MSC DEGREE ON MANAGEMENT OF SUSTAINABLE AND ECOLOGICAL TOURISM: FIRST YEAR OF THE ACADEMIC PROGRAMME

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Abstract

The Master on Management of Sustainable and Ecological Tourism, METS, has been designed as a specialized postgraduate degree, whose aim is to create future graduates able to carry out a comprehensive ecotourism management. It is an official Master Programme, adapted to European Higher Education Area. Now, the first edition of METS (the ANECA accredited master programme) has started. In September 2016, and with the participation of students from different parts of the world, that contributes to the internationalization of the programme, METS started, with the aim to train professionals in the field of sustainable tourism to cover an educational space in a growing sector that every day has more adepts and requires specialized professionals. During this academic year, the contents of METS have been developed by specialized teachers from UPM (Forestry, Agronomic and Sports and Physical Activity Sciences) in three specialties of the sustainable and ecological tourism: Sportive Tourism, Rural Tourism and Tourism in Nature; so as subjects in the frame of Marketing, Quality and Social Responsibility. Through online tutorials, learning modules, videos, online debates, etc., students have received the necessary material to be properly trained and able to access to the labour market with extensive knowledge and guarantees of success. This article wants to show how the first year of the Master’s degree has been developed, the problematic of undertaking a program in this category and the reception it has had from teachers and students, as well as from those companies related to sustainability (most of them, members of FRIENDS OF THE MASTERS CLUB), which have been involved to offer students internships, the scope of them and future prospect.

Keywords: Tourism, learning, sustainable, Master, course, ecology, enterprise.

1 INTRODUCTION

Master’s Degree on Management of Ecological and Sustainable Tourism (METS) aims to cover the growing demand of professionals specialized in the management of ecological tourism. The degree qualifies to perform multiple activities related to ecotourism, through the adoption of tourism practices based on sustainable development and conservation of the natural environment. METS joins sustainability, ecology and tourism, bringing together people from different disciplines both from academia and the business world, thus completing the theoretical dimension with practicalities. The student will be confronted with a wide spectrum of knowledge that transcends the boundaries between disciplines, highlighting the relationship between ecological educational, political, social, economic and environmental aspects.

The students are gaining the capacity of decision-making in the management of new ecotourism practices, since they imply a boost to the economy, especially in developing countries.

This Master's Degree aims to cover the growing demand of professionals specialized in ecological tourism. In the last decades, together with the growing number of tourists, the demand for a higher
quality of the final product and the need for it, have been increasingly related to the conservation of the environment in a respectful and sustainable way.

1.1 Main objectives

- To provide the necessary tools and knowledge to develop an adequate management of tourism activity from the point of view of environmental ethics and social responsibility.
- To add the necessary capacities to be able to develop the concepts of sustainability, environmental management and the different types of ecological tourism products with the best training and experts in the field.
- To offer quality training in each of the disciplines.
- To develop the skills of students, professionals and entrepreneurs who already own a tourism company.

1.2 Degree structure

The modules of the program constitute the units of knowledge of the different orientations of the title:

- Sustainable and Ecological Tourism Management and Projects
- Ecological and Sustainable Tourism Resources
- Nature tourism
- Rural tourism
- Sports tourism
- Marketing, certification and social responsibility

The last two modules correspond to the internships and the Master Thesis. The Master’s Degree is in the modality of distance-learning, for which materials have been developed in electronic format, virtual teaching platform, videos, tutorials, etc., and the students must take 60 ECTS (European Credit Transfer System).

The Master’s structure has been developed as follows:

- Module I
  Principles of Ecological and Sustainable Tourism, comprises the following Compulsory Subjects:
    - Conceptualization and importance of ecological and sustainable tourism.
    - Economic resources and financial management of funds.
    - Sustainable construction and energy efficiency.
    - Formulation and evaluation of tourism projects.
    - Cultural heritage.
    - Ecotourism products.

- Modules II and III
  Optional subjects: Rural tourism, Sports tourism, Nature tourism, and Marketing, quality and social responsibility. The student can choose optional subjects for a number of up to 12 ECTs in total. If the student prefers, he can substitute these options totally or partially for business practices.
    - Sports activities - tourist in nature. Active or adventure tourism.
    - Planning and project management of Agro tourism - Rural Tourism
    - Competences for the management of tourism or rural-local projects
    - Nature Observation Tourism.
    - Tourism in Protected Natural Areas.
    - G.I.S. Design of routes and cartographic elaboration.
Marketing of ecological and sustainable tourism destinations
Quality, Certification and Environmental Management. Social responsibility and good environmental practices.

