

# Top 30 soft skills in tourism and hospitality graduates: A systematic literature review

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## TOP 30 SOFT SKILLS IN TOURISM AND HOSPITALITY GRADUATES: A SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW

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### Abstract

*Purpose* – To improve the employability of tourism and hospitality (T&H) graduates, faculty must continually reassess what soft skills are essential for T&H graduates to possess and amend their curricula to meet these needs. Thus, this study aims to identify the soft skills perceived as essential for the T&H graduates through a systematic literature review (SLR).

*Methodology* – Google Scholar was systematically queried from 1990 to April 2018, resulting in 77 T&H soft skills-related peer-reviewed publications. Four T&H researchers/educators produced an initial pool of 1447 T&H soft skills from these publications, categorized them in either conceptual/creative, leadership or interpersonal dimensions of Sandwith's (1993) Competency Domain Model and trimmed for relevance. Finally, the elicited key soft skills were further edited via an online survey of 19 T&H researchers/educators from Italy, Malta, Portugal, and Spain. The relevance of generated soft skills was double-verified through the same SLR based process for literature from April 2018 onwards.

*Findings* – A final set of 30 items emerged – 10 items per each of the three soft skills dimensions – i.e. conceptual/creative, leadership, and interpersonal. Based on these findings, both T&H higher education institutions and faculty should evaluate their classes/curricula to determine whether a particular soft skill identified in this study is included as a learning objective of one or more specific classes.

*Contribution* – The main contribution lies in devising a theoretically-and methodologically-based list of key soft skills for a broad range of segments of the T&H industry. From a methodological point of view, the SLR conducted is considered as novelty in T&H soft skills research. Practically, this study provides educators with an updated benchmark tool to identify gaps in the curriculum. The related positive implications are expected for the students and T&H industry as well.

**Keywords:** Soft skills, systematic literature review, key skills list, student employability, hospitality human resources, tourism education.

### INTRODUCTION

Travel & Tourism industry accounts for 10.4% of world GDP, supports 10% of jobs worldwide (319 million jobs), being the fourth biggest employment sector (WTTC 2019). In the EU, tourism is the third largest socio-economic activity and in 2019 it directly and indirectly supported over 37.1 million jobs, contributed to 9.1% of the total EU GDP (WTTC 2020).

The worldwide growth and complexity of tourism has led to a demand for highly employable graduates and, in turn, to a dramatic increase in the number of Higher Education Institutions (HEI) offering baccalaureate programs in tourism and hospitality (Sisson and Adams 2013). Furthermore, HEIs spawn graduates with degrees not only in the traditional areas of lodging, food and beverage, and tourism but also in meetings, events, conventions, festivals, recreation, gaming, cruise management, etc. (Sisson and Adams 2013). Graduate employability can be defined as “a set of achievements – skills, understandings and personal attributes – that makes graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations, which benefits themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy” (Yorke 2006, 8).

Despite many studies on the topic, no consensus exists on which competencies are most important for the T&H industry (Ferrerias-Garcia et al. 2020). However, in the advent of fourth industrial revolution, the employability skills required from graduates are shifting from technically focused towards social and softer skills (Teng et al. 2019). Soft skills are essential in today’s increasingly volatile labor market and necessary to increase graduate employability (Succi and Canovi 2020). In order to successfully transition from school to work, contemporary students need to develop a range of soft skills, such as entrepreneurial skills, coping skills, learning to learn, ability to work in teams, clear and effective communication, capacity to adapt to different cultural contexts, problem solving, conflict management, capability to endure complex or stressful situations, etc. (Succi 2019). The findings in T&H industry confirm the prevailing importance of soft skills (Denizci Guillet et al. 2019).

In the quest to improve the employability of tourism graduates in the EU’s rapidly evolving T&H sector, HEIs’ educators must continually investigate which soft skills are essential for T&H graduates to possess and amend the T&H curriculum to meet these needs (Sisson and Adams 2013). The main objective of this study is to identify the top 30 soft skills required from the T&H graduates. In order to encompass the voluminous literature and soft skills identified in the T&H literature, we apply the systematic literature review (SLR) classifying the soft skills based on Sandwith’s (1993) Competency Domain Model (CDM).

## **1. SOFT SKILLS AND THE COMPETENCY DOMAIN MODEL**

In both scholarly and professional literature, the set of work-related personal attributes, knowledge, and skills is often termed as competencies (Wang and Tsai 2014) or job competencies (Sisson and Adams 2013). These competencies can be further defined as hard or soft, depending on whether they cover vocational/technical aspects or interpersonal skills (Sisson and Adams 2013). However, what competencies HEIs offer may differ substantially from the actual competences that businesses need (Fraser 2020).

