

**Research and Publication in Tourism and Hospitality:
Possibilities in the Ecuadorian Academic Setting**

By

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Introduction

University professors teach, do research and provide service to their university, the academic community, their field of study and to society in general. How much teaching and how much research they do varies greatly depending on several factors, such as the mission of the university, its funding structure (whether it is a private or a public institution), prevailing beliefs about the role of the university in society, how past research has helped in addressing society's issues, political pressures, the expertise of its professors and the demands the university places on their time (Bok, 1982; Fairweather, 1990; Gottlieb & Keith, 1997; Birtwistle, 2003). Ecuador's universities have historically been teaching universities, with professors spending a majority of their time on teaching-related activities and very little, if any, time on research, making it very difficult for them to create and maintain an active research portfolio (Van Hoof, Estrella, Eljuri & Torres, 2013). Yet, given these historical limitations, there are possibilities for faculty members in tourism and hospitality to do research and to publish their work in refereed, indexed publications.

This article discusses the roles that research and teaching play in a university environment based on a review of relevant literature, with an emphasis on hospitality and tourism. It looks at how research and teaching effectiveness are evaluated, how the quality of publications is assessed and briefly discusses the socio-economic and political factors that are presently at work in Ecuador's academic environments. It offers some suggestions on how research in tourism and hospitality can be conducted in Ecuador and how professors can get published, given the limited resources that are available.

Review of Literature

Assessing Research and Teaching Quality

Most universities are labelled as either "research universities" or "teaching universities" and this designation depends on several factors, the most important being their role in society (Fram and Lau, 1996; Demski & Zimmerman, 2000; Marsh & Hattie, 2002; Lewis & Simmons, 2010). Being a "teaching" or "research" university does not mean that universities only teach or only do research; all universities are expected to do both and

ideally, teaching supports the research effort to some extent and research not only addresses a societal problem or enhances theory but also improves the students' classroom experience as is it integrated in the teaching effort (Thomas & Harris, 2001).

Faculty performance in research and teaching universities is also assessed differently. It is largely determined by whether the university places a greater emphasis on teaching or on research. Professors in research universities are expected to dedicate a large majority of their time on research and publication, with fewer hours spent on teaching and service activities. In teaching universities, this pattern is reversed: professors spend a majority of their time and effort on teaching and service, with only a few hours dedicated to research.

In teaching universities there are high performance expectations for professors' classroom performance and assessments of teaching quality are primarily based on how well they are able to convey knowledge to students (Tang, 1997; Ory, 2000; Knapper, 2001; Young, 2006; Prince, Felder & Brent, 2013). They are also evaluated on their service contributions. Their research and publication activities however are often seen as additional efforts that are not necessarily expected, yet highly appreciated and recognized as such. In the tourism and hospitality field, several authors have suggested ways in which the teaching effort can be enhanced and its outcomes be made more relevant (Haywood, 1989; Lewis, 1993; Powers & Riegel, 1993; Ashley, et.al., 1995; Lashley & Barron, 2006; Morrison and Gorman, 2008).

Similarly, there are also high performance expectations for professors in research universities. A research university provides professors with time, flexibility and resources to do research so that they can conduct their experiments, work with graduate students, apply for and work on grants and write refereed articles. Success in research is measured in various ways. It can be measured by the quality of an article that was generated by the research and the journal it appears in. The citation rate of an article (Garfield, 1972; Law & van der Veen, 2008), the frequency with which it is downloaded from electronic sources (Ryan, 2005; Law & van der Veen, 2013), the quality of the journal it appears in (Lewison, 2009) and the impact it has on the work of others (Law & Chon, 2007; Aragon, 2013) are all indicative of its quality.

