Title: Tourism Industry Career Prospects and the Business Environment: Evidence from Canada and Macau

Abstract

Previous researchers have undertaken detailed examinations of the factors impacting on aspirant perceptions of tourism and hospitality careers. This paper moves beyond personal and internal dimensions to explore business conditions in the cities where hospitality and tourism students are studying or where recent graduates are making their careers. By examining the prevalent business environments in cities in both North America (Calgary) and in Asia (Macau), the researchers show how such settings influence the perceptions of hospitality and tourism aspirants towards their industry futures, including peer influence.

Keywords:

business environment, careers; hospitality; gaming; employment; labour market

INTRODUCTION

To attract young talent, businesses generally and the tourism and hospitality sector in particular recruit from nearby higher education institutions and amongst recent graduates. The factors that shape the effectiveness of such approaches include prevailing attitudes towards the careers outlook (Chang & Tse, 2012). Though many researchers have explored student attitudes to industry careers, their focus has been on more individual issues than on considerations that reflect the wider business environment (Brown, Thomas, & Bosselman, 2015). Most relevant empirical work has been focused at country or institution-specific level. The major challenges identified by researchers who have ranged more widely to explore education/industry synergies have included: graduate attrition rates, low levels of graduate employment and fierce competition from other professions to attract and retain the best and brightest graduates. The current researchers suggest that the significance of tourism and hospitality within the wider business environment impacts career related attitudes. The impacts include perceptions amongst those studying more generic business programmes (e.g., in finance, human resources or marketing), as well as those who are embarking on tourism and hospitality careers.

In considering how the perception and reality of wider business conditions shape attitudes to tourism and hospitality careers, this study examines the perspectives of those aspiring to tourism and hospitality careers in two contrasting settings - Calgary, in Alberta, Canada and Macau, SAR in China. Alberta is a resource-based province with a focus on extractive industries, particularly oil and gas (Visit Calgary, 2016). Tourism graduates who are seeking careers in Alberta enter a world in which tourism and hospitality comprise a small part of the overall economy. As a tourism services driven economy, Macau is a contrasting example with a massive casino and gaming sector dominating both employment and consumption (Li, 2017). The business environments in the two settings differ substantially.

This study will contribute to knowledge by examining how the prevailing business environment in their place of study shapes the career aspirations of students and recent graduates and the influence of their peers. Kusluvan & Kusluvan (2000) previously observed that tourism and hospitality student career perceptions are influenced by the nature of the relevant industries and encouraged researchers to conduct more comparative studies on undergraduate tourism student career attitudes in different regions or countries. This present paper addresses the gap and contributes to recent research about how individuals make career related decisions, their subsequent career satisfaction and what they intend to do in future (Zopiatis, Theocharous, & Constanti, 2016). By giving due consideration to the context of business and employment the researchers will contribute to practice by helping those who are responsible for staff recruitment and promotion to understand the relationship between the attitudes of industry aspirants and the prevailing tourism and business environments.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Tourism and hospitality career prospects

One domain of the career related literature has focused on how personal and internal factors affect student perceptions of and attitudes towards tourism and hospitality (Aksu & Köksal, 2005; Richardson, 2008). Such investigations have been helpful because an understanding of student perceptions and attitudes towards tourism and hospitality jobs may inform their industry prospects after graduation (Kusluvan & Kusluvan, 2000). Previous related studies have investigated the effects of work values on student career expectations, goals and choices (Chen & Choi, 2008; Wong & Liu, 2010). Other researchers have focused on how demographics such as gender, work experience, year of study, and the influence of friends and/or family may affect career intentions and commitment and student perceptions of and attitudes towards tourism and hospitality (Chuang & Dellmann-Jenkins, 2010; O'Leary & Deegan, 2005; Roney & Öztin, 2007; Wan & Kong, 2011; Wong & Liu, 2010).

A study by Teng (2008) investigated the relationship between student personality traits and career aspirations and concluded that an extrovert personality is a significant predictor of attitudes towards and aspirations towards hospitality jobs. Industry-person congruency was also found to be a key attitudinal factor mediating the effect of extroversion on hospitality employment aspirations. Jiang and Tribe (2009) used five sub-categories to explain factors influencing student concerns about longer-term tourism industry careers. These were: (a) personal reasons, (b) nature of tourism jobs, (c) human factors, (d) educational factors, and (e) management factors. Hsu (2013) used self-determination theory to explore work motivation, job burnout, and employment aspirations amongst hospitality and tourism students. Robinson, Ruhanen, and Breakey (2016) investigated the influence of internships on the career aspirations of tourism and hospitality students. Many respondents had switched their pursuit from hospitality towards developing a tourism career, but not the reverse.

