

# Distance learning for professional education in tourism

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*Distance learning, with its time flexibility and ability to fulfil individual preferences, is one of the most appropriate tools for vocational education in tourism. This contribution describes typical functions of distance learning courses, the role of distance learning in tourism at university education level, modified Jafari's education model and some aspects of distance learning in tourism at Hradec Králové University. Examples illustrate the importance of unifying course structures, time and content planning.*

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## 1. Introduction

New technologies (predominantly transportation, and information and communication technologies, ICTs), an increasing amount of free time, tourist motivation in looking for new experiences, economic growth in many countries are among the factors that cause changes in tourism and substantially increase human mobility. Nowadays, tourism is changing rapidly in terms of quality and types of services, methods of management and marketing, the need for cooperation in the public and private sectors and for new sustainable framework of activities (long-term planning, fundraising, education, application of de-marketing, set of sustainable indicators for environmental impacts monitoring). Temporal and spatial differentiation of tourism activities (mass versus individual tourism), globalisation, etc. have their effect, as do ICTs. The latter offer communication and promotional applications (especially multimedia and pseudo-virtual reality), direct-services (e-business – reservation, home-banking; safety services – biometry applications; transport management) and information potential (local based services, GIS <sup>(8)</sup> applications, huge meta-informational services) and are very important as one of the driving forces of change.

New technology driven product development and the international labour market are changing the demands of professional education for tourism. The following basic questions can be asked of educators:

- (a) what should education content be for different professional segments? <sup>(9)</sup>;
- (b) what is the best education technology for different professional segments?

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<sup>(8)</sup> Geographic information system.

<sup>(9)</sup> Segmentation is mainly into business segment, region (cultural and local specific), previous education, student age, personal preferences and opportunity to study.

## **2. Distance learning**

Distance learning transforms the role of the teacher as a direct educator (and also in higher education as a creator of study materials) to the role of tutor as a consultant, study materials creator, organiser and educated user of ICT (developing and design of study materials). Implementation of distance learning can generally use a combination of different technical tools: video, data carriers (CD-ROM, DVD), different applications on the Internet, and exploitation of existing Internet resources. These technical tools can offer the following functions:

- (a) authorisation of students and tutor;
- (b) accurate information on course content, time plan, demands for courses admission and completion (methodology of tests and written and oral exam evaluation, specification of entrance knowledge from other fields, exam questions, illustrations of credit and exam tests);
- (c) study materials, including topics, texts or summaries of lectures, lists of recommended literature, lists of other information resources, overview of information resources on the Internet and their annotation and revision, other study materials (legislation, course outlines, professional publications by tutors, etc.);
- (d) programming, including content and instruction for single tasks, topics and content of course projects;
- (e) communication between student and tutor, personal consultation;
- (f) discussion among students, with tutor moderation, of professional topics, revision of course projects, public consultation;
- (g) overview of individual study, including meeting credit prerequisites, results of credit tests and exams, revision of course projects and training;
- (h) stimulation of students, with presentations of the best students projects;
- (i) introduction and profile of tutor, including photograph, professional profile, interests;
- (j) management of bachelor and diploma projects; topics and their content, overview of tutor, consultation.

The Internet is a natural technical tool for distance learning in tourism and has broad potential for tourism education. Direct use of the Internet in tourism has increased considerably as a medium of service presentation and marketing, marketing research, electronic searching services and of electronic business.

## **3. Distance learning in tourism at university level**

The demands of graduate study can be described on the basis of a graduate profile. The travel and tourism university graduate should be an independent person demonstrating initiative in

his/her field of study. There should be an ability to apply skills immediately, or after short professional training and self-study at any position in an organisation, institution or tourism company, in the European or international labour market. The graduate's professional career is based on:

- (a) personal profile and appropriate behaviour in different situations;
- (b) communication, organisation and project skills;
- (c) knowledge and skills in fields closely connected to solid basis of social and natural sciences;
- (d) information intelligence.

