark that the ultimate say has to remain within the academic's remit.

*Employers I think they have to. Because if they are employing... they are employing people from different cultures, they at least, they have to at least understand each... you can't have everyone.*

*Employees as well. Employees in the tourism industry, for example, make... they meet other people all the time, so it needs to be there. And even with other colleagues. Academics maybe... it's not that much important as, as people working in the industry. But still if you have students that have different cultures, they still need*

*to understand and maybe make the lecture appropriate for each and every culture. Students, maybe not that much. But they need to understand more when they start working. (SP3)*

*The MHRA, MTA, you know. If you are applying it to other industries, you need to speak to the relevant bodies. (SP2)*

*Tourism for sure. I would include in work with people in hotels for sure. People, who maybe in events, in fairs... who meet people from different nationalities, so in the travel sector too. So, anywhere where people are engaging with people, especially from different nationalities, different backgrounds, cultures, basically. (SP5)*

Industry representatives also lamented this lack of interaction. Some attributed this to academia's lack of engagement. A particular member mentioned that while individual academics may be interested, it becomes a little more difficult if done in an official format as one needs to take into account the teachers' unions.

*No, useful for sure. I think it should be across all levels personally. The only problem you have there is the Malta Union of Teachers (MUT). Because we tried to introduce that some time ago. The problem is that you have some fantastic academics. I was an academic myself. But then the touch with the industry is... not there! (MN2)*

## **6. Analysis**

Overall, the findings revealed that all the participant groups felt the actual adoption and correct implementation of any aspects related to implementation of soft-skill related curriculum development was dependent upon the attitudes held by the stakeholders involved, together with the degree of trust existing between them. Trust affects the level of interaction and the attitudes influence the value which the participants attribute to a given issue.

### *6.1. Stakeholder involvement as a critical factor*

It is clear that all the key stakeholders need to be involved in order to have a successful constructively aligned and blended learning environment. It also highlights the need for the different stakeholders to interact and exchange views in this respect.

On the other hand, the findings clearly indicate that there is a high element of mistrust when it comes to having one group working with another. Yet Biggs and Tang (2011) make it clear that Constructive Alignment requires the different stakeholders in the education process, namely students and academics (but also administrators), to be able to work together in order to make it a success. It is therefore fundamental that ways to increase trust between the different stakeholders are found.

### *6.2. Establishing trust between all stakeholders involved*

Determining the needs of the individual stakeholder groups is one thing; getting them to work together is another. This study clearly shows a degree of mistrust between some of the stakeholders involved. The way that certain initiatives in higher education were managed as part of the higher education strategy (NCFHE, 2014) and the underlying perception of a preference for foreign ‘consultants’ over local ones does not help at all.

Academics want to retain overall control of the course design and development, but view directives from the management as intrusion in their teaching and learning. Students feel they have little say in the changes being carried out and therefore see little point in participating in the process. Employers see their considerations being met with scepticism if not outright suspicion.

Yet, to be successful, the implementation of a novel learning environment related to tourism education should involve the key stakeholders, as by Maric (2013).

### *6.3. Acquiring trust by understanding each other's attitudes*

The discussion arising from the findings (from both the student focus group, the workshop with representatives from the hospitality sector, and the in-depth interviews with students, academics, and IT Services staff) highlight the need to have the ‘right’ attitude. However, the different stakeholders have different notions as to what constitutes the ‘right attitude’. Moreover, the attitude is often dependent on the degree of trust present.

Students do not trust one another in peer assessment. They also think that academics are out of touch with reality. Academics do not trust students: they think that students do not have the right attitude and maturity. Academics are sceptical of other academics who, in their view, should be humble enough

to admit that they are not well-versed blended learning methods and outcomes-based learning principles. Academics are wary of working with industry representatives for fear that the latter would impose their own agenda. Academics are at loggerheads with the university administration who they see it as stifling academic freedom. Operators in tourism are sceptical of academics as, like students, they view them as being completely out of touch with the reality within which they operate.

This lack of trust between the different groups is the main obstacle towards preventing them from working together. Therefore, apart from the training indicated in the earlier section, there has to be a series of confidence-building measures that improves trust between the different stakeholders at the ITTC.

#### *6.4. Improving trust implies improving stakeholder communication*

The lack of opportunities for stakeholders to engage and exchange ideas further highlights the lack of trust between them. A particular sequence of events that took place at the ITTC throughout the period under scrutiny in this research is symptomatic of this.