The various studies of hospitality and tourism career prospects have been overwhelmingly focused on specific institutions or countries. A couple of exceptions include Airey's comparative analysis of career attitudes in the UK and Greece (Airey & Fontistis, 1997). Another study by King, McKercher and Waryszak (2003) compared hospitality & tourism graduates in Australia & Hong Kong. These two studies have shown the prospective insights from comparative studies examining the connection between hospitality and tourism education and graduate career prospects in different settings. In forming a realistic impression of tourism and hospitality employment opportunities, it is important to have a true picture or the numbers in work. A recent paper by Koens and Wood (2017) has provided a preliminary quantification by country and territory by mining a wide range of official statistics. They concluded that hospitality accounts for 4.6% of employment in Asia and 6.9% in North America.

The influence of business environment

The previously mentioned line of research explored the influence of student personal characteristics, attitudes, and personalities towards tourism and hospitality careers. A second and to date relatively understudied line of research concerns how the prevalent business environment

shapes career aspirations. Previous researchers have explored what influences the business environment in tourism destinations and how the business environment in turn impacts on competitiveness, entrepreneurism and social sustainability. The present study extends this by investigating the current labour force and of aspirants to future employment.

For example, Lethbridge and Hong (2000) examined the business environment in Hong Kong and covered issues such as the economy, the legal and political environment, social structure, business culture, infrastructure, competitive advantage and market potential as well as the labour force. In a related Macau study, Wan and Kong (2008) examined entrepreneur perceptions of the business environment. The authors found that entrepreneurs of small tourism ventures (STVs) were constrained by shortages of human resources.

In her study with key community leaders in Macao, Wan (2012) investigated the social, economic and environmental consequences of casino gaming since the liberalization of licenses in 2002. Various pressing issues were identified including the changing values of teenagers, the high student drop-out rate, problem gambling and crime and changing family relationships. Her study presented the impact of casinos on the Macau community with implications for policy and governance.

Schoar and Zuo (2017) investigated how the prevalent economic conditions when managers first enter the labor market could have long-term effects on their career paths and management styles. They found that managers became chief executive officers (CEOs) more quickly when they began their careers during recessions, and displayed more conservative management styles, such as making lower investments in research and development, and capital expenditures, as well as a higher incidence of leveraging and cost cutting. The fact that these managers had little option but to start in smaller or private firms during recessionary labor market conditions at that time had an influence on their subsequent career development.

Resource versus service dominant business environments

To explore the impact of wider business conditions on attitudes to tourism and hospitality careers, the present study examines the perspectives of aspirants in two contrasting business environments - Calgary, in Alberta, Canada and Macau, SAR in China. Alberta is a resource-based province with a focus on extractive industries, particularly oil and gas. Located in the Province of Alberta, the city of Calgary is acknowledged as Canada's oil and gas industry capital and accounts for the country's second largest number of corporate head offices, indicative of corporate power. It was ranked in the top five world's most livable cities by the Economist Intelligence Unit in 2012, and was named by MoneySense (in 2013) as Best Place to Live in Canada (Tourism Calgary, 2013). Though oil and gas dominate the economy, Calgary's tourism and hospitality sector is substantial. The city accounted for one-quarter of all person-nights spent in the province in 2014 and for most of the overnight visitors (Travel Alberta, 2017). In 2015, Calgary International Airport handled over 15 million passengers, visitor arrivals exceeded 8 million and visitor spending amounted of CAN$1.7 billion (Visit Calgary, 2016). Though Calgary receives substantial corporate travel, it also has a leisure tourism profile. It hosted the 1988 Winter Olympics and is home to the Calgary Stampede, an annual rodeo, exhibition, and festival. It is a gateway to notable nature-based destinations such as Banff and Lake Louise, and

appeals because of its proximity to United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) World Heritage sites (Tourism Calgary, 2014).

