



AN OVERVIEW OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN TOURISM AND HOSPITALITY IN PORTUGAL

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ABSTRACT

Objective: This study evaluates the higher education provision in Portugal's tourism and hospitality sector, examining its evolution and alignment with labor market demands to address the growing skills gap in the industry.

Theoretical Framework: The research is grounded in concepts of labor market demands, educational alignment, and workforce development amid digital, societal, and economic transformations. Theories on skills mismatch and human capital development help understand the dynamics between education and employment in this sector.

Method: A comprehensive review of higher education offerings in tourism and hospitality in Portugal was conducted, assessing the number of courses and student vacancies while analyzing job market trends. Data were collected from national educational databases and industry reports to examine the evolving relationship between educational programs and labor needs.

Results and Discussion: Results indicate a notable increase in tourism and hospitality courses and student vacancies in Portugal's higher education system, reflecting efforts to cultivate a skilled workforce. However, gaps persist in regional job distribution and the need for specialized training in certain areas.

Research Implications: The findings suggest that higher education institutions are progressing in closing the skills gap by offering programs aligned with industry needs, which may influence workforce development strategies and curriculum design.

Originality/Value: This study contributes to the literature by analyzing Portugal's educational response to labor market shifts, highlighting the growing alignment between education and industry needs, and providing actionable insights for improving human capital development in tourism and hospitality.

Keywords: Higher Education, Tourism and Hospitality, Human Capital, Portugal.

UMA VISÃO GERAL DO ENSINO SUPERIOR EM TURISMO E HOTELARIA EM PORTUGAL

RESUMO

Objetivo: Este estudo avalia a oferta de ensino superior no sector do turismo e da hotelaria em Portugal, analisando a sua evolução e alinhamento com as exigências do mercado de trabalho, de modo a colmatar a crescente lacuna de competências no sector.

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Enquadramento Teórico: A investigação baseia-se em conceitos de exigências do mercado de trabalho, alinhamento educacional e desenvolvimento da força de trabalho no contexto das transformações digitais, sociais e económicas. As teorias sobre a inadequação de competências e o desenvolvimento do capital humano ajudam a compreender a dinâmica entre a educação e o emprego neste sector.

Método: Foi efectuada uma revisão abrangente da oferta de ensino superior em turismo e hotelaria em Portugal, avaliando o número de cursos e de vagas para estudantes e analisando as tendências do mercado de trabalho. Foram recolhidos dados de bases de dados educativas nacionais e de relatórios do sector para examinar a evolução da relação entre os programas educativos e as necessidades do mercado de trabalho.

Resultados e Discussão: Os resultados indicam um aumento notável dos cursos de turismo e hotelaria e das vagas para estudantes no sistema de ensino superior português, reflectindo os esforços para cultivar uma mão de obra qualificada. No entanto, persistem lacunas na distribuição regional do emprego e na necessidade de formação especializada em determinadas áreas.

Implicações da pesquisa: Os resultados sugerem que as instituições de ensino superior estão a progredir no sentido de colmatar a lacuna de competências através da oferta de programas alinhados com as necessidades da indústria, o que pode influenciar as estratégias de desenvolvimento da força de trabalho e a conceção do currículo.

Originalidade/Valor: Este estudo contribui para a literatura, analisando a resposta educativa de Portugal às mudanças do mercado de trabalho, destacando o crescente alinhamento entre a educação e as necessidades da indústria, e fornecendo insights acionáveis para melhorar o desenvolvimento do capital humano no turismo e na hotelaria.

Palavras-chave: Ensino Superior, Turismo e Hotelaria, Capital Humano, Portugal.

UNA VISIÓN GENERAL DE LA EDUCACIÓN SUPERIOR EN TURISMO Y HOSPITALIDAD EN PORTUGAL

RESUMEN

Objetivo: Este estudio evalúa la oferta de educación superior en el sector del turismo y la hostelería en Portugal, examinando su evolución y alineación con las demandas del mercado laboral para abordar el creciente déficit de cualificaciones en la industria.

Marco Teórico: La investigación se basa en conceptos de demandas del mercado laboral, alineación educativa y desarrollo de la mano de obra en medio de transformaciones digitales, sociales y económicas. Las teorías sobre el desajuste de competencias y el desarrollo del capital humano ayudan a comprender la dinámica entre educación y empleo en este sector.

