

Event Management Education in Finland

Author

Slaughter, Lee, Reid, Sacha, Arcodia, Charles

Published

2003

Downloaded from

<http://hdl.handle.net/10072/47929>

Link to published version

<https://www.polyu.edu.hk/>

Griffith Research Online

<https://research-repository.griffith.edu.au>

EVENT MANAGEMENT EDUCATION IN FINLAND

Lee Slaughter

School of Tourism and Leisure Management
University of Queensland

Sacha Reid

School of Tourism and Leisure Management
University of Queensland

Charles Arcodia

School of Tourism and Leisure Management
University of Queensland

ABSTRACT

As event management emerges to become a key sector of the tourism and leisure industries worldwide there is increasing need for tertiary educated event managers, and for evaluations of event management curriculum. By using in-depth interviews as the method of inquiry, this paper reports the results from an analysis of event management curriculum in Finnish higher education.

The paper provides a context for event management education in Finland by presenting brief backgrounds on the educational system, differences between universities and polytechnics, and current tourism and leisure programs which incorporate event management. It then provides a summary of key findings specifically relating to education in event management and suggests a series of preliminary conclusions. This study establishes a platform from which to develop an investigative framework which can be used in comparative studies of event management curricula worldwide. Apart from curriculum evaluation however, it can also be used as the basis for training needs analyses and creates a better understanding and compatibility between event management education and industry practice.

Keywords: education, event management, Finland

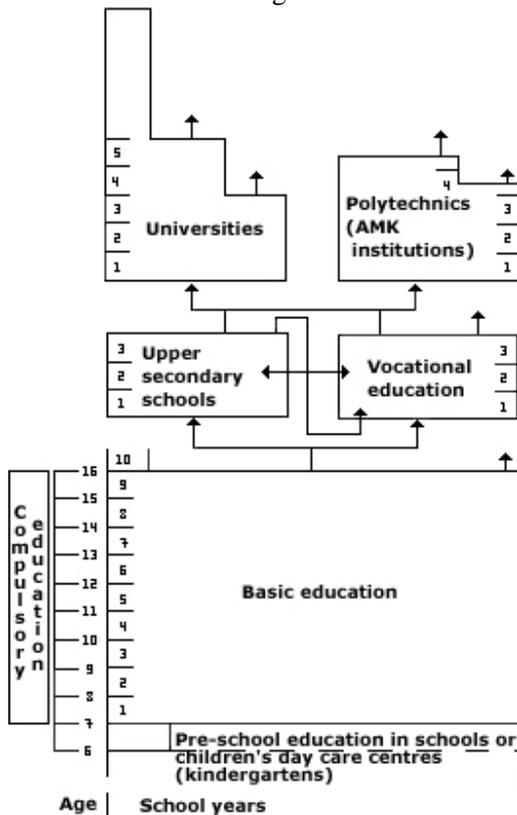
INTRODUCTION

Event management has emerged to become a key sector of the tourism and leisure industries worldwide and this has given impetus to the need for tertiary educated event managers, and for evaluations of event management educational curriculum. The number, diversity and popularity of events has also grown and can be categorised into three basic groupings: business events (e.g. conferences, trade fairs), cultural events (e.g. festivals, art exhibitions) and sporting events (e.g. football games, car racing). As the number of events increase and the field of event management matures, there is a growing realisation about the continuing need to develop event management professionals who are able to create, organise and manage events (Arcodia & Reid, 2002). Employing high-quality individuals who are trained and qualified in the field may satisfy several objectives. It will help to ensure professionalism in the field; equip managers with the necessary skills to deal with the specific challenges of the industry (McCabe, 2001) and new challenges as they arise (Neale, 2000); and will ultimately help to sustain the delivery of high quality events (Harris & Jago, 1999).

To achieve these objectives effective event management education is needed. Defining an event is an ambitious undertaking. Events encompass a wide range of infrequently occurring gatherings from mega-events such as the Olympic Games to local gatherings such as school fetes. In this paper event management education is defined as a course or program that relates solely to event management as opposed to event management being encompassed within a broader area of study, such as tourism management.

