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HUMAN SCIENCES – PSYCHOLOGY, COMMUNICATION AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

CICLO XXXII

Analysis of the offer of thematic tourism products: the case of Marche Region as a potential educational destination.

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Summary

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List of Abbreviations

AACUPI - Association of American College and University Programs in Italy

AC - Abstract conceptualization

AE - Active Experimentation

CBT – Community-based tourism

CEFR - Common European Framework of Reference for Languages

CELI – General Italian Certification

CILS – Certificazione di italiano come lingua straniera (Certification of Italian as a foreign language)

DILS – Didattica dell'Italiano Lingua Straniera – Didactic of Italian as a foreign language

DMO – Destination Management Organisation

EC - European Commission

EUROSTAT - European Statistical System

GDP - Gross Domestic Product

GMDAC - Global Migration Indicators

HEI – Higher Education Institutions

ICT – Information and Communication Technologies

IES - Institute of International Education of Students

ISC – International Student Competition

LO – Learning organisations

LTD – Learning tourism destinations

MOOC - Massive Open Online Courses

NAFSA - Association of International Educators

NGO – Non-Governmental Organisation

OECD - Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development

PBL – Problem-based learning

RO - Reflective observation

S3 – Smart Specialisation Strategy

SA – Study Abroad

SDM - System Dynamics Modelling

SME – Small and Medium Enterprises

UIS - UNESCO Institute for statistics

UNESCO – IBE – UNESCO - International Bureau of Education

UNESCO - United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

UNICAM – University of Camerino

UNIMC – University of Macerata

VFR – Visiting friends and relatives

WEF – World Economic Forum

Introduction

This study is the result of a three-years-experience at the University of Macerata, at the Department of Education, Cultural Heritage and Tourism, working in collaboration with a research team coordinated by Professor Alessio Cavicchi, committed in place branding and agri-food marketing and agribusiness researches, with a focus on sustainable tourism development in rural areas. The context in which the PhD pathway has developed is the EUREKA scholarship project, an industrial PhD funded by both public and private bodies in which the candidate spent half of the time in a company for research & development purposes. In this case, Andreani Tributi Srl, located in Macerata (Piediripa) is the company in which the candidate worked on a project related to experiential tourism in rural areas.

Both the academic activity and the applied research in the company can be considered as part of a process of civic engagement (Goddard & Kempton, 2016; Goddard *et al*., 2016; Charles, 2016) of the University of Macerata in the surrounding territory and with the local stakeholders. By applying action research methods (Gilmore & Carson, 1996), the team invited public and private actors to participate in place-based joint projects with the attempt to identify specific needs and to find and co-create innovative solutions to real problems (Atterton & Thompson, 2010; Ward *et al.* 2005; Trencher *et al*., 2014), by combining global knowledge to local co-production and exchange of knowledge (Charles, 2016) so to contribute to the local development.

Co-creation for innovation, in line with the Smart Specialisation Strategy (Rinaldi *et al*., 2018) and the Quadruple Helix of Innovation (Carayannis, & Campbell, 2006; 2009; 2010) is at the base of the many projects realized, which have the common main objective of promoting Marche Region rural areas from a touristic point of view by identifying food and wine as distinctive assets for competition. The starting point of this process can be identified with the beginning, in 2009, of *Marche Excellence* (Rinaldi & Cavicchi, 2016) project. Nevertheless, it is only after the 2016 earthquake that hit Marche Region and its rural areas, that this tie between the university and the territory has been progressively empowered by creating new opportunities for collaboration and by widening the horizons also at international level, with projects funded by the European Union, such as the Erasmus+ *The Wine Lab-Generating Innovation between Practice and Research* [1] and *FOODBiz - University and business learning for new employability paths in food and gastronomy* [2], in which also students, scholars, firms from the agrifood sector and from the tourism industry, public bodies, associations, representatives of the local communities of rural areas play a major role in the co-creative process.

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[1] https://www.thewinelab.eu/en/ (last retrieved: 20.11.2019)
[2] http://foodbiz.info/en/ (last retrieved: 20.11.2019)

In this context of collaboration, the candidate has developed her own research design. Marche Region offers a variety of opportunities in terms of culture heritage, cultural events, handicrafts and know-how, nature and landscapes, wine & food, as also confirmed by the presence of regional tourism clusters which reflect these characteristics.[3] They potentially entail educational and experiential learning components, that, if properly declined within a thematic tourism offer, could eventually provide a distinctive advantage to the region, by involving all the actors of the supply, including, somehow, the University.

Educational tourism is a growing industry which includes several sub-categories. Cultural tourism, ecotourism, volunteer tourism, agritourism (Ritchie *et al.*, 2003; Richards, 2011); study abroad programmes for higher education students, school excursions; exchange programs; language travel; adult and senior study tours (for credits courses; for professional development; hands-on and experiential learning seminars for skills enhancement; educational cruises) (Ritchie *et al.*, 2003; Sie *et al.*, 2016; Nugroho & Soeprihanto, 2016) are included.