Similarly, the number and types of financial sources that supported the research, (particularly if a peer review process was used for project appraisal), the frequency with which it is cited on patents or in the media (Lewison, 2009) and the contribution it makes to theory are also important benchmarks for success. Moreover, the number of graduate students supported and the impact it has on solving society's problems, or in other words the service it provides, can also be used (Stolte-Heiskanen, 1992; Gosden, 1995; Chow & Harrison, 1998; Geuna & Martin, 2003; Hardre & Cox, 2009). All these quality indicators apply equally to the tourism and hospitality fields as numerous authors have reported (Xiao & Smith, 2006; Rivera & Upchurch, 2008; Svensson, Svaeri & Einarsen, 2009a; Svensson, Svaeri & Einarsen, 2009b; Kim et.al., 2009).

The Role of the Research University in Society

Institutions of higher education around the world are increasingly called upon to guide its socio-economic development and help solve its problems. Modern universities are not only expected to foster economic growth, promote cultural diversity, disseminate knowledge and grow political democracy and economic trade (Marginson, 2010). They are also asked to address urgent societal needs in the area of sustainable development (Waal, Verbruggen & Wright, 2010) and to support nations' globalization efforts as they open up to the outside world (Scott, 1998). Universities help countries and governments to understand modern society's growing complexities and assist them in dealing with growing populations that place enormous burdens on its limited natural resources and fragile ecosystems.

Ecuador too is faced with considerable societal problems such as income inequality, poverty, a divide between rural and urban population groups and environmental concerns related to oil exploration in the Amazon basin. Fully aware of the important role universities can and should play in a society that has tremendous needs, the Ecuadorian government recently implemented several rapid and invasive changes to its universities' funding structures, reporting lines, admission policies, faculty qualifications and research responsibilities. Both the speed with which those changes were introduced and their dramatic impact on higher education are indicative of the sense of urgency that exists in government circles about changing the role of higher education in Ecuadorian society.

In moving the country from a primarily agricultural society to a more balanced, modern mixed-economy and to a more prominent global position, Ecuador's government, as many of its global counterparts, is looking for its universities to take a more prominent role in addressing its societal problems and in guiding its decision makers. It is trying to convert its university system from a "teaching-only" to a "teaching and research" orientation, hoping to raise the research bar rapidly and bring Ecuador's universities to a higher level of research output. Yet, ever since the first Ecuadorian university was established in the mid-sixteenth century, the country's universities have focused primarily on teaching. Very little research has been conducted, faculty research skills are limited and research output is low.

In order to make the conversion, the government launched two landmark initiatives in recent years, the Constitution of 2008 and the 2010 Higher Education Law, both of which have greatly impacted Ecuador's system of higher education. These initiatives have met with considerable resistance (Lloyd, 2010), have greatly raised anxiety levels among faculty members, have university administrators in uproar, have caused universities to be closed and faculty retire and have placed the government in charge of student admissions and university budgets (Van Hoof, et. al. 2013). Yet, they have also been welcomed as timely and necessary and have raised expectations for all involved.

Whereas proponents and opponents agree it was high time for some of these changes to occur, they do not necessarily agree on the execution of the changes and some of their unforeseen consequences. As part of these two legal initiatives there is an expectation that universities should enhance the quality and quantity of their research output and the research qualifications of their professors. For a university to be considered a "research" university by 2017, 70% of its professors must hold doctorates. For it to be recognized a "research-teaching" institution, this benchmark lies at 40% of all professors (Van Hoof et al., 2013). Given the low number of doctorates in the system at present and the lack of research capabilities, these will, most likely, prove insurmountable obstacles for most universities. The university system does not have adequate means to support successful research: the physical research infrastructure is dated, there have never been many incentives for faculty members to do research, there is a lack of appreciation about

its value and importance, professors lack an understanding of basic research methodology and there is a chronic lack of funding.

The article review process: indexation and impact factors

Besides requiring university professors to hold graduate degrees, the government also requires professors to do research that leads to refereed publications in indexed journals. Refereed, indexed publications are proxies for research output and, to some extent, for success. As discussed earlier, they are not the only indicators of research success, yet they are commonly used to measure the quality and quantity of a research effort because they have been deemed acceptable by peers in the field.