Tourism Education in Finland

As a relatively new field of academic enquiry, event management is generally encompassed within the discipline of tourism, at both university and polytechnic level in Finland. As shown in Figure 1, both universities and polytechnics are institutes of higher learning. Having completed ten years of compulsory education and three years of either upper secondary school education or vocational education, students can then apply for admission to either a university or polytechnic. A brief background of tourism education at both universities and polytechnics helps to provide a context for event management education in Finland.



(Source: EDU.fi, 2003)

Figure 1
The Finnish Education System

The Finnish University Network of Tourism Studies (FUNTS) is the primary provider of university level tourism education in Finland. The network commenced in 1995 in recognition of the multidisciplinary nature of tourism. With seventeen universities involved in the network, staff can be drawn from member institutions, depending on their area of expertise, to ensure students are provided with a well rounded program.

Polytechnics were initially vocational institutions, with only a few teaching tourism. When the Polytechnic system was introduced in the early 1990s, the program changed from a two year diploma to a three and a half to four year degree. One of the directives from the Ministry of Education was for polytechnics to phase tourism programs into their curriculum, consequently some tourism programs commenced as late as 1998.

Although both universities and polytechnics are educational institutions, universities have a stronger research focus, offering opportunities for post-graduate studies, while polytechnics place greater emphasis on incorporating practical components into their programs. A number of polytechnics however, are exploring ways to be more actively involved in applied research.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The academic literature that investigates event management education, curriculum development and approaches to teaching is limited, which is a testament to the recent interest in and perhaps the increasing maturity of the global event management industry. There are however a few useful studies which contribute to the current development of event management curriculum.

Perry et al. (1996), conducted the first Australian study of event organisers' training and education needs. One of the significant outcomes of this survey was the identification of five key knowledge areas that should be encompassed by an integrated event management program. The five key knowledge domains were: legal/financial, management, public relations/marketing, economic/analytical and ethical/contextual. The study showed that there was a general consistency about the knowledge that should be imparted to event organizers.

Hawkins and Goldblatt (1995) identified some of the key functions of event management and a variety of competencies that were applicable to the successful carrying out of the role. They described a variety of certified programs and as a final contribution they identified some implications of the emergence of event management to tourism education. Hawkins and Goldblatt's (1995) main proposition was that as the scientific investigation of the event management industry increases, tertiary institutions will need to address a variety of curriculum development questions such as, should event management be infused within a tourism curriculum or should it be developed as a stand alone program; can the disparate areas of event management be successfully incorporated into a cohesive curriculum; how does a program balance the tension between the practical, technical and theoretical aspects of event management? These questions were first posed by the authors in 1995 but they remain quite pertinent to the current situation of event management curriculum.

Research conducted by Harris and Jago (1999), pertaining to the number and type of event related subjects being offered within Australian universities found that of the twenty nine universities that were examined, seventeen offered at least one subject that was identified as belonging to the events-meeting sector. The majority of subjects identified in this study as having an 'events-meetings' focus were offered as electives within tourism, hospitality, sport management and human movement programs.

McDonald and McDonald (2000) developed a model for experiential education and then applied it to an event management class at a North American university. The model was developed by combining humanistic methodology and experiential approaches to education to create what they

have coined as humanistic experiential education. As McDonald and McDonald (1995:6) explain:

The model was designed for educators and festival and event managers to use for the development and refinement of university courses and professional training programs.

The study was a reflection and evaluation of this humanistic experiential education model that gave students the opportunity to learn about the processes of event management through theoretical and applied exercises. The final outcome of the learning activities was the production of an actual festival.

In a recent study Getz (2002) added that most academics involved in a major way with events have been preoccupied with their management and impacts, largely because of the career orientation of the academic programs and the fact that the people relate to an “event industry” driven by economic and commercial interests. By identifying the core knowledge that is unique to events, Getz (2002) indicates that we should be encouraging research and theoretical development for the sake of the discipline, not just to support management issues.