Marche Region is particularly devoted to agri-tourism and cultural tourism which are considered among the educational tourism categories due to their experiential and learning components, potentially interesting for tourists, which can consider them as a primary or secondary motivation for their travel (respectively "education first" and "tourism first" educational tourists) (Ritchie *et al.*, 2003). These tourists are, indeed, keen on being informed about the culture and to experience folklore, customs, natural landscapes, and historical landmarks, perhaps also enjoy other activities in a rural setting such as nature walks, adventure activities, sports, festivals, crafts, and general sightseeing. In these terms, cultural tourism, especially if community-based, can make the destination suitable for education, entertainment and enrichment purposes for both tourists and the communities themselves, thus creating experiential learning opportunities and commitment for all (MacDonald & Jolliffe, 2003). Learning through the direct experience, through a "meaningful discovery", is at the base of experiential learning (Dewey, 1938; Boydell, 1976; Kolb, 1984). Cultural and agri-tourists can be then potential target groups to be attracted in Marche Region.

Similarly, international students studying abroad are potential educational tourists belonging to the "education first" segment. Their presence at local level, especially in rural areas, has some impacts in terms of socio-cultural exchange and for economic reasons (Samah *et al.*, 2012). They boost local economy with their expenditure also on tourism-related items such as transport, visits to cultural attractions, restaurants and local food (Ritchie *et al.*, 2003; Huang, 2008). Short-term study abroad programs are also relevant from this point of view. Stone & Petrick (2013) defined study-abroad programs, including short period programs, as touristic experiences perceived by the students as

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[3] https://en.turismo.marche.it/ (last retrieved: 20.11.2019)

challenging and potentially enriching opportunities to travel, live and learn about another culture and language. Experiential learning is common in this kind of programs, among which field study projects (Willis, 1997; Mergendoller *et al.*, 2006), where the project-based learning model (Boud & Feletti, 1997; Bell, 2010) is often applied and language travel (Iglesias, 2016; Boekstein, 2017) are included. The advantages of study abroad programs in small towns, which also comprehend destinations located in rural areas, are highlighted in a report by the Association of American College and University in Italy (Shneider, 2017). It shows that students can immerse themselves in the destination's cultural environment, by being hosted in families and by also taking part to community activities and festivals, thus, intensively practicing the host community language. Off-the-beaten path tourism experiences are available at local level, without excluding the opportunity to travel to the main destinations. On one hand, another positive aspect for students is that services and facilities are less expensive than in bigger cities. On the other hand, the presence of students at local level brings a positive economical contribution to the host town.

Starting from these premises, this study tries to answer to the following research questions:

- Have Marche Region rural areas the potential to become an educational tourism destination?
- Which role can the University play in promoting educational tourism in rural areas?

For what concerns methodology, qualitative methods were applied. Interviews with open-ended questions were directly conducted and recorded by the candidate for all the studies and, then, transcribed and analysed with content analysis methods.

In order to gain a better understanding about educational tourism related to higher education institutions, a literature review on the relationship between university study abroad programs and sustainable development of rural areas is presented in the first chapter. It includes an overview about the main definitions and frameworks about educational tourism provided by scholars; a paragraph is dedicated to the relationship between travel and learning and the relevance given by researchers to universities; furthermore, their civic engagement in the promotion of educational tourism in rural areas is then highlighted. A section is dedicated to international students considered as educational tourists and to their potential impact in the host communities.

The following chapters present some cases of educational tourism experiences from Marche Region, respectively declined in sub-categories: the language travel supply in Macerata area, a fied-study project organized by the University in collaboration with an association of local stakeholders and an agri-tourism experience, represented by a local festival, considered from a learning and wellbeing perspective.

The second chapter presents a study about the language travel industry in Marche Region, more specifically in Macerata area, with an analysis of local Italian language and culture schools based

upon Porter's Five Forces (Porter, 1979; 1980; 2008). Fourteen Italian Language and Culture Schools are located in Marche Region, with students mainly coming from Central and South America, China and Central and Northern Europe and some U.S. Universities. Most of these schools offer opportunities for experiential learning and tourism activities at local level. A framework based on Porter (2008) to represent the forces and factors influencing the local industry is presented, thanks to the information collected through the interviews to two Italian language and culture schools located in Macerata area.

The third chapter[4] presents the case of a field-study project, a short-term study abroad program (Ritchie *et al*., 2003) lasting one week organized by the University of Macerata and the Piceno Laboratory of Mediterranean Diet, the "International Student Competition on Place Branding and Mediterranean Diet (ISC)" (Cavicchi *et al*., 2018). It is an example of collaboration between local stakeholders and the University with the aim to promote the rural area of Fermo, in Marche Region, with a place umbrella brand, the Mediterranean Diet, inscribed in the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage List in 2013 (UNESCO, 2013) based on a historical and scientific tie with the area. The competition consists in involving international master students coming from several universities of Europe in teamworking and place-based tourism activities. During the week, they attend lectures held by international scholars related to place branding in rural areas and learn how to provide innovative and feasible proposals for place branding strategies through a project-based and problem-based learning approach (Vygotsky, 1978; Blumenfeld *et al*., 1991; Paris, 2011) while also promoting the area through social media. The study investigates the learning outcomes of this educational tourism experience in terms of development of knowledge and soft-skills useful for students' employability.