Traditionally, the curricula of HEIs in tourism has focused on learning hard skills (Wilks and Hemsworth 2011), sometimes termed technical skills, internal employability skills, vocational skills, specific skills, professional abilities, subject skills, specific techniques or employability capital (Wang and Tsai 2014; Weber et al. 2013). Because hard skills are considered task-oriented (i.e. administrative and technical) competencies learned

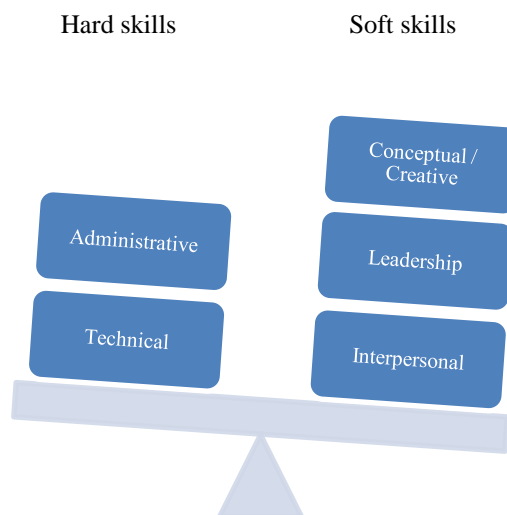
through formal education and/or training (Weber et al. 2009), working in tourism has often been inaptly characterized as low skilled (Baum 2006).

Contrary to the traditional view, the contemporary educational paradigm increasingly places greater emphasis on soft skills (Shum et al. 2018), sometimes termed nontechnical skills, employability skills, external employability skills, core skills, people-related skills, personal skills, applied skills, 21st-century skills, generic skills, common skills, key skills, life skills, transversal skills or transferable skills (Robinson and Garton 2008; Robles 2012). Soft skills can be defined as the conceptual/creative, leadership, and interpersonal competencies that are necessary to apply hard skills in any position or field of work (Cimatti 2016; Weber et al. 2009).

Although both hard and soft skills are necessary for a successful T&H career (Andrades and Dimanche 2017), soft skills are most often regarded as more important (Denizci Guillet et al. 2019), especially since they “can be deemed relevant across many different jobs or professions” (Cassidy 2006, 508) and their growing relevance in the foreseeable future (Teng et al. 2019). Thus, identifying the key soft skills that enhance T&H employability is a valuable theoretical and practical goal.

A review of T&H scholarly literature reveals that Sandwith’s (1993) CDM (Figure 1) is often used as a descriptive tool to identify, categorize and summarize relevant competencies for a specific job (Chung-Herrera et al. 2003; Tsai et al. 2006). It divides competencies into (1) conceptual/creative, (2) leadership, (3) interpersonal, (4) administrative, and (5) technical domains.

Figure 1: Sandwith's Competency Domain Model



Source: Authors' elaboration based on Sandwith (1993)

The conceptual/creative domain denotes “cognitive skills associated with comprehending important elements of the job” (Sandwith 1993, 46). The leadership domain encompasses the skills to communicate and execute an organization’s current and new ideas and the ability to ‘get everyone on board’. The interpersonal domain relates to how well an individual interacts with both work colleagues and customers. This domain includes oral, written, and telephone communication skills, as well as conflict management and negotiation skills (Sandwith 1993).