Método: Se llevó a cabo una revisión exhaustiva de la oferta de educación superior en turismo y hostelería en Portugal, evaluando el número de cursos y las vacantes de estudiantes al tiempo que se analizaban las tendencias del mercado laboral. Se recopilaron datos de bases de datos educativas nacionales e informes del sector para examinar la evolución de la relación entre los programas educativos y las necesidades laborales.

Resultados y Discusión: Los resultados indican un notable aumento de los cursos de turismo y hostelería y de las vacantes de estudiantes en el sistema de enseñanza superior de Portugal, lo que refleja los esfuerzos por cultivar una mano de obra cualificada. Sin embargo, persisten lagunas en la distribución regional del empleo y la necesidad de formación especializada en determinadas áreas.

Implicaciones de la Investigación: Los hallazgos sugieren que las instituciones de educación superior están avanzando en el cierre de la brecha de habilidades al ofrecer programas alineados con las necesidades de la industria, lo que puede influir en las estrategias de desarrollo de la fuerza laboral y el diseño curricular.

Originalidad/Valor: Este estudio contribuye a la literatura analizando la respuesta educativa de Portugal a los cambios del mercado laboral, destacando la creciente alineación entre la educación y las necesidades de la industria, y proporcionando ideas prácticas para mejorar el desarrollo del capital humano en el turismo y la hostelería.



Palabras clave: Educación Superior, Turismo y Hostelería, Capital Humano, Portugal.

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1 INTRODUCTION

Tourism and hospitality are among the most dynamic sectors worldwide, playing a crucial role in fostering employment opportunities and contributing to economic growth. In Portugal, tourism is a major driver of job creation and a cornerstone of the national economy (Costa *et al.*, 2012). However, the sector faces a pressing challenge: a labor shortage that threatens to undermine its growth and sustainability (HOTREC, 2022). This shortage has been intensified by a range of factors, including ongoing economic, societal, and technological transformations, as well as disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and an aging workforce (Santos *et al.*, 2021). These factors have collectively weakened the supply of skilled labor, leaving the industry struggling to meet rising demand.

To address these challenges, experts emphasize the importance of enhancing workforce training and qualifications, particularly through higher education. As part of recovery strategies, upskilling workers and preparing future professionals with the right qualifications is essential for ensuring that the tourism sector remains competitive and resilient in the face of change (Santos *et al.*, 2021). Higher education serves as a key instrument in this endeavor, offering pathways for professional development and requalification that can directly address the skills gap and improve the quality of services in tourism.

In recent years, there has been a marked increase in the number of individuals pursuing higher education degrees, reflecting a societal shift towards greater educational attainment (Fonseca, *et al.*, 2018; Schofer & Meyer, 2005). Given this trend, it becomes crucial to assess what educational offerings are available to tourism professionals and how well these align with the evolving demands of the labor market.

The primary objective of this study is to provide a comprehensive analysis of higher education provision in tourism and hospitality in Portugal. Specifically, it aims to map the trajectory of educational opportunities within the sector and assess the availability of academic programs and job prospects for future professionals. By investigating whether the Portuguese higher education system has made significant investments in cultivating a highly skilled tourism



workforce, this research seeks to address critical questions regarding the alignment between education and industry needs.

The paper is organized into five key sections. Following this introduction, the theoretical framework underpinning higher education in tourism and hospitality is discussed. The third section outlines the methodology used to conduct the research. Next, the findings are presented, with a focus on both the historical evolution of higher education offerings and the current state of the educational landscape. Finally, the concluding section reflects on the theoretical and practical implications of the findings, offering insights into the future of tourism and hospitality education in Portugal.

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

We live in an era of rapid economic and technological transformation, where paradoxes in the labor market are becoming increasingly evident. While millions of people are unemployed across Europe, 40% of employers report difficulties in finding qualified workers, highlighting significant imbalances between labor supply and demand (World Economic Forum, 2018). As we look to the future, half of today's jobs are projected to be at risk of extinction, replaced by emerging roles that will require entirely new skill sets. By 2025, it is anticipated that six out of ten young people entering the workforce will be performing jobs that do not currently exist (European Institute of Business Administration, 2016; World Economic Forum, 2018).

In the tourism sector, the level of qualification among EU workers is notably lower compared to other industries, particularly at the higher education level. Despite this, tourism serves as a crucial entry point into the labor market for many, including migrants, youth, and students with lower educational attainment. The industry is characterized by temporary, seasonal, and part-time jobs, often with lower wages and precarious working conditions, which typically offer limited opportunities for training or career development (European Commission, 2016).

