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## The implementation of the Principles for Responsible Management Education within tourism higher education institutions: A comparative analysis of European Union countries

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## Highlights

- This study's objective is to evaluate the implementation of PRME in tourism courses and its outcomes in EU countries.
- There is a notable absence regarding PRME and the tourism higher education and sustainability nexus.
- PRME has not been fully embedded in tourism curricula.
- We present a conceptual model focused on ambidextrous management to enable a deeper contribution to tourism sustainability.
- The application of PRME must go beyond the *stricto sensu* education environment and be extended to (tourism) businesses.

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15

## 16 **Abstract**

17

18 Despite the growing body of literature on tourism higher education, there is a notable absence  
19 regarding the Principles for Responsible Management Education and the tourism higher education  
20 and sustainability nexus. The main objective of this study is to evaluate the implementation of PRME  
21 in tourism courses and its outcomes in European Union countries. This conceptual paper finds that  
22 PRME is not effectively embedded in tourism curricula. As a result, we present a conceptual model  
23 centred around an ambidextrous management approach to enable a deeper contribution to  
24 sustainability and the tourism industry when engaging with PRME.

25

## 26 **1. Introduction**

27

28 Education is one of the most powerful and proven vehicles for sustainable development and regional  
29 economic development (Shaw & Allison, 1999) and achieving a quality education is the foundation  
30 to creating sustainable societies (Sibbel, 2009). There is a growing recognition in the literature that  
31 education is an integral part of the sustainable development agenda (Shaw & Allison, 1999; Wright,  
32 2002; Wals & Jickling, 2002; Sibbel, 2009; Åberg & Müller, 2018; Srivastava et al., 2019; Sonetti et  
33 al., 2019). Global institutions and initiatives, such as UNESCO Education for Sustainable  
34 Development (ESD) and more recently the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals  
35 (SDGs), have also addressed the role of education in sustainability. Of the 17 SDGs, ‘quality  
36 education’ is enshrined in the 4<sup>th</sup> goal, although it is also intrinsic and critical to the achievement of  
37 all 17 SDGs. The Principles for Responsible Management Education (PRME), which is a United  
38 Nations-supported initiative, have been founded in an effort to raise the profile of sustainability in  
39 higher education schools around the world, to transform management education, research and  
40 thought-leadership globally, and to promote an awareness about the SDGs (Godeman et al., 2014;  
41 Parkes et al., 2017; Bradley, 2019; PRME, 2019; Sroufe et al., 2015).

42 Yet, as Burrai et al. (2019) highlights, there is a need to rethink the ideology of responsible tourism  
43 as it is not sufficiently rooted in the daily reality of life and not enough robust reflection has been  
44 carried out. The extant literature on sustainability issues in the field of tourism has largely overlooked  
45 the impact of PRME in tourism higher education. The literature on tourism higher education has also  
46 neglected the role of responsible management education as a key element in achieving the goals of  
47 sustainability. Against this backdrop, this study sought to address such issues by investigating  
48 sustainability in tourism and cognate disciplines with a particular focus on PRME as a potential long-  
49 term strategy for the sustainability of the tourism industry.

50 The main objective of this study is to evaluate the implementation of PRME in tourism courses and  
51 its outcomes in European Union (EU) countries. In this study, PRME is viewed as an ‘input’ for  
52 which outputs are analysed and discussed. As a result, this study addresses two main research  
53 questions:

- 54 1. How is PRME imbedded in tourism courses in European Union (EU) countries?
- 55 2. How might PRME impact (directly or indirectly) on the sustainability of the tourism industry  
56 of these countries?

57 These questions are important as sustainability programmes in tourism are meant to generate tourism  
58 sustainability thinkers, actioners and/or transformers (Kemper et al., 2019) by empowering students  
59 (Joo et al., 2020). Furthermore, these questions are of great significance given that standards and  
60 principles have been, and are still being, questioned in terms of ethics and actual impacts on the  
61 society (Cret, 2007; Elliot, 2013; Heriot et al., 2009; Miles et al., 2004; Proitz et al., 2004; White et  
62 al., 2009).

63 This conceptual paper is articulated in four main sections. The first section is setting the context of  
64 the study and presents key debates in the literature on tourism education, sustainability and  
65 responsible management education in tourism; the second and third sections present the  
66 methodological approach employed in the study to collect data and discusses the related results.  
67 Finally, the last section critically discusses PRME and its impacts whilst providing several  
68 recommendations and suggesting further avenues for research.

69

## 70 **2. Theoretical Background**

### 71 *2.1. Tourism education and the sustainability nexus*

72

73 Given the growing concern over tourism being harmful on the environment and local communities,  
74 it is important to have sustainability leaders for the long-term sustainability of the planet and that of

75 the industry alike (Gretzel et al., 2014; Sroufe et al., 2015; Rasoolimanesh et al., 2020). A  
76 sustainability mindset can “help educators frame curricula to facilitate broad and deep systemic  
77 learning among current and future leaders” (Kassel et al., 2016:1). As higher education institutions  
78 are training future leaders, there is a subsequent need for tourism education providers to focus on  
79 sustainability (Camargo & Gretzel, 2017; Raagmaa & Keerberg, 2017). Education has an important  
80 role to play in the long-term sustainability of the planet, as it can empower individuals with a strong  
81 understanding of what sustainability is, and, equally important, make individuals confident enough  
82 to implement their knowledge and skills to address issues related to sustainability (Zanotti &  
83 Chernela, 2008; Bowser et al., 2014; Camargo & Gretzel, 2017). Empowerment is widely recognised  
84 as a key aspect in achieving successful sustainable tourism development (Scheyvens, 1999; Cole,  
85 2006; Joo et al., 2020).

86 However, current tourism curricula in higher educations have so far failed to foster leaders with  
87 sustainability mind-sets and educate reflective practitioners who can promote sustainability. Thus,  
88 there is no evidence that tourism education can contribute to sustainability (Gretzel et al., 2014;  
89 Raagmaa & Keerberg, 2017). This is all the more important given there is a substantial increase in  
90 sustainable tourism-related classes in tourism curricula since the Agenda 21 for the Travel and  
91 Tourism industry. Yet, little is known about what students actually know and feel with respect to  
92 sustainability (Camargo & Gretzel, 2017). The current approach of sustainability in tourism courses  
93 contributes mainly to generate sustainability thinkers, or individuals with critical thinking and  
94 questioning attitude, while the ultimate objective of any sustainability empowerment is to generate  
95 sustainability actioners and transformers (Kemper et al., 2019). For Camargo and Gretzel (2017), in  
96 order to have successful and effective curricula encompassing the key dimensions of sustainability,  
97 sustainable tourism programmes should include six core elements, namely:

- 98 1) Technical literacy: using of literature, theories etc. to give learners the necessary background  
99 knowledge in order to understand tourism sustainability, its importance and application;

- 100 2) Analytical literacy: providing students with the skills required to be able not only to analyse  
101 an issue but also to provide appropriate solutions;
- 102 3) Ecological literacy: enabling students to connect the concepts of actions and  
103 impacts/consequences;
- 104 4) Multicultural literacy: the need to protect local cultures, particularly when they are  
105 endangered;
- 106 5) Policy and political literacy: providing students with a good understanding of the decision-  
107 making chain in tourism planning and management;
- 108 6) Ethical literacy: nurturing a sense of ethics within students.

