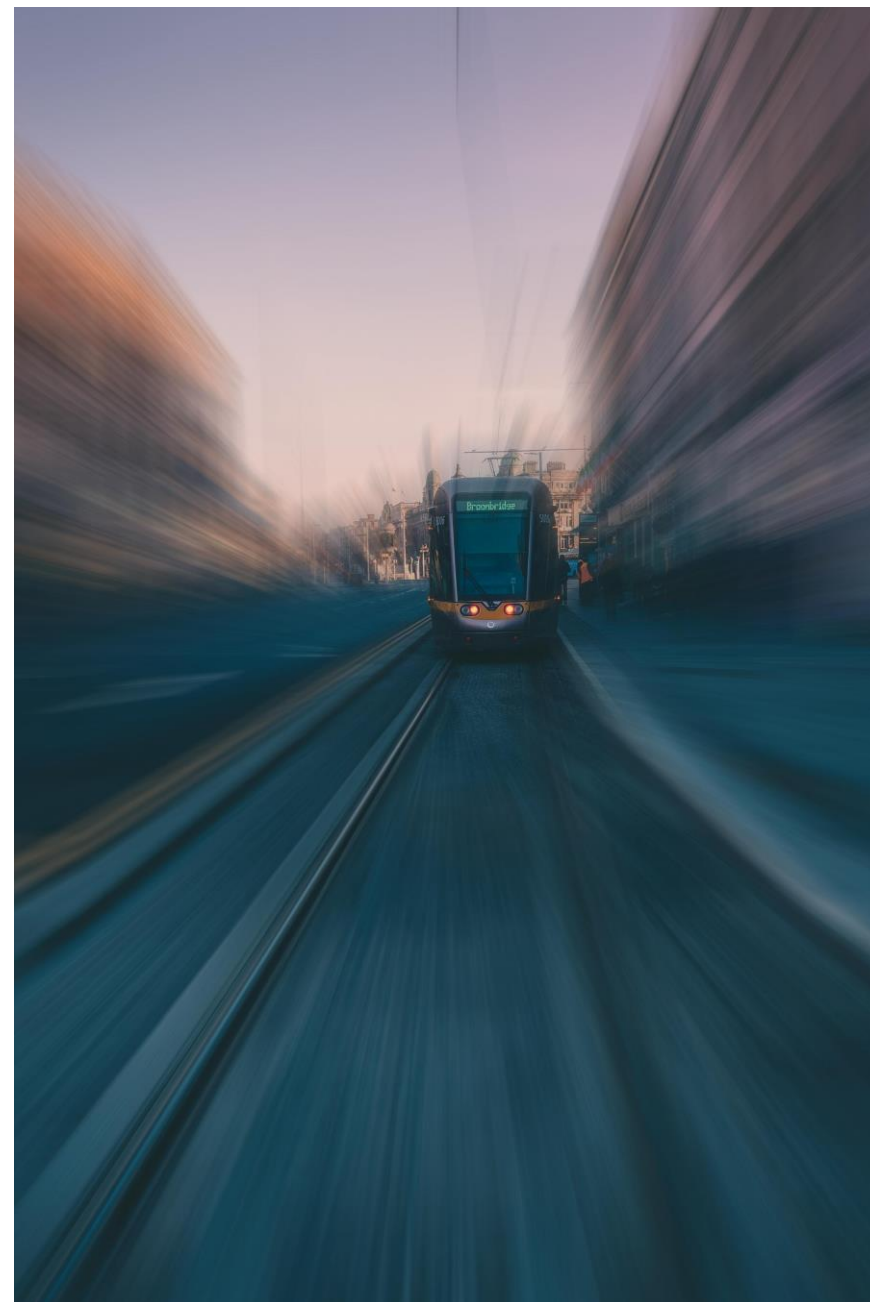


*Between the Past and the
Uncertain Future: Post-Covid-19
Challenges, Remote Working,
Climate Changes and the
Development of Sustainable Skills
in Tourism and Hospitality in
Ireland*

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INTRODUCTION

- This paper focusses in analysing changes in the tourism and hospitality sectors in Ireland, that have been redefining employment and education (as the fast-paced changes in life and work brought by the COVID-19 pandemic, such as increased mobility and changes in work models, the current climate-change events).
- It also focusses in discussing skilling needs, such as the increased use of digital technologies, climate mitigation actions, and wellbeing at work, that bring an urgent need to redefine actions to produce more profound changes in the industry