Due to the multidisciplinary nature of tourism, employment in the sector demands a wide range of knowledge areas. Consequently, education and training in tourism must encompass diverse topics, ensuring that workers are equipped with skills that can be applied across a variety of roles within the industry (Daniel *et al.*, 2017; Inui *et al.*, 2006). As a service-based sector, tourism is defined by intangibility and the inseparability between the consumer and the service provider. These dynamic underscores the critical role of human resources in co-



creating unique, meaningful experiences and memories for tourists (Sorensen & Jensen, 2015).

In order to thrive in an interconnected, fast-evolving, and culturally diverse global society, tourism professionals must engage in continuous skill development, particularly those that foster a global and intercultural perspective. Education plays a pivotal role in imparting these essential skills, providing students with the knowledge and competencies needed to navigate and succeed in increasingly complex environments (OECD, 2018).

The competitiveness of tourist destinations and businesses depends largely on their ability to sustainably and efficiently leverage all available resources to offer high-quality, innovative, and attractive products and services. This ensures not only added value for tourists but also the responsible maintenance of residents' quality of life, a crucial component of sustainable tourism development (OECD, 2013; Sitompul *et al.*, 2017; Valkonen *et al.*, 2013).

Tourism as a discipline is relatively new and has emerged significantly over the past 50 years. The primary goal of tourism education is to develop curricular structures that respond to the evolving needs of the labor market, ensuring that graduates are well-equipped to meet the sector's challenges. Achieving this requires fostering a closer relationship between educational institutions and businesses, promoting the establishment of protocols that facilitate practical, real-world learning experiences for students. Market trends increasingly emphasize the need for workers who possess a deep understanding of how the tourism industry operates (Huang *et al.*, 2016; Teixeira, 2001).

Given the sector's importance, scientific research has predominantly focused on analyzing tourism supply and demand, seeking to predict and interpret the challenges and opportunities facing various businesses. This analysis recognizes that economic globalization and advancements in technology significantly influence consumer behavior and business practices. However, there is a notable gap in the literature regarding education and learning in the tourism sector (Buhalis & Law, 2008; Falk *et al.*, 2012).

Given the crucial role of education in preparing individuals for the labor market, it is essential to gather detailed information that facilitates the planning, evaluation, and monitoring of national training policies. Additionally, such information allows for international comparisons with other countries. This comprehensive understanding is vital for informed decision-making and strategic development in the field of tourism and hospitality education.

3 METHODOLOGY

To analyze the evolution of higher education in the tourism and hospitality sector, a



comprehensive methodology was employed, consisting of two primary stages.

3.1 STAGE ONE: LITERATURE REVIEW

Initially, a thorough literature review was conducted to assess the historical development of higher education programs in tourism. This review focused on existing studies and diagnoses, aiming to identify patterns and gather relevant data that would enable a comparative analysis with the contemporary educational landscape presented in this paper.

3.2 STAGE TWO: DATA COMPILATION AND ANALYSIS

The second stage involved the collection and analysis of data from the Directorate-General for Higher Education in Portugal. This data served as the foundation for creating a robust database that details the current state of higher education, both in general and specifically within the tourism and hospitality sectors. For the academic year 2022-2023, the objective was to determine the number of courses offered, the available vacancies, and the proportion of programs dedicated to tourism-related studies.

Once tourism-centric courses were identified, the analysis expanded to evaluate their significance within the broader educational context. This included examining their geographical distribution, educational modalities, institutional affiliations, and specific course structures. Additionally, efforts were made to categorize these programs according to the National Classification of Education and Training Areas, while also considering factors such as internship opportunities.

This comprehensive data collection and analysis not only illuminate the evolution of higher education in tourism and hospitality but also support informed decision-making processes. The insights gained are instrumental in formulating and refining educational policies and practices to effectively address the evolving demands of the industry.

4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This section presents the results derived from both the comprehensive literature review and the accurately constructed database. Through this synthesis, a detailed diagnosis of the higher education landscape in tourism and hospitality within Portugal is established.



The literature review provides valuable insights into the historical development of tourism and hospitality education and provides a contextual framework for understanding the current situation. At the same time, the database analysis provides quantitative data on the current provision, including the number of courses, vacancies, institutional distribution, and geographical spread.