109 Camargo and Gretzel (2017) also highlighted the crucial role of an innovative teaching approach in  
110 achieving the objectives set by these core elements. Sheldon, Fesenmaier, and Tribe (2011) outlined  
111 a framework developed by Tourism Education Futures Initiative [TEFI] for the future development  
112 of tourism education. They argue that TEFI aims to fundamentally transform tourism education and  
113 ‘seeks to provide vision, knowledge and a framework for tourism education programs to promote  
114 global citizenship and optimism for a better world’ (p. 3). Drawing on Freirean philosophy on critical  
115 pedagogy, Boluk and Carnicelli (2019) offers a conceptual framework for the inclusion of critical  
116 pedagogy in tourism curriculum. The authors further argue the implementation of their suggested  
117 principles enshrined in Citizenship and Agency in teaching potentially create a curriculum stimulating  
118 engaged and politically active citizens. Jamal et al. (2011) proposed a progressive, experiential and  
119 collaborative approach to sustainable tourism pedagogy (STP) which encompasses above-mentioned  
120 core STP literacies (technical, analytical, ecological, multi-cultural, ethical, policy and political). The  
121 STP literacies “guide skill and knowledge development for the sustainability practitioner” (Jamal et  
122 al., 2011:133).

123 Sustainable Tourism Pedagogy (STP) is a pedagogy based on practical experience (e.g., field  
124 experiences), a hands-on approach which can be imbedded in traditional (in-class) educational

125 programmes to provide students with real-world experiences. It is viewed as an action and change  
126 oriented pedagogy which should tackle environmental and social issues, address the well-being of  
127 tourists and tourism-related industry (Jamal et al., 2011), as well as enforcing a sustainable mindset  
128 within future leaders (Gretzel et al., 2014; Sroufe et al., 2015). Innovative pedagogic practices are  
129 important and have the potential to turn individuals into sustainability actioners (individuals looking  
130 to incite changes in other people or the community) and also into sustainability transformers  
131 (individuals wanting to unlock changes in the surrounding environment) (Kemper et al., 2019).  
132 Sustainability transformers are important for a society because sustainability can only be achieved  
133 through transformational leaders with strong ethical values (Visser, 2015; Sroufe et al., 2015).  
134 Outside the classroom environment, new technologies and social media strategy have also proven to  
135 be useful, as they enable students from different institutions around the world to collaborate on  
136 projects (Camargo & Gretzel, 2017).

137 According to Buffa (2015), educating the younger generation is indeed important, not only because  
138 they are the future leaders, but also because they are the market of the future. She highlights that  
139 people between 15 and 30 years of age are keen to discover and learn about new cultures; they are  
140 more aware of sustainability issues and more receptive than the older generations to adopting  
141 behaviours; and they often have responsible environmental attitudes and beliefs. In essence, Buffa  
142 (2015) states that they are often said to be paving the way for responsible tourism. She suggests that  
143 between the tourists of the future and the tourism leaders of the future, two groups could be identified:

- 144 1) The hard-path group: This group is made of pro-active people with regards to collecting  
145 information. This group is also characterised by those who fall under this category are more  
146 adventurous and willing to try new things.
- 147 2) The soft-path group: This group tends to rely on external providers to obtain the information  
148 they need. They are less open to novelty.

149 The group of hard-path young people appears to be the most suitable target on which leadership  
150 training on sustainability to focus on. That said, soft-path young people are not to be excluded. Indeed,  
151 Hutton (2016) explained that, too often, the modern society disempowers groups or individuals that  
152 are considered passive and/or powerlessness, while quite often they reveal not to be. Notwithstanding,  
153 hard-path young people are more likely to be the most suitable sustainability tourism leaders.

154 Consequently, identifying the right pedagogical approach to educate young people (either hard or soft  
155 path future tourists or tourism leaders) becomes important. This is all the more important as  
156 “businesses are the product and the extension of the personal characteristics of their leaders” (Favre,  
157 2017: 558). Overall, an effective sustainable tourism pedagogy would need to:

- 158 1) Foster leaders with sustainability mind-sets;
- 159 2) Develop their knowledge of sustainability principles;
- 160 3) Embed the six core elements listed by Camargo and Gretzel (2017);
- 161 4) Have practical experience dimension;
- 162 5) Turn sustainability thinkers into sustainability actioners and transformers.

163 To achieve an effective sustainable tourism pedagogy, the embedding of PRME into curricula in  
164 tourism and cognate disciplines would undoubtedly represent a potential suitable alternative.

## 165 166 *2.2. The Principles for Responsible Management Education (PRME)* 167

168 PRME is an initiative launched in 2007 by the United Nations (UN) with the objective to change the  
169 curriculum, research, and learning methods of management education based on the UN Global  
170 Compact/ Corporate Sustainability approach. This initiative aims to foster ethical values and raise  
171 sustainability awareness among future leaders who, arguably, are the current students in higher  
172 education (Annan-Diab & Molinari, 2017; Parkes et al., 2017). PRME was also created and launched  
173 in order to advance the UN SDGs (United Nations Development Programme, n.d.) and help create a



174 more sustainable future (Annan-Diab & Molinari, 2017; Parkes et al., 2017), and ultimately fight  
175 poverty at local, national and international levels (Rosenbloom et al., 2017).

176 Parkes et al. (2017) argue that, to fully embed PRME in the curricula, higher education institutions  
177 need to review their curriculum design, teaching approach, research strategy and agenda, and, equally  
178 important, work in partnership with all stakeholders of the sustainability ecosystem. In addition to  
179 these requirements, there is a need to add field-work experiences, put in place initiatives to reward  
180 good actions, and develop learning and assessment platforms such as the Sustainability Literacy Test  
181 or Sulitest (Decamps et al., 2017; Gentile, 2017; Tyran, 2017). Adopting such an approach in the  
182 curricula would potentially deliver a holistic interdisciplinary approach of education for sustainability  
183 (Annan-Diab & Molinari, 2017). The six principles of PRME (see Figure 1) provide a good overview  
184 of the elements underpinning this ideological approach of education for an effective sustainable  
185 tourism programme, which is in line with the six core elements listed by Camargo and Gretzel (2017).



186  
187 Figure 1: PRME Principles  
188 Source: PRME, 2019  
189

190 Additionally, PRME seems to meet all five criteria required for an effective pedagogical approach to  
191 reach a sustainable transformable change in the tourism industry through the new leaders (Table 1).