Questions for this research:

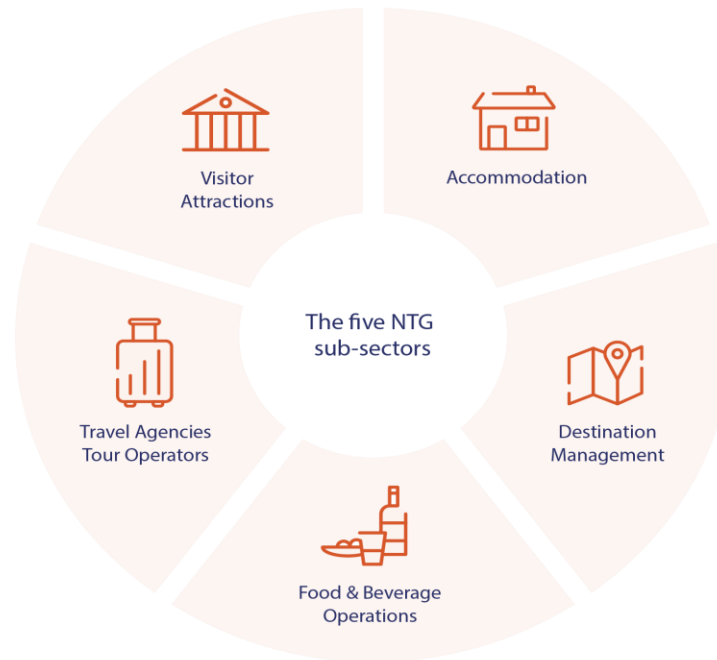
What are the views of the past and the future of work in tourism and hospitality? How does skilling for sustainability takes place on this changing scenario?

INTRODUCTION

This research was developed in an EC Erasmus+ funded project, **Pantour** (2022-2026).

This consortium aims specifically at designing research to address skills needs in tourism with education-industry partnerships.

It involves 13 partners from the industry and education sectors from 10 different countries (Bulgaria, Finland, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Netherlands, Portugal, Spain)



LITERATURE DISCUSSION

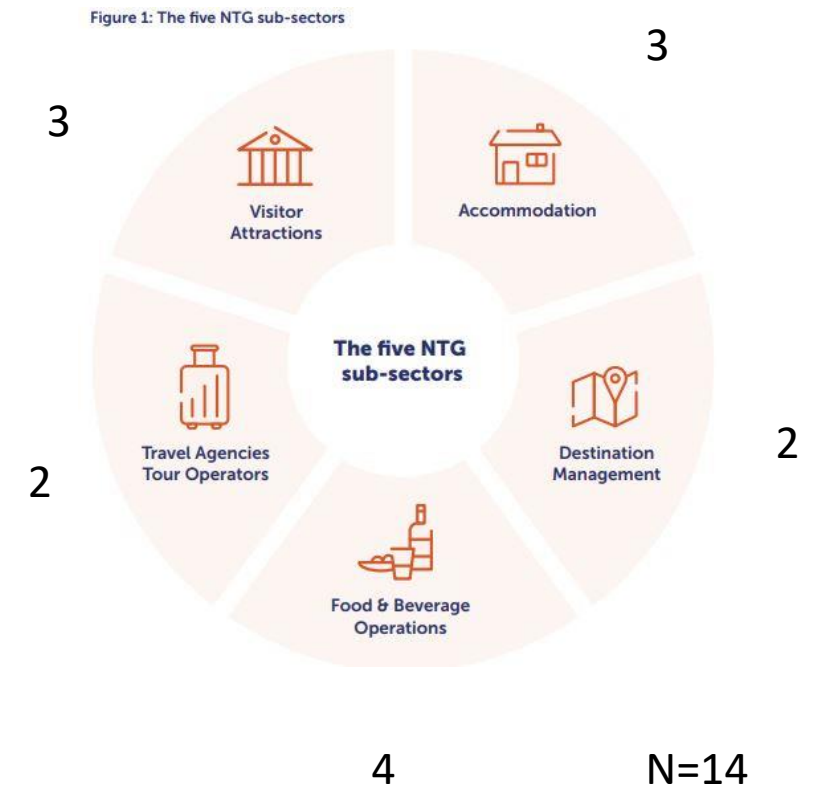
- **Critical tourism:** challenges of the SDG agenda bringing forward the equipping of students on sustainable skills: 'interrogating transformed futures in tourism' (Boluk, Cavaliere & Freya Higgins-Desbiolles, 2019)
- **The future of work:** 'the tourism sector at a turning point' (ILO, 2022) -> Pre-covid and Post-covid realities in the world of work
- **Promoting actions sustainably and responsibly:** 'beyond the GDP approach' to promote wellbeing in the tourism and hospitality sectors' (corporate sustainability, workplace relations, environmental challenges) -> (Dwyer, 2023)
- **Sustainable tourism policies in a time of crisis:** 'Sustainable tourism policies implemented during the COVID-19 crisis, either to promote sustainable tourism development or to seize the opportunity to transform tourism to make it more resilient, have been insufficiently researched.' (Schonherr, Peters, Kuřsˇcer, 2023)