By synthesizing the findings from these two complementary sources, this section provides a comprehensive overview of the higher education ecosystem in tourism and hospitality. This holistic understanding not only facilitates an assessment of the current educational landscape, but also provides the basis for informed decision-making processes and strategic planning initiatives aimed at improving the quality and relevance of educational provision in Portugal's tourism and hospitality sector.

4.1 THE EVOLUTION OF HIGHER EDUCATION PROGRAMS IN TOURISM AND HOSPITALITY IN PORTUGAL

The Portuguese higher education system encompasses both university and polytechnic education, offered by public or private institutions. Various degree options are available, including undergraduate, master's, and doctoral degrees, which can be pursued in both polytechnics and universities. Additionally, there exists the option of obtaining a non-degree higher education diploma through Technical Short Cycle Studies, a program typically offered by polytechnic institutions. The unique structure of this system often leads to challenges in translating Portuguese educational titles. Upon completion of a bachelor's degree, students attain a graduate degree in the 1st cycle of studies. Progressing to a master's degree, equivalent to the 2nd cycle of studies, requires further education. Finally, achieving a doctorate, the 3rd cycle of studies, necessitates completion of a Doctorate's degree. These programs are also commonly referred to as post-Bologna process degrees (Directorate-General for Higher Education, 2023a).

Tourism higher education in Portugal traces its roots back to 1957 with the inception of courses at the Lisbon School of Hospitality and Tourism. Subsequently, in 1963 and 1964, two additional programs were introduced at private institutions: the Institute of New Professions and the Higher Institute of Languages and Administration. The landscape expanded further in 1965 with the establishment of the National Center for Tourism and Hotel Training by the Portuguese government, paving the way for the emergence of more educational initiatives.



Notable among these were the Algarve School of Hospitality and Tourism in 1967 and the Estoril School of Hotel Management and Tourism in 1991.

During the 1960s and 1970s, tourism courses primarily focused on grooming professionals for the hotel industry. However, the late 1980s marked a pivotal shift as higher education offerings broadened to encompass a holistic view of the field. This expansion saw the integration of specialized areas such as economics, geography, sociology, management, anthropology, and planning into tourism education.

In 1986, a significant milestone was reached with the introduction of bachelor's degree programs in tourism, including Tourism, Language and Tourism Technicians, and Tourism at various institutions. The University of Aveiro emerged as a trailblazer in public higher education, pioneering the bachelor's degree in management and planning in Tourism in 1988. This initiative catalyzed the proliferation of tourism programs across polytechnic universities during the 1990s. (Eurico *et al.*, 2012).

Between 1991 and 2000, public institutions alone introduced 17 new tourism and hospitality-related courses, as reported by the European Commission (2016). By the year 2000, the total count stood at 23 public and 16 private courses, according to Eurico *et al.* (2012).

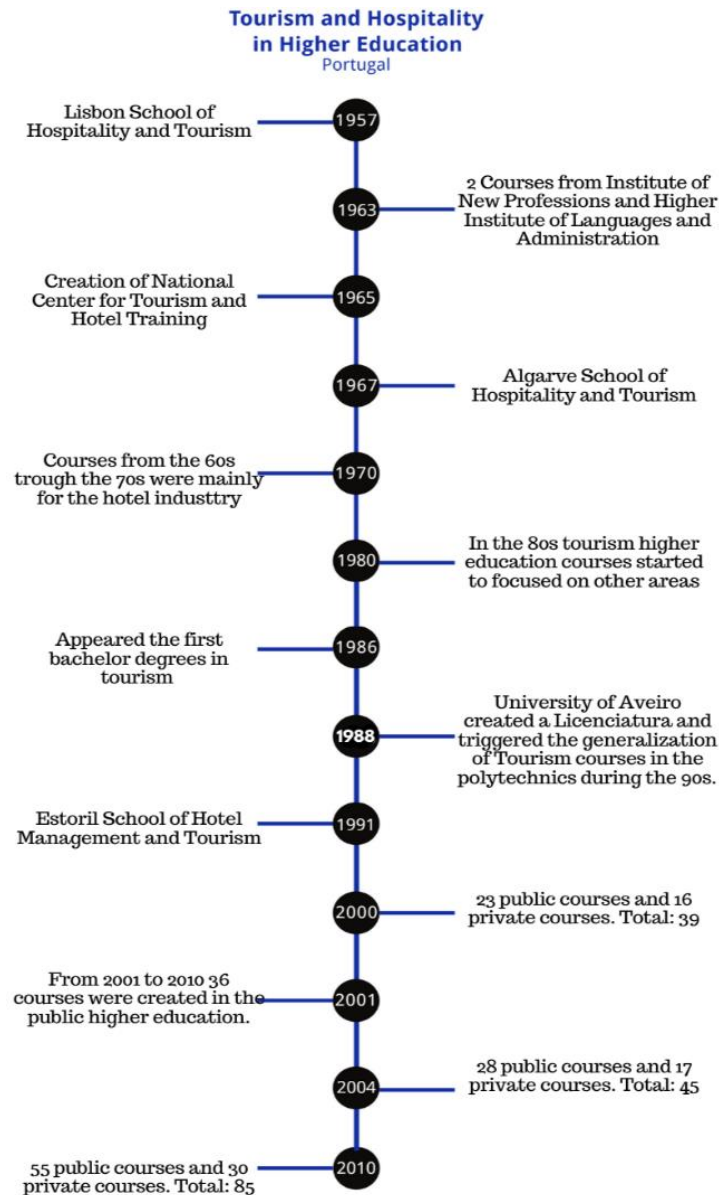
The trend continued into the next decade, with an additional 36 courses launched in public higher education between 2001 and 2010, as disclosed by the same source. In 2004, the tally stood at 28 public courses and 17 private courses (Eurico *et al.*, 2012).