In contrast to Calgary's resource-extraction focus, Macau's economy is service-dominated and enjoyed a decade-long economic surge after liberalization of the gaming industry in 2002. Macau's gaming revenues first surpassed those of Las Vegas in 2006, and the city is now the world's largest single gaming destination with revenues amounting to MOP58.86 billion in 2014. Macau has also positioned itself as a leading global tourism destination. In 2005, the World Heritage Committee inscribed Macau's Historic Centre on the UNESCO World Heritage Site listing. The twin phenomena of gaming and tourism have prompted a massive increase in visitation, especially from mainland China (Li, 2017).

Labour markets

Though employment has softened in recent years due to lower oil and gas prices, Calgary's labor market is still dominated by resources. When unemployment rose to 7.2% in the first quarter of 2016, losses were concentrated in the natural resources sector (Calgary Herald, 2016). Nevertheless, the tourism and hospitality industries employ approximately 127,000 full-time equivalent jobs, including in hotels, resorts, RV campgrounds, retail and transportation services (Alberta Canada, 2016). Calgary's hotel room supply increased its 20 per cent through the addition of 2,400 hotel rooms in 2015. As outlined in Alberta's Tourism Framework, the provincial goal is to increase tourism revenues to $10.3 billion by 2020. Tourism is becoming a model for economic diversification across the province (Visit Calgary, 2016).

The contrasting employment market in Macau is characterised by labor shortages. The unemployment rate was a mere 1.9% in 2016, up by a modest 0.1 percent over 2015. Median monthly earnings in 2016 for those employed in hotels, restaurants and similar activities were MOP14, 440, up by 4.1% year-on-year (Macau SAR Government, 2016). According to the Government employment survey and reflective of almost full employment, Macau's unemployment rate has been consistently below 2% since 2012, due to the rapid decade-long development of hospitality and gaming (Macau SAR Government, 2016). Macau's hospitality and gaming employers have struggled to recruit sufficient skilled workers and professionals in the face of high employment rates (Chiu, 2011).

Tourism and hospitality education provision

The University of Calgary is Calgary's largest higher education institution. The university's Haskayne School of Business offers a Tourism Management program as a concentration within the Bachelor of Commerce degree alongside other specializations such as accounting, finance, and marketing. At the University of Macau (UMAC) the hospitality and gaming management program is located within the Faculty of Business Administration. It sits alongside departments that offer accounting, information management, finance, business economics, management and marketing, though without separate or independent departmental designation.

METHODOLOGY

Data collection

Qualitative data were collected from 97 respondents consisting of students and recent graduates at the two universities. A member of the research team was responsible for recruiting alumni of the University of Calgary's tourism management (TM) program and obtained 46 responses via snowball sampling. The initial interviewees were asked to provide contact information for up to five graduates whom they felt would be willing to share their experiences. Another member of the research team was responsible for recruiting students enrolled on the University of Macau's hospitality and gaming management (HGM) program and proceeded to obtain 51 responses using convenience sampling.

The researchers posed questions to each of the two respondent groupings under four section headings. Participants were asked to: a) discuss why they selected their program instead of alternatives offered within the business school, b) describe the comments expressed by peers across other business programs about their choice of specialization; c) explain how they reacted to such responses; and d) express their subsequent feelings. Respondents were also asked for general demographic information (e.g. age, gender, and nationality). The researchers prepared a Chinese translation of the questionnaire for the Macau sample to complement the original English language version.

When adopting a qualitative approach, there are benefits and drawbacks to questioning interviewees directly or indirectly. For example, specific interviewer requests such as "how does the business environment in your city affect your career choice and attitude", are directly geared to the research question. However, the weakness of this approach is the prevalence of considerable social desirability bias in the research process (Hollander, 2004). For example, participants may highlight certain areas (e.g., echoing prevailing views from current events or the media without truly understanding the context) in order to seem more knowledgeable about the macro-economic environment during the interviews. Here, social desirability could be particularly relevant as participants are, nevertheless, representing their institutions and may not want to be seen as less competent in front of the researchers. Instead, by asking indirectly and by focusing questions on the interviewees themselves (i.e., why they selected their program instead of alternatives offered within the business school; comments expressed by peers across other business programs about their choice of specialization; how they reacted to such responses, and their subsequent feelings), they are better able to focus on their own experiences, rather than potentially reciting views from sources they may have heard from, in order to please the researcher.