Over a period of four years, the ITTC board appointed three different directors and three different board chairpersons — this when the designated duration for each post is four years. High administration staff turnover was also observed. Both factors contributed to a breakdown in the communication between the various stakeholders. Academics felt isolated and not supported in their work, yet they still had to adhere to grading deadlines, course learning outcomes, etc. Initiatives in blended learning were seen as a further burden within this context.

This lack of communication makes it even more difficult to support existing practices, let alone initiate new ones. The challenge is therefore to network effectively with all the stakeholders and improve communication. If by improving communication, the value of the others' contribution (Cajander et al., 2012) is acknowledged, then confidence, trust, and mutual respect for the other will increase.

However, it is not without challenges, as this study itself shows. Identifying and engaging with the stakeholders required time and careful planning. In this study, the 'insider' status of the researcher (Trowler, 2011) was an advan-



tage at times, especially in terms of obtaining access to some stakeholders, and identifying the gatekeepers and their influence.

It may be more difficult to get the same level of co-operation in other organisations without the availability of this level of insider information, which is not always there. One has to identify the stakeholders and get them to sit around a table. The second step would be identifying the attitudes held by each group. Subsequently one has to determine the knowledge and skills needed in order to establish proper communication between the parties and diffuse any conflict situations that may arise. Only then would it be possible to move towards intercultural reflection and finally achieve constructive interaction between all the stakeholders involved (Boecker and Jager, 2006).

### *6.5. A role for intercultural competence in consolidating trust*

The findings of this study suggest that the contribution of intercultural competence may be extended to attribute value to the contributions of all the stakeholders involved in a given HE scenario, not just students. Only by being able to attribute value to the other stakeholders' contribution, can there be mutual tolerance, and subsequent communication across all parties. This would instil a sense of mutual trust between the parties involved in the educational process to eventually arrive at a stage where each stakeholder is able to, using Boecker and Jager's (2006) words, interact constructively. Its application in education management would consolidate Boecker and Jager's (2006) view that intercultural competence is indeed a key skill for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

This study helped determine the stakeholders' different attitudes towards blended learning, aspects of constructive alignment and, indeed, intercultural competence. Future research should aim towards using intercultural competence to bring together all the stakeholders involved for a given context within higher education, such as blended learning or constructive alignment. Each stakeholder would need to be made aware of the other's attitudes regarding the issue being studied, and then determine the knowledge and skills that need to be shared across all the parties in order to ensure effective communication between them. Each stakeholder should be able to empathise with the position held by the other stakeholder/s and interact in a constructive fashion.

To use intercultural competence in other organisations may pose significant challenges. Stakeholders may be difficult to identify and some may be

unwilling to participate. Not everyone may be as open and direct during the data gathering sessions as was the case in this study. Further work in this respect is required to determine the best ways of engaging with interested parties in other situations. Nevertheless, it is my view that the application of the principles underlying intercultural competence may contribute towards increasing trust and reciprocal understanding between different stakeholders for a given scenario.

John Dewey's (1916) statement, mentioned earlier in Section 2.3.1, seems to provide a fitting conclusion:

*“And there is perhaps no better definition of culture than that it is the capacity for constantly expanding the range and accuracy of one's perception of meanings.”*

(Dewey, J (1916), p. 123).

Intercultural competence reminds us that one's perception of meanings must necessarily include the perception of meanings of the other. It is by doing so that we, as educators and education planners, can truly respond to the challenges being placed in front of us by 21<sup>st</sup>-century society.

## **7. Limitations of this study**

The issues of being an insider researcher and dealing with gatekeepers was discussed earlier. I was fortunate to have had the 'status' of an insider researcher, that certainly facilitated matters in certain aspects. On the other hand, it posed ethical issues that were previously not encountered in other previous research exercises. It also brought up the issue of gatekeeping and whether gatekeepers will be expecting anything in return for their help in accessing research participants or existing documentation.

I consider myself fortunate in that I did not encounter serious issues with respect to these two issues. All the research participant groups were relatively easy to access and they all graciously accepted to take part. However, there will be other instances where determining the key stakeholders will be more difficult and even harder to get them to accept the invitation to take part in a research exercise. Some stakeholder may have confidentiality concerns which require addressing. Very often, the researcher will have a single oppor-

tunity to engage and therefore it needs to be well planned in advance. This study had a similar scenario when the opportunity to engage with the industry representatives came up. Unlike with the other participant groups, less time was available to design and implement the data collection exercise.