Fast forward to 2010, the landscape had expanded significantly, with a total of 85 courses offered across public and private institutions. To aid comprehension of these developments, a timeline has been devised, delineating key dates and milestones in the evolution of tourism and hospitality education within Portuguese higher education. This timeline is depicted in Figure 1.



Figure 1

Charting the growth of higher education in tourism and hospitality across Portugal.

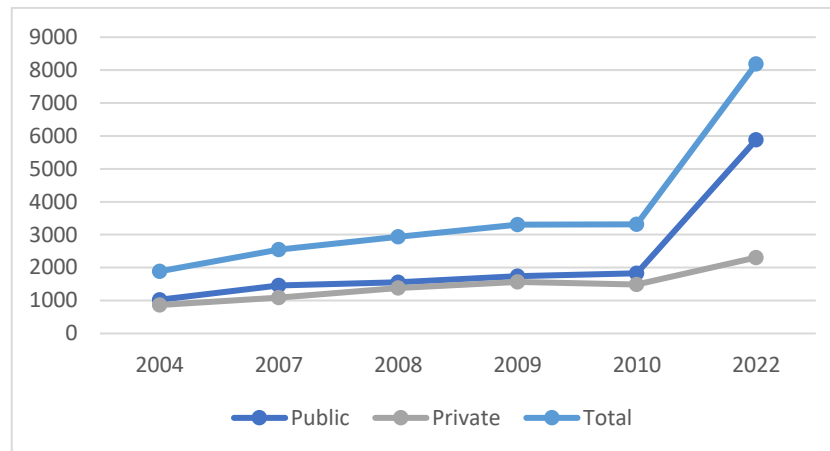


Analyzing the vacancy data for Portuguese higher education within the tourism and hospitality sector, as documented in Eurico *et al.* (2012) and Salgado (2004), reveals a notable upward trajectory over the years. In 2004, the aggregate vacancies amounted to 1890, surging to 3314 by 2010. This translates to an impressive average annual increase of 15.72% (Fig. 2).



Figure 2

Tourism and hospitality higher education vacancies.



Taking a broader perspective on the total number of vacancies in public higher education in 2010, as reported by Salgado (2004), the number was 53,986, with 3.39% allocated to the tourism and hospitality sector. Looking forward to 2023, the number of vacancies reached 54,733, an increase of 372 vacancies compared to the previous year (Directorate-General for Higher Education, 2023b).

The results show a significant increase in both the overall number of courses and the number of vacancies offered to prospective professionals. In particular, the data for tourism and hospitality courses show a consistent upward trend over the years. Public institutions have played a significant role in expanding these opportunities (see Tables 1 and 2). In the academic year 2022-2023, a total of 229 tourism and hospitality courses were available, accompanied by 8191 vacancies.

