

TRANSFORMING TOURISM EDUCATION: FOUR YEARS OF INNOVATION AT THE ÉCOLE D'HÔTELLERIE ET DE TOURISME DU LUXEMBOURG (EHTL)

Isabelle Frank^{1*}

¹École d'Hôtellerie et de Tourisme du Luxembourg, Diekirch, Luxembourg, isabelle.frank@education.lu

Abstract

For over twenty years, the École d'Hôtellerie et de Tourisme du Luxembourg (EHTL) has placed tourism at the heart of its institutional identity. In the wake of COVID-19, the tourism sector has experienced structural changes, with greater emphasis on artificial intelligence, local immersion, and social inclusion. In response, EHTL has redesigned its tourism programme to meet evolving market needs while maintaining educational quality and employability. The revised curriculum features historical and cultural literacy, integration of digital tools and AI, sustainability-focused storytelling, and a shift from passive observation to active local engagement. Excellence in hospitality remains a core component. A rigorous methodological framework guided curriculum development, including professional consultation, literature review, participation in industry events, and reflective pedagogical practice. Outcomes include a region-specific curriculum for EMHTR in Cotonou, Benin, aligned with global standards, and the planned launch of a new BTS in Tourism and Communication. This curriculum fosters immersive, digitally enhanced learning and incorporates communication strategies to support meaningful, inclusive tourism. EHTL thus distinguishes itself as a leader in tourism education innovation.

Keywords: curriculum, tourism, communication, resilience, think tank

JEL Classification: I21, L83, Z32, Z39

DOI: 10.24818/CTS/7/2025/2.12

1. EHTL: tradition, renewal and the post-pandemic challenge

The École d'Hôtellerie et de Tourisme du Luxembourg (EHTL) has a long-standing tradition of providing vocational education in hospitality. For over 75 years, it has trained students in the core practices of the sector, and for more than two decades, it has included tourism in its educational programmes. This integration was formalised in 2018 by adding “Tourisme” to the institution's name, reflecting a strategic expansion of its curriculum to encompass tourism studies.

This development was partly inspired by the legacy of Alexis Heck (1830–1908), a pioneering hotelier from Diekirch and the author of *The Grand Duchy of Luxembourg: A Short Handbook for Travellers* (1893), the first known tourist guide to Luxembourg. His contribution established the historical foundation for tourism in the Grand Duchy.

The COVID-19 pandemic was a disruptive force across all sectors, particularly in tourism and education. In line with Churchill's assertion to “never waste a good crisis” (Blanchet and Luczak-Rougeaux, 2022), EHTL used the pandemic as a turning point for curricular reform. The institution recognised the need for rapid adaptation, resilience, and innovation to address a profoundly changed tourism landscape.

Post-pandemic changes in the tourism industry have been multifaceted. The shift from traditional sightseeing to experiential and immersive travel has altered travellers' expectations. Furthermore, the concept of destinations – referred to by Knafo (2012) as “lieux du voyage” – has evolved, with greater emphasis on authenticity and local engagement. Stakeholders, including governments, local communities, and tourists, have had to navigate complex cycles of over-tourism, under-tourism, and the resurgence of mass tourism.

*Corresponding author

At the same time, the sector faces new systemic challenges, including climate change, sustainability imperatives, accelerated digital transformation, the integration of artificial intelligence, and increasing demand for social inclusion. These factors require a comprehensive rethinking of tourism education to prepare future professionals for an increasingly complex and dynamic environment.

In response, EHTL began a strategic overhaul of its two-year tourism technician training programme. A key constraint in this process has been the lack of age-appropriate educational materials in French. Most available resources are designed for post-secondary education levels, such as the French BTS Tourisme, and are therefore not aligned with the cognitive and academic levels of students aged 15.

In this context, tourism education extends beyond the transmission of knowledge to include the development of critical thinking and interpretive skills essential for understanding and engaging with global tourism systems. As a result, EHTL is developing a modern, relevant, and accessible curriculum tailored to younger learners, ensuring that future professionals acquire both technical skills and reflective capacities.