Data analysis

A qualitative interpretive approach was used to capture any meanings behind the narratives. This approach seeks to make sense of interviewees' individual behaviours, and provides researchers with the flexibility to identify and describe interviewees' perceptions (Burrai, Font, & Cochrane, 2015). Additionally, this approach allows interviewees to contextualize their perceptions so that they can explain how and why they reacted in a certain

way. Though such means, this study seeks to extract in detail the undertones within interviewees' narratives in order to provide a more in-depth understanding of the connotations derived from the different business environments.

The researchers adopted an inductive approach to identify meanings and drew upon participants' written responses and transcriptions. This analysis technique extracts depth and quality from the data, rather than pursuing results that can be generalized to the broader population. A manual coding approach was used to identify keywords and short phrases that represented units of meaning. This step was undertaken prior to interpretation and depends on similarities between the various items (Miles & Huberman, 1994). It was found that some codes covered overlapping themes. One Macau respondent indicated, for example, that: "Some people don't think this specialization needs to exist because in their eyes, they only think of dealer-type jobs which only needs training before employment." The example may reflect preconceptions about the legitimacy of education, and challenges the relevance of tourism and/or gaming and hospitality management education. It also alludes to prospective career and job-related biases towards particular professions. In the present case, the vibrancy of Macau's business environment, concerns about the adequacy of professional standards and awareness of the merits of strengthening the provision of trained staff confirmed the need for HGM education.

Some written responses to the Macau survey were provided in Chinese. To strengthen the rigour of the data analysis process and to ensure the transcripts stayed close to the data, the researchers retained the literal translation for some Chinese phrases (Tung et al., 2017). For example, one participant observed that: "Like the Chinese saying, '*swords around me, none are sharp*.'" In such cases, italics are used to denote direct translations from Chinese. The researchers opted for raw translations, rather than transformations that might compromise the intended meanings. Trustworthiness of the findings is reached through the researchers' observations and discussions of the data.

RESULTS

The business environment affected participants' justification of their choice of TM or HGM studies across three key domains.

"Home-birds" versus "wanderers"

This domain reflects prevailing attitudes, behaviours and values through the labelling of respondents as "TM" or "HGM" (Tung & King, 2016). The two cohorts were exposed to strikingly different attitudes. Macau students experienced considerably more positive views in support of their chosen study domain than their Canadian counterparts. There is a widespread perception that Macau HGM students are "smart" because it is tough to enter the program. Other individuals suggested that HGM "fits (the student) because he/she likes to smile" and will help students "improve their communication skills" because they will "become more active and talkative." More importantly, Macau students were viewed as "cool" for studying an area in "detail that (others) didn't know" and were "praised" for their choice as they must have wanted to "stay in Macau for work after they graduate."

The Canadian TM graduates expressed very different responses. They encountered passively aggressive condescension from others who commonly assumed that they must have a "love of travel." Respondents described biases that were ascribed to them such as "you must value your free time" and "you must love learning about new cultures and history and meeting new people". Preconceptions of their travel patterns were also evident as follows: "you must have been everywhere" and you must "travel a lot." Yet, participants experienced a lurking undertone of condescension. Since others perceived that the degree is "all fun" and they were not doing "real work" (such as accounting), they felt they were not being "taken seriously". There is an apparent contradiction between the disdain for Canadian TM graduates because of their perceived love of travel, and Macau HGM students who were praised for staying home. The following comment captures the apparent inconsistency. When Macau HGM students were asked about the reactions of friends who were undertaking other business majors towards their program choice, they received the comment: "You are so brave to choose a major which can only work in a few countries." The first connotation of this quote is positive, namely acknowledgment of the student's "brave" decision "to choose" the HGM major. The second part: "can only work in a few countries," might be construed as a negative qualification of the positive attribution. Taken together, the quote reflects the preconceptions of the HGM specialization as being applicable only to Macau, with consequential limitations on career mobility. The fact that Macau is the only location within greater China where casino gambling is legal may have shaped this perception about limited opportunities beyond the local, albeit in an environment where casino developments are spreading fast across the Asia-Pacific region.