Table 1

Type of institutions through the years.

| Type of Institutions | 2000 | 2004 | 2010 | 2022 |
|----------------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| Public | 58.97% | 62.22% | 64.71% | 71.18% |
| Private | 41.03% | 37.78% | 35.29% | 28.82% |
| Number of Courses | 39 | 45 | 85 | 229 |

Over the years, there has been a notable increase in the number of vacancies, with the value of vacancies quadrupling in just under two decades. In particular, between 2010 and 2022, a period of 12 years, the number of vacancies in tourism and hospitality more than doubled (see Table 2).



Table 2

Evolution of vacancies available for tourism and hospitality courses.

| Type of Institutions | 2004 | 2007 | 2008 | 2009 | 2010 | 2022 |
|----------------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| Public | 54.23% | 57.19% | 52.98% | 52.66% | 55.19% | 71.82% |
| Private | 45.77% | 42.81% | 47.02% | 47.34% | 44.81% | 28.18% |
| Total | 1890 | 2546 | 2935 | 3306 | 3314 | 8191 |

4.2 EXPLORING HIGHER EDUCATION IN TOURISM AND HOSPITALITY: A 2022-2023 PERSPECTIVE

In 2022, Portugal offered a total of 5961 courses, of which 229 were dedicated to tourism (Directorate-General for Higher Education, 2023b).

This means that tourism-related higher education in Portugal accounted for only 3.84% of the total number of courses (see Table 3).

Table 3

Evolution of vacancies available for tourism and hospitality courses.

| Total of Courses Available | Total of Tourism Courses | Tourism % |
|----------------------------|--------------------------|-----------|
| 5961 | 229 | 3.84 |

The distribution of courses by region is shown in Figure 3, with darker shades indicating a higher concentration of courses in that region. Lisbon comes out on top with 1674 courses, representing 28.08% of the total. It is closely followed by Porto with 1068 courses, representing 17.92% of the total. Coimbra is in third place with 496 courses, representing 8.32% of the total, closely followed by Braga with 448 courses, representing 7.52% of the total. Conversely, districts such as Beja (52 courses, less than 1%), the Azores (63 courses, 1.06%) and Portalegre (65 courses, 1.09%) offer the fewest courses (Directorate-General for Higher Education, 2023a). It is worth noting that the Portuguese coastline emerges as a focal point for training provision.



Figure 3

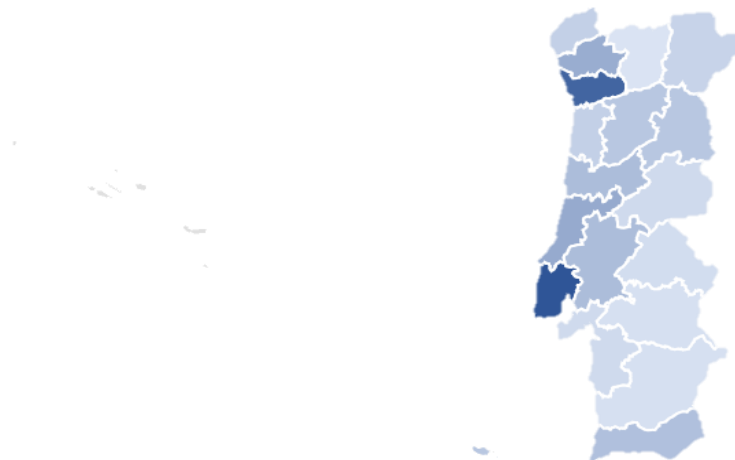
Geographical Distribution of Higher Education Courses in Portugal.



The geographical distribution of tourism courses in Portugal is shown in Figure 4. In first place is Lisbon, which hosts a significant share of tourism courses with 20.09%, or 46 courses. Porto follows closely with 17.90% (41 courses), while Leiria secures third place with 8.30% of the courses, 19 out of a total of 229. Braga comes fourth with 7.86% (18 courses), followed by Coimbra and Santarém, both with 5.68% (13 courses each). On the other hand, the Azores and Vila Real offer the fewest tourism courses, with just 0.44% of the total, or one course each (Directorate-General for Higher Education, 2023b). Again, it is worth noting that tourism courses are mainly located along the Portuguese coast.

Figure 4

Geographical Distribution of Tourism and Hospitality Higher Education Courses in Portugal.