192  
193  
194  
195

Criteria for an effective pedagogical approach for tourism sustainability	PRME	Evidence
1 - Foster leaders with sustainability mindsets	PRME1/PRME6	-Ethical values of leaders are ethical values of businesses ( <i>Annan-Diab &amp; Molinari, 2017; Mayer &amp; Hutton, 2016; Parkes, Buono &amp; Howaidy, 2017</i> )
2 - Develop knowledge of sustainability principles	PRME2 / PRME3/PRME4	-To have PRME fully imbedded in their curricula, higher education institutions have to review their curriculum design, teaching approach; research strategy and agenda; and equally important, work in partnership with all stakeholders of the sustainability ecosystem ( <i>Parkes, Buono &amp; Howaidy, 2017</i> ). -Sulitest ( <i>Decamps et al, 2017</i> )
3 - Imbed six core elements listed by <i>Camargo and Gretzel (2017)</i>	PRME3/PRME4/PRME6	-PRME is based on a holistic interdisciplinary approach of education for sustainability ( <i>Annan-Diab &amp; Molinari, 2017</i> ). -Sulitest ( <i>Decamps et al, 2017</i> )
4 - Practical experience dimension	PRME5	-Field actions or field work, such as delivery of talks or presentations; put in place initiatives to reward good actions; development of programmes that can be implemented by a wide range of organisations; etc. ( <i>Sharing Information Progress report of the implementation of PRME, 2018; Tyran, 2017</i> ). -Giving the Voice to Value ( <i>Gentile, 2017</i> ).
5 - Turn sustainability thinkers into sustainability actioners and transformers	PRME1/PRME5/PRME6	-Ethical values of leaders and then ethical values of businesses ( <i>Annan-Diab &amp; Molinari, 2017; Mayer &amp; Hutton, 2016; Parkes, Buono &amp; Howaidy, 2017</i> )

197 Source: The authors

198  
 199 Seraphin and Vo Thanh (2020), who examined PRME in the context of resort mini-clubs as a  
 200 springboard for children empowerment as a key element of SDGs (e.g., SDG 4: Quality education  
 201 and SDG 12: Responsible consumption and protection), argue that PRME could happen anywhere,  
 202 even in non-purpose and/or designated built education venues. For it to happen, it is important to have  
 203 flexible partners or systems (De Silva, 1997). Seraphin and Vo Thanh (2020) also argue that PRME

204 may be applied to private businesses and inform their strategy, and, as a result, align their values so  
205 that the organisation can contribute to the achievement of SDGs.

206  
207 *2.3. Conceptual framework of the study*

208 In line with the previous research and literature reviewed in this paper, this study puts forward the  
209 following propositions:

210 P1) Higher education institutions with a tourism curriculum should consider observing and  
211 adhering to PRME in the delivery of tourism courses in order to influence and ensure long-  
212 term sustainability in the industry.

213 P2) Higher education institutions with a tourism curriculum who are PRME signatories contribute  
214 to fostering hard-path leaders and tourists, while non PRME signatories generate soft-path  
215 leaders and tourists.

216 These propositions resonate with Johnson's (2011) views who argued that when a workforce is  
217 educated or skilled in a particular area (in this case, sustainability education), adapting to changes  
218 becomes easier for the individual work required in the firm (i.e. change towards a more sustainable  
219 future). De Silva (1997) also highlights that pace of changes and implementation and adaption is  
220 dependent on the level of education.

221 The resulting conceptual framework of the study is presented as follows (Figure 2).

222

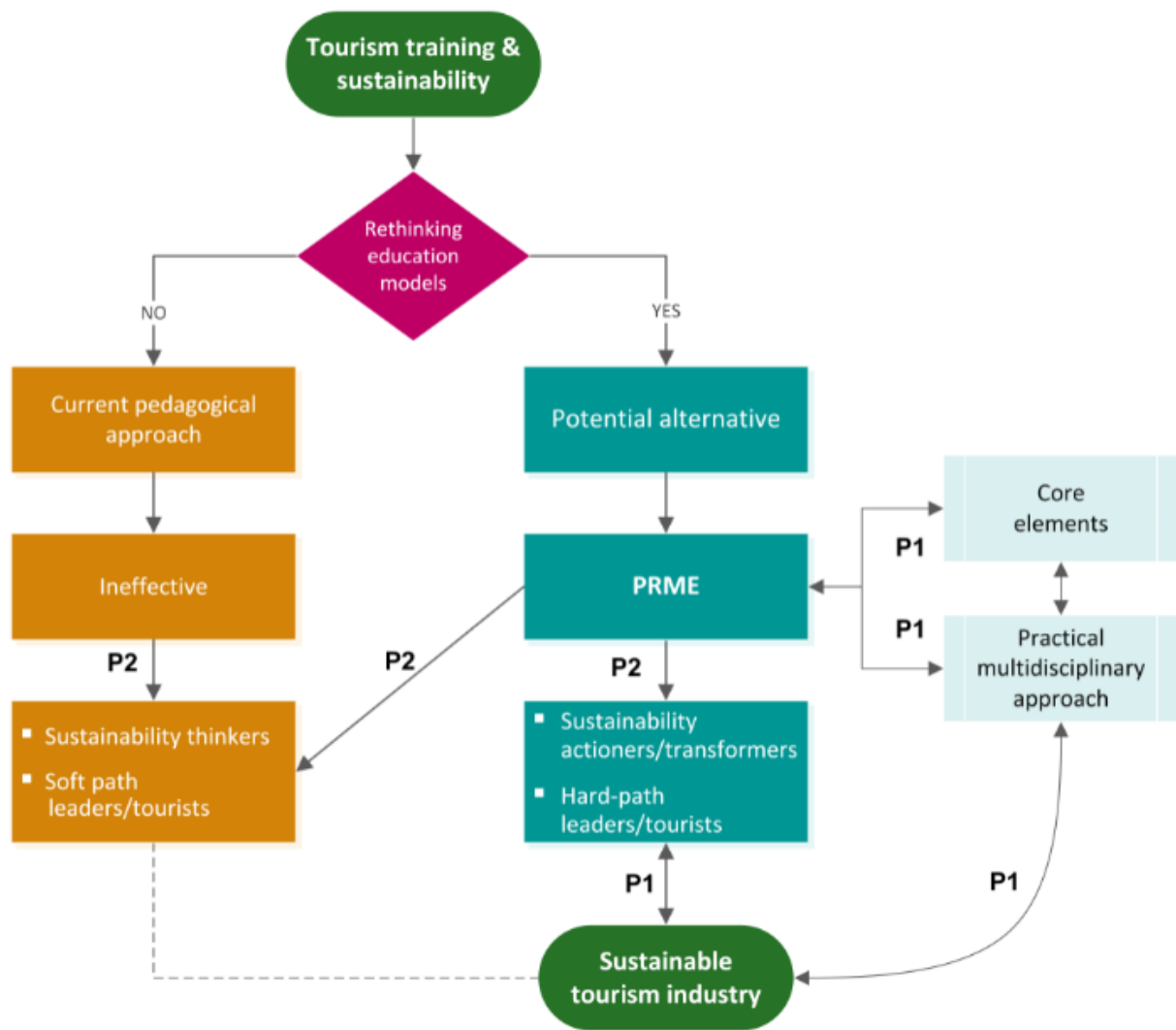


Figure 2: Conceptual framework of the study  
Source: The authors

223

224

225

226

227 Theoretically, PRME appears as fully suited to develop effective leaders in tourism sustainability.

228 The next section discusses the research approach used in evaluating the propositions made in this  
229 study.

230

### 231 3. Research Approach

232 From a methodological point of view, this study employed a problem-focused approach (Gilson &  
233 Goldberg, 2015) based on objective interpretation (Hammond & Wellington, 2013) of publicly  
234 available secondary data as means of guiding the development of a theoretical framework.