This study examines the institutional strategies EHTL employs to redesign its tourism curriculum, with emphasis on pedagogical innovation, the integration of digital technologies, and the incorporation of sustainability principles into the training framework. The aim is to provide insights into how vocational education providers can remain responsive and forward-looking amid systemic industry change.

2. Rethinking tourism education in a changing world

Tourism is currently undergoing significant transformation, influenced by various sociocultural, environmental, and technological factors. As Edelheim, Joppe and Flaherty (2022) state, tourism is “a hallmark activity of the postmodern world” and plays a central role in shaping societal behaviours and identities. This evolving landscape directly affects tourism education, which must now address not only industry expectations but also broader philosophical and ethical considerations.

Several drivers of change have reshaped the tourism sector in recent years. The COVID-19 pandemic served as a global reset, forcing both the industry and education providers to reassess their models and values. Climate change continues to alter traditional seasonal travel patterns, prompting destinations and institutions to reconsider long-term strategies. The rise of artificial intelligence (AI) is enhancing efficiency while also challenging the human-centric nature of the tourism profession. As Blanchet and Luczak-Rougeaux (2022) observe, the growing influence of augmented and virtual reality has created a “phygital” reality, where digital innovation intersects with the physical world, accompanied by countertrends such as digital detoxification and digital nomadism.

Social inclusion is another major theme. Although the discourse on inclusive tourism began in the 1990s, it remains a pressing issue. As Font (2024) notes, inclusion is among the central challenges facing contemporary tourism, encompassing accessibility, representation, and equity. In response to these multidimensional pressures, Edelheim, Joppe, and Flaherty (2022) call for an “awakening of lived values and consciousness” within both the industry and education sectors.

EHTL has worked to align its curriculum with these dynamic changes. The school’s forthcoming programme, the Brevet de Technicien Supérieur (BTS) in Tourism and Communication, is designed to address these evolving conditions. In Luxembourg, the BTS is a professionally oriented higher education degree, typically completed in two years (minimum 120 ECTS credits). The curriculum is structured to meet the needs of local industries and to prepare students for careers in a rapidly changing tourism landscape.

A dual reality exists within tourism education. On one hand, there is the external, fast-moving world of practice, marked by concerns such as over-tourism, climate adaptation, regenerative travel, and the ethical integration of artificial intelligence. As Antoniou (2023) states, tourism can be interpreted as a form of international relations, playing roles in diplomacy, development, and peacebuilding. On the other hand, the internal world of tourism education remains, in many contexts, conservative and outdated. To bridge this gap, curricula must be revitalised to prepare students for contemporary demands. As Cholat et al. (2018) suggest, tourism and adaptation must be understood as inherently plural and interdependent concepts.

During the development of the new curriculum, EHTL emphasised the need to balance innovation and adaptation. Localism, for example, received increased attention in response to the growing importance of regional culture and domestic tourism after the pandemic. Innovation also included the introduction of new course content and the creation of opportunities for experimentation with exercises and pedagogical models. According to Blanchet and Luczak-Rougeaux (2022), “innovation is defined as the constructed improvement of our human condition”, a guiding principle in EHTL’s reform.

The redesign of the tourism curriculum was collaborative and evidence-based. It was informed by input from over 40 consultations with tourism professionals, as well as contributions from teachers, external experts, and institutional stakeholders, including the Ministry of National Education and the Ministry of Tourism. A key component of this process was a 17-question survey distributed in 2021 to stakeholders from both the public and private tourism sectors, which helped define training priorities.

This research and consultation process identified three foundational pillars for training tourism and communication technicians:

- *General culture to enhance knowledge and performance quality.*
- *Digitalisation to prepare students for contemporary tools and platforms.*
- *Customer relationship management to maintain human-centred service and empathy.*

These were later expanded into five integrated pillars:

2.1 General culture and heritage

Combined to promote understanding and preservation of both tangible and intangible heritage. EHTL incorporates the concept of “patrimondialisations”, as discussed by Gravari-Barbas and Jacquot (2024), while cautioning against the Disneyfication of culture. The programme includes subjects such as tourist geography, history and culture, and geopolitics, consistent with its UNESCO school values.