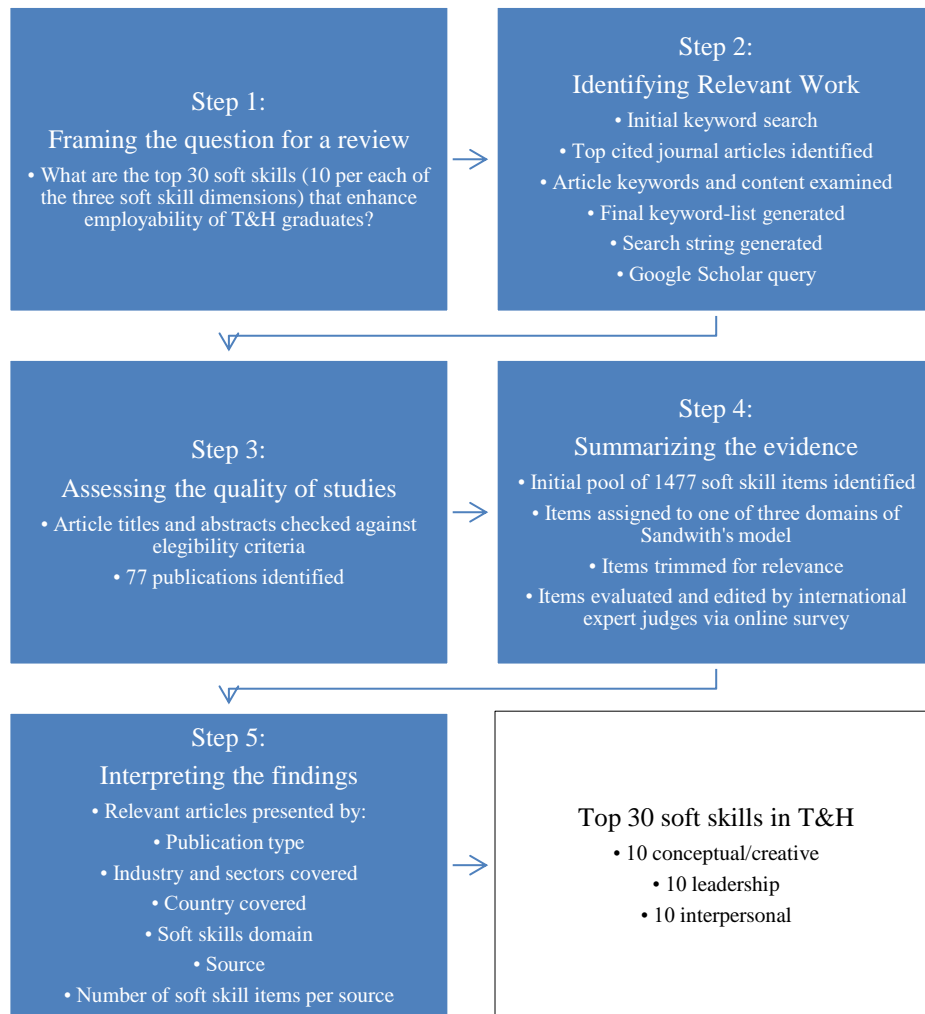
The administrative skills are typically the same across all departments of an organization and entail knowing about the rules and regulations that an organization must follow, educating others about them, and enforcing them. The technical domain comprises those skills that are essential to producing the product or service (Figure 1).

In terms of the hard vs. soft skills dichotomy, while the technical and administrative skills correspond to hard competencies, the skills in the conceptual, leadership and interpersonal domains correspond to soft skills (Weber et al. 2009). CDM is one of the most influential and reliable competency models (Millar et al. 2010) and the prevailing model used in hospitality research (Marneros 2020), and thus adopted in this study to classify soft skills in T&H.

## **2. METHODOLOGY**

In line with Khan et al. (2003), this study followed a five-step SLR, i.e. (1) framing the question for a review, (2) identifying relevant work, (3) assessing the quality of studies, (4) summarizing the evidence, and (5) interpreting the findings (Figure 2).

Figure 2: A Five-Step Systematic Literature Review (SLR)



### 2.1. Framing the Question for a Review

Our review was designed to answer the following question: What are the top 10 sought-after soft skills that enhance employability of T&H graduates in each of the three soft skills dimensions?

### 2.2. Identifying Relevant Work

Google Scholar, the most comprehensive data source across almost all subject areas (Gusenbauer 2019; Martin-Martin et al. 2021, 2018a, 2018b), was systematically queried

and mined to identify scholarly works related to skills /competencies in T&H. The search included works from 1990 to April of 2018.

The first phase consisted of defining relevant keywords to be used to search for scholarly sources on T&H soft skills. Initiating the query with the search string ‘skills AND (tourism OR hospitality)’ produced a number of search results. Thus, top 20 cited articles on T&H skills were selected and their keywords and article content examined. The resulting keyword-list comprised the following terms: soft skills, employability skills, nontechnical skills, core skills, people-related skills, personal skills, applied skills, twenty-first century skills, generic skills, common skills, key skills, transferable skills, and life skills.

The second phase consisted of searching Google Scholar using a search string broadened with the terms from the previously generated keyword-list, i.e. ‘(soft OR employability OR nontechnical OR core OR people-related OR personal OR applied OR twenty-first century OR generic OR common OR key OR transferable OR life) AND (skills OR competencies) AND (tourism OR hospitality)’. Since Google Scholar’s default search setting is to use the search string to search the full text of its scholarly works, including citations and abstracts, we did a second search using Google Scholar’s advanced search feature “intitle:” in order to find results with our search term in the document title only. Ultimately, step two generated a large number of publications for further assessment.

### **2.3. Assessing the quality of studies**

In step three, titles and abstracts of retrieved publications were checked against eligibility requirements. We sought peer-reviewed publications (i.e., journal articles, review pieces, conceptual pieces, and conference proceedings) published in English that provided information on soft skills in T&H.