While the above points are useful to the current discussion, there is certainly a need for more studies which investigate the many facets of developing new curriculum in response to international developments in the event industry.

RESEARCH METHOD

In total there are thirty-one higher education institutions in Finland that offer tourism courses. Of these, sixteen were included in the primary data for this paper, thereby representing a convenience sample of institutions based on their willingness to participate. During May 2002, lecturers, directors and heads of faculty from tourism programs at three universities and thirteen polytechnics throughout Finland were interviewed.

In-depth interviews were used for the data collection as they can produce a richness of information quantitative research can not provide (Ryan, 1995). Other benefits of in-depth interviews are that large amounts of data can be obtained quickly and immediate follow-up and clarification is possible. There is also opportunity to reflect on participants’ responses and probe relevant issues further. As several researchers were involved in the data collection, semi-structured interviews ensured that each researcher sought similar information by incorporating predetermined questions in their interviews (Berg, 2001; Merton, Fiske & Kendall, 1990).

There were also several limitations to using this research method. The sample size is limited by ‘willingness to participate’. Ideally all thirty-one institutions would have been incorporated in this study but time constraints did not make this feasible. Another factor that impacted on the sample size was language barriers. The interviews were conducted in English. Although Finns are generally fluent in English, the mastery of the language required for in-depth interviews dissuaded at least one institution from participating in the study. These constraints resulted in this study being a snapshot of event management education in Finland, rather than an exhaustive study. However, as explained in the conclusion, this study was undertaken at a point in time that enables preliminary findings to provide a basis for ongoing research.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Profile of the Sample Population

Event management education in Finland is generally encompassed within the discipline of tourism, although few of the interviewees claimed tourism as their original academic qualification. As shown in Table 1, tourism academics in Finland come from a wide range of backgrounds, as is consistent with the multidisciplinary nature of tourism (Mowforth & Munt, 1998). There was also diversity in the period of time respondents had been involved in tourism education, although of the eighteen academics interviewed only one had more than ten years experience in tourism education.

Table 1
Academic profile of respondents

Respondent	Original academic discipline	Years as an academic in tourism education
1	Tourism marketing	2
2	Economics (marketing tourism services)	5
3	Geography	5
4	Economics	3
5	Economics and Business Administration	20
6	Food Science/ Languages and Literature	10/1
7	Tourism and Ethnology	
8	Hospitality Management/ Tourism Management	10/1
9	Hotel Management	3
10	Education	6
11	Not available	
12	Law	10
13	Services marketing	5
14	Human geography and tourism	3
15	Not available	
16	Geography	5

Note: Where two entries are made for columns 2 and 3, this indicates that two respondents participated in the interview.

Government Involvement in Event Management Education

Determining the fields of study taught at an educational institution in Finland is a process of negotiation between the institution and the government. It should be noted that universities have more opportunity for diversification in their choice of subject areas than polytechnics. In accordance with Finland's Higher Education Policy (Ministry of Education, 2000:26) polytechnics have a stronger directive to 'serve regional needs' than do universities. Once the subject areas have been negotiated, individual institutions determine the content of their programs, which are monitored rather than dictated, by the government. Funding is then allocated based on the resource requirements of each subject area and on the number of students attracted to each program.

In the absence of a subject area called event management, related courses generally fall under Tourism, Catering and Institutional Management. However, it is expected that the government would be supportive of event management education being incorporated into the curriculum.

I think that they would be very supportive if one would introduce this type of discipline or study. Whenever you come up with something new that has not been done yet and will not be done in every school they will be very supportive. [Respondent 9].

It was also noted, that some government intervention in program content may be beneficial. As Finland has a small population of 5.2 million (Virtual Finland, 2001), at a national level there is only a limited pool of students (250,000) from which to draw (EDU.fi, 2003). If too many institutions offer the same programs there could be too much competition and enrolments at a single institution may be too small to justify running the program.

