

TOURISM AND COMMUNITY CULTURE IN SERGIPE/BRAZIL: A PRACTICAL EXPERIENCE DEVELOPED BY FEDERAL INSTITUTE OF SERGIPE

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ABSTRACT: This paper intends to be a reflection on the relation enters theory x practical professional training in tourism through the practical experience of a project developed by the Federal Institute of Sergipe (IFS) that consists of technical travels as a facilitators techniques as tools in the learning process of the course of Tourism, since it causes a real experience at the students life. Every year, since 2008, tour guide students from IFS experience the Cultural Tourism by visiting the most important city of cultural tourism and cultural heritage in the state of Sergipe (SE): São Cristóvão. The study was contextualized from research papers, books and articles published in specialized tourism and education, economic development, and social and regional plans, pedagogical, reports and accounts of experiences of teachers / students of the Tour Guide Course at IFS. Furthermore, the research discusses the role of disciplines based on the relationship between tourism practices - education and supported the tripod: teaching, research and extension. The study revealed that the technical visits constitute practices to develop processes of action, observation, reflection and commitment among students, community and the cultural heritage.

Keywords: Tourism. Cultural Tourism. Tour Guide. São Cristóvão/SE/Brazil.

INTRODUCTION

A skilful guide is one of the most valuable assets a tourism company can have. In many ways, a guide is the ‘face’ of a business or company (Pond, 2003). Many foreign visitors tend to view their tour guides as representatives of the region or country (Pond, 2003). Due to the importance of guides and the growth in heritage tourism there is increasing interest in roles of tour guides (Holloway, 2011; Hughes, 2011; Weiler & Davis, 2010).

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Although the Oxford dictionary (Willis, 2009) defines a guide simply as...a person who shows others the way (p. 446), research has found the role of a tour guide is much broader (Cohen, 2005; Holloway, 2011). In a review about the origin, structure and dynamics of tour guiding, Cohen (2005) created a model based on its historic beginnings with the pathfinders and mentors of ancient times. He re-named these two roles to make them more relevant to modern tour guiding and called the pathfinder role 'leadership', and the mentor role 'mediatory'. As a leader, the tour guide has to organise (i.e. provide direction, access, and control) and build the team (i.e. ensure group cohesion and morale). As a mentor, the guide acts as an interactionary (or 'middleman') and is an educator for the group.

In this perspective, this article aims to discuss the relationship between theory and practice regarding the formation of the professional of Tourism through the practical experience of the Micro internship project, an educational innovation of the Teaching Plan of the Technical Course on Tourist Guide from the Federal Institute of Sergipe (IFS), which visits São Cristóvão city every semester.

The methodology applied here has as a background the technical-scientific experience of the students and teachers during the visit to São Cristóvão. The methodological resources used were: review of the specialized literature on the topics being covered, the Institutional Development Plan (PDI), the Pedagogical Project of the Course (PPC); and reports about the experiences of students and teachers of the Technical Course on Tourist Guide of the IFS.

Cultural/ Heritage Tourism in São Cristóvão/ Sergipe/ Brazil

To understand and recognize the heritage and its diversity is of great importance for the socioeconomic development and for the improvement of the quality of life of people who live in the historical areas of cities. Furthermore, to identify the heritage through touristic activities requires a comprehension that it must be practiced in a harmonic manner between its agents – community, tourists and tourism professionals -, because, before being established as a touristic attraction, the heritage is processed within the identity framework of a place and, in this context, culture must be highlighted as an important element in the appreciation of heritage and identity.

Considering this premise, the historical centre of São Cristóvão is the most significant representative of Sergipe's social, religious and cultural aspects and has, in its religious and civil architecture, the expression of the time when the 'Sergipano' people began its history. The location was the centre of the colonization and organization of the Sergipe "capitania" (region) for 265 years and has historical, cultural, material

and immaterial heritage of great relevance. The historical centre of the city still preserves great part of the architectural heritage built between the XVII and XIX centuries in the colonial-baroque and neoclassical styles. It also has a wide variety of cultural demonstrations, with a festive and religious calendar, and a diversified and unique gastronomy.