The last chapter[5] presents the case of *Lavandaso* festival, the festival of lavender, in Fermo area, as a community-based tourism experience investigated both from a tourism engagement and from a learning perspective. The event, whose objective is to revitalise abandoned villages and to promote a healthy and sustainable lifestyle in the specific rural area, actively engages all the participants and can have transformative effects. Among the participants that were interviewed, students from the local university, both local residents and foreigners, collaborate and take part to the event, considering it as an educational tourism experience.

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[4] A revised version of this study has been accepted for the special issue *"Generating public value through partnership – oriented public policies"* by International Studies. Interdisciplinary Political and Cultural Journal. Journal of the University of Lodz.

[5] A revised version of this study has been published as a book chapter. The publication is the following: Bertella, G., Tomasi, S., Cavicchi, A., and Paviotti, G. (2019) Community-Based Tourism engagement and wellbeing from a learning perspective. In *Wiltshier, P., & Clarke, A. (2019). Community-Based Tourism in the Developing World: Community Learning*, Development & Enterprise.

CHAPTER 1
Educational Tourism and sustainable development of rural areas: the role of universities

1. Introduction

In the last decades, the number of students engaged in study abroad has increased throughout the world, with important outcomes for the host universities and countries, and the students themselves. According to UNESCO "an internationally mobile student is an individual who has physically crossed an international border between two countries with the objective to participate in educational activities in a destination country, where the destination country is different from his or her country of origin."

The advantages of study abroad programs accrue to the host country as well as to the student. On the one hand, host countries benefit from the income international students can bring, with an impact on economic and innovation systems (OECD, 2016), considering their expenditures on accommodation, food and beverages, entertainment and leisure activities, and in some programs, tuition fees, not to mention the inevitable taxes. On the other hand, students benefit not only from their studies, but also from interactions with local and foreign people, opportunities to travel, and experiences that foster personal and professional growth. In addition, international students also are tourists, taking advantage of the opportunities to visit local attractions or travel to other regions of the host countries, alone or with friends and relatives. Experiential learning is part of studying abroad and tourism is part of the whole experience (Huang, 2008). It can a transformative (Richards, 2011; McGladdery & Lubbe, 2017) combination of learning and personal growth (Pine & Gilmore, 2013), thus creating a complete social experience (Wenger, 2000; Sie *et al.*, 2016).

Most frequently cited among the factors that motivate students in their choice of a university abroad are the quality of education offered and the attractiveness of the destination (Michael *et al.*, 2004; Huang, 2008; Nyaupane *et al*., 2011; Lam *et al*., 2011; Abubakar *et al*., 2014; Tashlai, & Ivanov, 2014; Lee, 2014; Rahman *et al.*, 2017).

In a parallel development to the growth in the number of students who study abroad, universities in recent decades have become progressively more committed to their third and fourth missions, especially universities in rural areas, interacting more with the society in which they are located and seeking to boost the local economy through promotion of technology transfer to businesses (Etzkowitz *et al*., 2000). Moreover, through their engagement in place-based, multi-stakeholder partnerships, they have sought to bring innovation to bear in addressing local and world challenges (Trencher *et al.*, 2014). In this environment, universities also pursue their civic mission (Goddard & Kempton, 2016; Goddard *et al*., 2016) in a holistic way (Goddard *et al*., 2016) by involving students

in educational activities with the local community, thus providing opportunities to practice active citizenship, gain knowledge, and improve their employability. In this context, international mobility also creates opportunities to attract talents, that, once trained, if locally employed can support the process of innovation and the development of production systems, providing skilled workers for the future of the local area (OECD, 2016). In addition, international student mobility may promote future international scientific co-operation networks and cross-faculty fertilisation (Hénard *et al.*, 2012), thus creating benefits for the host university and destination, for the students themselves.

Given these positive aspects of hosting international students, this study investigates the role of universities in fostering sustainable development through educational tourism in rural areas.

First, a brief description of the methods used for the literature survey is provided, then several definitions of educational tourism put forth in the literature are outlined, and some useful conceptual frameworks are discussed. Second, study abroad programs are considered in the context of educational tourism, focusing on travel as an opportunity for experiential learning. Third, we explore the concept of civic universities, and examine the potential role of universities, especially those in rural areas, in improving the educational tourism vocation of their areas and thus fostering sustainable development at the local level. In fact, by engaging local and international students in place-based activities in the local community, universities act upon their civic commitment to the local society. In this context, we look at international students as educational tourists, and explore their motivations for undertaking an educational tourism experience. The managerial implications for the universities, government, industry and society are considered in terms of the Quadruple Helix model proposed by Carayannis, & Campbell (2006). Fourth, the economic impact of educational tourism is presented, drawing upon examples in the literature.