...polytechnics are following each other because when one takes some interesting points then all the others follow. It is not that good idea because Finland is such a tiny country so we could have one polytechnic or two that provide for the event side and then they could send students to those courses and so on [Respondent 11].

Integration of Event Management into Tourism Programs

There was no evidence of a complete event management program at either university or polytechnic level, although individual event management courses do exist in many polytechnics but they are often not labelled as such, as shown in Table 2. Typically components of event management, such as conference or congress management are taught within the tourism program, although one polytechnic was planning to offer a specialisation in event management.

Table 2: Examples of event management oriented courses taught at each institution

Respondent	Courses offered that relate to event management
1	Meetings and Conferences
3	Product Development
4	Meetings, Congresses and Event Facilities
5	Congress Management and Program Services
6	Event Management; Project Management
7	Conferences
8	Meetings and Congresses
9	Conventions Management
11	Project Management; Congresses and Meetings; Sports Events
12	Program Service; Conferences and Congresses
13	Congresses and Conferences; Project Management
14	Health and Sports Tourism
15	Planning and Implementing Events; Sport and Economics; Sports Organisations and Organisation theory; Sports Marketing; Sports Tourism
16	Urban and Event Tourism

Student interest in the event related courses suggests there is potential for further development of this area of specialisation. Although many of these courses are compulsory for tourism students, an indication of their popularity can be gauged by the interest from students taking them as elective courses. Some institutions noted the need to cap numbers because of their popularity, while others believe a course's popularity as an elective is not a fair indicator because "it's not a question of popularity, it's a question of timetables" [Respondent 3].

Despite these indicators of interest, the general perception is that “event management is too narrow” [Respondent 6] to be a field of study in its own right. Instead it is “good for them [students] to study first widely and then decide okay that this [event management] is our thing later on” [Respondent 11]. Others however, felt that event management could become a field of study in Finland in the future.

I am sure that it [event management] will come because in Finland congress management and sporting and cultural events are getting bigger and bigger [Respondent 14].

While this illustrates the broad perspective, other institutions saw specialist areas of event management, such as sports events or cultural events, as an opportunity for differentiation between institutions:

...especially if there is no other schools in Finland, then that would be something that really draws students to this area if we had a really specialist line here and people who would know how to teach it well [Respondent 9].

Many of the institutions that saw an opportunity for event management emphasised its appropriateness in relation to the activities of the area. For example, areas that were renowned for holding a lot of sporting events would be best suited for studies in sports events, while places that held many cultural events would be most appropriate for studies in cultural events.

Undergraduate Education in Event Management

With only a small proportion of institutions seeing value in an event management specialisation at present, it follows that event specific courses are limited. At an undergraduate level a few institutions have a generic event management course that incorporates most types of events, while other institutions cover only one type of event. Within tourism programs the focus is generally on congresses and conferences, while sports events are generally the focus in sports tourism programs. However, it should be noted that these courses constitute only a small proportion of the courses undertaken as part of a student’s degree. Many of the tourism programs have a strong business component, therefore the tourism component is often only 30 to 50 percent of the entire program, as shown in Table 3, and the event specific courses are a minor part of these. The remaining 50 to 70 percent of the program is comprised of business courses which are often given a services or tourism orientation, such as a marketing course encompassing tourism marketing or services marketing.

Table 3: Examples of the proportion of tourism courses within the study program

Respondent	Business/ Marketing Component	Tourism Component
2	50%	50%
6	65%	35%
9	50%	50%
10	40%	60%
11	60%	40%
13	60%	40%

Postgraduate Education in Event Management

Currently postgraduate education in Finland is undertaken primarily at universities, rather than polytechnics. Universities offer both bachelor and masters degrees although most students graduate at masters level.

It's not common I would say it's only a few students every now and then [do a bachelor degree]...I would say 100% of our students when they start with the first year they're ending it master students [Respondent 15].

