In_Spire: Fostering Pedagogical Innovation in Tourism Education

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Objectives | This paper aims to establish a didactical framework that can scaffold the adoption of experiential approaches in Tourism and Hospitality Higher Education (THHE). Having been developed in the context of the collaborative project In_Spire – Sharing Best Practices in Tourism Education – it draws on a systematic literature review, putting forward a model that supports the creation of a toolkit for tourism educators and the sharing of innovative pedagogical practices. In addition to reflecting on the affordances of experiential learning, this review will set the foundations for the toolkit, whose main goals include the dissemination of good practices, the enhancement of teacher training and the development of a dynamic repository of annotated resources for THHE, paving the way for future work, leveraging pedagogical innovation within this scope.

Methodology | The methodology used was based on a systematic literature review focusing on two key topics: the adoption of Experiential Learning in Higher Education and the use of toolkits in enhancing Tourism and Hospitality Education. The documentary corpus was gathered from international, open access, peer-reviewed journals and project reports. Given the key role of innovation and the need to focus on current skill demands, the search was restricted to the timeframe from 2019 to 2023. Researchers resorted to bibliometric and content analysis, based on pre-defined categories pertaining to typology (report, case study, experience report, framework, literature review) and subsector (tourism, hospitality and restaurant/catering).

Main Results and Contributions | The review was instrumental in bringing the toolkit into fruition. With the idea for developing the toolkit being heavily reliant on practice, there was a need to clearly define theoretical concepts and to establish a sound framework that could support its development and validate its contributions. In addition to defining the concept of Experiential Learning and making a clear connection to the field of Tourism and Hospitality Education, researchers were able to work on a model that sustained the definition of a set of guidelines for educators, as well as criteria for categorizing and assessing the activities to be included in the final output of the project. Based on

learning cycles that require learners to "Do, Reflect, Think and Apply" (Kolb, 1984; McCarthy, 2010) the authors also draw on the work of Butler (2019) as to define principles of good practice for experiential learning activities.

Limitations | Given the exploratory nature of the approach followed in the development of the toolkit, the current review, albeit instrumental in its design, will have to be complemented by further research, particularly regarding the skill profile of current tourism and hospitality graduates. Future work will include the definition of a skill and activity matrix, making it possible to categorize the activities to include in this toolkit.

In order to validate the framework and ensuing matrix, the toolkit also needs to be reviewed and validated by stakeholders (experts and practitioners), that can further endorse its application.

Conclusions | Within the scope of Tourism Education, Experiential Learning has proven to have significant potential when it comes to enhancing teaching and learning processes, particularly regarding the application of theoretical knowledge and the development of problem-solving and communication skills. Nevertheless, and despite its perceived value, incorporating Experiential Learning into the tourism and hospitality curricula remains challenging, making a case for further research on the topic, particularly regarding teacher training and the creation of communities of practice.

Aiming to fill this void by identifying a working rationale to support a toolkit for tourism and hospitality educators, the authors were able to expand on existing experiential learning models and develop templates that support the sharing of good pedagogical practices. Besides defining key theoretical concepts, they were able to agree on a set of guiding principles that can not only help other educators understand the affordances (and potential drawbacks) of Experiential Learning, but also assist them in implementing their own ideas and activities, thus fostering pedagogical innovation and a sense of community.

References

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