

# Research and Publication in Hospitality Management and Tourism Higher Education in Ecuador: A Decade-Long Journey 2012-2021

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## Abstract

This paper describes a ten-year, ongoing research engagement with colleagues in hospitality and tourism higher education in Ecuador. It addresses the challenges and highlights the rewards of conducting research in an environment where publication needs are high and academics are keen to publish, but where the infrastructure to conduct research is very limited and professors often lack research and publication experience. The paper describes the successes we attained, and encourages others to engage in similar endeavors. It makes a case for academics to work across different cultures and assist those among their peers who are less fortunate in terms of the personal and professional resources they have available to be successful in of research and publication.

**Keywords:** Ecuador, hospitality and tourism education, research and publication, sabbatical, cross-cultural collaboration.

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## Introduction

Many of us in higher education are fortunate to have a sabbatical every six years and we generally spend it working on our personal research programs. Away from our students, colleagues and offices, we work at home or in a library, enhancing and revitalizing our research agendas. The focus of the sabbatical tends to be on “I” and “my,” as the rules of the game tell us. Yet, could a sabbatical also be about “we” and “our” and fulfill our personal sabbatical requirements at the same time? Even though this paper is written from a personal perspective, it is not intended to be about me. It is about the international colleagues and graduate students I have worked with over the past decade and the successes we have had as teams, with each team member working to the best of his/her ability.

When I stepped down from more than fifteen years in academic administration and went back to a faculty position in 2011, I told myself that I would never again publish alone. This might fly in the face of conventional wisdom or common practice, but being about twelve years away from retirement at that time, I felt that I should focus on helping others reach their objectives, and in doing so, reach my own. To me, the role of a senior faculty member is to support and nurture others: graduate students and junior colleagues at my own institution and colleagues abroad who work under challenging circumstances. The international colleagues that I am referring to here are professors in Ecuador who have limited experience in doing research and publication, but who are expected to publish while having to spend most of their time in the classroom.

Thanks to a personal connection, I secured a yearlong sabbatical position in Ecuador. I was the fortunate recipient of a “Prometeo” grant from the Ecuadorian government, a grant similar in nature to a Fulbright scholarship. Prometeo scholars were expected to help develop the research and publication skills of the faculty members they worked with in Ecuador, and to raise the stature of the country’s higher education system in the process. In July 2012, I set out to fulfill my end of the bargain and left for Cuenca, a provincial city of some 500,000 inhabitants in the middle of the country, located at an altitude of 9,000 feet in the foothills of the Andes. I arrived at the University of Cuenca and took stock of the challenges that lay ahead of me.

## The Challenges

Once I had settled in, I quickly came to realize that there were two main challenges facing professors in Ecuador in general and the faculty members in the College of Hospitality and Tourism Sciences at the University of Cuenca in particular. My arrival had coincided with a concerted push by the Ecuadorian government to raise the country’s academic stature by improving its research capabilities and output. Concretely, it meant that full-time university professors, most of whom held bachelor’s degrees and taught 30 hours a week, were now expected to hold at least a master’s degree, work 40 hours a week, and publish in refereed journals. On top of that, many of them were told to complete a doctoral degree at a reputable university in seven years at the start of the initiative in 2010. The assumption was that better educated professors would be more informed instructors that could instigate and conduct research on their own and thereby raising the bar for the university system overall and supporting the country in its economic and social development needs (Van Hoof et al., 2013).

The second challenge was both external and internal to the academy. The government had put some bite behind its initiative and had decreed that, as of 2010, future raises and promotions would be tied to research output and degrees held. That meant that professors who had been teaching for decades, many without a graduate degree, risked demotion in rank, a decline in salary, or even the loss of their jobs. Even though the goals of the initiative might have been laudable, and the government had provided some financial support for the initiative (as a Prometo grant recipient I was part of that support), the consequences were not well thought out and its execution was flawed, to say the least (Van Hoof, 2015).

How do you complete a doctorate in five years if you only hold a bachelor's degree? How do you do research if you have no research background, there are no journals available in the library, or you have never even read an academic journal? At the time, there were no programs in the country granting doctoral degrees. There were grants available for faculty members to pursue a doctoral education abroad, but that would mean leaving or uprooting one's family. There were some Ecuadorian professors with doctorates, but rather than conducting research and teaching others, most of those were placed in administrative positions and their research efforts and skills fell by the wayside.