The legitimacy of tourism education: "Out of place" versus "great fit"

Students in Macau and Canada experienced remarkably different biases towards the legitimacy of HGM and TM as fields of study. While HGM students were often applauded for pursuing an "essential" field of study in the Macau context, their peers pressurised Canadian participants to justify their very existence as tourism students. TM graduates were sometimes "challenged" by other students because they "understood other ones (specializations) like marketing, but they didn't get tourism." Many students had a "hard time explaining" when asked "why they needed a degree to work in tourism." They also confronted preconceptions that "all you needed was work experience", questioning what they "really learn in tourism." and "do you really learn anything?" In contrast, HGM students indicated feeling great because "it seems the university is also expanding and improving this major." The feedback from others indicated that it's a "relatively fitting and useful specialization. It's applicable and interesting." Moreover, HGM students felt "special" and explained that others are "jealous of me because I often get to visit different hotels and even Disneyland." HGM students further commented that other students are "very envious of my major and say they regret not choosing it." Another student recommended others to "change their major to my major." Overall, HGM students were exposed to positive perceptions, such as the following: "I feel great because this major is easier compared to finance and accounting, but it is more interesting so I don't feel bored. This major is related to, and is the leading industry in Macau."

The primacy of Macau's hospitality and gaming sector also prompted same paradoxical perceptions. On the one hand, the favourable business environment in Macau generated positive

views that favour HGM education. However, HGM students encountered bias towards the legitimacy of HGM as a field of study, due to perceptions about its broader societal and economic impacts. One HGM student recounted that: "My friend once said HGM is a problem for Macau because gaming development has grown too big. It has lots of social impact. They feel taking HGM will contribute to the growth of this negative social atmosphere." Another participant also confronted preconceptions about the "casinos" dimension of HGM and was told that it is "not good". Nevertheless, the same participant also acknowledged that: "People do not know what this specialization is about. They have misunderstood our studies." A previous study of Macau student attitudes to careers in the casino sector concluded that respondents were positive about the available gaming jobs because they were perceived as "challenging" and "interesting" with new things to learn and opportunities to meet new people (Wan & Kong 2011). This is indicative of a degree of ambiguity, but with a leaning towards the positive.

Along with the prevalence of positive views, some Macau students faced skepticism about the necessity of pursuing HGM for future employment. For example, one HGM student indicated that: "Some people don't think this specialization needs to exist because in their eyes, they only think of dealer-type jobs which only needs training before employment." The following comments by another student exemplify such perceptions; "This major has very little academic content so must be very easy"; and "They said it seems not useful and everyone can do it. They are not interested. That's why they have no idea why I chose this major."

Both cohorts also experienced a questioning of the overall legitimacy of TM and HGM education. "They think that after taking HGM, I will do dealer-type jobs in the future which do not require higher education." Furthermore, participants indicated that: "People do not know what this specialization is about. They have misunderstood our studies and they think that we must work in casinos and it is not good. They think that hospitality does not need to be studied, experiences are more important." One student began to question his own abilities after hearing his friend's biases about the legitimacy of HGM education. The student explained that: "Like the Chinese saying, '*swords around me, none are sharp.*'" He concluded that: "This major feels like I learn everything, but nothing in-depth."

Tourism as a professional field: "Temporary occupation" versus "career-track"

Relative to their Canadian counterparts, Macau HGM students received mixed positive and negative views towards their anticipated careers. There were fewer favorable responses towards the choices of Canadian graduates. TM graduates were questioned about their prospects for compensation, career progression, and opportunities for a professional designation. They were often asked, "how much would you make", and were informed that, "tourism grads don't make that much." Their career advancement prospects also contrasted with the paths that were attributed to other specializations. One participant noted that: "My friend in accounting ... (would) get his CA (Chartered Accountant designation), and go back to industry … Then he would either move up the ladder to become a controller or CFO (chief financial officer), or become a partner (at an accounting firm). I guess that shows he was confident … I felt like I didn't have such a neatly laid out route … or I didn't have such a clear idea when compared to him or other friends." TM graduates were also confronted by the view that they must have made a temporary choice of occupation. One TM graduate recalled that: "She (another student) asked

me where I would end up five years later … She thought I was going to end up doing a five-year gig and that I had no long-term plans because you 'can't just work at hotels forever even if you love to travel.'

