

Chapter Four

Innovation in hospitality management education: Empirical evidences from university of Naples

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Abstract

The tourism sector is characterized by high labour demand and education plays a key role. The competitive feature of the tourism sector requires highly skilled and specialized human resources. Higher education institutions have to guarantee new innovative teaching ways in collaboration with hospitality firms. Professionalizing courses seem to be the right answer to an innovative teaching approach which is closer to the labour world. Innovative teaching does not only include the introduction of digital tools but also a different teaching approach based on an inverted didactic through which academic professors, students and firms can interact and students are called to collaborate with universities and firms to co-create new knowledge and value. Tourism sector trends have greatly influenced the way in which education is conceived, prompting even particularly traditional contexts such as Italy to forge partnerships between the academic and business worlds in order to build new pathways that are linked to the specific needs of companies, demonstrating proactive attitudes in launching and seizing new challenges linked to digitalisation, the strong heterogeneity of demand and the increasing global competition. Professionalizing courses do not only contribute to reduce gaps between the academic word and labour word but they also have been supporting the hospitality sector during the pandemic, indeed students, professors and academic had the opportunity to meet in order to discuss about the tourism industry crisis due to the travel restrictions that have indirectly forced the closure of hospitality firms as hotels and restaurants. Digitalization, in this

case, has played a key role to facilitate the communication between universities and firms, on-line webinars, on-line delphi panels have allowed discussions and to cooperate to face the economic crisis. This chapter offers a literature contribution focused on innovative teaching supported by empirical evidence in hospitality management education.

Keywords: Innovation, Education, University, Teaching, Hospitality

Introduction

From an employment point of view, workers in the tourism sector amount to 3.5 million (ONT, 2019). If we consider the decade 2008-2017, employment in the tourism sector has increased by 20%; while, in the last twenty years, there has been an increase of 43%. Thus, the tourism sector has seen an increase in the employment rate in the medium to long term, both in the hospitality and in the catering sectors. From the Excelsior Information System (Unioncamere, 2018), which provides a forecast of employment and professional needs in Italy in the medium term (2018-2022), it emerged that the tourism and catering sector is the one that recorded the absolute highest rate of demand expansion (3%), i.e. the incremental demand for work recorded through the annual variation of the stock of employees for a specific sector. From the Synthesis Report on the Occupational Condition of Graduates conducted by Almalaurea in 2018, it can be seen that for three-year degree courses related to the tourism sector, about 50% of those interviewed declared that they were working just one year after graduating. The percentage improves considerably if we consider a broader time spectrum, taking as a starting point the results for the Master's Degree Courses in the field of Planning and Management of Tourism Systems; indeed, it turns out that three years after graduating, more than 80% of those interviewed manage to find stable employment with high levels of satisfaction for the work they have done. European data also confirm the need to build pathways with specific skills because, according to the Europe 2020 objectives, the EU labour market requires high professional qualifications for about 35% of jobs. In this scenario, Italy is in last place as only 25% of young people aged 25-34 have a tertiary level qualification compared to 42% of the average of OECD countries (Miur, 2017).

It is clear, therefore, that these indicators are particularly relevant in relation to the economic, social and civil development of the country: the knowledge economy requires, in fact, professional figures who possess a particular combination of transversal and digital skills together with a high degree of specialisation and knowledge of the sector. More specifically, the OECD statistics clearly show that the employment rate is influenced by the organisation of higher education chains and that, despite the fact that employment rates of traditional graduates tend to be similar among the most advanced countries, the absence of intermediate segments in advanced technology sectors has a strong impact on youth unemployment. The various analyses agree, therefore, in stating that one of the main causes of this gap is to be attributed to the structure of the educational offer, which has always suffered from the absence of short and highly professional courses, closely integrated with the economic and productive context and aimed at enhancing both the human capital and the productive system of the territories. The analysis of the data and the trends in employment and training levels in the national and international context also reveal the opportunity and importance of activating a

professionalising degree course. At national level, degree courses in tourism science tend to have a multidisciplinary approach, very much oriented towards the analysis of the territory and with a high humanistic-cultural matrix in the curricula. The bachelor degree courses, although more oriented towards economics and management, have a predominantly generalist educational offer, with the aim of opening up opportunities in areas and businesses connected to the tourism sector (with reference to the entire supply chain rather than to a specific sector) and cultural heritage. In Italy the first initiative in this direction is the professionalising degree course in Hospitality Management at the University of Naples Federico II.