Those were the challenges we faced when I arrived: a faculty desperate for advanced degrees and anxious to publish but without any experience in doing research and with very heavy teaching loads. Opposed to that, a central government that pursued policies with lofty goals but that clearly had not thought through the practical consequences of its decisions, and a university infrastructure that could do very little to support any research initiatives. However, this paper is not about the challenges we faced, but rather about the solutions we found.

## **The Solutions**

### ***A Pragmatic Approach: Phase 1 2012-2013***

At the start of the sabbatical, my local colleagues in Cuenca and I agreed that the choice of a pursuit of a doctorate was a personal decision that I could do very little about. I could advise them on what degrees to pursue, at which universities and in which countries, but that was the extent of my value to them. Where I could make a difference was in exposing them to the research process and in getting them published.

We agreed that we had to be pragmatic and pursue immediate results. My local colleagues only had a few years left on a clock that had been ticking for two years already, with everybody still in shock and not having done anything about it, not because they did not have a sense of urgency, but rather because they just did not know where to start.

We decided that we would include several faculty members on every research project we initiated, and that we would add them on every refereed article we would write. Our projects should be within what was possible and should initially include study subjects that were readily available. We agreed that we would publish in English and in Spanish, that our publications had to be refereed, that we would work at a high pace, and that we would actively support the only refereed journal published in the University of Cuenca with manuscript submissions as well. My Ecuadorian colleagues were desperate for refereed publications and I needed to be able to show the results of my efforts to the Ecuadorian Ministry of Higher Education and to my own university at the end of my sabbatical year.

Making the most of what was initially possible, we started with the low-hanging fruit, duplicating studies that I had done with colleagues and graduate students in the past in a cross-cultural setting, since the research premises, the methodologies and most of the data collection tools had already been developed. We established a process in which local faculty members reviewed relevant literature in Spanish, collected the data that we needed for the studies and translated original manuscripts in English into Spanish when needed. My role was to come up with the research ideas, organize the team, include collaborators in the US, assign responsibilities, and then write the bulk of the manuscript.

Those initial projects, and the articles that came out of them, (Van Hoof et al., 2013a; Feyen and Van Hoof, 2013; McGinley et al., 2013; Van Hoof et al, 2013b) mostly dealt with student reading behaviors, student career prospects, industry perceptions about hospitality higher education, faculty reading behaviors, and the recent changes that had occurred in Ecuadorian higher education. By spring 2013, we had published four articles in local, national and international refereed publications. Those initial successes generated enthusiasm about what was possible among my colleagues in Ecuador and among my colleagues and graduate students in the United States.

Yet, this also led to me being asked to do presentations about the research process and academic writing. Where at first I only presented to my immediate collaborators in my home college, this soon grew into a lecture series for the university faculty overall and later for faculty at universities around the country. Even more so than those initial publications, these presentations fulfilled the requirements of my Prometeo grant, which had charged me to raise the research awareness among hospitality and tourism faculty around the country and among faculty from various other departments at the University of Cuenca. Those lectures also led to a growing pool of potential collaborators at other universities in Cuenca, Guayaquil and Quito, who were equally in need of

publications. At the end of my sabbatical, my Ecuadorian sponsor indicated it had been a successful year and my own university was satisfied with its outcomes as well.

### ***Phase 2: 2013-2018***

I left Ecuador in the summer of 2013 with several additional manuscripts under review, most of which came out in 2014 (Cueva Navas et al., 2014; Van Hoof, et al., 2014). One of those was published in Spanish, which was a first for me. I found out that in Spanish the document we wrote in English became some 20% longer, a cultural and semantic learning experience that was reflective of the nature of the Spanish language and of my own ignorance.

Given our early successes, it was the vision of the president of the University of Cuenca at the time that extended my collaboration with the university for a longer period of time. He asked me to come back every semester to continue my lectures and work with the faculty from a distance. This led to several additional publications and to collaboration with faculty members at other universities in Ecuador.

This time, however, the focus changed. Whereas I had generated the ideas, set up the process, assigned responsibilities and wrote the bulk of the articles in the initial phase, we changed our approach somewhat, without giving up on our intent to get as many people as possible involved in the process. The needs for publications had only grown as the 2017 deadline was rapidly approaching.