235 Consequently, this study endeavoured to build a conceptual model “by offering propositions

236 regarding previously untested relationships” (Gilson & Goldberg, 2015, p. 129) based on existing  
237 knowledge and theory reviewed in this paper. Contrary to a purely theoretical paper, the propositions  
238 in conceptual papers such as the present study are more closely linked to testable hypotheses and in  
239 doing so offer a bridge between validation and usefulness (Weick, 1989; cited in Gilson & Goldberg,  
240 2015). The propositions formulated in this study were further evaluated through a review and analysis  
241 of publicly available secondary data from extant literature and reports.

242 This research, and hence the secondary data collection used to guide the conceptual model’s  
243 development, is based on 27 countries of the European Union (EU), which also constitute popular  
244 European tourism destinations. However, in recent years, several European destinations have  
245 experienced sustainability issues, such as overcrowding, pollution and pressure on public facilities  
246 (Adie et al., 2019), and overtourism and tourismphobia (Seraphin et al., 2018). Among these countries  
247 are Spain (Blaquez-Salom, 2019; Goodwin, 2019), Italy (Nolan & Seraphin, 2019; Visentin &  
248 Bertocchi, 2019), the Czech Republic (Roncak, 2019), and Portugal (Costa et al., 2019), to name a  
249 few. As a result, the European Commission (2019) recently adopted a new initiative named the ‘EU  
250 sustainable development track by 2030’ which provides members countries with insights and  
251 guidance about sustainable development.

252 The secondary data was collected, organised, and aggregated in a format that facilitates the analysis  
253 of the data (Fox et al., 2014) (see Table 2). The data presented in Table 2 reflects the following:

- 254 • The European countries examined and their corresponding official country code. The list of  
255 27 countries of the European Union was obtained from the Schengen Visa Information  
256 website: <https://www.schengenvisainfo.com/eu-countries/>.
- 257 • The number of PRME institutions for each country. The list of PRME institutions was sourced  
258 from the UN PRME official website: [https://www.unprme.org/participation/search-  
259 participants.php](https://www.unprme.org/participation/search-participants.php).

- 260 • The number of PRME institutions with either tourism, hospitality, leisure and events training  
 261 and education programmes. The provision of programmes offered by each PRME institution  
 262 was carefully checked against the respective PRME institution website and information  
 263 provided on education programmes and courses offered to students.
- 264 • The number of higher education institutions in each country. This list was obtained from the  
 265 European Commission website: [https://ec.europa.eu/education/study-in-europe/country-](https://ec.europa.eu/education/study-in-europe/country-profiles_en)  
 266 [profiles\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/education/study-in-europe/country-profiles_en).

267 Table 2: Tourism and PRME in EU countries (Tourism, T / Hospitality, H / Leisure, L/ Events, E).

	European Countries	Country Code	Number of PRME Institutions	Number of PRME Institutions with either T,H,L,E	Number of HE institutions in the country
1	Austria	AT	6	4	82
2	Belgium	BE	5	2	22
3	Bulgaria	BG	1	1	51
4	Croatia	HR	3	2	119
5	Cyprus	CY	0	0	60
6	Czech Republic	CZ	5	0	68
7	Denmark	DK	2	1	30
8	Estonia	EE	1	0	20
9	Finland	FI	8	4	39
10	France	FR	39	14	3500
11	Germany	DE	39	10	450
12	Greece	EL	3	3	38
13	Hungary	HU	3	1	68
14	Ireland	IE	7	3	34
15	Italy	IT	10	7	254
16	Latvia	LV	8	0	24
17	Lithuania	LT	3	0	47
18	Luxembourg	LU	1	0	6
19	Malta	MT	0	0	6
20	Netherlands	NL	10	0	50
21	Poland	PL	10	6	428
22	Portugal	PT	9	2	127
23	Romania	RO	1	1	92
24	Slovakia	SK	1	0	36
25	Slovenia	SI	2	1	61
26	Spain	ES	25	3	84
27	Sweden	SE	11	5	35
	Total		213	70	5831

268 Source: The authors

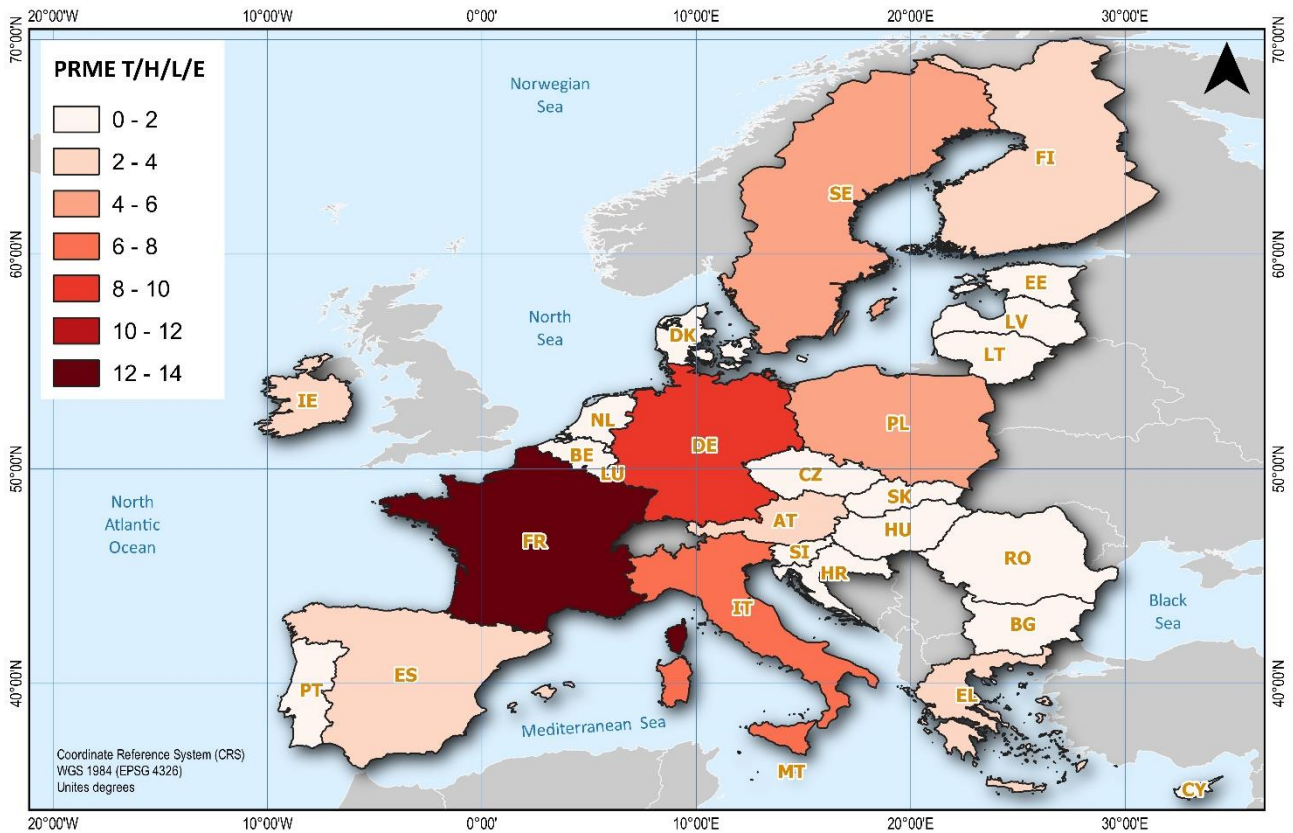
269 **4. Secondary Data Analysis and Results**