According to the analysis carried out, today there is a strong gap between theoretical knowledge and the practical skills required by the working world. According to AlmaLaurea data (Report on the Profile of Graduates, 2018) 42% of Italian graduates have not carried out any internship or recognised work experience. Moreover, there is still a strong need for a greater connection between the world of tourism education and the business world. In this direction, recent legislative measures (DD.MM. 635 and 987/2016 and DD.MM. 60/2017) have established professionalising degree courses, characterised by about one third of training in companies, open to no more than 50 students and with placement targets of at least 80% within one year of graduation. These courses contribute to combating this phenomenon by creating a link between the world of study and the corporate world. Professionalising degrees have been conceived with the aim of increasing the percentage of graduates in the country: less than 27% of Italians between the ages of 30 and 34 have a degree, a figure that puts Italy in second-to-last place among European Union countries: a gap that remains unchanged compared to ten years ago, ISTAT. Tourism is a leading sector of youth employment. The latest observatory on the tourism labor market in Italy estimates that the tourism sector has almost 1 million jobs in Italy, a figure that represents 5% of national employment. From the travel industry, with agents and tour operators, to the hotel and restaurant sector, this sector offers more and more opportunities to young people and those who want to work in this area. Young people account for 63% of the employed, 602,000 employees under 40 and 342,000 under 30. The sector also guarantees economic stability as workers hired with permanent contracts represent 67% of the total.

Moreover, a comparative analysis of the best universities in the world shows the undeniable role played by innovation both in the methodological approach to teaching and in the actual co-creation of courses of study in partnership with the business world. Promoting the employability of qualified professional figures means to invest in their training and professional growth. As shown by international university cases, the drivers of innovation can be found in the strategic vision of companies and universities, which strongly believe in the creation of professional courses, in innovative tools to support teaching, in the ability of companies to appoint mentors who accompany the student in his path so that he can conceive it as a continuum in which university and company interact to contaminate each other, in the psychographic and cultural profile of the students, from which emerges a strong proactiveness towards a professionalising course of study, in the territory, which represents the container of the territorial identity but also the real humus where relations at various levels take place and in respect of which it is necessary to build a strategic storytelling that represents the basis of

tourist attraction, both current and prospective, in the hardware component of the training places such as classrooms and internship structures, which must be highly innovative.

The pandemic scenario

The COVID-19 pandemic crossed all barriers, affected every country indiscriminately and destroyed entire economic sectors, with no exception of education. Indeed, the sanitary emergency has highlighted the vulnerability and fragility of education systems. In particular, educational institutions have done and are still doing their utmost to assure the continuity and regularity of the educational pathways, relying on new teaching methods and tools, known as distance learning or e-learning. For students this has meant to equip themselves with essential resources to ensure their participation in virtual classrooms, lessons, courses and examinations. Governments in many countries have introduced economic measures to support students and educational institutions in order to face school and university closures. In 2020, the Italian government introduced measures to foster distance learning, such as: economic resources allocated to acquire licenses to use digital teaching platforms, to train staff, and support less affluent students to purchase digital devices and internet connections (Law decree 17th March 2020 n.18). In addition, in May 2020, the Italian government, in response to the persistent state of emergency, has introduced further measures which seek to provide extra funding to cover costs at the school and university level (Law decree 19th May 2020 n.34). 94% of students would benefit from eLearning and taking online classes and lessons, in most cases (65%) with satisfaction, but this doesn't mean that face-to-face lessons and direct relationships with teachers can become relinquished.

