

PRESS RELEASE

Tourism in Transition: Artificial Intelligence, Digital Transformation, Sustainability and Evolving Skills Needs

What interviews with representatives of the tourism ecosystem reveal within the Erasmus+ BIAD project

Technology is already transforming tourism. The critical question is no longer only which new tools businesses and destinations will adopt, but whether the workforce and organisations can keep pace with the rate of change.

This is one of the key messages emerging from 13 interviews with representatives of the tourism ecosystem, conducted by members of the Ionian University project team (IURC) within the Erasmus+ project BIAD – AI-Enabled Skill-Building for Tourism and Hospitality: Bridging the Industry–Academia Divide (WP2, Task 2.3).

Participants included executives from tourism and hospitality businesses, small and medium-sized enterprises, public-sector bodies, and representatives of higher education.

Towards a More Data-Driven Environment

The tourism sector is becoming increasingly digital, interconnected and data-driven.

Digital bookings, PMS and CRM systems, revenue management tools, online platforms, digital communication, reviews and data analytics have significantly changed both the day-to-day operations of businesses and the entire visitor journey – from search and booking to the experience itself and its evaluation.

At the same time, several participants describe a shift towards data-driven processes and decision-making.

The pace of technological change, however, creates a constant need for adaptation. At policy and destination-management level, a characteristic “speed gap” is identified between the evolution of technology and the ability of the workforce to absorb it.

Artificial Intelligence Is Already Part of the Change – but Technology Alone Is Not Enough

Artificial intelligence (AI) is not only a future trend, but a tool already being used or tested across different areas: content creation, communication, chatbots, data analysis, demand forecasting and decision support.

The adoption of AI and new digital tools more broadly is not automatic. Recurring barriers include **cost, limited time for training, a lack of appropriate skills and resistance to change**. In some cases, additional challenges include data quality and security, compatibility with existing systems, and difficulty assessing which tools create meaningful value.

These challenges are particularly visible among smaller businesses and in highly seasonal environments, where time and resources for systematic training are more limited.

AI literacy is associated not only with the use of tools, but also with data interpretation and the ability to assess the usefulness of each technology for a specific function or business.

www.projectbiad.com



**Co-funded by
the European Union**

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor EACEA can be held responsible for them.

AI Is Changing Work – Human Skills Remain Critical

Most interviewees do not describe a future in which technology fully replaces people. Instead, the skills repeatedly identified as critical include **communication, critical thinking, problem-solving, adaptability and collaboration**, together with meaningful human interaction with visitors.

The picture, however, is not one-dimensional. AI may increase productivity expectations, as the same or greater output may be expected from the same or fewer employees, while another interview identifies fear of job displacement as a factor contributing to resistance to the adoption of new technologies.

Overall, AI and automation are viewed primarily as tools that can take over or support repetitive tasks, while human judgement, authenticity, communication and the quality of personal interaction remain central to the tourism experience.

Sustainability and Resilience

Sustainability frequently emerges as a training priority. Issues mentioned include ESG, energy management, the circular economy and environmental monitoring.

In some activities, environmental management is no longer viewed solely as a regulatory requirement, but also as an element of corporate image and competitiveness. More specific findings also point to the growing importance of traceability, certification and environmental reporting.

At public-policy level, **destination resilience** is becoming particularly important, as destinations are called upon to operate in an environment of successive crises, climate pressures, seasonality and changing visitor demands.

From Theoretical Knowledge to Professional Readiness

One of the most consistent findings concerns **the gap between academic knowledge and professional application**.

Graduates are often described as theoretically well trained, but not always adequately prepared for workplace demands. The gaps identified mainly concern practical experience, professional communication, decision-making under pressure, and the professional – rather than merely everyday – use of digital systems.

In some cases, limited familiarity with specialised systems such as PMS, ERP and CRM is specifically noted, along with difficulty applying knowledge in demanding operational environments.

At the same time, graduates are credited with strengths such as familiarity with technology and foreign languages and an ability to adapt quickly. The priority is to connect education more systematically with internships, concrete operational problems, modern tools, and closer cooperation between universities and the tourism sector.

From Education to Continuous Learning

In an environment of rapid technological change, initial education needs to be complemented by continuous skills upgrading that goes beyond learning a single tool and develops the ability to adapt to new systems and ways of working.

Participants place particular emphasis on applied forms of learning: **internships, workplace learning, and short, targeted programmes**, case studies drawn from day-to-day professional practice, and closer cooperation among education providers, businesses and public-sector bodies.

“The message we take from the interviews is clear: in tourism, graduates’ familiarity with new technologies is not enough. The sector needs professionals who can use them with sound judgement and apply their knowledge effectively and responsibly in real working conditions.”

— Professor Christina Beneki, Scientific Lead of the BIAD project for Ionian University



We warmly thank all interviewees for their participation and for their contribution to identifying the needs and challenges of the tourism sector.

The project is funded under the ERASMUS-EDU-2025-PI-ALL-INNO-EDU-ENTERP – Alliances for Education and Enterprises programme (Project Coordinator: Prof. Luca Reitano, Forma Camera, Rome, Italy).

www.projectbiad.com



**Co-funded by
the European Union**

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor EACEA can be held responsible for them.