The Directorate-General for Higher Education categorizes its provision according to type of education, institution, and course (Directorate-General for Higher Education, 2023a; 2023b). The types of education include university and polytechnic, with the majority of Portugal's educational provision falling under the university umbrella (Directorate-General for Higher Education, 2023a; 2023b); Eurico *et al.*, 2012), accounting for 57.36% of the total (Directorate-General for Higher Education, 2023b). However, a closer look at the tourism sector reveals a significant investment by polytechnic universities, which account for 81.66% of the total number of tourism courses offered (Directorate-General for Higher Education, 2023b).

Institutions are classified as public, private and public military and police. Public institutions dominate the landscape with 79.42% of all courses, while private institutions account for 20.58% (Directorate-General for Higher Education, 2023b). In the field of tourism, public institutions provide the majority of courses, accounting for 71.18% of the total, while private institutions provide 28.82% (see Table 4).

Table 4

Distribution of Courses and Tourism Courses by type of Education and Institution.

| Type of Education | % | Tourism & Hospitality % | Type of Institution | % | Tourism & Hospitality % |
|-------------------|-------|-------------------------|----------------------------|-------|-------------------------|
| University | 57.36 | 18.34 | Public | 79.42 | 71.18 |
| | | | Private | 20.58 | 28.82 |
| Polytechnic | 41.36 | 81.66 | Public Military and Police | 1.74 | 0 |

The Portuguese Higher Education system offers various types of courses, each with distinct characteristics (see Table 5). Notably, Technical Short Cycle Studies do not confer degree-level qualifications. Conversely, Bachelor's degrees, Integrated Master's degrees, Master's degrees, and Doctorate's degrees are recognized as courses that lead to a degree. Among these, Master's degrees predominate, constituting 40.41% of the total Portuguese offerings, followed by Bachelor's degrees at 27.85%. Doctorate's degrees and Technical Short Cycle Studies contribute similarly to the educational landscape, comprising 14.09% and 16.54%, respectively (Directorate-General for Higher Education, 2023b). Integrated Master's degrees represent a mere 1.11% and are gradually being phased out. In numerical terms, out of 5961 courses, 2409 were Master's degrees, 1660 were Bachelor's degrees, 986 were Technical Short Cycle Studies, 840 were Doctorate's degrees, and 66 were Integrated Master's degrees.

**Table 5***Overview of Courses and Tourism Courses by course type.*

| Higher Education Course Type | % | Tourism & Hospitality% |
|--------------------------------------|-------|------------------------|
| <i>Technical Short Cycle Studies</i> | 16.54 | 40.61 |
| <i>Bachelor's degrees</i> | 27.85 | 34.06 |
| <i>Integrated Master's degree</i> | 1.11 | 0 |
| <i>Master's degree</i> | 40.41 | 23.14 |
| <i>Doctorate's degree</i> | 14.09 | 2.18 |

The total number of tourism vacancies for the academic year 2022-2023 is 8191 (Directorate-General for Higher Education, 2023b), with a significant majority of 71.82% offered by public institutions and the remaining 28.18% by private institutions (see Table 6).

Table 6*Tourism and Hospitality Higher Education Vacancies for 2022-2023.*

| Total Vacancies | Public Institutions | Private Institutions |
|-----------------|---------------------|----------------------|
| 8191 | 71.82% | 28.18% |

The Portuguese Directorate-General for Higher Education classifies each course into specific fields based on its curriculum. Within the field of tourism education, the 229 courses identified cover a wide range of 14 different training and educational areas. Some areas, such as business, audiovisual and media production, history and archaeology, and social work and counselling, account for only 0.44% of the total number of tourism education courses. Similarly, fields such as electricity and energy, sociology and other studies and life sciences each account for 0.87%. Sports, agriculture and animal husbandry and education each contribute 1.31%. Marketing and advertising together account for 3.06% of tourism courses, while management and administration account for 3.49%. Predictably, tourism and recreation accounted for the largest number of courses, with 55.90% of the total, closely followed by hotels and restaurants with 29.26%.

These results corroborate the literature, since employment in tourism, owing to its multidisciplinary nature, requires expertise in multiple knowledge areas. Consequently, education and training programs in tourism must encompass a wide array of topics to ensure transparency and applicability across all job types within the industry (Daniel *et al.*, 2017; Inui *et al.*, 2006). This comprehensive approach to education should cover essential aspects such as hospitality management, cultural heritage, customer service, sustainable tourism practices, digital marketing, and culinary arts. By integrating these diverse subjects, training programs



can better prepare individuals to meet the varied demands of the tourism sector, enhancing their adaptability and proficiency in different roles (Sitompul *et al.*, 2017; Valkonen *et al.*, 2013).