ICT and Education

Research on the use of ICT in education is a central issue and is explored in a specific field of applications (for example, mathematics rather than geography - Bray and Tangney, 2017; Livingstone, 2012) and according to different levels of education (primary, secondary, high school, university, etc.), highlighting the benefits both for students and teachers. Information and communication technologies (ICT) is widely recognized as a great influencer in the area of education (Zucker, 2008; Van Oostveen et al., 2011). However, if ICTs, on one side represent a useful tool to support and contribute to make education more effective, to foster daily connection and respect for subjective norms, as highlighted by the study of Voet and Wever (2016), on the other side, these cannot prescind from teachers and replace their knowledge or minimize their role in the educational process and in supporting the ICT journey undertaken by students (Lang et al., 2016). "ICT self-efficacy" (Aesaert et al., 2015, 2017; Fraillon et al., 2014), meaning the ability to use computer and Internet, depends on the actual competences (i.e., accuracy of ICT self-efficacy), on the gender (Bench et al., 2015; Pajares & Kranzler, 1995), on the individual cognitive ability (Nietfeld & Schraw, 2002) and on the familiarity with the topic of interest (Zell & Kriza, 2014). The use of ICT is relevant to enhance team relationships, to give emphasis to practical exercises "through modelling, visualisation, manipulation and the introduction of more complex scenarios" (Bray & Tangney, 2017). However, there are some studies that show critical points to take into account: the large use of ICT can generate a strong dependency, create isolation from the other colleagues, and/or deny

the role of the teachers, reduce the propensity to work in teams, damaging interpersonal relationships and creating difficulty in integrating within the place of work's environment. The set of tools that provide services to educational institutions and promote interactive learning by leveraging digital technologies and content, is commonly known as the 'modern e-learning phenomenon' (Tikhomirov et al, 2015: 49) but, as several authors point out, in the literature, scholarly attention has focused on the technological applications and solutions rather than on identifying a paradigm linking ICT to smart education.

In accordance with these arguments and in light of the systematic literature review, this study introduces a new model suitable for addressing the issue of smart education in the current context, offering interesting theoretical and managerial insights into the role of ICT in the field of smart education. The concept of smart education, as defined by Tikhomirov et al. (2015), is characterised by three dimensions: educational outcomes, that refer to the aims to be achieved in terms of acquisition of competences, skills, knowledge and social values; the ICT dimension, which covers different aspects of education, from smart environment to smart educational technologies and smart educational materials, and lastly the organisational aspects that include “educational programs, forms of learning, and principles of teaching” (Tikhomirov et al., 2015: 53). As emerges from this model as well as from the literature on this topic (Frاند, 2000; Zucker, 2008; Van Oostveen et al., 2011; Prensky 2001), the role of ICT in smart education has to be studied according to an overlapping perspective between the demand side (students) and offer side (people involved in the educational system).

The drivers of innovation can be traced in the strategic vision of companies and universities that strongly believe in the establishment of vocational courses, in innovative tools to support teaching, in the ability of companies to designate mentors who accompany the student on his path so that conceive as a continuum in which universities and companies interact to contaminate each other, in the psychographic and cultural profile of the students from which a strong proactivity towards a professionalizing course of study emerges, in the territory that represents the container of territorial identity but also the real humus where multi-level relationships occur and with respect to which it is necessary to build a strategic storytelling that represents the basis of current and prospective tourist attraction, in the hardware component of training places such as classrooms and internship structures that must have a strongly innovative character tive.

