

Rather Together? Network Effects among Students

Florian Aubke, Ivo Ponocny and Anja Hergesell

Introduction

Being faced with global trends that challenge the way tourism is conducted at present (Dwyer, Edwards, Mistilis, Roman and Scott, 2009; Dwyer, Edwards, Mistilis, Scott, Roman and C., 2008), educators worldwide have recognized the need to adapt tourism students' education in order to enable them to recognize changes in the environment and manage the implications (Bramwell, 1996; Sheldon, Fesenmaier, Woeber, Cooper and Antonioli, 2008). Efforts range from the development of educational materials such as collecting international case studies of good practice (Bramwell, 1996; Carlsen, Liburd, Edwards and Forde, 2008) and the design of topic specific teaching modules (Liburd and Edwards, 2010) to the creation of a new framework for teaching (TEFI, 2009). The latter asks for a fundamental change in teaching, away from a mere development of business skills and other tourism-related competences and towards values, which underlie all behavior as professionals and individuals. TEFI (2009) identified five central values related to future tourism education, namely stewardship, knowledge, professionalism, ethics and mutuality. Some of these values relate to individuals' qualities, their human capital, while others like knowledge are closely linked to the social capital of a person.

The importance of, on the one hand, teaching students the skills and values to build social capital (Wilson, 1997), and, on the other hand, supporting effective social capital building among students (Wilcox, Winn and Fyvie-Gauld, 2005; Helliwell and Putnam, 2004) has been stressed in the literature. The latter aspect builds on study findings describing positive effects of social capital building on student performance and subjective wellbeing. Students' sense of belongingness is often stated as one of the main reasons for students to complete their higher education studies successfully (Wilcox, Winn and Fyvie-Gauld, 2005). Social integration and social support are also generally credited as being highly influential for someone's sense of wellbeing (Helliwell and Putnam, 2004). Thus, claims that academic performance and sense of wellbeing are closely tied to social integration come as no surprise. It is this issue that the study turns to. It shows, through application of a structuralist lens, that sense of wellbeing and academic performance are to some degree a result of the social relationships that the individual holds to other individuals around him.

The study findings reported on in this article cover the results of an initial survey round among an international cohort of undergraduate tourism students who just commenced their studies. The

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survey was conducted during the first part of the first semester and constitutes the starting point for a longitudinal study on the evolvement of students' networks throughout their studies and thereafter.