1.1 Background context

To better understand the dynamics of study abroad in recent years, some statistics and data are helpful. According to the UNESCO Institute for statistics (UIS), there were over 4.8 million international students in 2016, up from 3.9 million in 2011, as shown in the Global Migration Indicators (GMDAC, 2018) (Figure 1).
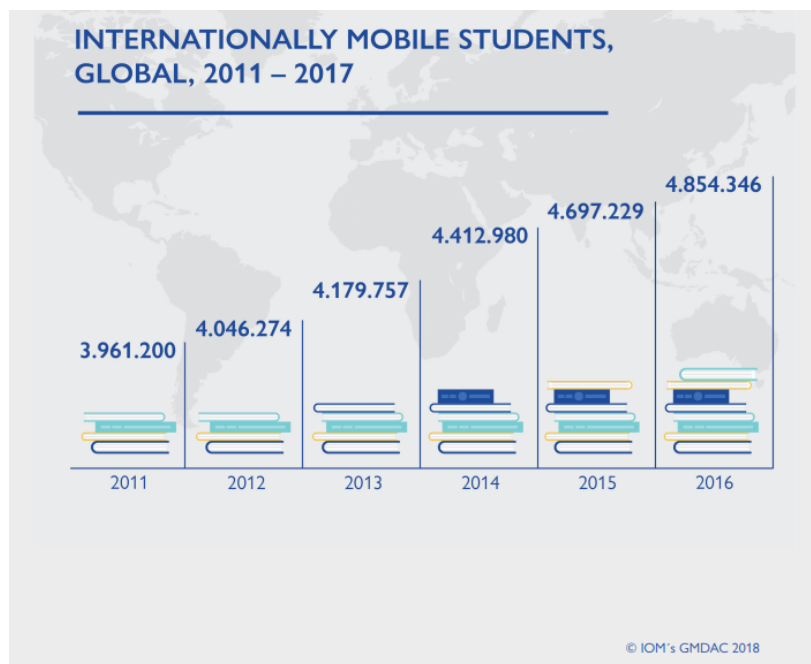
Figure 1 - Internationally mobile students, global 2011 − 2017 (GMDAC, 2018 − elaborated from UNESCO, 2018)

More than 50% of these students were enrolled in educational programmes in six host countries: the United States of America, the United Kingdom, Australia, France, Germany and the Russian Federation. Prominent sending countries of international students include China, India, Germany, South Korea, Nigeria, France, Saudi Arabia and several Central Asian countries.

American students abroad numbered 304,465 in 2013-14, with Europe as their favourite destination, in particular the U.K., Italy, Spain, France, and Germany, while China, Ireland, Australia, Japan, and South Africa also hosted significant numbers of American students.

Looking at data for the OECD area, in 2016, there were 3.5 million international or foreign students (OECD, 2018), over half of them from Asia, especially China (1.9 million, 55% of all international students in 2016) which chose the U.S., U.K. and Australia as destinations. Europe is the second major region of origin with 845,000 European cross-border students. Fully 80 % of Europeans travel for study across Europe, perhaps because of the Erasmus student mobility program, which, in its 30 years of activity, has enabled study abroad for 4.4 million European students (European Commission, 2017). From 2014, when the Erasmus + program started, to 2017, up to 2 million students have participated.

Moving from discussion of student origins to that of their destinations, the U.S. was the top OECD destination country for mobile tertiary students (971,000 students) in 2016. The European Union (1.6 million students) was another key destination (OECD, 2018; EUROSTAT, 2018). The U.K. was the destination of choice for 26% of the total number of students from abroad. In fact, in 2014–15 there were approximately 437,000 international students enrolled, 19% of all students registered at U.K. universities. Of these, 125,000 came from other EU member states and 312,000 from the rest of the

world (Universities UK, 2017). France and Germany (both at 245,000) were also major host countries, followed by Italy (93,000), the Netherlands (90,000) and Austria (70,000).

26% students are Europeans, the 29.5% comes from Asia and 12.7% are from Africa. In 2016, international students came to the European Union for Bachelor's degrees (46%); Master's degrees (41%); Doctoral degrees (10%); and Short-cycle tertiary courses (3%), according to EU learning mobility statistics (EUROSTAT, 2018).

The economic impact for host countries can be considerable, as detailed in studies for the U.S., Italy, and the U.K. In the U.S., during academic year 2017-18, the 1,094,792 international students contributed $39 billion to the economy and supported more than 455,000 jobs (NAFSA, 2018). A 2013 study by the Association of American College and University Programs in Italy (AACUPI) stated that the value added created by these international educational programs was particularly significant in the education sector (46.9% of the total impact in terms of value added generated by the presence of international students), because of tuition expenditures. Economic impact in other sectors was not negligible either: real estate (1.2%), sales (6.9%), food & beverage (5.8), transport (40%) and other services, among them arts and entertainment (more than 1%) were affected. The tertiary sector was most impacted, and this could create opportunities for the development of more services and benefits, above all in those destinations where the programs are well developed (Borgioli & Manuelli, 2013). Quite detailed information is also available regarding the economic impact of international students in the U.K. during the academic year 2014-2015 (Universities UK, 2017).