As there is no bachelor degree offered in tourism at university level, much less a degree in event management, it is only possible to obtain a masters with a minor in tourism. However, there is opportunity for specialisation through a masters and/ or doctoral thesis.

The major provider of tourism postgraduate education at a doctoral level is the Finnish Universities Network of Tourism Studies (FUNTS). Doctoral level education within the FUNTS system started in 2001 and since this time methodological and theoretical courses in tourism have been offered. As yet no event management courses are offered at this level which could be a result of event management being such a new area of academic enquiry.

I think one of the reasons is that today FUNTS has about 15-16 postgraduates and none of those is concentrated on event management...they are more on tourism [Respondent 14].

Although polytechnics have not traditionally offered postgraduate education this is beginning to change. From mid 2002 some polytechnics have been allowed to trial 'post polytechnic' degrees which are similar to a masters. This will allow greater cooperation and integration between polytechnics and universities. Currently both institutions offer bachelor degrees but graduates from polytechnics are not able to matriculate into the masters degree offered by universities. As the following respondent explained:

... those who have graduated from polytechnics with a bachelor have wanted to go on. But if they wanted to go on to a masters degree at university they have to start almost at the very beginning...so that is why polytechnics have got the permission to start the post polytechnic degree [Respondent 8].

As the focus of this trial initially is in the areas of business administration, information technology and social studies, it is not anticipated that tourism will become a target area for some time. Some respondents were in favour of not being included in this initial trial.

I hope [they don't get post polytechnic degrees] not for a long time because we still have to work on the basic bachelors studies at the undergraduate level to make it more effective and up to date and so on. I hope that we will be given the peace to develop further before going into this postgraduate level [Respondent 9].

Event Management Research in Finland

Although postgraduate research is currently undertaken by universities "it is not only universities that create new information like it was in the old times" [Respondent 10]. Currently, both polytechnics and universities are involved in event management research in some capacity, although most acknowledge that "the research is mainly very applied" [Respondent 15] and somewhat limited. Most of this research is generated by student projects or industry requests:

Some students have done their dissertations on events and we have also done some economic impacts on specific events to find out how much people spend on events and how much the town is benefiting [Respondent 5].

Our students write a thesis and some do it on event management [Respondent 3].

Much of the research that is currently being conducted is based on regional tourism strategies, therefore the scope of the research is restricted by issues that affect tourism within a region.

...we have so called regional responsibility, when our polytechnic is in central part of Finland we have to take responsibility that our field is working with our field in industry here in central Finland so this regional work is our responsibility [Respondent 10].

It is very much dependent on the local and regional tourism strategy...In every event which we have in the ... region some of our students are involved by doing survey work for example [Respondent 1].

Such research is funded through a number of sources, including the national government, the European Union and consultancies. Traditionally research funding has gone to the universities but the changing structure of academic institutions is opening up funding sources for polytechnics.

The government gave a little bit of money just to start our research work, but also there is the Finnish Academy that traditionally finances university it might be open to us too and then we have the one centre that finances the technologies [Respondent 10].

CONCLUSION

Essentially this study is a snapshot of event management education in Finland. However, this snapshot is taken at a poignant point in time. Demand for event management skilling is increasing, yet the education system appears slow in recognising this need. While this is not unique to Finland, highlighting the case in Finland provides some preliminary insights into why this situation has arisen.

Consistent with other countries, many academics have entered the tourism academic field from other disciplines. This has clear advantages in that it provides an eclectic group from which to draw teaching and research expertise, and experiment with new theories and models. This allows the use of the best of research from other disciplines which have had the benefit of many years of theory building. The disadvantage is that as a nascent research field, it relies heavily on theories developed in other disciplines and consequently, it will take some time before the theoretical platform from which implications are drawn can be truly claimed by tourism scholars.