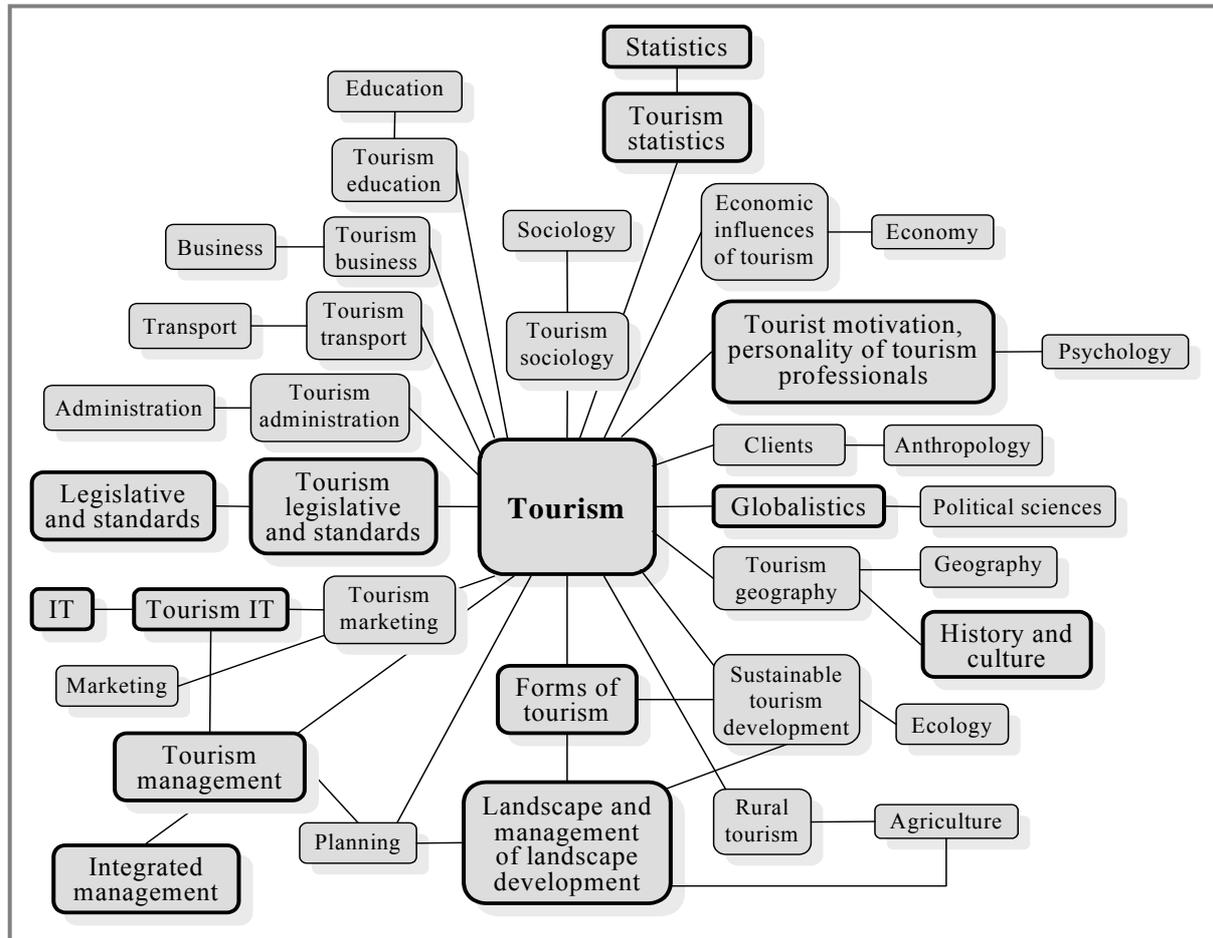
Knowledge and skills are acquired in a comprehensive and open system which is gradually completed in the course of the professional life. The competitive potential of a company increases significantly through employee activities and self-confidence based on knowledge and skills, application of modern methods and approaches, orientation towards the customer and product quality. The university graduate should fully respect the principles of sustainable tourism development and apply these principles in a system of values, behaviour and products. The appropriate knowledge structure is shown in the Figure 1.