- They contributed £6.1 billion to the U.K. economy;
- They paid an estimated £4.8 billion in tuition fees to U.K. universities;
- Through payments to universities (for tuition fees and accommodation) they supported an additional estimated £13.5 billion in gross output and contributed £13.8 billion gross value added to GDP in the U.K.;
- Transport and retail sectors benefitted from the subsistence spending of international students. Respectively, 13% and 12% of the total increase in economic output was due to the presence of international students.
- Through their economic activity and employment sustainment, they generated £1 billion in tax revenues for the U.K. Exchequer;
- Their expenditures generated a total of 206,600 full-time equivalent jobs nationally.
- Their off-campus spending together with that of their visitors generated £25.8 billion in gross output in the UK, contributing £13.8 billion in gross value to the GDP;

This last point is of considerable interest. Visitors spent about £520 million in 2014-15 for transport, hotels, hospitality, and cultural, recreational and sports attractions, generating an estimated £1 billion

in gross output in 2014–15. Their presence supported a further 11,000 jobs and £100 million in tax receipts (Universities UK, 2017).

Moving on to discussion of benefits that accrue to the students themselves, two studies contribute useful insights. A 2002 survey of alumni of study abroad programs run by the Institute of International Education of Students (longitudinal study, IES, 2002) found that 98% of respondents felt that study abroad helped them to better understand their own cultural values and biases, and 82% felt that the experience gave them a more sophisticated way of looking at the world. For 94% of the alumni, the study-abroad experience continues to influence their interactions with people from different cultures. The choice of subsequent educational experiences was influenced by the study abroad experience for 87% of respondents: nearly half of all respondents went on to international work or internships (usually in offices) and/or international volunteerism. The second study, the Erasmus Impact Study (European Commission, 2013), reported that most respondents felt that their future career paths were influenced by the skills acquired during their study abroad period (Figure 2). It indicated that companies are willing to hire students who studied at foreign universities (Figure 3), because they feel that this kind of experience increases the employability of the students by helping to develop the transversal skills important for the world of work. The study also described how Erasmus influences the personal lives of students (Figure 4).
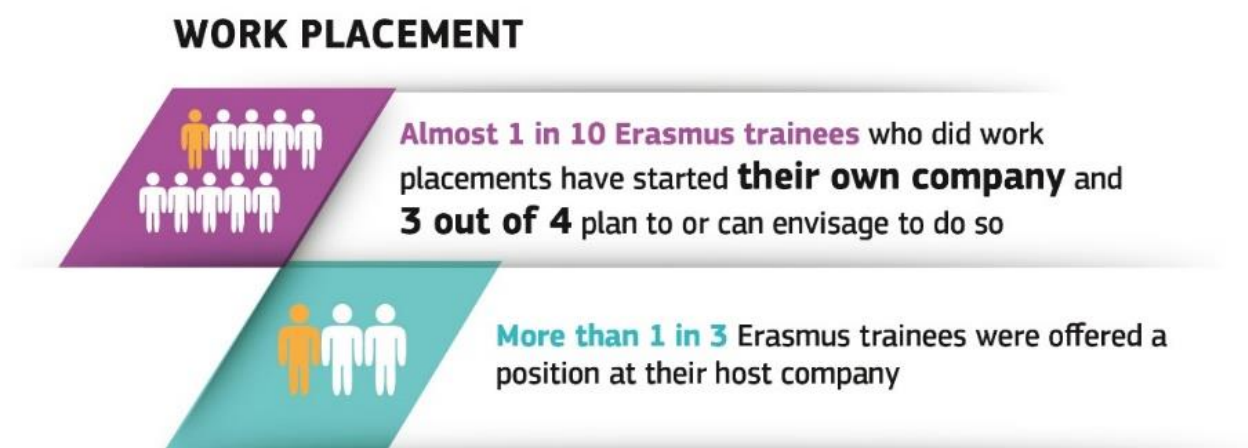
Figure 2 - Work placements of Erasmus students (EC, 2013)

Figure 3 - What employers are looking for (EC, 2013)
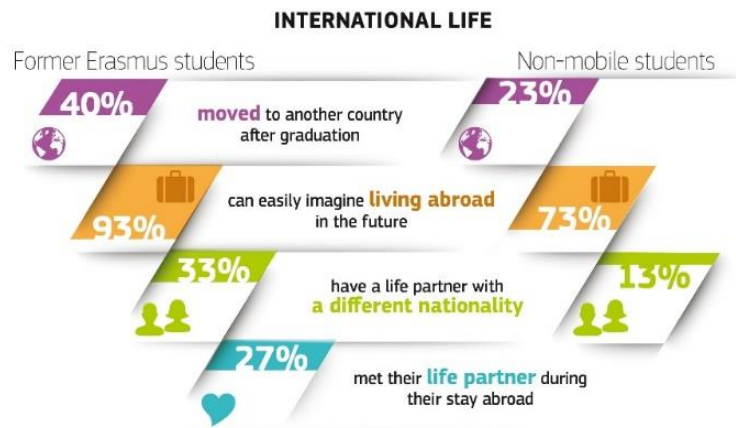
Figure 4 - The international life of Erasmus students – a comparison (EC, 2013)

1.2 Methodology

A first phase of desk research focused on collecting academic contributions about educational tourism, using the Google Scholar search engine, the Scopus, EBSCO and the Web of Science databases, and the Academia.edu and Research Gate academic social networks, for the following key words: "educational tourism"; "educational tourism" combined to the words "impact"; and "sustainability"; "educational travel"; "study abroad"; "learning experience"; "learning destination"; "experiential learning"; "learning backpackers"; "international students" combined with "tourism"; "rural tourism" combined with "education"; "civic university"; "quadruple helix"; "smart specialisation strategy". Abstracts were perused and works most relevant to the main research topics

were chosen for in-depth reading. Both conceptual papers and case studies, the latter applying both qualitative and quantitative methods, were considered. From a first selection of over two hundred papers, about one hundred papers were chosen for their contents and organised according to the following topics: educational tourism (in general); adult educational tourism; educational tourism destination; international students educational tourism; international students' push and pull factors for educational tourism; benefits of educational tourism for international students; economic impact of educational tourism; social implications of educational tourism; educational tourism in rural areas; ecotourism as educational tourism; travel and experiential learning. For each group of papers, a table of contents was created to immediately highlight important common aspects to be pursued in the discussion.