POLICY PERSPECTIVE

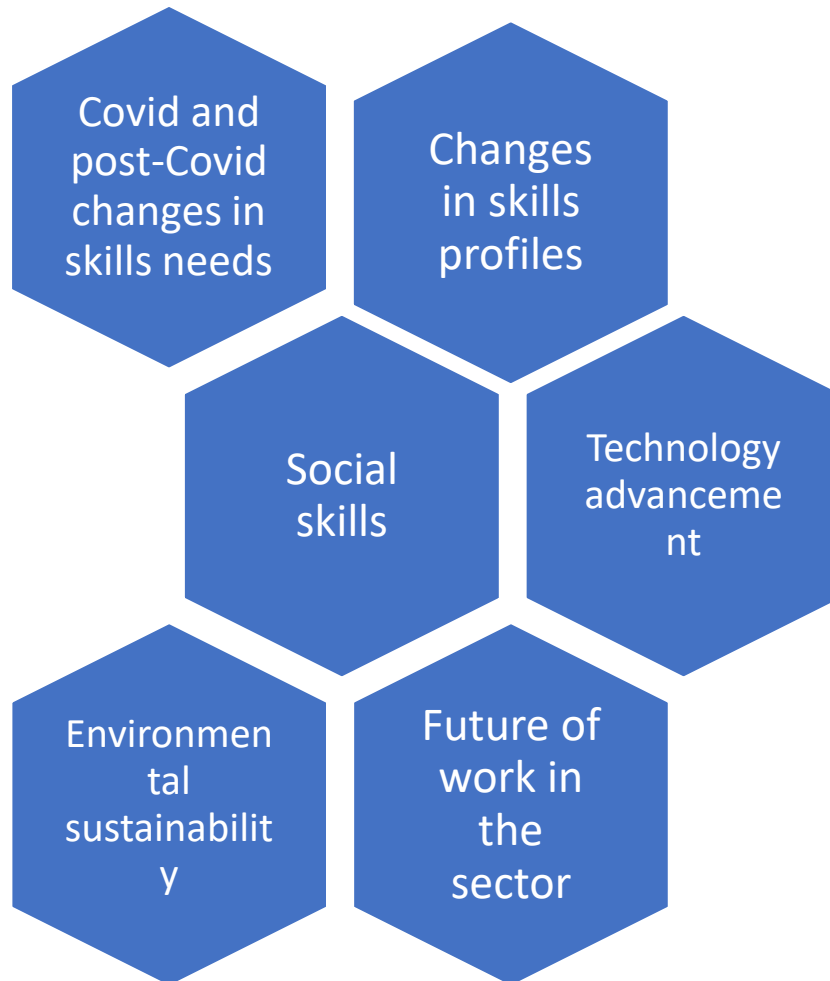
- The European Skills Agenda (2020) and the Transition Pathways for Tourism (European Commission, 2022): moving forward to skilling for sustainability
- The Pact for Skills (European Commission, 2023) : cooperation efforts to support the upskilling and reskilling of workers for the green and digital transition, looking to produce shifts in attitudes to face future changes at work

METHODOLOGY

- 14 interviews in five subsectors
- Reflections on how organisations see changes in employment/skills demands, aligned with current economic and societal changes
- Participants' views on what is necessary to build a sustainable workforce and challenges associated with it
- Interviews conducted between June and November of 2023



METHODOLOGY



Full Pantour research report:

Combination of secondary research, survey and interviews with managers:



REFLECTIONS: POST-COVID-19 CHANGES

- Impacts on the workforce: one accommodation employer has seen 90% decrease of employees
- Reskilling of staff: many left the industry, reskilling has been a challenge since then
- Working 'in an office' and stability in other services cited as factors that drove the workforce away
- Return of visitors, jobs, changes in employment relations ('work dynamics changed')
- Covid-19 had the hugest impact among all challenges cited

'Covid impacted our industry in lots of ways; with the lockdowns and airports shutting down, our turnover started to be severely impacted and dropped 95%. We spent the following two years protecting the business, rightsizing the business, and keeping staff levels we could afford to maintain. The conditions to hire in the industry are much harder post-Covid (...). Ways of doing business are more complex, and expectations have changed; new generations are entering the workforce, and their expectations have changed'.

Manager, Tour Operation Organisation

REFLECTIONS: SKILLS FOR ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

- Environmental impacts and climate change as preoccupations for all managers. However, not seen as an issue for their future business activities
- Small actions needed to mitigate environmental impacts
- Staff awareness and training on green skills was already a key focus in their business
- One tour operator mentioned that this was not put as a priority with the return of the workforce after Covid-19
- 'Appropriate skilling will become more common with time'
- The importance of engagement with local communities in relation to environmental: 'climate change demands a collaborative response' (food and beverage sector)
- Energy efficiency and resource management were cited by most interviewed as importance skills set moving forward

'Our way of dealing with energy consumption will be crucial in the future. We do generate a lot of energy with solar panels and other environmentally friendly energy sources, and smaller things as car charging points in the visitor's attraction site, provision of electric bikes instead of cars, it is going to be absolutely key for businesses in the future.'

Manager, Visitor Attraction

REFLECTIONS: SOCIAL SKILLS IMPORTANCE

- Importance of social skills noted by all interviewees; most see the industry needs social skills, and hire people with social skills
- ‘Resilience: important now, and in the future’
- Training for equality, diversity and inclusion: although this set of skills was considered highly important, managers mentioned they had no training on these skillsets in the workplace
- One manager in the accommodation sector pointed out that social skills were highly important after the 2008 crisis, but were not a focus of much attention before Covid-19 and after
- Training for inclusive management seen as ‘crucial’ by one manager/chef in the food and beverage sector: ‘inequality exists and (working as a chef) is difficult for women’; EDI training is seen as a key pillar to move forward in the sector
- Diversity and intercultural awareness were cited as common/important training in the area

About training for inclusivity management: *‘It’s really important- understanding also that everybody has problems sometimes, and you have to be able to have a system that they can come and talk to you. If you are working under pressure, you need to be able to communicate and sit down with your staff and discuss these things that are really important’.*

Manager, Food and Beverage Sector

RESULTS: DIGITALISATION AND IMPACTS IN SKILLING IN THE SECTOR

- There was more of a focus during the COVID-19 crisis on adaptation to new demands, especially in the digital skills.
- Essential literacy on digital skills as use of documents, spreadsheets and writing emails were cited by managers in different sectors, but especially accommodation as still very important
- Participants mentioned the importance of keeping pace with new technologies with constant reskilling
- Most participants also mentioned that although Artificial Intelligence will eventually have a role to play in the sector, it will not substitute core staff. It was mentioned that the industry is made of 'connections', it's a 'people' industry and 'built on interactions'.
- Manager in a DMO: 'Young employees are a lot more equipped, they catch on to systems much quicker; the digital transition will naturally happen'.

'At the end of the day we are tourism-based, a lot is based on personal interaction. I don't think that's replaceable.'

Manager, Visitor Attraction

REFLECTIONS: THE FUTURE OF WORK IN TOURISM AND HOSPITALITY

- One manager in the accommodation sector sees that the workers will change. They mentioned Gen Z is different from Gen X, and the key is adapting to what people want. Since the digital revolution, there are changes in what is expected.
- People's mental health and looking after the team in a holistic way was also cited
- 'Technology can't be human, but it has a massive place in hospitality as well.'
- Increase in IT specialists and digital skills training; most participants see growth in jobs in the future
- Generation expectations: keeping pace with them

'Expectation in generations have changed. They (the new generation) are not concerned about changing jobs. They want to know benefits, which is much more than just a job description, and they are interested in the culture of the organisation, and looking to understand how the job is going to be good for them.'

Manager, DMO

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Questions?

Thank you!

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