Four T&H researchers/educators from a large public university in Croatia divided the publications in a way that each title and abstract was evaluated by two reviewers. An assessment form was posted to a shared collaboration site, and each reviewer independently assessed whether a publication met the inclusion criteria. Discrepancies were resolved by the two reviewers jointly reviewing a study in question. If no consensus was reached, a third reviewer, unaware of the other reviewers’ decisions, functioned as an arbitrator. After thorough selection, step three resulted in 77 scholarly works that were germane to our review question. Each above presented phases was carried out in the same way for works from both sets as defined above.

### **2.4. Summarizing the evidence**

In the fourth step, applying the same evaluation procedure as in step three (i.e., independent assessment, joint resolution of discrepancies, and arbitration), the four reviewers thoroughly read the selected publications and extracted the soft skills.

The first phase consisted of produced an initial pool of all T&H soft skills elicited from SLR identified publications. The second phase entailed placing the soft skills from the initial item pool in either conceptual/creative, leadership or interpersonal dimensions of Sandwith's (1993) CDM. When a reviewer was in doubt of competency domain, that skill was temporarily placed in the unclassified category and later jointly discussed and allocated to one of the three domains. In phase three, through an iterative consultation process, the reviewers checked and ranked the items for relevance, clarity, completeness, and redundancy and to produce a smaller, more manageable item pool for further consideration (DeVellis 2003, 1991).

In phase four, in mid 2018, the soft skills were further evaluated and edited via an online survey of 19 T&H researchers/educators from Italy, Malta, Portugal, and Spain. The participants were instructed to perform one or more of the following four actions: (1) mark the items on the trimmed-down list that should be deleted, (2) reword the items on the trimmed-down list, (3) mark the items in the initial item pool that should be added to the trimmed-down list of soft skills, and/or (4) leave it as it is. Systematizing the responses received, the final list of top 30 T&H soft skills was obtained.

In all four phases of summarizing the evidence, participants were asked to ensure that a set of desirable soft skills that an entry-level management trainee should possess upon completion of a T&H undergraduate degree is applicable to any segment of the T&H industry. All four phases also helped ascertain face, content, and construct validity.

As the research process described was conducted in 2018, to ascertain that its results provide original contribution to the literature and that soft skills extracted are relevant, the steps 1 – 3 and first two phases of step 4 of SLR (Figure 2) were performed for the period from April 2018 to April 2021. This yielded 22 publications that were analyzed as previous studies in presenting the findings, where, relevant these two periods are separately reported.

## **2.5. Interpreting the findings**

The literature matrix catalogued the relevant articles by publication type (industries and sectors covered, countries covered, soft skills domain, source (author and year of publication), and number of soft skill items per source. Systematized features of papers analysed (Table 1) reveal that scholars have looked into the soft skills in tourism from diverse perspectives but empirical studies are prevailing. Several empirical studies use qualitative or mixed method approach whilst the majority are survey-based focusing on separate individual stakeholders in the T&H HEI process or more of them (so-called "gap studies"). The studies are conducted worldwide, the majority being in the USA.