Macau students received more positive views about graduation prospects than their Canadian counterparts. Other students commented that you "don't have to worry about finding a job in the future." Further feedback also supported the view of HGM as a professional career-track, with students taking "courses or programs in Switzerland and Singapore … keep learning … become more and more professional in the future." Such positive comments were very encouraging for many students and prompted the conclusion that: "This specialization provides me with many future career options, such as events and hotel management." In the case of Macau, career-related views were closely associated with the city's economic prospects, reinforced by Macau's hospitality and tourism industry outlook. For example, confidence about Macau's continued development generated positive views for HGM students. As one student noted: "They are very optimistic about my future because Macau is developing this industry so they feel that I will not be unemployed." Students however experienced some biased perceptions towards their level of professionalism in the face of a softening Macau economy: "(My friends) pointed out my graduation is equal to unemployment. It's like (I have) no special skills. Future employment targets are very unclear … I was speechless to respond. When I started, I responded by saying I am riding Macau's development. But now the tourism and gaming sectors are weakening." Such comments are indicative of some volatility in attitudes to industry prospects.

Despite the overall prevalence of positives, Macau students faced negative preconceptions about the career potential of HGM. One student indicated that, "they say I'm short-sighted" and afterwards acknowledged that, "I don't have a clear path about my career (so I) just let them say (it)." Others questioned whether HGM leads to professional careers, since they asked, "if I really wanted to work at a casino and become a dealer, then why didn't I just find a job without studying?" Another student was asked whether "I am going to be a dealer in the future." The requirement that dealers should be Macau permanent residents benefit careers for locals, since it reduces competition across the applicant pool. The previous suggestion, however, suggests that less competition does not necessarily generate positive perceptions.

DISCUSSION AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

In this study the authors have compared tourism and hospitality student career aspirations in two settings. Calgary represents a developed country economy which is dependent on resources rather than tourism dependent. Macau, on the other hand, exemplifies a services dominant economy which has grand ambitions – to become a "world's tourism and leisure centre". The researchers concluded that in the tourism and services dependent Macau context students receive ample positive reinforcement from their peers. Following a recent and short lived business downturn, the tourism outlook is perceived positively by both students and their peers and this generates optimism about the future. Students also receive encouragement from their peers which reinforces their choice of study area and career. However, there was prevailing skepticism about future prospects in the case of Calgary TM respondents, where the chosen program of study has rather imprecise career outcomes and where tourism plays a marginal role within the wider employment market.

With its stronger focus on the wider industry and business environments, the present study has extended King, McKercher and Waryszak's (2003) previous conclusions - that tourism and hospitality graduates view generic business and general education subjects as more valuable for their careers than specialist tourism subjects. Though the earlier study also benefited from adopting a comparative approach, it had a narrower focus on alumni attitudes to programme content. The current researchers have reached very different conclusions from their predecessors by identifying contrasting attitudes between respondents across two business environments. The contrasts were not predictable. The conclusion of a previous New Zealand study, for example, concluded that students at different institutions exhibit rather uniform views about tourism and hospitality industry prospects (Bamford 2012).

The in-depth comparison of two business settings where tourism and hospitality education programmes are preparing graduates for different economic circumstances is a novel contribution to knowledge. This study has a scholarly contribution by showing that business conditions and structure influence confidence amongst students, graduates and peers about tourism and hospitality career prospects. There are also implications for practice. The finding that loosely formulated peer attitudes to prevailing business conditions influence career choices suggests that faculty members and their students should be informed and realistic about tourism and hospitality career prospects. The insight into the role of academic peers extends the substantial influence on hospitality and tourism career choices that was attributed to parents in research that was conducted in China (Wong & Liu, 2010). Another study by Chuang and Jenkins (2010) identified the role of friends and relatives in student decisions about selecting an academic majors. The present paper has extended this finding by adding a peer dimension.

Tourism and hospitality degree programme leaders across the globe who appreciate the role of tourism within the local and global settings should extend their tourism and hospitality professional linkages as a contribution to developing human capital across the sector. Based on the Calgary and Macau examples, city destinations may also strengthen the career prospects of local graduates by developing reciprocal industry/education networks both within tourism and hospitality and into the wider business community. The merit of such links is evident in a tight job market such as Macau where employers are competing for a limited graduate pool, but is also applicable in Calgary where the marginalisation of tourism vis-a-vis leading economic sectors may undermine its appeal for tourism and hospitality graduates. Career related perceptions and image will be critical success factors where other industries are competing vigorously to attract and retain the best talent (Baum, 2006).