2.2 Digitalisation and innovation

The COVID-19 crisis highlighted the essential role of digital tools in both teaching and practice. EHTL uses technologies such as Apple Education and Google for Education to equip students with practical skills. Valeri (2023) emphasises the transformative impact of technology on the tourism workforce, noting that digital literacy is critical for future employability.

2.3 Communication and storytelling: In today’s tourism economy, effective storytelling through multimedia platforms is increasingly valuable. EHTL emphasises multilingual communication and narrative construction in French, English, German, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, and Dutch, reflecting the industry’s diversity.

2.4 Experience and immersion

The curriculum includes hands-on activities, site visits, and immersive learning opportunities to help students internalise tourism values. Initiatives also feature workshops on regenerative tourism, as discussed during the Enforce Workshop (Camera di Commercio Italiana Lussemburgo, 2024).

2.5 Good manners, courtesy and intercultural etiquette

Given tourism’s interpersonal nature, intercultural competence and respectful behaviour are essential for both study and professional practice. Hospitality and *savoir-vivre* are therefore core values of EHTL’s educational philosophy.

The updated programme, now titled Tourism and Communication, reflects the sector’s evolving requirements. It emphasises cultural heritage, sustainability, digital fluency, effective communication, and interpersonal skills. By integrating technical training with humanistic values, EHTL aims to prepare students for employment and for responsible, impactful careers in a global tourism environment shaped by increasing complexity and change.

3. Designing a future-oriented curriculum

The development of a contemporary tourism curriculum at EHTL was based on empirical research and informed professional practice. The process began with market research focused on the national tourism

sector and a comparative analysis of tourism education programmes in neighbouring countries, specifically those offering instruction in German or French. These investigations benchmarked existing programmes and identified gaps and opportunities relevant to the Luxembourgish context.

Over four years, the reform was shaped by ongoing critical reflection and iterative consultation with stakeholders, aligned with a long-term vision of academic progression and professional readiness, defined by Ten Guiding Questions for Change:

1. What models of tourism education exist in neighbouring countries?
2. How can high-quality student training be ensured?
3. How can employability be fostered within Luxembourg and internationally?
4. Which curricular elements are essential to gain industry endorsement?
5. What distinguishes this reformed programme from its predecessor?
6. Why was the curriculum structured around two disciplinary pillars?
7. How were key priorities identified by the industry addressed?
8. What defines a contemporary training programme?
9. Why introduce a BTS in Tourism and Communication at this point?
10. What added value does a BTS in Tourism and Communication provide?

These questions guided the entire curriculum redesign process and served as the foundation for the tourism technician training curriculum at EHTL.

The decalogue led to the development of the tourism technician training curriculum at the École d'Hôtellerie et de Tourisme du Luxembourg (EHTL) through a structured methodology based on six key approaches:

3.1 Ongoing dialogue with industry professionals

Continuous interaction with tourism professionals, including representatives from the Ministry, the Directorate General of Tourism, travel agencies, tour operators, and UNESCO, ensures a strong connection with the external environment. Given Luxembourg's small size and the school's specialised focus, direct engagement with industry stakeholders highlights local attitudes and practices. Access to Luxembourg's tourism databases through workshops on big data provides specific insights into visitor profiles, expectations, and feedback. Collaboration with the tourism and events industry fosters partnerships with companies, enabling students to participate in internships and practical projects that link theory to practice. Regular field trips support these interactions, helping students become familiar with local issues and maintain direct links with key players in the tourism industry.

3.2 Servant leadership in education

A key element in fostering effective academic and professional training is the concept of servant leadership (Greenleaf, 1977). This leadership model emphasises the role of educators in supporting students and collaborating with the industry to promote mutual growth and knowledge transfer.

3.3 Continuous research and engagement with current trends

Ongoing research in specialised tourism literature is essential for staying informed about current trends and emerging developments in the field. Additionally, the ability to engage with literature in multiple languages broadens the scope of knowledge, incorporating international perspectives into the curriculum.