1.3 Defining Educational Tourism

Since the 1990s some scholars engaged in tourism research have explored the aspect of educational tourism (Kalinowski & Weiler, 1992; Holdnak & Holland, 1996; Bodger, 1998; Gibson, 1998; Ritchie *et al.*, 2003). But even before, in 1981, Burkart & Medlik wrote that travel serves to satisfy curiosity about the way people live at home and abroad, including the desire to learn about the culture and the customs of the places visited; their observation was echoed by Kalinowski & Weiler (1992), who noted that educational tourism can stimulate an anthropological interest in the culture, language, art, music, architecture, and folklore of the place visited, and that this curiosity also extends to the natural environment, landscapes, plants and animals, cultural heritage and historical sites of the place. But, they noted, educational tourism goes "beyond a curiosity, interest or fascination in a particular topic. It involves a travel experience in which there is organised learning, whether that be formal or experimental" (Kalinowski & Weiler, 1992: 17).

Along the same lines, Bodger (1998: 28) defined educational travel as "a program in which participants travel to a location as a group with the primary purpose of engaging in a learning experience directly related to the location." Gibson (1998), referring to a study conducted in 1994, added that tourists are interested in developing skills during the journey. "Educational tourists" who may be students, adults, and seniors, "are those respondents who indicated that they took part in study tours or who attended workshops to learn new skills or improve existing ones while on vacation".

One of the most accepted definitions of educational tourism is Ritchie *et al.* (2003: 18)'s: it is a "tourist activity undertaken by those who are undertaking an overnight vacation and those who are undertaking an excursion for whom education and learning is a primary or secondary part of their trip". From his perspective, educational tourism encompasses adult study tours as well as international and domestic student travel for educational purposes, including language schools, school excursions

and exchange programs. These activities can be organised independently or formally and can be undertaken in a variety of natural or human-made settings (Ritchie *et al.*, 2003). The author divides the market into "education first" and "tourism first" segments.

Pitman *et al.* (2011) conceived educational tourism as a process, without applying Ritchie *et al.* (2003)'s market segmentation perspective. They defined educational tourism as "a form of tourist experience that explicitly aims to provide structured learning *in situ* though active and engaged intellectual praxis. Learning is explicit and core to the delivery of the product" (Pitman *et al.*, 2011: 6). They also saw this kind of learning as transformative, noting three elements that characterise educational tourism (for adults) (Pitman *et al.* (2010):

- an intentional pedagogical structure;
- an educational leader/teacher;
- an *in situ* experience that triggers an emotional, sensory reaction in the learner, which in turn facilitates transformative learning.

They asserted that this personal and pleasurable pursuit in which the learning moment is structured and facilitated by an expert and supported by materials, has the potential to transform the learner (Ritchie *et al.*, 2003; Richards, 2011; Pitman *et al.*, 2010). Finally, they suggested that to better implement the transformative process, which also entails ethical aspects, universities could work in more accessible locations by removing socio-economic barriers to this form of experiential learning (Pitman *et al.*, 2011).

Sie *et al.* (2016) defined educational tourism as an organised leisure-travel trip which lasts at least 24 hours and usually takes place in an informal setting. They noted how the social aspect plays a role in the learning process, because learning occurs as part of a total experience through the interaction among related stakeholders (participants, tour operators/leaders, and local community). As in Pitman *et al.* (2010), the role of educators is significant: they need to be skilled in their role of guides leading the experience.

1.4 Framing Educational Tourism

Travel and learning are strongly related. To better understand how the former contributes to the latter, Falk *et al.* (2012) elaborated a framework based on Aristotele's concept of *phronesis*, which entails three competences: *episteme* (theoretical knowledge), which is systematic and universal across particular contexts; *techne* (practical knowledge), which relates to creating, making and doing; and *phronesis* (practical wisdom), which differs from *techne* because it is the application of experiential knowledge to specific contexts and includes reflexivity. It means acting in the right way, for the right reason and at the right time. Experience, practice and repetition can enhance *phronesis* and make it

become part of living. In this framework, learning through travelling may occur both passively and actively (Figure 5).