One way to tackle this is to identify the key stakeholder groups early in the study. And ensure that all the ethical aspects are dealt with well in advance (anonymity etc.). This will allay some, if not all of the stakeholders' concerns and encourage them to take part. All the researchers need to be thoroughly conversant with research aspects issues as one omission may derail the work of the entire team.

## **8. Final Reflections**

My interest in what are collectively defined as 'soft skills' had started at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century during my Masters' degree studies.

Malta has since joined the EU, and as a result of healthy economic growth, it is experiencing an influx of people coming to work. Some choose to settle. In less than a decade, the Maltese Islands have experienced a population growth of almost 20% in the process, whereas up till the 1960's and 1970's emigration to the United Kingdom and other Commonwealth countries was seen as way to mitigate unemployment (Baldacchino, 2019). From a fairly homogenous, native-based population, there are now numerous expatriate communities. This has increased the need for all the stakeholders to engage even more and ensure that no one is left adrift.

Malta is a microcosm of what has been happening elsewhere. Close to our shores one can observe similar situations in many countries within the European Union and other, neighbouring countries. Migration, whether for economic or other, more dramatic reasons, will continue. Individuals with different cultural backgrounds are more likely to get into contact. The need to be empathise with others is vital in order to interact constructively with one another.

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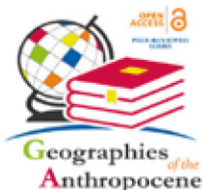
This book offers a comprehensive examination of the dynamic interplay between human mobility, migration, and tourism in the context of the Anthropocene era. The collection of eight chapters delves into various aspects of this complex relationship, shedding light on crucial issues, challenges, and opportunities in today's rapidly evolving global landscape. The concept of responsible tourism is a transversal element in this publication, exploring its significance in promoting sustainable practices and mitigating the environmental and socio-cultural impacts of movement of people. Another topic which is addressed here is the post-Covid regeneration of tourism-dependent island economies. The authors analyze the challenges faced by these regions and explore innovative approaches to sustainable recovery. The discussions here revolve around the importance of community engagement, diversification, and resilience in building a robust and sustainable tourism industry. Sustainability also takes a center stage in this edition. The discourse presented in various chapters examines the pressing environmental issues associated with the movement of people. It also delves into the transformation of the hotel industry and explores tourism opportunities in isolated geographical exclave, shedding light on unique destinations that face challenges related to accessibility and connectivity. Important analysis is also presented on cultural landscapes, heritage sites, and local traditions and how cultural authenticity and meaningful interactions between tourists and local communities can shape the tourist experience.

This book will be of great interest to scholars, researchers, policymakers, and practitioners seeking to understand and navigate the challenges and opportunities that arise in this rapidly changing global landscape.

**Gian Luigi Corinto** is Associate Professor of Geography, teacher of Sustainable Destinations in the Master Degree International Tourism and Destination Management; Geografia e marketing agroalimentare, and Geografia del turismo in the Degree Beni culturali e turismo at the University of Macerata, Italy. He is joined to the Environment and Territory Research Section of the Department of Education, Cultural Heritage and Tourism of the University of Macerata. His research focus is on media and geography, local development, and sustainability. His works are edited in national and international journals and books. He is editor of the International Journal of Anthropology. Fellow of AGel, Italian Society of Geographers.

**Glen Farrugia** is an Associate Professor in Cultural Heritage and Tourism Management at Triagon and lectures on subjects related to Tourism Management, Culture Heritage and Organisational Research at postgraduate and doctoral level in Malta and abroad. His academic responsibility also covers supervision of Doctoral theses and external examination. He is also the Chief Operating Officer of Academia at the Institute of Tourism Studies. Glen holds professorial chairs at the University of Vitez and the University of Applied Management in Acra. He is serving the Government of Malta through two boards; the Mutual Recognition of Qualifications Appeals Board and the National Curriculum Framework Implementation Board. Glen is also specialized in undergraduate and postgraduate curriculum development and implementation and is currently the editor of the International Journal of Tour Guiding Research and the Editor-in-Chief of the Futouristic Journal. Professor Farrugia published several papers and books and his contribution to Heritage, Tourism & Higher Education is widely known.

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