Table 1: **The typology of scholarly works covered**

		<b>Authors</b>
<b>Conceptual pieces</b>		Sandwith (1993); Burns (1997); Bharwani & Jauhari (2013); Caruana & Mcpherson (2014); Bharwani & Talib (2017); Ginaya et al (2020); Kumar (2021)
<b>Review pieces</b>		Klein et al. (2006); Adeyinka-Ojo (2018)
<b>Empirical pieces</b>	Surveying students	Hannam et al. (2004); Horng & Lu (2006); Hertzman et al. (2015); Ko (2010); Spowart (2011); Scarinci & Pearce (2011); Valdez et al. (2015); Christou & Chatzigeorgiou (2019); Shereni (2019); Patiar et al. (2020); Susaeta et al. (2020); Chen et al. (2021)
	Surveying T&H industry professionals	Baum (1990); Clark (1993); Brownell (1994); Tas et al. (1996); Shay & Tracey (1997); Siu (1998); Kay & Russette (2000); Kriegl (2000); Lin (2002); Chung-Herrera et al. (2003); Tesone & Ricci (2006); Baum (2007); Baum and Thomson (2007); Brownell (2008); Zehrer & Mössenlechner (2009); Hassan et al. (2009); Foster et al. (2010); Kalargyrou & Woods (2011); Causin & Ayoun (2011); Wilks & Hemsworth (2011); Dhiman (2012); Weber et al. (2013); Sisson & Adams (2013); Wang (2013); Lolli (2013); Yang et al. (2015); Yang et al. (2016); Chiu et al. (2016); Shum et al. (2018); Bello et al. (2019); Costa et al. (2019); Andrades & Dimanche (2019); Denizci Guillet et al. (2019); Ferreras-Garcia et al.(2019); Kimeto (2020); Marneros et al. (2020)
	Surveying university professors	Fraser (2020); Hossny (2020)
	Surveying multiple stakeholders	Bach & Milman (1996); Davies (2000); Tsai et al. (2006); Wilkins (2006); Munar & Montaña (2009); Cheung et al. (2010); Millar et al. (2010); Huang & Lin (2010); Suh et al. (2012); Yang et al. (2014); Moolman & Wilkinson (2014); Luka (2015); Huang et al. (2016); Jack et al. (2017); Jiang & Alexakis (2017); Kim et al. (2017); Vučetić (2018); Raybould & Anderson & Sanga (2018); Bustreo et al.(2018); Sharma & Sharma (2019); Deale & Lee (2019); Temizkan (2020); Marneros et al. (2021)
	Surveying professionals in various industries	Wesley et al. (2017)
	Hotels	Brownell (1994); Tas et al. (1996); Shay & Tracey (1997); Siu (1998); Kay & Russette (2000); Lin (2002); Chung-Herrera et al. (2003); Tsai et al. (2006); Raybould & Wilkins (2006); Baum (2007); Huang & Lin (2010); Cheung et al. (2010); Kalargyrou & Woods (2011); Wilks & Hemsworth (2011); Wang & Tsai (2014); Yang et al. (2015); Yang et al. (2016); Fraser (2020); Hossny (2020); Marneros et al. (2020); Temizkan (2020); Patiar et al. (2020); Marneros et al. (2021)
<b>Sectors covered</b>	Food & Beverage	Wang (2013); Wang & Tsai (2014); Sharma & Sharma (2019); Shereni (2019)
	Other T&H businesses	Clark (1993); Davies (2000); Kriegl (2000); Nickson et al. (2005); Horng & Lu (2006); Tesone & Ricci (2006); Baum and Thomson (2007); Brownell (2008); Zehrer & Mössenlechner (2009); Hassan et al. (2009); Foster et al. (2010); Millar et al. (2010); Scarinci & Pearce (2011); Causin & Ayoun (2011); Dhiman (2012); Sisson & Adams (2013); Lolli (2013); Moolman & Wilkinson (2014); Hertzman et al. (2015); Valdez et al. (2015); Luka (2015); Kim et al. (2017); Wesley et al. (2017); Jack et al. (2017); Jiang & Alexakis (2017); Vučetić (2018); Bustreo et al.(2018); Shum et al. (2018); Bello et al.(2019); Costa et al. (2019); Ferreras-Garcia et al.(2019); Andrades & Dimanche (2019); Deale & Lee (2019); Kimeto (2020); Susaeta et al. (2020); Chen et al. (2021); Kumar (2021)
	Other	Baum (1990); Sandwith (1993); Bach & Milman(1996); Hannam et al. (2004); Klein et al. (2006); Munar & Montaña (2009); Ko (2010); Huang et al. (2016); Chiu et al. (2016); Wesley et al. (2017); Anderson & Sanga (2018); Denizci Guillet et al. (2019); Christou & Chatzigeorgiou (2019); Ginaya et al. (2020)

Table 1 (continued)

	Authors
Australia	Raybould & Wilkins (2006); Patiar et al. (2020); Fraser (2020)
Austria	Zehrer & Mössenlechner (2009)
China	Siu (1998); Cheung et al. (2010); Yang et al. (2015); Yang et al. (2016)
Cyprus	Marneros et al. (2020); Marneros et al. (2021)
Egypt	Hossny (2020)
Greece	Christou & Chatzigeorgiou (2019)
Hong Kong	Denizci Guillet et al. (2019)
India	Dhiman (2012); Yang et al. (2014); Sharma & Sharma (2019)
Indonesia	Ginaya et al. (2020)
Italy	Bustreo et al. (2018)
Kenya	Kimeto (2020)
Korea	Kim et al. (2017)
Kyrgyzstan	Baum (2007); Baum and Thomson (2007)
Malawi	Bello et al. (2019)
Malaysia	Hassan et al. (2009); Chiu et al. (2016)
Mongolia and Uzbekistan	Baum and Thomson (2007)
Montenegro	Vučetić (2018)
Philippines	Valdez et al. (2015)
Portugal	Wilks & Hemsworth (2011); Costa et al. (2019)
Russia	Andrades & Dimanche (2019)
South Africa	Spowart (2011); Moolman & Wilkinson (2014)
Spain	Munar & Montaña (2009); Ferreras-Garcia et al. (2019); Susaeta et al. (2020)
Taiwan	Lin (2002); Horng & Lu (2006); Tsai et al. (2006); Ko (2010); Huang & Lin (2010) Wang (2013); Wang & Tsai (2014); Chen et al. (2021)
Tanzania	Anderson & Sanga (2018)
Turkey	Temzkan (2020)
UK	Clark (1993); Hannam et al. (2004); Nickson et al. (2005); Foster et al. (2010)
USA	Baum (1990); Brownell (1994); Tas et al. (1996); Bach & Milman (1996); Davies (2000); Kay & Russette (2000); Tesone & Ricci (2006); Brownell (2008); Millar et al. (2010); Causin & Ayoun (2011); Kalargyrou & Woods (2011); Scarinci & Pearce (2011); Suh et al. (2012); Lolli (2013); Weber et al. (2013); Sisson & Adams (2013); Hertzman et al. (2015); Huang et al. (2016); Jack et al. (2017); Jiang & Alexakis (2017); Wesley et al. (2017); Shum et al. (2018); Deale & Lee (2019)
Worldwide / International	Shay & Tracey (1997); Kriegl (2000); Chung-Herrera et al. (2003); Klein et al. (2006); Luka (2015); Kumar (2021)
Zimbabwe	Shereni (2019)