In academic publishing, the quality of journals is measured by their listing in a Citation Index. An example of that is the *Social Science Citation Index* (SSCI), which is the leading global listing of some 2,500 high-quality journals in the social sciences and journals in tourism and hospitality are listed in this index.

A second quality measure of a journal is its “impact factor,” a numerical expression of its impact on the field. This number represents the average number of citations received per paper in a journal during the two preceding years. A journal impact factor of 2.0 signifies that each of the articles that were published in the journal in the two years prior was cited in the literature twice on average. Clearly, the more articles in a journal are quoted, the more important a journal becomes and the higher its impact. Yet, indexation, a rigorous review process and a high impact factor also make it more difficult for articles to be accepted.

It is very important for a journal to be “indexed” and to have an “impact factor,” probably more important than anything else in terms of journal and article quality assessment. This is why the Ecuadorian government is so adamant about “indexation” in its efforts to raise research output and publication standards in Ecuador and why it is so important for university faculty members to consider publishing in indexed publications. Indexation is a quality measurement tool: it is certainly not the only tool, yet is a universally accepted tool that ensures that certain quality standards have been met.

Whereas the *Social Science Citation Index* is a global index for the social sciences with journals listed in more than 50 disciplines, there is a Latin-American index as well.

Latindex is an inventory of scholarly publications in the Ibero-American environment (Latin America, Spain, Portugal and the Caribbean). At present, it contains a catalogue of 3,500 journals from 30 countries in its listing. All of these adhere to certain quality standards, such as a review process, abstracts and key words in Spanish and English, coverage in international databases and international review boards. At present, there are 82 journals in Ecuador listed in this catalogue in all fields. This index is a good place for Ecuadorian professors to start looking for publication outlets, since the journals on this list qualify as being “indexed” and “refereed.” Indexation and a peer review process are the means by which academia safeguards publication quality and how the government and universities measure one’s success as a researcher and author.

What is Possible?

As stated earlier, the research infrastructure in Ecuador is far from ideal. Whereas the goals which the government hopes to achieve are laudable, the timelines it has put in place and the execution of the plan are flawed. Professors cannot do doctorates in a few years. Rather than asking “How quickly can I get done?” the first question that professors looking into doctoral education should ask about a program of studies is “Will this program prepare me to do research?” If Ecuador’s professors only enroll in a graduate program because they need a degree in the shortest amount of time (which is certainly understandable given the amount of pressure they presently operate under), they may safeguard their short-term futures, yet they may not acquire many of the research skills that guarantee long-term success. Selecting a program of studies that is rigorous, with high standards, and with a reputation for preparing its students well for future research responsibilities is essential. If not, the contribution that these newly-minted PhDs will make to the research effort in Ecuador will be negligible and it will not accomplish the goals that were set by the government.

Professors teach too much, they are not educated to do research yet, they do not have time, and there are very few resources and incentives available to them. So what is possible? There are three important prerequisites to doing research and to publish:

1. *Inclination* – Professors either want to publish or have to publish. The former motivator is positive and intrinsic and hints at one's inclination. The latter is negative and extrinsic and not necessarily an inclination. Nevertheless, both of them are motivators;
2. *Resources* – Professors need time, money, and support to do research;
3. *Ability* – Professors need to have the ability to do research and to publish. This depends on the level of graduate education professors have received and on experience with the research and publication process.

Many professors in the higher education system in Ecuador have an inclination to do research. They see its value and realize that Ecuador's universities should play a larger role in solving the country's problems and addressing its future. They would like to do research because they see a need and they have an interest, or perhaps because they feel the pressure to do so since their future in academia depends on it. Yet, only an inclination will not get them started.