270 *4.1. PRME institutions in the EU*

271 A quick overview of Table 2 reveals that there are 213 PRME signatory institutions in the EU. France  
272 and Germany are the European countries with the highest number of PRME institutions (39), followed  
273 by Spain (25), Sweden (11), and Italy, Netherlands, and Poland (10). All other destinations have less  
274 than 10 institutions part of the PRME network.

275 *4.2. PRME in tourism higher education institutions in the EU*

277 70 European institutions that are PRME signatories offer tourism (T), hospitality (H), leisure (L), and  
278 events (E) programmes and courses. France (14) and Germany (10) remain the top performing  
279 destinations. Followed by Italy (7), Poland (6), and Sweden (5). All the other destinations have less  
280 than 5 institutions falling into this category (see Figure 3).



281  
282  
283 Figure 3: Map showing the distribution of Principle of Responsible Management Education (PRME) institutions offering  
284 tourism and related subjects (Tourism, T / Hospitality, H / Leisure, L / Events, E) in the EU.  
285 Source: The authors



286 However, it appears that in France the ratio of institutions combining taught programmes in tourism/  
 287 PRME signatories is 0.4%. In Germany, it is 2%, Italy 3%, and Poland 1%. Sweden stands out with  
 288 14% and is subsequently the destination performing the best (Table 3).

289 Table 3: Performance of destinations with institutions combining PRME/Tourism

European Countries	PRME institutions / HE institutions [%]	PRME institutions with either T, H, L, E / HE institutions [%]
France	1%	0%
Germany	9%	2%
Italy	4%	3%
Poland	2%	1%
<b>Sweden</b>	<b>31%</b>	<b>14%</b>

290 Source: The authors

291

292 Despite the ambitions of PRME, whose emphasis is largely on “the next generation of managers,  
 293 leaders and business professionals committed to developing their capabilities to be generators of  
 294 sustainable value for a more inclusive global economy” (Parkes et al., 2017: 62), and, with  
 295 membership status conferred to signatory institutions, PRME does not appear sufficiently established  
 296 in Europe. Sweden is the exception.

297 The reviewed literature supports the position that, to achieve sustainability of the industry in the long-  
 298 term, tourism higher education institutions should be a PRME signatory (Annan-Diab & Molinari,  
 299 2017; Parkes et al. 2017). However, the secondary data collected and analysed in this study does not  
 300 reflect this connection. Hence, the first proposition (P1) of this study is not supported, i.e., higher  
 301 education institutions are not observing and adhering to PRME in the delivery of tourism courses.  
 302 The remainder of this study investigates this lack of adoption and integration of PRME in EU  
 303 countries, despite the clear need for such a framework (in tourism and related subjects/industries).  
 304 Thus, the focus now shifts to the evaluation of the second proposition (P2) that tourism higher  
 305 education institutions who are PRME signatories contribute to fostering hard-path leaders and  
 306 tourists, while non PRME signatories are more likely to generate soft-path leaders (and tourists). The  
 307 compelling case of Sweden is used in this endeavour.

308

309 *4.3. Tourism and PRME in Sweden: What can be learnt?*

310 The tourism industry in Scandinavia is mainly based on its natural attractiveness, which makes the  
311 area a nature-based destination (Kaltenborn et al., 2001). Beyond the tourism industry, outdoor  
312 recreation is also a tradition and lifestyle for Scandinavians (Kaltenborn et al., 2001; Hall, Müller, &  
313 Saarinen, 2008). Outdoor recreation also includes hunting and fishing (i.e., extractive activities).  
314 Hunting, in particular, is declining in Sweden, mainly due to socio-economic and cultural  
315 transformations (increasing education and urbanization, growing environmental concerns) and,  
316 nowadays, a series of non-extractive activities are offered to tourists (Margaryan and Fredman, 2017).  
317 Moreover, Sweden offers the Right of Public Access for recreationists (i.e. unlimited access to nature,  
318 not just into the designated natural areas, and no entrance fees) (Margaryan and Fredman,  
319 2017). Because Scandinavia has a small population, a deep attachment with their environment, and  
320 still a low volume of visitors, the natural areas are in good ecological state (Hall et al., 2008). This  
321 good state of the nature also contributes to locals' quality of life and their strong sense of place. This  
322 form of tourism could also be said to prevent tourismphobia by promoting the development of social  
323 capital between locals and visitors, as this form of tourism is a playful exploration that foster  
324 encounters between locals and visitors (Buckley, 2007).

325 The information provided about Scandinavia as an area could be applied to the specific case of  
326 Sweden. Indeed, Sweden is also a nature-based, nature-orientated and recreation; or ecotourism  
327 destination, with 60% of the country being forested (Bostedt & Mattsson, 1995; Buckley, 2007;  
328 Cottrell & Cutumisu, 2006). Locals' concern and protection of their environment (Kaltenborn et al.,  
329 2001), combined with the fact that domestic nature-based tourism and outdoor recreation are well  
330 developed in Sweden (Margaryan and Fredman, 2017), may also explain the good state of natural  
331 areas. The destination is ranked 11 (figure 4) in the world for environmental sustainability (World  
332 Economic Forum, 2019).