Source: Author's research

The soft skills categorized according to the domain and the period of publishing are enclosed in Table 2. The number of soft skills revealed in 1990-2018 period (1180 skills) demonstrated the need for the present study to establish the most important soft skills in T&H. The set of scholarly works published after March 2018 indicates that soft skills remain relevant and in the focus of interest of scientific community (Figure 3). More importantly, the detailed analysis of papers in that period revealed that no papers were found applying similar extensive methodological process for identifying the key soft skills in T&H.

Table 2: An Initial Pool of Soft Skill Items

Soft skill domain	1990 – 2018 (March)		2018 (April) – 2021 (April)		
	Soft skill items (No)	Authors	Soft skill items (No)	Authors	
Conceptual/creative	289	Bach & Milman (1996) Brownell (2008) Causin & Ayoun (2011) Dhiman (2012) Foster et al. (2010) Hannam et al. (2004) Hassan et al. (2009) Hertzman et al. (2015) Hornig & Lu (2006) Huang & Lin (2010) Huang et al. (2016) Jack et al. (2017) Jiang & Alexakis (2017) Kalargyrou & Woods (2011) Kay & Russette (2000) Kim et al. (2017) Ko (2010) Kriegl (2000) Millar et al. (2010)	Moolman & Wilkinson (2014) Munar & Montaño (2009) Raybould & Wilkins (2006) Sandwith (1993) Scarinci & Pearce (2011) Shay & Tracey (1997) Spowart (2011) Suh et al. (2012) Tas et al. (1996) Tesone & Ricci (2006) Tsai et al. (2006) Wang (2013) Wilks & Hemsworth (2011) Yang et al. (2014) Valdez et al. (2015) Yang et al. (2015) Yang et al. (2016) Zehrer & Mössenlechner (2009)	43	Andrades & Dimanche (2019) Bello et al. (2019) Ferrerias-Garcia et al. (2019) Fraser (2020) Kimeto (2020) Kumar (2021) Marneros et al. (2020) Marneros et al. (2021) Patiar et al. (2020) Shum et al. (2018) Temizkan (2020) Vučetić (2018)
		Bach & Milman (1996) Baum (1990) Baum (2007) Baum and Thomson (2007) Brownell (2008) Causin & Ayoun (2011) Cheung et al. (2010) Chung-Herrera et al. (2003) Clark (1993) Dhiman (2012) Foster et al. (2010) Hannam et al. (2004) Hertzman et al. (2015) Hornig & Lu (2006) Huang & Lin (2010) Huang et al. (2016) Jack et al. (2017) Jiang & Alexakis (2017) Kalargyrou & Woods (2011) Kay & Russette (2000) Kim et al. (2017) Ko (2010) Kriegl (2000) Luka (2015)	Millar et al. (2010) Moolman & Wilkinson (2014) Munar & Montaño (2009) Raybould & Wilkins (2006) Sandwith (1993) Scarinci & Pearce (2011) Shay & Tracey (1997) Siu (1998) Spowart (2011) Tas et al. (1996) Tesone & Ricci (2006) Tsai et al. (2006) Valdez et al. (2015) Wang & Tsai (2014) Wang (2013) Weber et al. (2013) Wesley et al. (2017) Wilks & Hemsworth (2011) Yang et al. (2014) Yang et al. (2015) Yang et al. (2016) Zehrer & Mössenlechner (2009)		108