Founded in 1590, São Cristóvão was the headquarter of the Serpige D'el Rei region and an important economic intersection between the Bahia and the Pernambuco regions, as the centre of livestock and sugar production, until 1855, when it loses its position to the capital of Aracaju for economic reasons. In 2010, the 18th seal was granted to Brazil by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization – UNESCO, making the São Cristóvão Square (Image 1) a World Heritage for preserving a faithful representative of the Iberian constructions from the Brazilian colonial period.



Image 1: São Francisco Square

Source: Culture Journal, 2011

The Teaching Learning Process in the Technical Visit

The teaching-learning is a process that should take into consideration the past experiences of the student and take those experiences in a positive way, in a way that he may be capable of reflecting upon a new reality against the exposed problem. According to P. Silva (2006, p. 170) “The student only predisposes to learn in the moment he notices and identifies in the process of learning the possibility of having his personal and/or professional interests accomplished in a short to medium term.”

Therefore, the learning must favor the difference between theoretical and practical knowledge, enabling the transformation and comprehension of the reality that surrounds the student.

In the technical visits it is possible to observe the presence of four teaching techniques: listening, talking, living/questioning and transforming it, with the intent of reaching the needs in the formation of the professional tourist guide, where the teacher can comprehend the reality of the product, the destiny and the tourism equipment. Besides that, according to UNESCO (2011), learning to know-reconcile a culture in general, with the purpose of learning, doing and developing the ability to confront unusual situations that might require group work; learning to coexist-realize the increasing interdependence of the human beings; Learning to live-develop the independence and capacity to judge, as well as build up the responsibility for the self-development personally, professionally and socially.

This way the technical visit links with a perspective of a practical knowledge, besides just the classroom that points towards the goal of professional competence in tourism. "The field study provides an interest for the learning and gives opportunity to identify the practice of a determined content that has been or will be ministered" (P. Silva, 2006, p. 177).

It is still considered that the environment where the technical visit will take place awakens an interest for the comprehension of the theoretical elements from the curricular component and other elements from the experienced culture, environment and student values.

The students are responsible for exposing the goals to be reached by the visit, checking them beforehand in a way to motivate the students, with professional testimonials that have been successful in the field, motivating them to mingle between theory and practice. The place in where the technical visit will take place should be well oriented with the intent of attending the goals with spare time for the doing of all the activities.

The Professional Practice developed by the Micro Internship Project of the Sergipe Federal Institute – IFS

At the IFS, the professional practice developed aims the construction of knowledge defined by the Teaching Plans of the Course – PPC, through activities guided by a teacher of each area, according to the student's topic of study. Some of the activities considered as professional practices are: case studies, experience at the productive system, researches, technical-scientific and community services. These activities are part of the courses, with their respective work hours, weekly schedules, methodologies and evaluation methods.

The pedagogical practices adopted by the teachers of this institution are based on the assumption that their effectiveness depends on the students' level of learning. The employment of methodologies and

practices centred on learning itself is usual in the teaching practice. To do so, they elect activities such as the elaboration and development of projects, identification and solving real problems, preferably with an interdisciplinary approach. The selection of activities is based on the assumption that the more challenging they are, the more they will contribute for the development of investigative and autonomous attitudes of students when facing challenges of the learning process.

One of these activities is the Micro Internship. An innovative project developed by the coordination and the teachers of the tourism course which aims to socialize, contextualize and interconnect knowledge and teaching processes with the world of work and to encourage consideration of the classroom theory with the practice and the reality beyond the school walls.

The insertion of the Micro Internship in the Technical Course on Tourist Guide is a didactic-pedagogical strategy of promotion and integration between theoretical and practical knowledge to foster the construction of additional experiences and knowledge to the curriculum, a necessary part of the professional training of any student. Thus, this practice has become a curricular activity which enhances the experiences of the student outside the classroom in an environment of real work in the Tourism area, integrating the academic content in the social-environmental, political and cultural dimensions.