3.4 Active participation in seminars and conferences

Participation in working groups, seminars such as those provided online by the University of Jaén in Spain, conferences, and webinars offers opportunities to acquire in-depth knowledge on emerging topics, challenges, and expectations in the tourism sector. For example, a workshop led by Xavier Font, Professor of Sustainability Marketing at the University of Surrey, held in December 2024, was a catalyst for new ideas on redesigning tourism experiences to create positive change.

3.5 Visits to tourism events and trade fairs

Students benefit from visits to major tourism events and trade fairs, such as the ULT Travel Expo, Luxembourg Tourism Summit, Expogast, RTK Dialogtage, ITB (Berlin), and IMEX (Frankfurt). Active participation at stands, such as the “Visit Luxembourg” stand at ITB, provides immersive experiences in the tourism industry. These events offer valuable exposure to current trends, consumer expectations, and tourism promotion challenges, while helping students establish connections with future business partners and clients.

3.6 Identification of paradigm shifts

An essential part of curriculum development is identifying paradigm shifts that inform programme adaptation and innovation. The current situation highlights the relevance of these shifts, particularly regarding the relocation of the Centre Pompidou to Metz in the Greater Region. The Metz Museum, designed by Shigeru Ban, winner of the 2014 Pritzker Prize, positions the site within the broader context of “Stararchitecture(s)” (Gravari-Barbas & Renard-Delautre, 2015), a trend gaining traction in Luxembourg and the Greater Region (Luxembourg, Lorraine, Rhineland-Palatinate, Saarland, Wallonia, and German-speaking Belgium). The museum will benefit from the relocation of artworks during the closure of the Parisian site until 2030. Moreover, current political events underline the importance of geopolitics and local tourism.

4. From learning to impact: the results of four years of reform

The programme spans four years, each comprising 28 weeks of academic courses, followed by 10 to 12 weeks of work experience in Luxembourg or abroad, depending on the students’ age. This structure ensures a blend of theoretical knowledge and practical application, preparing students for the dynamic tourism and communication sectors.

The curriculum emphasises several key areas to provide a comprehensive, well-rounded education. These 11 areas include:

1. A balanced focus on the tourism and communication sectors.
2. Enhancing existing language courses and introducing new languages.
3. Teaching tourist geography, covering regions from Luxembourg to Oceania.
4. Integrating history and culture to foster a deeper understanding of the tourism field.
5. Promoting and appreciating localism and regionalism.
6. Introducing a geopolitics course with connections to tourism.
7. Educating students on the role of social media networking in the tourism industry.
8. Developing skills to identify and understand different customer profiles.
9. Providing lessons based on current tourism trends.
10. Offering training in manners, politeness, and intercultural management.
11. Organising visits and excursions to tourist sites and partners within the tourism and external communication sectors.

The curriculum aims to instil eight essential humanist principles: 1. multilingual communication; 2. respect and tolerance in a diverse, globalised world; 3. sharing history and culture on a global scale; 4. highlighting local attitudes and regional specialities; 5. critical discussions on tourism’s social and environmental impact; 6. addressing concerns about over-tourism and sustainability; 7. enhancing well-being through responsible tourism practices; 8. responsible and intelligent use of artificial intelligence in tourism.

Each course in the curriculum follows a logical sequence that builds on prior knowledge, providing both repetitive and increasingly challenging learning experiences. This structure aims to develop students who are knowledgeable, curious, innovative, and well-prepared for careers in the tourism sector, whether as professionals or future scholars. EHTL’s curriculum encourages curiosity about other cultures, whether established in Luxembourg or the broader region. This fosters respect, mutual tolerance, and an understanding that cultural diversity enriches tourism. Specific cultural elements are essential for developing tourism in new areas and dispersing tourist flows, benefiting both visitors and local communities.