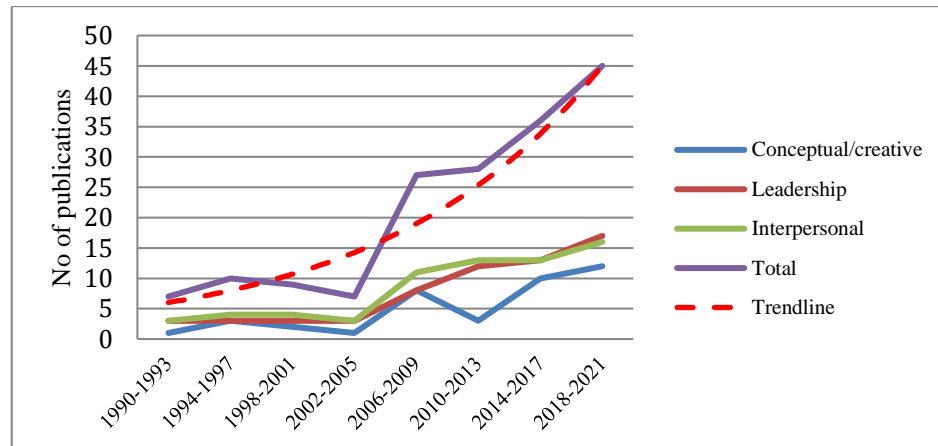
Table 2 (continued)

Soft skill domain	1990 – 2018 (March)		2018 (April) – 2021 (April)	
	Soft skill items (No)	Authors	Soft skill items (No)	Authors
Interpersonal	395	Bach & Milman (1996)	Lin (2002)	Andrades & Dimanche (2019)
		Baum (1990)	Lolli (2013)	Christou & Chatzigeorgiou (2019)
		Baum (2007)	Luka (2015)	Deale & Lee (2019)
		Baum and Thomson (2007)	Millar et al. (2010)	Denizci Guillet et al. (2019)
		Brownell (1994)	Moolman & Wilkinson (2014)	Ferreras-Garcia et al. (2019)
		Brownell (2008)	Munar & Montaña (2009)	Fraser (2020)
		Causin & Ayoun (2011)	Nickson et al. (2005)	Ginaya et al. (2020)
		Cheung et al. (2010)	Raybould & Wilkins (2006)	Hossny (2018)
		Chiu et al. (2016)	Robles (2012)	Kimeto (2020)
		Clark (1993)	Sandwith (1993)	Kumar (2021)
		Davies (2000)	Scarinci & Pearce (2012)	Marneros et al. (2020)
		Dhiman (2012)	Shay & Tracey (1997)	Marneros et al. (2021)
		Foster et al. (2010)	Siu (1998)	Patiar et al. (2020)
		Hannam et al. (2004)	Spowart (2011)	Susaeta et al. (2020)
		Hassan et al. (2009)	Suh et al. (2012)	Temlžkan (2020)
		Hertzman et al. (2015)	Tas et al. (1996)	Vučetić (2018)
		Hong & Lu (2006)	Tesone & Ricci (2006)	
		Huang & Lin (2010)	Tsai et al. (2006)	
		Huang et al. (2016)	Valdez et al. (2015)	
		Jack et al. (2017)	Weber et al. (2013)	
Jiang & Alexakis (2017)	Wesley et al. (2017)			
Kalargyrou & Woods (2011)	Wilks & Hemsworth (2011)			
Kay & Russette (2000)	Yang et al. (2014)			
Kim et al. (2017)	Yang et al. (2015)			
Klein et al. (2006)	Yang et al. (2016)			
Ko (2010)	Zehrer & Mössenlechner (2009)			
Kriegel (2000)	Zhang (2012)			
Unclassified	88	Hassan et al. (2009)	Moolman & Wilkinson (2014)	Anderson (2018)
		Hertzman et al. (2015)	Munar & Montaña (2009)	Chen et al. (2021)
		Huang & Lin (2010)	Scarinci & Pearce (2011)	Costa et al. (2019)
		Huang et al. (2016)	Sisson & Adams (2013)	Ferreras-Garcia et al. (2019)
		Hong & Lu (2006)	Wang (2013)	Ginaya et al. (2020)
		Jiang & Alexakis (2017)	Wesley et al. (2017)	Sharma & Sharma (2019)
		Kalargyrou & Woods (2011)	Yang et al. (2014)	Shereni (2019)
		Ko (2010)	Yang et al. (2015)	Susaeta et al. (2020)
			Yang et al. (2016)	
			Zehrer & Mössenlechner (2009)	
	Zhang (2012)			
<b>Total (1477)</b>	<b>1180</b>		<b>297</b>	

Source: Author's research

The scholarly works published after March 2018 confirm the growing trend in publications dealing with the soft skills in T&H, demonstrating the highest number of publications studying soft skills in T&H (Figure 3).

Figure 3: **Trendline of publications dealing with skills in T&H**



Source: Author research

Finally, Table 3 presents the top 30 soft skills in three soft skills domains based on the SLR for period 1990 and March 2018 and confirmed by 19 T&H researchers/educators from 5 countries. The relevant skills were double-checked and found to be covered i.e still relevant in works published after March 2018.