Rank	Economy	Score
1	Switzerland	6.0
2	Norway	5.8
3	Austria	5.7
4	Luxembourg	5.6
5	Finland	5.6
6	Netherlands	5.4
7	Denmark	5.4
8	Slovenia	5.4
9	Germany	5.3
10	France	5.3
11	Sweden	5.2

Figure 4: Environmental sustainability  
Source: adapted from WEF TTCR (2019)

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Tourism *stricto sensu*, Sweden is a competitive destination (World Economic Forum, 2019). Indeed, out of 140 countries assessed for their Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Index, which measures the set of factors and policies that enable the sustainable development of the travel and tourism sector, Sweden was placed 22<sup>nd</sup> (Figure 5).

When comparing the data on the performance of destinations (PRME/Tourism) (Table 3) with the World Economic Forum (WEF) data on the travel and tourism competitiveness index 2019 overall rankings (Figure 5), and the environmental sustainability performance of destinations (Figure 4), it appears that all countries listed in Table 3 are also in the top-performing destinations when it comes to sustainability and competitiveness.

Rank	Economy	Score <sup>1</sup>	Change since 2017		Diff. from Global Avg. (%)
			Rank	Score <sup>2</sup>	
1	Spain	5.4	0	0.3	41.4
2	France	5.4	0	1.5	40.4
3	Germany	5.4	0	2.0	40.0
4	Japan	5.4	0	2.1	39.6
5	United States	5.3	1	2.6	36.6
6	United Kingdom	5.2	-1	-0.2	34.9
7	Australia	5.1	0	0.8	33.6
8	Italy	5.1	0	1.9	32.2
9	Canada	5.1	0	1.6	31.3
10	Switzerland	5.0	0	1.5	30.4
11	Austria	5.0	1	2.0	28.8
12	Portugal	4.9	2	3.2	27.2
13	China	4.9	2	3.2	26.7
14	Hong Kong SAR	4.8	-3	-1.1	25.1
15	Netherlands	4.8	2	3.2	24.5
16	Korea, Rep.	4.8	3	4.7	24.3
17	Singapore	4.8	-4	-2.0	23.7
18	New Zealand	4.7	-2	1.4	23.4
19	Mexico	4.7	3	3.4	21.9
20	Norway	4.6	-2	-1.0	19.4
21	Denmark	4.6	10	3.4	19.1
22	Sweden	4.6	-2	0.2	18.6

Figure 5: Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Index 2019 overall rankings  
Source: adapted from WEF TTCR (2019)

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According to initial data, Table 4 presents the performance rankings of destinations for the top five performing destinations in terms of PRME/ tourism. The rankings in the first two columns of Table 4 were obtained from data presented in Table 3. Destinations are ranked based on their performance in terms of the percentage of institutions that are delivering tourism and are PRME signatories as well. Rankings in the third and fourth columns of Table 4 were obtained from data presented in figures 4 and 5. The ranking was scaled down to the five destinations represented in Table 4.

359 Table 4: Performance of destinations PRME & Tourism / Environment sustainability / Competitive index

European Countries	Ranking institutions / PRME tourism et al.	Environmental sustainability	Competitive index
<b>Sweden</b>	<b>1st</b>	<b>5<sup>th</sup></b>	<b>4<sup>th</sup></b>
Italy	2nd	-	3rd
Germany	3rd	3rd	2nd
Poland	4th	-	-
France	5th	4 <sup>th</sup>	1st

360 Source: The authors

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362 The data in Table 4 reveals that, firstly, there is no correlation between PRME and destination  
 363 performance in terms of environmental sustainability and competitiveness. Indeed, France is the best  
 364 performing destination in terms of competitiveness, but it is placed second in terms of environmental  
 365 sustainability (despite doing poorly when it comes to combining PRME/tourism). Sweden, on the  
 366 other hand, is the least performing destination for both competitiveness and environmental  
 367 sustainability. To some extent, Table 4 is rejecting Proposition 2 (P2) by reducing PRME to a less  
 368 involved supporting role or sub-criteria in evaluating the performance of a destination as part of a  
 369 multi-criteria decision analysis (MCDA), i.e., a comparison method supporting the decision-makers  
 370 facing with numerous and conflicting criteria/alternatives to make an optimal decision (Modica et al.,  
 371 2014; Greco et al., 2016). PMRE is not a decisive criterion within this particular outlook. Indeed,  
 372 Hermannsson et al. (2017) argue that external impacts of higher education training are often  
 373 overlooked in educational policy design.

374 Botti and Peypoch (2013, p. 109) explain that MCDA helps with decision-making using a variety of  
 375 criteria as in the real world, when sorting problems, the approaches are rarely mono-criterion, but  
 376 incorporate a variety of criteria, which could sometimes be contradictory. According to a model  
 377 developed by Botti and Zaman (2015), which was adapted from an earlier model of Ritchie and  
 378 Crouch (2003), five criteria are generally used to evaluate destinations' performance: supporting  
 379 factors and resources (transports, ICT, etc.); core resources and attractors (infrastructures, natural  
 380 resources, cultural resources, etc.); destination policy, planning and development (human resources;

381 etc.); destination management (regulations, tourism plan, etc.); and, qualifying and amplifying  
382 determinants (environmental sustainability, safety, hygiene, and health, etc.). In this typology, as a  
383 strategic HR developmental tool, PRME falls under destination policy, planning, and development.  
384 This criterion is even more important for destinations like Sweden and Scandinavian countries in  
385 general as locals and visitors have full access to public and private natural areas such as forests  
386 (Bostedt & Mattsson, 1995; Kaltenborn et al., 2001). A trained workforce to look after those areas  
387 contributing to the attractiveness and competitiveness of the destination is of great value (Kaltenborn  
388 et al., 2001).

389 Thus far, the study has highlighted two important points: (1) PRME is not a common pattern within  
390 the delivery of tourism, hospitality, leisure and events management courses; and (2) Being a PRME  
391 signatory does not influence the performance of destination in terms of sustainability performance or  
392 performance in terms of competitiveness. From a business perspective, PRME could be considered  
393 as a signatory model not worth investing in by HE institutions as it does not have any impacts on the  
394 performance of a destination. That said, from an ethics point of view, enforcing PRME still remains  
395 valid. PRME is only a decade old (Parkes et al., 2017) and its short history could explain the relatively  
396 low number of signatory institutions in Europe. In comparison, the Advance Collegiate Schools of  
397 Business (AACSB), the most longstanding accreditation, dates back to 1916 and was founded by  
398 leading American universities, which partly explains the surge of demand over the years for this  
399 accreditation (Elliott, 2013). PRME does not have this antecedent.

400 This study suggests that more emphasis should be placed on expanding and anchoring PRME within  
401 higher education institutions. In the long-term, PRME could be considered as an input that could play  
402 a direct role in the tourism planning and development of the destination and, therefore its  
403 competitiveness. Furthermore, PRME plays a crucial role in the performance of higher education  
404 institutions, as sustainability is now selling point for customers (Bostedt & Mattsson, 1995; Buckley,  
405 2007; Cottrell & Cutumisu, 2006; Seraphin & Nolan, 2016).