The Micro Internship is, thus, an activity which aims to foster the construction of significant knowledge through methodological procedures which prioritize the principles of curricular interdisciplinarity, contextualization and flexibility of the teaching practice.

In addition, the Federal Institute of Sergipe seeks to promote professional and technological education, offering courses at various levels and types of education in line with the social and labour demands, contributing to the development of the local and regional productive organizations.

In the project of creation of the Federal Institutes of Education the responsibilities and the social commitment of these institutions are notorious. They are called to contribute with the programs and processes of development and social inclusion in a country historically marked by enormous contradictions in its distribution of the socially produced goods.

This institution has been improving, transforming and (re)inventing its practices in order to satisfactorily respond to these responsibilities and to the commitments derived from the model here presented.

The Federal Institute positions itself in a strategic way, as a public institution, in this nation project which seeks the construction of a fair and equal society, because education and work can ensure social inclusion. It is committed to provide professional and technological edu-

education which prepares the student not only for a job but also to manage skills and knowledge that will allow his insertion in the formal and informal productive processes in a proactive manner, without losing sight of the dialogue with other public policies which foster further research, dissemination of knowledge and social inclusion.

Therefore, in view of the technical visit in the teaching-learning process, the specificity of the micro internship is necessary as a methodological instrument within the field of studies of tourism, and more specifically the technical course on tour guide, which seeks to enable a systemic perspective of reality, through a critical, reflexive and integrator view of the facts and phenomena of social life, allowing for an experience of the professional reality. This course aims to train professionals capable of guiding, assisting and leading people or groups during transfers, tours, visits and trips with ethics and respect for the environment, culture and law, while giving information about the socio-cultural, historical, environmental, geographic aspects and others that may interest the visitor.

RESULTS

The results of the research have been drawn from five (5) questions asked to 60 students in a roundtable discussion conducted by one of the teachers who participated in the planning of the activities in São Cristóvão/ Sergipe/ Brazil on July and October 2013. These meetings were done twice a year, two days after which visit.

Some students data are following below:

The age of the students varies from 19 to 45 years old. 80% are female, ie 48 students. Only 10% of all students are formally employed, ie 6 students. 15 students, ie 25% have children, but 4 of them are married. 20% have informal jobs and 70% are looking for their first one.

Most of them (80%) live in the capital, Aracaju. The others live between 30 and 60 km from the capital.

Table 1 – Guiding questions for data collection (teacher/student)

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1. In your opinion, the Micro Internship activities may be considered a training method? Why?
 2. Has the Micro Internship project contributed to your overall professional experience? Why?
 3. Have the objectives of the Micro Internship been met? Justify your answer.
 4. Has your opinion of cultural tourism and preservation of cultural heritage changed after the activities conducted in São Cristóvão city?
 5. Would you like to visit another cultural touristic destination in Brazil? Which one?
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Source: Pabim (2013).

Even though open-ended questions allow for a wide range of information, they also encourage a contextualization important for the process of construction of the evaluation and feedback tools of the Pedagogical Project of the Course (PPC).

The students' comments were strongly guided by the importance of maintaining and expanding the micro program activities, which was considered by all an effective method of teaching capable of causing profound changes in their perception of community-based tourism (Issues 1 and 4).

This aspect is supported by M. Huiyuan and W. Zeping (2010) which criticizes the old concepts of education in tourism, such as the "college" style – a traditional teaching method which works behind closed doors -, for oppressing the initiative and the creativity of students.

Regarding the practical experiences lived in São Cristóvão, given that they will contribute for the development of investigative and autonomous attitudes in students when facing the challenges of the tourism labour market in Sergipe and other states of the Brazilian North-East, (Question 2), it became clear that the deepening of the theoretical themes related to the tourism labour market in which the student will be inserted is necessary, emphasizing the professional profile expected at the end of the Course. Question 2 resumes the paradoxical debates which involve the dialogue between professionals of this area and local businessmen.