Now, my own US graduate students generated some of the research ideas and they were charged with data analysis and writing a first draft. My role was still to initiate the studies and organize and manage the teams, but rather than being the writer, I became the editor. My graduate students needed applied research experience and publications as they worked their way through our doctoral program towards tenure-track positions, and they now had a means to test their research ideas in cross-cultural settings.

As part of this initiative, seventeen more joint publications came out between 2015 and 2019. My own graduate students and my Ecuadorian colleagues were the lead authors in most cases (Van Hoof et al., 2014a; Van Hoof et al., 2014b; Van Hoof, et al., 2015a; Van Hoof et al., 2015b; Xu et al., 2015; Cueva et al., 2015; Sanchez Rodas et al., 2015; Van Hoof et al., 2015c; Fan et al., 2016; Xu et al., 2016; Feyen et al., 2016; Xu et al., 2016; Pinassi et al., 2017; Van Hoof et al., 2017; Xu et al., 2017; Ozanne et al., 2017; Ouyang et al., 2019), and none of them were single-authored.

### ***Phase 3: 2019-present***

At present, almost ten years after my sabbatical in Ecuador, things have changed yet again. Because of severe budget restraints, it is no longer possible for universities in Ecuador to pay for my expenses. The Prometeo grant program has been cancelled and Ecuador is in economic dire straits. However, the contacts have remained, as have the needs for publication.

We now work long-distance and communicate on-line. We conduct research and publish jointly with colleagues from universities in Ecuador and in Europe. We have recently started several cross-cultural projects with junior colleagues in my own department, with former graduate students who are now at other universities (Jolly et al., 2021; Fan, et al., 2021) and with colleagues at the University of Applied Sciences in Maastricht, the Netherlands who are also anxious to build their research portfolios.

My role is still to bring the teams together and to communicate with team members for the duration of the projects. However, my colleagues are now in charge of the writing and publication responsibilities and my involvement with the manuscripts is mostly as a final set of eyes on a document before they it is submitted for publication. We continue to look for ways to involve our colleagues in Ecuador and actively encourage them to publish in Spanish themselves, which they are now able to do with minimal guidance.

Ultimately, I would like to see some of my junior colleagues take over as I retire in a few years. They will have their own studies and topics to pursue, and in those studies the importance of applying them in a cross-cultural setting is only growing. Our Ecuadorian colleagues now have a greater awareness of study design and methodology and are able to identify suitable research journals for their own publications. They still need some guidance at the conceptual level and I often provide them with brief paper outlines and an “angle for the story.” After that, however, they are able to submit manuscripts for review themselves.

### **Conclusion**

As a result of our joint efforts, twenty-five refereed publications in English and Spanish, in refereed journals in the US, Europe and South America were published. Seven colleagues and ten graduate students in the US were involved over the years, as well as twenty-seven different faculty members at six different universities in Ecuador and Argentina. Were all the publications of the highest quality? Of course not. Pragmatic considerations to get as many different people published as quickly as possible at times determined the choice of publication outlets. Did everybody do an equal amount of work? Of course not. We all worked to the best of our abilities, but nobody received credit without making a contribution. Did I have to do most of the work initially? Of course

I did, if only because I knew how to put a team together and how to manage team members' responsibilities, and because I had done it before. Moreover, the work that I did was a requirement of the grant that I had received.

I started out this discussion by wondering whether a sabbatical that focuses on “we” and “our” could fulfill one’s personal sabbatical requirements at the same time. I think it can, as the above pages have explained. But, it is more than just the fulfillment of my sabbatical requirements in terms of research and publication that makes me look back with great pleasure at the past ten years.

I have been able to fulfill the role that every senior faculty member, especially at the end of his/her career, could play. In my mind, mentoring graduate students and junior colleagues so that they are better prepared to become our successors, and supporting colleagues abroad who work in conditions that are far from ideal, but who make up for a lack of formal research education with boundless energy, appreciation and enthusiasm is what it is all about. Several Ecuadorian colleagues got raises and promotions and found positions at other universities because of the work they had done as members of the project.

Being a good professor is not just being a prolific and highly recognized researcher or a great teacher who inspires his/her students. Being a good professor is also being a good “academic citizen.” I encourage colleagues who are looking forward to an upcoming sabbatical to keep this in mind as they make their plans and to look at South America as a wonderful place to spend it. It is possible to accomplish all of one’s goals in a sabbatical and support others at the same time. The whole can truly be bigger than the sum of its parts.

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