In terms of internship opportunities provided to students (Table 7), a substantial 86.90% of tourism courses incorporate internships into their curriculum. Most of these internships are facilitated by polytechnic universities (86.43%) and public institutions (72.86%). Among the 229 identified courses, only 8.73% do not offer internships, while for 4.37%, internship information was unavailable (see Table 4). It's worth noting that the duration of internships varies across institutions and depends on the specific course cycle.

Table 7

Tourism and Hospitality Courses Internships.

| Internship | % | Type of Education | % | Type of Institution | % |
|---------------|-------|-------------------|-------|---------------------|-------|
| Internship | 86.90 | Polytechnic | 86.43 | Public | 72.86 |
| No Internship | 8.73 | | | | |
| Unknown | 4.37 | University | 13.57 | Private | 27.14 |

Internships are crucial for future tourism professionals as they provide practical experience, enhance industry-specific skills, and foster a deeper understanding of real-world challenges and opportunities within the tourism sector (European Commission, 2016; HOTREC, 2022). In this sense, in Portugal, public education, and in particular polytechnic education, is more in line with this vision, with around 86% of its tourism and hospitality training offering opportunities for knowledge transfer through internships.

Fostering a closer relationship between educational institutions and businesses is essential, and this can be achieved through the establishment of collaborative protocols. These protocols should facilitate more practical and real-world learning experiences for students. As market trends increasingly favor workers with a comprehensive understanding of the tourism industry's operations, such partnerships will be essential. By integrating hands-on training and industry insights into the academic curriculum, students will be better equipped with the effective knowledge and skills required to thrive in the competitive tourism sector. This synergy between academia and industry will not only enhance the quality of education but also ensure that graduates are well-prepared to meet the evolving demands of the tourism marketplace (Huang *et al.*, 2016; Teixeira, 2001).



5 CONCLUSION

This paper aimed to diagnose the current landscape of Portuguese higher education offerings in the tourism and hospitality sector. It sought to trace the evolution of these courses over the years and evaluate their present status. The findings indicate a substantial increase in the number of courses and available vacancies. Starting from the first bachelor's degree in Tourism established by the University of Aveiro in 1988, there has been a significant multiplication of courses, which have also diversified in their focus areas.

The Portuguese higher education system has evidently been committed to preparing future professionals in the tourism and hospitality industry by authorizing numerous courses and specializations over the years. The diversity in course offerings illustrates tourism's broad connection with various other sectors, transitioning from a narrow perspective to a comprehensive academic landscape. Notably, the fields of Tourism and Leisure, and Hotels and Restaurants (Hospitality) account for over 85% of the academic offerings.

Currently, aspiring tourism professionals have access to a variety of specializations within the tourism and hospitality sector. The study identified 14 distinct areas of education and training within the 229 recognized tourism and hospitality courses. These courses not only offer specialization opportunities but also frequently include internships as part of the curriculum, with over 86% of the courses incorporating practical training. Public institutions play a crucial role in providing these courses, heavily investing in broadening their educational scope.

The trend towards specialization in higher education institutions is geared towards producing skilled and competent professionals for the tourism and hospitality sector. This focus on specialization is anticipated to equip tourism professionals with enhanced abilities to address the diverse needs of tourists effectively. Moreover, professionals with recognized tertiary qualifications are expected to gain deeper insights into their roles and contributions within the industry.

It is essential to emphasize the importance of valuing these human resources, as they play a pivotal role in the success of the tourism and hospitality sector. By leveraging their expertise, these professionals can offer a competitive edge to businesses and public sector bodies, thereby bolstering the overall competitiveness and sustainability of the industry. Higher education institutions, industry leaders, and the government must collaborate to provide even more opportunities for tourism professionals to meet the evolving demands of the industry. They must also work together to ensure that the contributions of these professionals are recognized and valued, as their efforts are often undervalued.



While the database constructed for this study was based on information from the Directorate-General for Higher Education and checked multiple times for accuracy, it was manually created and thus subject to potential human error. Despite this limitation, the results underscore the significant emphasis placed on the tourism and hospitality sector by the Portuguese higher education system. Future research could explore the number of individuals who have completed these tourism degrees and assess their successful integration into the industry.

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