Hospitality Education Empirical Evidences

In light of these innovation drivers, an interesting case is represented by the Professionalizing Degree Course in Hospitality Management of the Federico II University of Naples. The latter, which for years has been involved in the tourism sector thanks to the research and teaching activity of a specialized teaching staff, has launched an experimental professional degree course in the tourism hospitality sector starting from the 2019-2020 academic year: Professionalizing Degree Course in Hospitality Management, aimed at creating specialized figures in the hospitality sector, with respect to the main areas of activity of companies. This objective arises from the need to orient the three-year degree program in a more targeted

manner with respect to the needs of the world of work. To this end, the course was created in collaboration with companies that most express the tourism hospitality sector in the Campania region, nationally and internationally. These companies have expressed a concrete interest in participating in the initiative, not only for internships and internships but also for on-the-job training, managed together with the university. This aspect represents an undeniable strength, as the interaction with companies concerns all stages of its implementation. The Hospitality Management course aims to train specialists in the culture of hospitality, with particular reference to Hotel Management and Food and Beverage Management, in the hotel sector. The training profile that is generated, acquiring knowledge and skills in various aspects of business management, also concerns possible entrepreneurial figures in both areas. A strong point, which characterizes the degree course, is represented by the teaching based on innovative methodologies such as the flipped classroom and the creation of digital educational content (smart-apps, videos) aimed at promoting cooperative learning and education. between peers, not only between students, but also between teachers and between teachers and students. The course, in fact, includes digital didactic laboratories in which students acquire the use of skills for the use of new technologies thanks to which they increase their transversal skills. As part of the redesign of teaching, the teachers of the professionalizing course in Hospitality Management enhance their innovative teaching skills connected:

- the use of e-learning and e-tools to support the courses envisaged in the teaching plan;
- teaching skills in an EMI (English as a Medium of Instruction) context both for teaching and for creating teaching material in English;
- the creation of interactive content through the use of specific platforms (for example, H5P, Articulate 360, Moodle, etc.), based on the concept of knowledge-sharing;
- the ability to connect teachers, students and the corporate world for the creation of open e-books and open e-content on the topic of hospitality management;
- the ability to combine the classic view of exams, conceived as an evaluation tool, with that of verifying skills and any critical issues in order to strengthen students' curricula;
- the creation of an open educational model to be shared with the faculty as a best practice in an educational context 4.0;
- the creation of synergies, in the context of the third mission, with the reference are through a specific "within the territory" teaching that enhances it, from a tourist point of view, through the creation of educational workshops. The output of the labs can refer to innovative ideas for the territory that connect the business world, local artistic crafts, the realities operating in the third sector that deal with tourism and other players in the social ecosystem;

Thanks to the implementation of innovative teaching, students have the opportunity to experience a real multimedia academy conceived as a place for sharing knowledge, where the students themselves produce educational content in the form of individual and group projects. Furthermore, students can confront challenges in order to develop business ideas in the tourism sector through the support of partner companies and business incubators.

Students have answered calls proposed by the firms in order to face the pandemic crisis (applying strategies to encourage a domestic demand, favouring the upgrading structure,

projecting and implementing digital devices as apps to facilitate the customer relation or the service provision). In the first lockdown from March 2020 to May 2020, panels of experts were organized through online webinars to collect data regarding the perspectives of managers and academics. The panels were conducted in three different periods of the pandemic crisis: at the beginning of the pandemic, during the full lockdown and during the re-start phase. During the panel a series of questions were subministrated to firms to understand their perceptions concerning the following aspect as the travel behaviour, their forecast on the reopening of tourism business, the investment that they will support in terms of digital marketing and sustainability.

Conclusions

The technologies used for teaching become tools capable of supporting and facilitating collaboration and socialization, improving the learning experience of students. The student participates personally in the construction of knowledge. The classes are equipped with a digital whiteboard connected to the Internet line and, moreover, each student has his own workstation to access the Internet line.

The inseparable combination at the basis of the didactics of the degree course is "teaching-learning" which allows a continuous improvement, in terms of quality, of this process. A fundamental role is played by the interaction between student and teacher and the use of technologies represents a transversal component that facilitates the exchange of knowledge and the creation of innovative outputs for teaching.

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