Image 2: Students and professor together with a dancing folkloric ladies group

Source: Pabim, 2013

Question 3, which deals with the objectives of the Micro Internship, was based on the understanding that maintaining a good level of technical education in tourism courses in the educational institutions

and training should be used to stimulate the creativity of professionals and their capacity to adapt to new technologies, to the use of new processes and organizational structures (M. Ansarah, 2012). In this item, all students and teachers agreed that all objectives of the project had been achieved.

All students declared that they would like to visit other Brazilian cultural touristic destinations, such as Salvador of Bahia state, Olinda of Pernambuco state and the historical towns of the Minas Gerais state (Question 5).

Thus, it was noticed that this kind of activity allows the student to interact with the labour market, benefiting his or her professional training and moving the tourism production chain.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Tourism is a relatively new field of study that emerged from vocational education. The nature of tourism education seems to contribute toward tourism pedagogies, driven by business and economic considerations. At the same time, this makes tourism education susceptible to social manipulation by these same forces. However, most discussions by educators and developers of tourism curricula tend to centre on a balance between a vocational and an academic focus. The discussion is often merely about efficient and effective transferability of school curricula to daily operations, overlooking the value of learning and the intangible impacts of tourism. It is clear that a focus on employability is at odds, or in conflict with, the goal of producing graduates capable of critical thinking. (J. Tribe, 2002, p. 354) suggests that the philosophic practitioner seeks to develop:

“...practical wisdom and action in the wider world at the same time as earning a living in, and contributing to the economic development of, a specific business domain of tourism. This is working in tourism while taking responsibility for stewardship of its developing world.”

The education heads off with the meaning of transferring values that would allow the work to have meaning and bring light to the possibilities of the individual. The professional development has a connotation of evolution and continuity. The formation highlights the technical aspects of dexterity and knowledge, focusing on attitudes (OMT, 2010).

The work brings attention to the fact that the environment, as a whole, is a great ally in the process of schooling, since it is in that scenario where everything happens, therefore, the place where the individual establishes his relations, interactions and transformations. It is, however, where the student becomes in close contact with the re-

ality, being able to experience some situations that become significant experiences.

In that sense, the technical visits are made of practices that are capable of developing the process of action, observation, reflection, commitment and integration, with the purpose of achieving the theory-practice in the education of the professional Tourist Guide.

It is important to highlight that the technical visits have had their instructive-pedagogical character formed by the academic-professional commitment powering the instruction-learning, and not just a trip to a place outside of the classroom. There is also a commitment with the receiving communities, the tourism market, with the objectives of the Institution of Schooling highlighting its plural, social and political purpose in the context itself.

Some studies have shown the importance of rethinking the education of tourism through new pedagogical practices, as linking research and teaching by exploring disciplinary spaces and the role of inquiry-based learning (Healey, 2005) or student work experiences (Leslie and Richardson, 2000) and practicums (Ernawati, 2003).

Much of the international debate about the relationship between research and teaching is characterised by difference. Individuals vary widely in their views about the nature of the linkage. Some believe that university research often detracts from the quality of teaching (Pocklington and Tupper 2002), while others argue that “courses taught by those at the cutting edge of research will necessarily be of higher quality than those taught by those merely using the research results of others – whatever the apparent quality of their style of delivery” (Lee 2004, p. 9). These strong views in part reflect the importance of linking research and teaching in the identity of many academics (Henkel 2000). The research evidence also varies, at least in its interpretation. For example, Hattie and Marsh (1996) found no significant relationship between research productivity and teaching effectiveness; on the other hand, “there is clear evidence from a range of studies in different types of institutions of students valuing learning in a research-based environment” (Jenkins 2004, p. 29). Given these differences, it is hardly surprising that a number of myths have developed about the nature of the research-teaching nexus.

This analysis offers a panorama for the elaboration of new strategies for the course, preparing the student in many ways to be a professional that is capable of working in any location. However, the knowledge and the act of pedagogy of the students with methodology and practices that are centered in the schooling must elect activities such as elaboration and project development, identification and solution to problems transposed in the local and regional reality, preferably with an interdisciplinary approach. The selection of the practical activi-

ties of the higher education in tourism must commit with the undergraduate student the capacity of innovating and being productive (A. Dencker, 2002).

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