	Passive	Active
Practical skills (*techne*)	Incidental development of generic skills and technique (e.g. communication, organisation, problem solving, navigation)	Active quest for control and mastery of physical or cognitive skills (e.g. golfing, sailing, photography)
Knowledge (*episteme*)	Serendipitous and spontaneous acquisition of knowledge (e.g. incidental learning about sites, settings and species)	Deliberate search for knowledge and understanding (e.g. intentional learning about sites, settings and species)
Practical wisdom (*phronesis*)	Accumulating 'life experience' through exposure to varied situations and settings (e.g. self-awareness, social and cultural awareness)	Active pursuit of a good and virtuous life (e.g. consciously learning about sustainable and ethical behaviours and cultural perspectives)

Figure 5 - How travel contributes to learning (Falk et al., 2012: 917)

It is possible to relate the contribution of Falk *et al.* (2012) to Ritchie *et al.* (2003)'s segmentation (Figure 6).
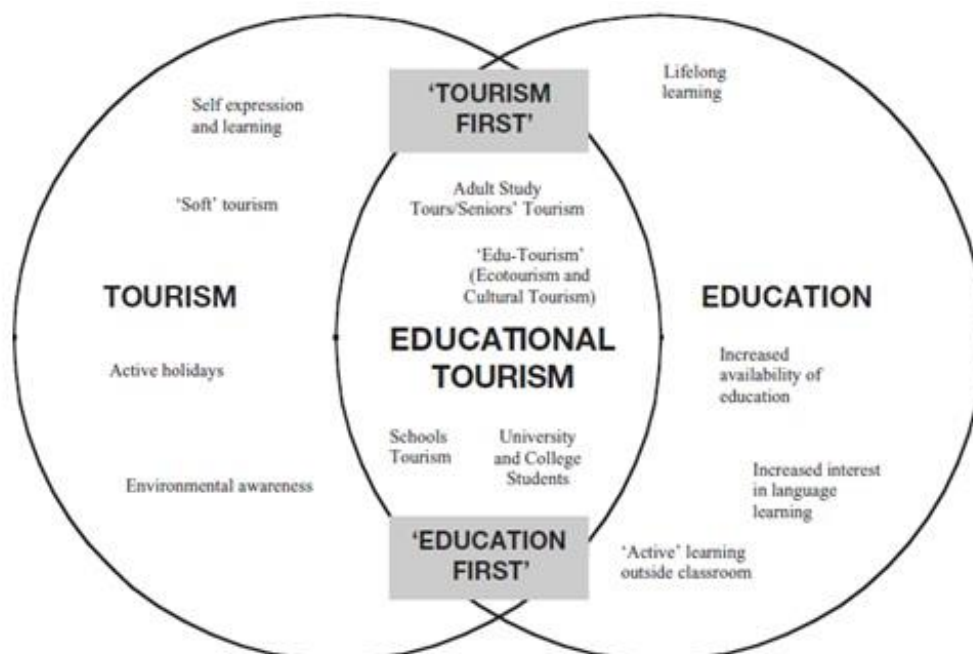
Figure 6 - Educational Tourism market segmentation (Ritchie et al., 2003)

In the "tourism first" segmentation, the tourism experience has priority; travel is the primary motivation and education is relevant but of secondary importance in influencing the decision to undertake a trip (Ritchie *et al.*, 2003). This can be compared to what Falk *et al.* (2012) meant when writing about "passive learning through travel", where the development of practical skills and the acquisition of knowledge occur in spontaneous and incidental ways and *phronesis* takes place within the cumulative process of experiencing through the exposure to diverse contexts. Ritchie *et al.* (2003)

classified as educational tourists within the "tourist first" segment those adults and seniors who take part in trips including cultural and nature-based experiential learning activities.

Active learning through travel (Falk *et al.*, 2012) can be compared to Ritchie *et al.*'s "education first" segment. The importance of learning experiences while travelling is stressed as a primary motivation for undertaking a trip (Ritchie *et al.*, 2003). Falk *et al.* (2012) described it as intentional, an active quest for controlling physical and cognitive skills and acquiring understanding and knowledge. The practical wisdom is here understood as learning and gaining awareness about sustainable and ethical behaviours and cultural views, to be implemented in a life-long perspective. According to Ritchie *et al.* (2003) it can involve both students (school tourism, universities and colleges) and adults, and includes school trips, undergraduate and postgraduate study abroad programs, international exchange programs, and language schools.

Another framework was elaborated by Sie *et al.* (2016), who conceived of a continuum based on the type of learning. In formal learning, at one end of the continuum, travel is related to university study projects abroad and for the purpose of gaining credits. Informal learning, at the other end of the continuum, may occur during experiences like family holidays or backpacking. In-between there is educational tourism, which is related to non-formal learning. Within the continuum, they included Ritchie *et al.*'s segmentation to identify three types of educational travel in terms of the tourists' purposes (Figure 7):

1. Learning and travel purposes: Formal learning and education are the core services, as in exchange programs, study tours for course credits, and educational trips for professional development;

2. Self-directed learning while traveling: Educational tourism. Non-formal learning and education + tourism are the core services, encompassing study tours for adults (active discovery or special interest) and study tours during school holidays;