## 407 **5. Discussion: Higher education, ethics and sustainability**

408 Ethics and sustainability are important issues in business. It is well-documented in the literature that  
409 sustainable business practice needs to be set within a framework of understanding of ethics (Crane,  
410 2004; Parkes et al., 2017). Yet, and to expand the discussion beyond the findings, it has been argued  
411 that business schools have not managed to sufficiently embed ethics (as a facet of sustainability,  
412 Camargo and Gretzel, 2017) in the curriculum; it has instead been weakened (Crane, 2004). The  
413 subject of ethics has been gradually replaced in business schools' curricula with more focussed  
414 business topics, and the main reason some business school programmes still deliver it (albeit to the  
415 minimum) is because Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB), or another impacting  
416 stakeholder, requires ethics to be included in the curriculum (Crane, 2004). This highlights the need  
417 to emphasize ethics education approach in business schools and finding alternative approaches and  
418 methods to strengthen this vital part of the curriculum. AACBS recognises the value and importance  
419 of ethics and are intrinsically driven to have it embedded in programmes, whereas business schools  
420 are extrinsically driven, often being blamed for focusing too narrowly on efficiency and profit  
421 maximisation (Blasco, 2012). Indeed, academic excellence in terms of scientific research is the main  
422 metric business schools are measuring themselves against (Bennis & O' Toole, 2005). AACSB and  
423 other accreditations such as the European Quality Improvement System (EQUIS) developed by the  
424 European Foundation for Management Development (EFMD), Association of MBA (AMBA), etc.  
425 offer credibility and endorsement of business schools in terms of their performance (Elliott, 2013;  
426 Miles et al., 2004; Proitz et al., 2004). These recognitions lead to benefits in terms of rankings (White  
427 et al., 2009), which subsequently lead to an increase of student recruitment (and retention) at  
428 international and local levels; therefore leading to increased income for the institution (Cret, 2007;  
429 Elliott, 2013). Other benefits include better employment prospects for students, better salaries for

430 academics, increased research productivity and quality, etc. (Elliott, 2013). Accreditation benefits all  
431 stakeholders (White et al., 2009). However, accreditations come with a cost (Heriot & Austin, 2009),  
432 and, as a result, business schools have to be business orientated, which implies a diversion from their  
433 original values (Bennis & O'Toole, 2005). One of the consequences is the increase in student fees  
434 (Elliott, 2013). Nevertheless, as the benefits of accreditations outweigh the costs, the number of  
435 institutions seeking accreditation has significantly increased (Elliott, 2013). In a dynamic and  
436 competitive academic environment, this shift is inevitable (Heriot & Austin, 2009) as proven by the  
437 change of orientation taken by AACSB for instance, which originally was mainly an accreditation for  
438 research-led institutions and, throughout the years, it opened up to teaching-led institutions (Heriot &  
439 Austin, 2009).

440 As more ethics is needed not only in the society but also in business schools (Bennis & O' Toole,  
441 2005; Crane, 2004; Blasco, 2012), PRME becomes even more important amidst other influential  
442 stakeholders, e.g. AACBS and a focus more on ethics as opposed to sustainability with ethics as a core  
443 part of that focus. That said, despite the fact PRME has been around for a decade, and also despite the  
444 growth of this model in terms of signatories (Parkes et al., 2017), there has been extremely limited  
445 (academic) research examining the possible benefits and challenges of this signatory model. Research  
446 focusing on PRME mainly deals with the state of the world and the role that business schools and  
447 PRME can play in the improvement of society and business schools, and practices in terms of the  
448 application of PRME (Parkes et al., 2017).

449 The intrinsically-driven benefits of PRME do not appear well-aligned with the extrinsically-driven  
450 objectives of business schools in terms of recognition for academic excellence (Elliott, 2013; Miles,  
451 Hazeldine & Munilla, 2004; Proitz et al., 2004) or with the benefits of accreditations such as the  
452 AACSB. With the surge of demand for ethics in society and business schools (Bennis & O' Toole,  
453 2005; Crane, 2004), as well as in the tourism industry and related sectors (Seraphin & Nolan, 2019),  
454 PRME have an opportunity to flourish, but might have to operate a strategic and value shift, the same



455 way AACSB did (White et al., 2009), in order to meet the needs of higher education institutions not  
456 only in terms of sustainability education (Bennis & O' Toole, 2005; Crane, 2004), but also in terms  
457 of reputation and therefore income generation (Cret, 2007; Elliot, 2013). Whilst the tourism industry  
458 has established that there is a relationship between environmental sustainability and destination  
459 attractivity (Pulido-Fernandez et al., 2019), the same has not yet been evidenced in tourism education.