Unfortunately, resources to do research are scarce. As stated earlier, professors teach too much and have very little time to do research. Twenty or more hours per week of teaching in the classroom, combined with course preparation and student assessment activities and numerous administrative responsibilities, leave very little time to do research. Money for research is scarce too, perhaps even more so than time. With regard to research support: professors may find themselves supported by their universities and their direct supervisors, but that support often does not go beyond verbal encouragement. It does not come in the form of release time from teaching, for instance, or in concrete incentives that reward success.

With regard to the third prerequisite, the ability to do research, the verdict is also negative. Most university professors in Ecuador are not prepared to do research yet at a level that gets them published in indexed journals. Research is guided by prior theory and a clearly identified need. Before one puts a manuscript together that can be published, there needs to be a literature review, a study design, a research question, a data collection instrument, statistical analysis and a write-up. Researchers not only need to know how to design and conduct a research study but also how to assess which journals to target and how to write an academic, refereed article.

So given all these limitations, what is possible in tourism and hospitality research in Ecuador? Research in tourism and hospitality tends to be applied in nature. Researchers in the field are interested in solving problems and addressing issues in society, in industry and in education. With the proper education and extensive experience in research and publication and sufficient time and resources, one could engage in empirical research in which controlled experiments are designed to isolate the impact of certain variables on other variables, and in doing so enhance theory and grow the literature on a particular topic. Yet, with the resource and time limitations and the lack of prior education that were discussed above, it is much more feasible and attainable to investigate issues and use investigative techniques that describe “what is” rather than “what should or can be.” Descriptive research that provides a service to society and that addresses a need for an answer makes sense as a first step. With practice, experience and proper education, higher levels of analysis will come and a higher quality of research will see the light of day.

The following are seven suggestions that might be helpful in pursuing initial research success. They are not presented in any particular order of importance or chronology, yet it is imperative to mention that these are only suggestions, not criticisms or mandates. On the contrary, they are intended to support initial research efforts in the field of hospitality and tourism.

1. *Taking small steps in the publication process*

Once a topic that generates passion and that is relevant has been identified and investigated, a good first step to get one’s article published in a refereed journal is a search of listings in the Latindex catalogue (and perhaps even the listing of journals in Ecuador). As a next step, a subsequent article could be submitted to more established journals in Latin America, journals like *Cultur* in Brazil, *El Periplo Sostenible* in Mexico, or *Cuadernos Interculturales* in Chile, for instance. In this process it is imperative to determine what topics and articles these journals publish and what they expect in a manuscript before work is submitted. A third step in the publication process would then be to start thinking about publishing in English. And finally, after success at various levels, researchers can target the higher impact journals. Starting with high impact journals may take years to get an article published and success will prove illusive. This will make the process frustrating

and will stifle future research endeavors. There is nothing as stimulating as seeing one's name in print for the first time, even if only as a third or fourth author, which is why the second suggestion is for professors to seek help and guidance from others.

2. Seeking help and guidance

Two people know more than one, and three collaborators know even more. One person may have insight into the environmental impact of tourism on the shores of the river Guaya, for instance. Someone else has some statistical skills and can analyze numerical data, and a third colleague maybe a good writer, perhaps even in English. Bringing a group of people together around a research topic benefits all involved; this is not the time to see the research and publication process as a competition and for researchers to be territorial. This is a time to seek out collaboration and advice, since only joint efforts might lead to results. Further sources of potential support and guidance are Ecuador's Prometeo program and the university research offices that are tasked with generating and organizing the university's research effort. Support may even be found in other academic units, other universities in Ecuador and universities abroad. Yet, without time to do research nothing substantial will happen.

3. Finding time and trust

Even though it may prove to be virtually impossible, time is needed to conduct research. This means that, if university rectors or faculty deans want to see research productivity, they will have to make time for their professors to conduct research. Time in this regard means time off from teaching because an hour here or there to do research will not work. Giving professors a schedule with two hours for research is not enough; they need to be able to separate themselves from the office and from the classroom and work without interruption for extended periods of time. With time also needs to come trust: trust in professors that they will do research in the time allotted, trust that their efforts will help grow the faculty and the university, and trust that a contribution can and will be made. Success in research should then be awarded, just as success in teaching leads to future

contracts and salary raises. This is the only way a research effort is sustainable in a university environment.