Distance learning is a modern form of education for tourism, most suitable for retraining or upgrading knowledge in certain fields. Distance learning in tourism is often proposed as a modular programme and can be built on the following modules:

- (a) economy and accounting, economy and tourism;
- (b) informatics: basic module;
- (c) tourism informatics;
- (d) local cultural: historical geography;
- (e) cultural: historical geography of Europe;
- (f) cultural: historical geography of the world;
- (g) management: basic module;
- (h) tourism marketing;
- (i) international tourism;
- (j) tourism management;
- (k) legislation of tourism;
- (l) guides and delegates in tourism;
- (m) psychology: basic module;
- (n) tourism psychology;
- (o) regional development and creating regional products;
- (p) statistics: basic module;
- (q) tourism statistics;
- (r) tourism technology;

- (s) tourism theory;
- (t) tourism trends and new products;
- (u) sustainable tourism;
- (v) world language 1, world language 2.

Figure 1: Model of tourist education: modified Jafari's scheme



Source: An introduction to TEDQUAL, A methodology for quality in tourism education and training, WTO 1997, ISBN 92-844-0211-5

#### 4. Distance learning in tourism at Hradec Králové University

Distance learning or, more accurately, computer-supported tourism education (distance learning is in the preparatory stage) has been in use at Hradec Králové University for 10 years. Nowadays, it is based on WebCT software and there are more than 30 courses prepared for tourism. The examples described below illustrate some interesting aspects of distance learning courses: standardisation (unification) of their structure (Example 1), and a possible method of course implementation (Example 2).

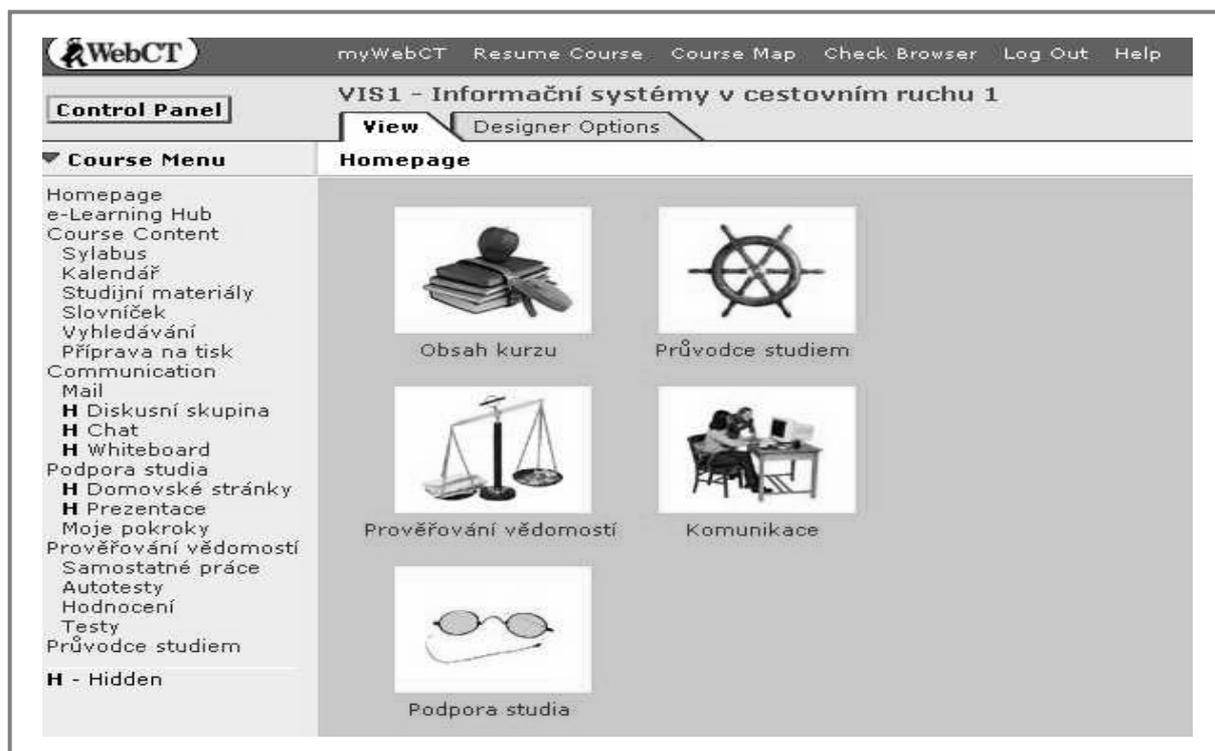
#### 4.1. Unification of course structure