Notwithstanding ethical concerns about the prevalence of gambling in the city, the current empirical findings and literature review show a generally positive image towards Macau's tourism sector. A positive impact of the scale of magnitude is exemplified by a recent announcement from one of Macau's "big six" casino operators (MGM) about the creation of 6,000 new hospitality jobs (GGR, 2016). In comparison, the fragmented Calgary tourism "industry" with its many small enterprises cannot compete with the corporate pull of the oil and gas conglomerates. The low awareness and profile is unfortunate in light of a Canadian Tourism Human Resource Council forecast that over 228,000 jobs will be unfilled in the Canadian tourism sector by 2030, due to the absence of qualified workers (Visit Calgary, 2016). This is

one of four competitive challenges that have been identified for Canada. For Calgary, the absence of a qualified workforce could impede service levels and limit growth, thereby generating negative tourist experiences and impacting destination sustainability and competitiveness (Ritchie and Crouch, 2003).

While tourism and hospitality education was experiencing no or slow growth in Europe and North America over the past decade, it has been booming across much of Asia. The optimism that Macau respondents have expressed about career prospects may derive from more positive regional economic conditions and growth prospects – a kind of "virtuous cycle" which affects both business and education. However, the divergent views of Macau and Calgary respondents may also reflect two objective assessments of graduate prospects. This raises the question of whether educational institutions in settings such as Calgary should articulate clearer graduate outcomes aligned to both local and global industry opportunities. Programme leaders should certainly monitor and preferably shape prevailing industry structures and conditions and the associated prospects for graduates. Such outcomes may also consider cultural dimensions. In Macau the student cohort is predominantly Chinese and the local industry environment which awaits them on graduation is international (eg the larger casino and gaming ventures) though with strong Chinese characteristics. In Calgary students are predominantly English speaking and Canadian. The industry style is North American. The present study has had a limited opportunity to consider the impact of cultural considerations in the two settings, including linguistic. This may be a worthwhile task for future researchers.

Limitations and future research

Economic conditions in Macau and Calgary are dynamic and constant growth should not be assumed. Macau's economy fell back in 2014 and 2015, and has only recently resumed its growth trajectory (from late 2016 into 2017) (Macau SAR Government, 2016). Future researchers may examine whether Macau students remain optimistic about their prospects, and receive continuing peer encouragement when the economy is faltering. Meanwhile Calgary researchers could investigate whether a weakening of the resources sector produces any benefits for tourism enterprises and consequential perceptions about graduate prospects. Viewed positively, a diminution of generic corporate opportunities may prompt more graduates to embark on smaller scale tourism entrepreneurship and contribute to innovation and creativity.

A number of limitations of this paper should be acknowledged. Firstly, the use of both interviews and questionnaires is an obvious study limitation. Graduate respondents had greater opportunities to articulate their experiences through the data collection process. As alumni with the benefit of elapsed time since their graduation from the program they demonstrated a willingness to provide a clear articulation of their views. By contrast and noting that one of the researcher team is currently an instructor at that institution, the questionnaire format allowed existing students to share their thoughts confidentially and anonymously. Nevertheless, it would have been more consistent if all participants had been interviewed. Secondly, the modest quantity of largely qualitative data constrained the researchers' capacity to generalise the findings beyond the two immediate settings. The nature of the two respondent cohorts, rather than the respective economic settings, may have produced different conclusions. It is, for example, unclear whether the imprecise career paths identified by the Calgary programme relative to its Macau counterpart has prompted divergent peer attitudes. Future researchers could

potentially test for any cohort based differences by gathering data from a wider respondent pool across multiple sites. Noting the contrasting institutional claims about career outcomes, this paper has provided some insights about the merits of transparency. The provision of comprehensive listings of graduate employment destinations by the two institutions might offer insights into future prospects. The authors also acknowledge the need to match such lists with the intended career outcomes of respective university programmes. Finally, it is acknowledged that the paper provides no detail about career planning. Since the focus has been on the business environment, rather than on respondent psychologies, it is also acknowledged that the paper does not address the issue of aspirant personality traits.

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