- Module IV
  Internship Companies. Compulsory activity. 6 ECTs.
- Module V
  Master Thesis. Compulsory activity. 12 ECTs that will reflect the skills and knowledge acquired by the student.

2 ACADEMIC SCHEDULE
The pre-registration period in the Master's Degree began in February 2016 and ended in July 2016. The following table shows the significant dates of METS, in terms of enrollment, exams and holiday periods.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>September 7-18, 2016</td>
<td>First semester enrollment period</td>
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<tr>
<td>September 19, 2016</td>
<td>Beginning of first semester classes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 4, 2016</td>
<td>San Francisco de Asís</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 20, 2016 to January 7, 2017</td>
<td>Christmas holidays</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 30 to February 3, 2017</td>
<td>First semester exam period</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 30 to February 3, 2017</td>
<td>Second semester enrollment period</td>
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<tr>
<td>February 6, 2017</td>
<td>Beginning of second semester classes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 8-16, 2017</td>
<td>Easter holidays</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 9, 2017</td>
<td>End of second semester classes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 12-16, 2017</td>
<td>Second semester exam period</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 29 to July 14, 2017</td>
<td>Extraordinary exam period</td>
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</tbody>
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3 RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS
In general terms, first year of the Master’s Degree on Management of Sustainable and Ecological Tourism is developing successfully, following the pre-established plan and without apparent incidents. As a resume of this academic course, we can provide next data and conclusions.

3.1 Number of students and nationality
First year of the Masters was developed thanks to the enrolment of fifteen students worldwide. Spain, Germany, Holland, Mexico, Argentina and China are the countries represented in METS, conferring the Master’s Degree international character. These students have worked individually and between them through a virtual learning platform (Moodle) where theoretical modules, exercises, seminars and exams were taught.

3.2 Dissemination platforms
In order to enrol students in the Master’s Degree, the management team, so as the Technical University of Madrid, used different ways, based on internet media: the webpage of Technical University of Madrid (UPM), joint to social networks of UPM. METS management team engaged the services of a Master’s Degree promotion platform called Emagister that works in the dissemination of different courses at international level.

Besides, social networks (Facebook and Twitter) of METS were created, so as a blog (https://metsecturismo.com/) where the news of the METS or general news of the sector of the ecological and sustainable tourism are biweekly published.
3.3 Creation of friends of the masters club

FRIENDS OF MASTERS brings together about ten entities, organizations and companies, whose activity is directly related to ecotourism and sustainable tourism. This club was created in order to create synergies between university and enterprises. The objectives of this group are:

- Involve expert organizations.
- Establish a network of mutual collaboration between members of Friends of the Masters and METS itself.
- Generate a focal point for discussion and exchange of experiences and knowledge.
- Collaboration on the academic side.
- Organize meetings and open debates.
- Generate METS communication channels.

Currently the academic year is in the second semester, and from June 2017 will begin a very important stage for the students training: internships in companies. The master's degree direction team has hardly worked to facilitate companies for the students who have participated in this first edition, and at this point the role of companies as members of the Friends of the Masters Club is fundamental.

The entities currently belonging to the FRIENDS OF MASTERS CLUB are:

- AENOR
- Agrotravel Turismo responsable
- Asociación Cantharellus
- Asociación de Turismo Rural Sierra Norte Madrid
- Asociación Española de Turismo Rural
- Asociación Kowabunga Ecoproject
- Centro Español Turismo Responsable
- Ciudad Sostenible
- Club de Ecoturismo en España
- CREANDO REDES
- CREARA
- Europarc
- Gastro Viaja
- Mercados Ambientales - ECOACSA
- Mirador de Babia
- Rutas Pangea
- SEO BirdLife
- UICN

3.4 Satisfaction survey

Finally, in order to evaluate the level of satisfaction of the students with the Master’s Degree on Management of Sustainable and Ecological Tourism, in terms of learning level, quality of learning modules, adequate learning method, etc. a satisfaction survey has been created. Currently, the direction of METS is waiting for the results of these surveys, and they are going to examine and take all the critiques in consideration, with the final purpose to improve the quality of METS for the next academic year (2017/2018).
REFERENCES