Therefore, EHTL includes two main topics in its curriculum:

a. The social impact of tourism

A core aim of tourism education is to promote the positive social impact of tourism. As Knafo (2012) notes, “tourism is first and foremost a journey and a confrontation with an unfamiliar place that is not part of one's daily life” (p. 55). This journey should be guided by educators who are open-minded and enthusiastic about teaching unfamiliar places, cultures, and traditions. Such an approach enables students to understand the essence of destinations, whether continents, countries, islands, regions, towns, villages, parks, or specific events. In today's tourism landscape, it is essential to promote all aspects that positively characterise a destination to preserve its authenticity. It is also important to promote “good” tourism, not “bad” tourism – tourism should be kind, sustainable, respectful, immersive, and regenerative.

b. The promotion of inbound and regional tourism

Luxembourg's unique position in Europe – bordered by France, Germany, and the Benelux countries, and as one of the founding nations of the European Union – makes it an ideal setting for showcasing cultural proximity. EHTL encourages students to explore the cultural and linguistic diversity within the Greater Region, where French, German, and Luxembourgish communities coexist within a 100 km radius. Respecting and appreciating local and regional characteristics in a globalised world is integral to tourism education at EHTL. The school also plans to establish a student exchange programme with a small Luxembourgish community in Wisconsin and to highlight the historical connection between Sibiu and Luxembourg.

4.1 From vocational training to a think tank

After four years of vocational training, during which students receive 25 to 29 hours of instruction per week, the current Brevet de Technicien Supérieur (BTS) in Hospitality Management – with four hours per week dedicated to tourism – serves as a springboard for diverse learning experiences and innovative case studies. These experiences include topics such as the promotion of UNESCO's intangible heritage and the exploration of trends and challenges in the tourism sector.

However, this BTS remains part of a broader training programme primarily focused on hospitality, incorporating elements from various disciplines, including economics, hotel management, events management, leadership, law, financial analysis, and marketing. While deeply rooted in a strong vocational tradition, the École d'Hôtellerie et de Tourisme du Luxembourg (EHTL) is increasingly positioning itself as a key player in educational innovation and industry research. This shift is exemplified by the adoption of active teaching methodologies, project-based learning, and the encouragement of student participation in practical activities such as presentations and case studies.

4.2 Achievement and project

1. Creation of a Tourism Curriculum for the EHMTR in Cotonou, Benin: For the 2026 academic year, a tailored tourism curriculum will be introduced at the École Hôtelière et de Management Touristique de Cotonou (EHMTR) in Benin, designed to meet the region's specific needs and standards.

2. Planned BTS (Advanced Technician's Certificate) at EHTL: For the 2027 academic year, EHTL plans to introduce a BTS in Tourism and Communication to further integrate research into the curriculum and immerse students in the tourism industry. This will position the institution as an innovation hub for the sector.

4.3 Role model for tourism education

The EHTL is a pioneer in developing contemporary tourism curricula. Integrating tourism and communication within the institution's educational framework has led to an advanced training programme. This programme emphasises storytelling, digitalisation, and artificial intelligence, shaping new immersive tourism experiences that incorporate local perspectives and promote social inclusion.

EHTL firmly rejects the concept of static and monotonous tourism monoculture (Costa, 2022) and actively fosters a dynamic and evolving field of study, embracing the concept of futourism – the future of tourism (Costa, 2022).

As a 75-year-old institution, EHTL encourages the responsible use of innovative research tools to advance and accelerate research, while also emphasising the importance of human intelligence in complementing artificial intelligence. Henry Kissinger, nearly 100 years old, ventured into this area by co-authoring a book on artificial intelligence (Kissinger, Schmidt & Huttenlocher, 2024).

The proposed BTS in Tourism and Communication, planned for the 2027/28 academic year, could serve as a laboratory for tourism research and innovation. This new post-secondary higher education course would combine theory and practice, offering new opportunities for the future of the tourism industry in an ever-changing world. It would further solidify EHTL's commitment to exemplary and transformative curriculum development in the tourism field.

This new post-secondary higher education course dedicated to tourism and communication training and research would enable EHTL to continue its exemplary and transformative curriculum development in this field.

5. Conclusions - shaping the future of tourism learning

The evolution of the tourism sector – shaped by post-pandemic disruptions, rapid technological advancements, and changing societal expectations – requires a reimagining of traditional educational models. The École d'Hôtellerie et de Tourisme du Luxembourg (EHTL) is proactively responding to these changes by implementing an ambitious educational approach that balances theoretical foundations with practical experience, adaptability, and innovation. The institution has revised its curriculum to address emerging tourism trends and to compensate for the lack of adequate pedagogical materials in French, especially in the post-pandemic context.