Table 3: **The set of most desirable soft skills for T&H graduates**

Conceptual/Creative	Leadership	Interpersonal
Maintaining the "big picture" while working on a specific property-management, layout, and design component	Steering conflicts away from personalities and toward issues	Managing guest requests with understanding and sensitivity
Manifesting critical thinking	Presenting ideas in a convincing manner	Communicating efficiently (orally and in writing) with other employees, clients, and customers
Demonstrating an understanding of the organization's interaction with the larger external environment	Expressing disagreement in a tactful and sensitive manner	Exhibiting emotional intelligence, such as emotional control and passion

Table 3 (*continued*)

Conceptual/Creative	Leadership	Interpersonal
Developing new ideas	Working to understand why others resist change instead of forcing others to accept change	Effectively handling staff grievances and complaints
Developing adaptation responses to unexpected changes	Operating effectively and calmly under pressure or in crisis situations	Acting courteously and respectfully
Exhibiting knowledge of related job roles - peers, subordinates, others	Building networks with people inside and outside the firm	Demonstrating awareness of others' feelings
Manifesting development and adaptation of innovation or improvements	Confronting problems early before they become unmanageable	Exhibiting negotiating skills
Understanding the agendas and perspectives of owners, staff members, managers, and other parties	Employing a team approach to solve problems when appropriate	Providing effective feedback
Considering customer needs when making decisions	Listening carefully to input and concerns expressed by others	Demonstrating empathy in dealing with customers and staff
Bringing together different perspectives and approaches and combining them in creative ways	Promoting respect and appreciation for diversity and individual differences	Manifesting intercultural sensitivity

Source: Authors' research

## CONCLUSION

The work presented demonstrates the burgeoning of the scholarly literature related to soft skills in T&H, reflecting the importance of these skills for the sector. Moreover, it revealed the extensiveness and complexity of the potential soft skills list. Few previous scholarly works have conducted adequate methodological procedures to extract the most important soft skills for T&H graduates (Chung-Herrera et al. 2003; Weber et al. 2013). However, the volume of literature in the after period requires a comprehensive and thorough SLR for defining the most critical soft skills required in the current T&H market.

The resulting top 30 soft skill list derived by the SLR based on the CDM is the key theoretical contribution of this study. Furthermore, the study has significant practical implications for the T&H industry and T&H HEIs which are simultaneously the recommendations for future research on the subject. Namely, the resulting lists need to

be empirically validated, i.e. used to evaluate the importance of the key soft skills and to what extent T&H students and graduates possess them after their studies completion. Various relevant stakeholders (academia, T&H business sector and graduates) need to be included in the empirical studies to detect "skill gaps" that the T&H study programmes should bridge.

Namely, it is widely accepted that collaboration among all T&H stakeholders "is required to enable the development of a common understanding of the expectations and outcomes of tourism education" (Anderson 2018, 13). As soon as T&H faculty, administrators, consultants, and industry practitioners capture and understand the key soft skills, the potential gap between the requirements of the T&H industry and tourism curricula adopted by HEIs can begin to be bridged.

Furthermore, studies in diverse T&H businesses and different countries/contexts are recommended to enable the much-needed comparisons and benchmarking. In the meantime, in line with calls from other studies on the need for the acquisition of cross-curricular or interdisciplinary skills (Kim et al. 2017), T&H HEIs need to advance the attainment of soft skills in their curricula and classrooms. Furthermore, HEIs should connect tighter with T&H business and create opportunities for students to develop their soft skills outside of the classrooms.

#### *Limitations of the study*

This study has several potential limitations. First is the use of Goole Scholar. While it significantly outperforms other well-known academic search engines (i.e., Dimensions, EbscoHost, Microsoft Academic, OpenCitation's COCI, Proquest, Scopus, Web of Science, etc.) in terms of coverage (Gusenbauer, 2019; Martin-Martin et al., 2021, 2018a, 2018b), it is not flawless. Notably, it has a 256 character limit (with spaces) for searches, it does not provide the criteria for what makes its results "scholarly," and its search algorithm is not known and cannot be controlled. Moreover, since Google Scholar adapts the search to each user to personalize information, an SLR is difficult to replicate. However, through an in-depth analysis of Google Scholar's search results, especially when aided by multiple researchers, as in the case of this study, its benefits significantly outweigh the drawbacks. The second limitation is the key soft skills selection based on the views of HEI instructors. Although all researchers involved in the process have more than 15 years of experience in the HEI and T&H research each, still their view of the key soft skills may differ from the views of T&H practitioners and students. The future studies should address this limitation.

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