4. *Application to real-life*

Operators in the hospitality and tourism industries, in government and in private industry will help and support research efforts if these efforts help them solve a problem. Often times it is not a matter of resentment of research but a matter of never having been asked before! Private industry and government will help and might even be sources of funding if they see the relevance of the research effort, and even if the results of the research are proprietary and confidential because someone paid for them, valuable research skills will have been acquired in the process.

5. *Keeping it simple and manageable.*

In the tourism and hospitality field in Ecuador almost anything is an enhancement of what is presently available. “Keeping it simple and manageable” means simple questions, simple designs, simple analyses and straight-forward publications. Since researchers are inexperienced, manageable studies that take these limitations into account will prove much more successful than complicated, elaborate studies. Initial efforts should not target publication in the *Journal of Travel Research* or the *Cornell Hospitality Quarterly* but should be geared towards a refereed paper in a journal listed in Latindex.

6. *Do not forget non-refereed articles, presentations, and guest lectures.*

Research can be shared and disseminated in many different ways, not only in the form of refereed articles. Even though non-refereed articles and conference presentations are not nearly as highly regarded as refereed publications, they show research and publication effort and they help in establishing the researcher’s reputation. The more that are done, the better and easier it gets and the easier it becomes to make the next step and publish a refereed article. Moreover, at conferences researchers hear what is being done in the field, they find new research ideas, and they meet other researchers who can become part of their network of collaborators.

7. Identifying research topics

The last suggestion is difficult since topics in the field of tourism and hospitality are too numerous to list. Research topic cannot be prescribed; they are driven by one's passion, one's interests, one's abilities and experience. They are guided by what is needed in theory and what is relevant in practice. They depend on collaborators. They may arise out of the literature on the topic or because a researcher keeps his/her eyes, ears and mind open. In the tourism and hospitality setting in Ecuador, much of what is done well and that addresses a societal issue can be a contribution or a solution and therefore may be relevant.

Conclusion

The future of Ecuador's university system is bleak if nothing is done about its lack of research activity. Whereas universities are drivers of change in many societies and play important roles in answering society's burning questions, their role in Ecuador still lies in educating undergraduates for future employment. It is certainly time for a change and nobody would argue otherwise. The burning question is how to bring that change about.

Ecuador's government has set some steep objectives through its most recent initiatives: if faculty members do not get doctorates they risk demotion and job loss and if universities do not conduct research they risk budgetary constraints, loss of status or even closure. These mandates may lead to greater productivity but could also lead to greater resistance. The country is moving from local university autonomy to central government decision making, from tuition-based funding to central government funding and from a teaching emphasis to a teaching-research emphasis in its university system and it is too early to tell if the changes will have the intended effect or if they will become bogged down in inertia, anxiety and resentment.

Where the demands are steep and the mandates are forceful, the centuries-old emphasis on teaching has made change very difficult. Very little research has been conducted, faculty research skills are limited, there are only limited resources, and there is a poor physical research infrastructure. Yet, despite all the limitations and shortcomings, conducting research and getting articles published in refereed publications is possible.

This article mentioned collaboration with others, simple and manageable study designs, a relevant topic that addresses a societal issue, and taking small, incremental steps in the publication process as ways to accomplish that goal. Time to do research will always remain an issue as long as teaching responsibilities are not reduced, and until many more professors have obtained the proper education, doing high quality research will remain a struggle. Yet, with the help of others inside and outside the country and large amounts of enthusiasm research and publication will not be insurmountable obstacles; they will be possible if initial research efforts do not overreach the limitations that presently exist and if the focus remains on the positives.

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