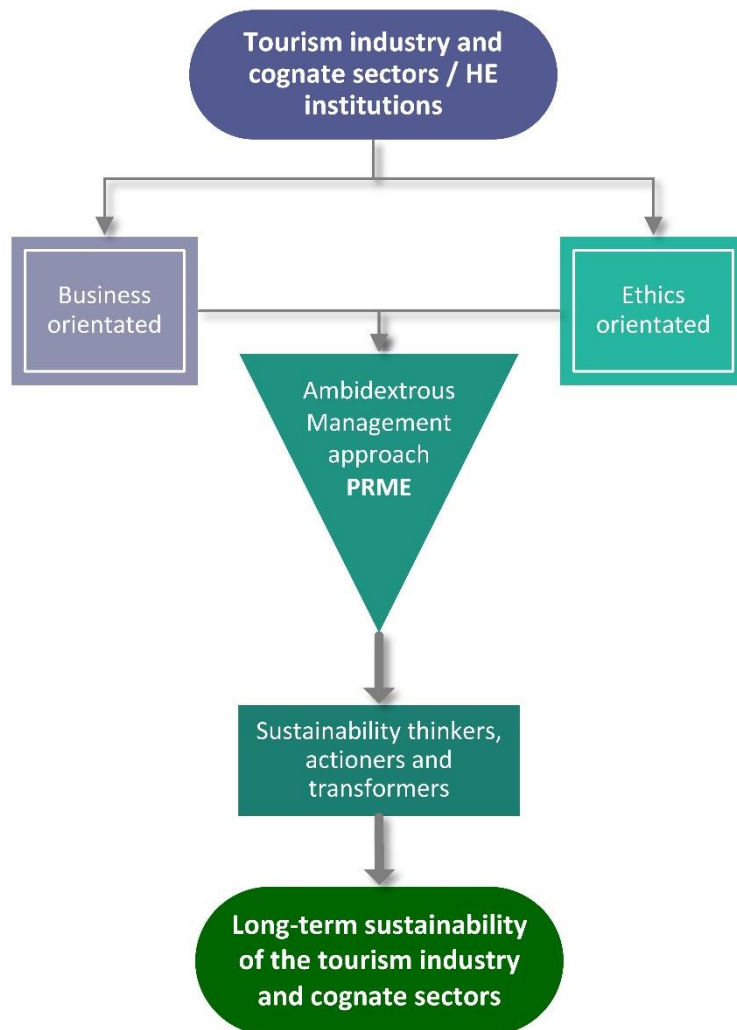
460 With proposition 1 (P1) not being supported in terms of larger numbers of EU higher institutions  
461 uptake to adhere to PRME in course delivery, there are limitations in supporting proposition 2 (P2),  
462 i.e., higher education institutions fostering hard-path leaders and tourists who embrace adventure and  
463 dynamic change for sustainable practice in the future. Indeed, there is a paucity of evidence to support  
464 P2 in general. Thus, and linking to the above, there is a need to consider a repositioning of PRME  
465 that can adopt a more business-orientated approach in order to align with the benefits of accreditations  
466 such as AACSB, while maintaining its current identity, values and objectives. A strategy to engage  
467 more effectively with the limitations of fostering future hard-path leaders and tourists (P2), as well  
468 as assisting a higher uptake for PRME in course delivery (P1), could be achieved through an  
469 ambidextrous repositioning, which would occur within an ambidextrous management approach. This  
470 approach consists in combining two strategies or approaches that might appear contradictory  
471 (Mihalache & Mihalache, 2016), act as polar opposites (Birkinshaw & Gupta, 2013; O'Reilly &  
472 Tushman, 2004, 2008, 2013; Raisch & Tushman, 2011), or even appear as paradoxical tensions  
473 (Stokes et al., 2015; Smith, 2016, 17). In a tourism context, an ambidextrous management approach  
474 has been associated with innovation, performance improvement, value creation, market performance,  
475 and customer loyalty (Vo Thanh et al., 2020). It can also be connected to short-term versus long-  
476 terms aspirations and approaches, with the latter being the most relevant limitation for P2 for fostering  
477 the future leaders and tourists needed. The impacts of ambidextrous management align with the  
478 benefits of accreditations discussed earlier in the paper. This management approach combined with  
479 PRME would align more with the current vision of business schools. To some extent, the

480 philosophical approach of this study is in line with Flohr (2001), who states that sustainability should  
481 be a core unit or aspect of every tourism course. On the other hand, as suggested by Stough et al.  
482 (2018), it would be useful to assess the outputs resulting from the integration of the issues of  
483 sustainability in higher education courses (e.g. acquired competencies or learning objectives).

484  
485 *5.1. Proposed conceptual model*

486 The resulting conceptual model of this study following the analysis of the secondary data available  
487 and the extant literature could be framed as suggested in Figure 6.

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Figure 6: Proposed conceptual model  
Source: The authors

493 Figure 6 highlights that PRME can play a role in the *long-term* sustainability of the tourism industry  
494 if, as a model, PRME is repositioned and managed in an ambidextrous way. A ‘long-term’ orientation,  
495 however, is key for two reasons. First, because PRME will require a long time to become an  
496 established model; this is possibly similar to the amount of time AACSB has required to reach its  
497 international recognition level. The AACSB accreditation was created in 1916 and has known a surge,  
498 for example, in the last two decades (Elliott, 2013). Second, the impacts on education, and therefore  
499 the impacts of the application of PRME in a tourism context, will also be long-term (Vo Thanh et al.,  
500 2020). In addition, more recent research carried out by Séraphin, Smith and Yahiaoui (2021) at Kedge  
501 Business School, a PRME institution in Marseilles, France, revealed that studying at a PRME  
502 institution does not influence positively the students’ understanding of sustainability, and does not  
503 turn them into sustainability actioners, i.e., individuals involved into sustainability initiatives. Also,  
504 the study revealed that practical applications of PRME to issues experienced or witnessed by students  
505 (such as case studies / field work) would enhance the effectiveness of the tool over time (Séraphin et  
506 al., 2021).

507 As a result, this study is calling for a longitudinal strategy to be put in place by all stakeholders of the  
508 tourism industry and cognate sectors. Subsequently, data regarding the impacts of the proposed  
509 strategy should be collected during the time the strategy is being implemented.

510 That said, despite the flaws identified in terms of providing suitable and effective sustainable courses  
511 in tourism and cognate disciplines, it is important to acknowledge that EU higher education  
512 institutions delivering tourism and related courses, either PRME accredited or not, are not dismissing  
513 the importance of sustainability. There is recent evidence that demonstrates that they are initiating  
514 events and actions in their efforts to develop students into sustainability thinkers. For instance, in  
515 France, in February 2020, four higher education institutions delivering tourism courses (two of them  
516 PRME institutions) jointly organised a competition called ‘Get Up 4 Tourism’ (Tourmag, 2020  
517 [Online]). Using a variety of resources over two months, student teams researched, prepared and

518 presented an informed view about what strategy could be put in place in a destination to foster its  
519 sustainable development while maintaining its authenticity (Tourmag, 2020 [Online]).

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## 521 **6. Conclusion**

522 Education has a strong potential in terms of educating the future generation of leaders and managers  
523 and is a key element in achieving the SDGs. This study focused on PRME and its relations to tourism  
524 higher education, with a particular focus on EU member countries. The analysis of our study showed  
525 that, due to its short history, a lack of clear financial benefits for higher education institutions, as well  
526 as a lack of clear correlation between PRME and the performance of destinations, PRME has not  
527 been fully embedded in tourism curricula. Sweden remains the exception in the EU due to the  
528 country's tradition of nature protection and close connection with the natural environment. An  
529 ambidextrous management approach should be applied to PRME in order to enhance its overall  
530 contribution to sustainability and to the tourism industry in particular. Additionally, the application  
531 of PRME should also go beyond the *stricto sensu* education environment and be extended to (tourism)  
532 businesses in order to reach out to a maximum of individuals and stakeholders.

533 This study contributes to the growing literature on sustainability and tourism higher education. The  
534 findings of the study show that education has a strong potential to the realization of SDGs. An  
535 ambidextrous management approach is also suggested as it best fits with the SDGs and the global  
536 community in general.

537 Nevertheless, this study has some limitations. For instance, the findings based on the analysis and  
538 interpretation of the performance of destinations/countries presented in Table 4 (as well as the entire  
539 study) only took into consideration PRME institutions. There is no evidence that other institutions do  
540 not cover sustainability in their tourism courses. In the UK, for example, Flohr (2001) explained that  
541 some postgraduate courses in tourism, albeit with no reference to sustainability in their title, cover

542 certain aspects of sustainability in their curriculum. Furthermore, in order to gain a clearer picture of  
543 the impacts and consequences of adopting PRME in tourism higher education programmes, a  
544 longitudinal study is recommended to examine these issues, which may be the focus of further  
545 research.

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