Also consistent with experience elsewhere, tourism programs are offered in many educational institutions yet little, if any, thought has been given to the more specialised area of event management. This is despite opportunity for specialisation as identified by authors such as Hawkins and Goldblatt (1995), McDonald and McDonald (2000) and Getz (2002). It is clear from the formation of the Finnish University Network of Tourism Studies (FUNTS) that Finland is an innovative country in tourism education, but event management has yet to be acknowledged as a significant area of study. This begs the question – is this general lack of awareness of the

potential for event management education indicative of other countries, or are there other reasons that event management education is, at best, a course or two within a tourism program? While this study does not address this question in its entirety, it does provide a basis from which an investigative framework can be developed.

From this study it is evident that factors such as a small population of domestic students, government directives and availability of funding, may have some impact on the importance a country places on incorporating event management education into its higher education curriculum. What is not clear is if these factors apply globally. By using the insights from this paper to develop the aforementioned framework and applying it worldwide several outcomes could be achieved.

From an educator's perspective it would provide a basis from which to monitor the adoption of an emerging field of study at both national and international levels. It is information such as this that often provides an historical account of when and how research into an area developed. From a potential students perspective it could show where the opportunities for event management education exist as well as foreshadowing opportunities or constraints that may be encountered in undertaking postgraduate research, such as availability of funding or industry partnerships. From an industry perspective, it would identify those countries that have been proactive in integrating event management into their education curriculum, thereby indicating where industry input might best be targeted.

It is the interest expressed by industry that provides a basis for a training needs analysis. In Finland, particularly in the polytechnic system, it is evident that industry is willing to take an active role in event management education. Clearly opportunities exist for industry and educators to work together to provide a well rounded event management program – one that may be pivotal in shaping event management curricula worldwide.

REFERENCES

- Arcodia, C. & Reid, S. (2002), The Mission of Event Management Associations, in K.W. Wober (ed.), *City Tourism 2002*, Vienna: Springer, pp.63-72
- Berg, B.L. (2001), *Qualitative Research Methods For the Social Sciences*, 4th Ed., Needham Heights: Allyn & Bacon.
- EDU.fi (2003), <http://virtual.finland.fi/finfo/english/otkuleng.html>, Visited 14th February 2003.
- Getz, D. (2002), Event Studies and Event Management: On Becoming an Academic Discipline, *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management*, 9 (1), pp.12 – 23.
- Harris, R. & Jago, L.(1999), Event education and training in Australia: the current state of play. *Australian Journal of Hospitality Management*, 6(1), pp.45 - 51.
- Hawkins, D.E. & Godblatt, J.J.(1995), Event Management: Implications for Tourism Education, *Tourism Recreation Research*, 20(2), pp.42-45.
- McCabe, V. (2001), Career paths and labour mobility in the conventions and exhibitions industry in eastern Australia: results from a preliminary study, *International Journal of Tourism Research*, 3, pp.493 – 499.

McDonald, D. & McDonald, T. (2000), Festival and Event Management: An Experimental Approach to Curriculum Design, *Event Management*, 6, pp.5-13.

Merton, R.K., Fiske, M. & Kendall, P.L. (1990), *The focused interviews: A manual of problems and procedures*, 2nd Ed., New York: Free Press.

Ministry of Education (2000), *Higher Education Policy in Finland*, Helsinki.

Mowforth, M. & Munt, I. (1998), *Tourism and Sustainability: new tourism in the Third World*, London: Routledge.

Neale, M. (2000). Time for a new school of thought on degrees, *Marketing Event*, Sept, 7.

Perry, M., Foley, P., & Rumpf, P. (1996), "Events Management: An Emerging Challenge in Australia Higher Education", *Festival Management & Event Tourism*, 4, 85 - 93.

Virtual Finland (1999), 'Factsheet Finland',
<http://virtual.finland.fi/finfo/english/facteng.html>, Visited 14th February 2003.

Ryan, C. (1995), *Researching Tourist Satisfaction: Issues, Concepts, Problems*, New York: Routledge.