Unification of the course structure aids student orientation throughout the course and effectiveness of study.

A home page provides visible basic course structure (Figure 2):

- (a) course content;
- (b) study guide (detailed description of course targets and how to reach those targets, past tests, test questions);
- (c) evaluation (self-testing, questions to modules, seminar works);
- (d) communication (e-mail, chat, white board);
- (e) study tools (student web pages).

Figure 2: Home page – basic structure of the course



Source: <http://oliva.uhk.cz> (available only in Czech)

The course content is the basic information resource for study (Figure 3). It contains:

- (a) the syllabus;
- (b) study materials (texts of lectures, questions, other lecture materials);
- (c) comprehensive explanatory dictionary with hyperlinks;
- (d) information resources (online textbooks, connection to information server, full-text articles, examples of resources, etc.);

- (e) seminar works (examples of the best student work, methodology of creation and evaluation, themes for small and large student groups);
- (f) photo gallery (as a support for discussions, thinking);
- (g) calendar (what and when);
- (h) a search engine.

Figure 3: Course content



Source: <http://oliva.uhk.cz> (available only in Czech)

#### 4.2. Implementing the course *Informatics for tourism* in the framework of distance learning

Below is a short extract of the content of the module *Informatics for tourism* in the framework of distance learning:

- (a) usage analysis of ICT in tourism and the hotel industry: the analysis is based on projects using ICT, practical training on a wide spectrum of products from all fields of the tourism and hotel industry, with the accent on information and reservation systems for travel agencies, tourism information centres and among different tourism subjects and target customers;
- (b) coordinated tourism information system and standards for Internet pages;

- (c) analysis of important products (two products as minimum for every type of business in tourism and hospitality);
- (d) case studies of ICT use by different subjects;
- (e) assessment of individual problems in trainee knowledge profiles.

*Box 1: Module 'Informatics for tourism' (web-based)*

**Time plan**

Total length of education: five months.

**1st month**

Overview of subject content, entrance demands, demands on credits, exam questions, time plan.

Study of recommended literature, mainly textbooks, list here.

Overview of Internet resources, list here.

Consulting of individual problems of knowledge of IT of students – table with overview of demands, creating individual plan to eliminate individual problems getting familiar with topics of semester projects (list), choice of two topics, consulting their working up with tutor.

**2nd month**

Elaboration of course projects with support of the Internet resources, consultation with tutor.

Installation of software, downloaded from www pages here.

Elaboration of exercise 1–5, content here.

Getting familiar with resources on www pages according to list.

Discussing content of literature recommended – discussion group, individual consultation.

*Source: distance learning project, designed by Zelenka, Jozef.*

## 5. Conclusion

Tourism can make use of distance learning, which can satisfy different student and professional groups. The quality of distance learning is based mostly on online applications created by professionals and can be considerably improved through online textbooks, unified course structure, detailed study time plan, different communication tools, student motivation and an information server. It is advisable to combine distance learning with face-to-face consultations and seminars to ensure personal and language skill development.

## References

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