Structured around five essential pillars, EHTL's updated curriculum closely aligns with ongoing transformations in the tourism industry. This pedagogical framework is supported by continuous research, strong partnerships with industry stakeholders, and robust experiential learning, ensuring a training program that is both relevant and forward-thinking.

The planned launch of a Brevet de Technicien Supérieur (BTS) in Tourism and Communication marks a pivotal step in this evolution. This initiative positions EHTL not only as a training center but also as a pedagogical and experimental laboratory, providing a stimulating environment to prepare the next generation of tourism professionals.

EHTL's commitment to tourism education extends beyond national boundaries. The development of a contextually adapted tourism curriculum in Cotonou, Benin, exemplifies the institution's dedication to sharing expertise and promoting flexible, globally conscious educational practices.

Through its innovative programs, EHTL aims to cultivate resilient, forward-looking professionals equipped with "intelligence touristique" - a tourism-specific form of critical thinking and adaptability requested by Maria Gravari Barbas (Foreword in: Cholat et al., 2018) - at a time when artificial intelligence increasingly intersects with and challenges human-centered approaches.

References

- Antoniou, K. (2023). *Tourism as a form of international relations: Insights from contemporary practice*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing [online] Available at: <<https://www.e-elgar.com/shop/gbp/tourism-as-a-form-of-international-relations-9781802207767.html>> [Accessed 20 November 2025].
- Blanchet, C. and Luczak-Rougeaux, J. (2022). *Dictionnaire tourisme et numérique*. Paris: Editions L'Harmattan [online] Available at: <<https://www.editions-harmattan.fr/catalogue/livre/dictionnaire-tourisme-et-numerique/2856>> [Accessed 18 November 2025].
- Camera di Commercio Italo-Lussemburghese. (2024). *Training Session ENFORCE on Regenerative Tourism*. EHTL [online] Available at: <<https://www.ccilux.eu/>> [Accessed 20 November 2025].
- Cholat, F., Gwiadzinski, L., Tritz, C. and Tuppen, J. (2018). *Tourisme(s) et adaptation(s)*. Elya Éditions. [online] Available at: <<https://shs.hal.science/halshs-02090507v1>>, [Accessed 20 November 2025].
- Costa, M. (2022). *FuTurismo*. 2nd edn. Un accorato appello contro la monocultura turistica. Bozen: Raetia.

- Edelheim, J., Joppe, M. and Flaherty, J. (Eds.). (2022). *Teaching tourism: Innovative, values-based learning experiences for transformative practices*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.4337/9781800374560>.
- Font, X. (2024). *How to market and communicate your authenticity and sustainability*. Sustainability [Workshop] with Prof. Xavier Font, 10 December, Luxembourg City Tourist Office, Luxembourg. [online] Available at: <<https://greenbusinessevents.lu/en/event/sustainability-workshop-with-prof-xavier-font/>>, [Accessed 20 November 2025].
- Gravari-Barbas, M. and Renard-Delautre, C. (2015). *Starchitecture(s): Figures d'architectes et espace urbain / Celebrity architects and urban space*. Paris: L'Harmattan. [online] Available at: <<https://journals.openedition.org/cybergeogeo/27856>>, [Accessed 21 November 2025].
- Gravari-Barbas, M. and Jacquot, S. (eds.) (2024) *Patrimondialisations: la fabrique touristique globale du patrimoine*. Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes.
- Greenleaf, R. K. (1977). *Servant leadership: A journey into the nature of legitimate power and greatness*. New York: Paulist Press.
- Kissinger, H., Schmidt, E. and Huttenlocher, D. (2024). *The Age of AI and Our Human Future*. London: John Murray.
- Knafou, R. (Ed.). (2012). *Lieux du voyage*. Paris: Le Cavalier Bleu Éditions.
- Valeri, M. (Ed.). (2023). *Tourism innovation in the digital era: Big data, AI and technological transformation*. Bingley: Emerald Publishing Limited. <https://doi.org/10.1108/9781837971664>.