3. General interest learning while traveling: Informal learning and tourism are the core services, and include family holidays, backpacking, and visiting amusement parks.
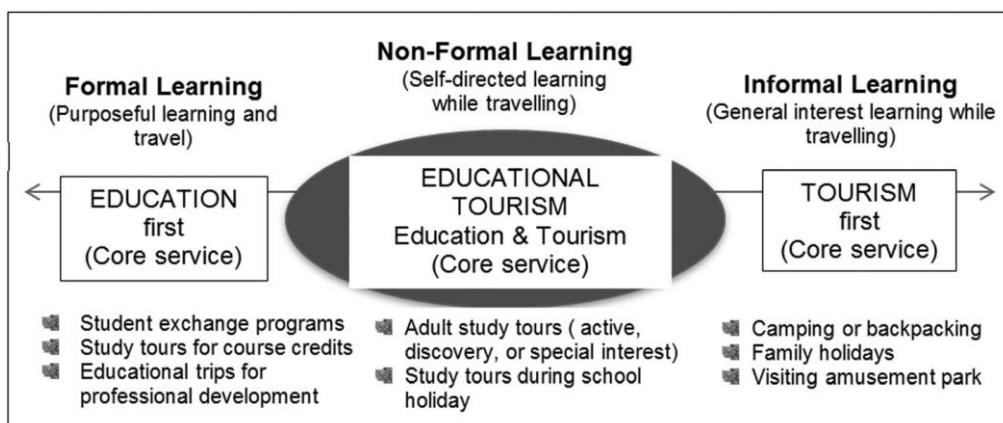
Figure 7 - Three types of educational travel (Sie et al., 2016: 108)

In 2016, Nugroho & Soeprihanto described educational tourism as a three-dimensional product, adopting Kotler's 3-level-products model: the main product (which answers to a basic/fundamental need/requirement), the real product (which answers to a specific requirement to meet a need or a "want"), and the additional product (which relates the "want" to a "desire" and is composed of the intangible features that make the product distinctive). The main product is the educational experience at the tourism destination and the consequent learning benefit. The real product is the tourist package, which meets the tourist's needs, and the additional product includes all the tangible and intangible aspects of the tourism experience which are additional to the main service. They further identify different formats of educational tourism: school trips (and perhaps a follow-up visit with the childrens' parents); study abroad experiences (intensive study sessions with cultural and linguistic full immersion); seminar vacations/senior seminars/hands-on enhanced experience vacations (which mostly appeal adults and seniors); skills enhancement vacations (trips with several practical learning activities, such as "how-to-do" learning or ecology-based activities); and educational cruises (which combine fun and specific-topic lectures).

McGladdery & Lubbe (2017) reconceptualised educational tourism, eschewing Ritchie *et al.*'s (2003) segmentation (Figure 8).
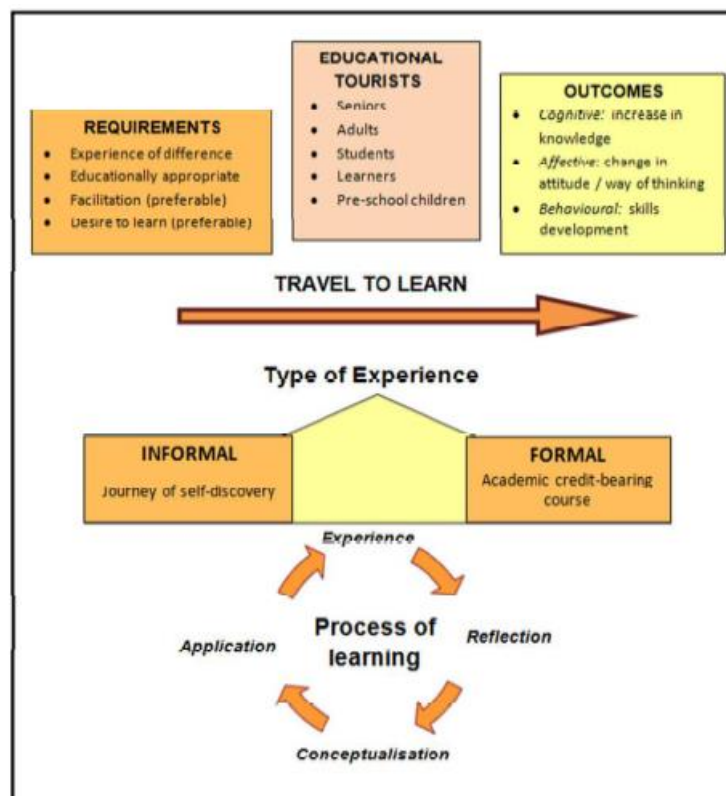
Figure 8 - Educational Tourism process-based model (McGladdery & Lubbe, 2017)

In their model, they consider educational tourism to be a transformative process. Experiential learning and international education elements are also integrated, including several measurable outcomes:

cognitive (knowledge acquired), affective (attitudes, or ways of thinking), and behavioural (skills development).

According to the authors, Ritchie *et al.*'s model, based on motivational factors, excluded some tourism niches. They also argued that it is not always so easy to determine whether the desire to learn while traveling is a primary or secondary motivation, and question Ritchie *et al.* for putting some categories in the "education first" segment that could also fit in the "tourism first" one, and vice versa, for example, in the case of cultural tourism and ecotourism.

Richards (2011) argued that educational tourism, including ecotourism, cultural tourism and agritourism, can be transformative and related to experience, with reference to the experience value of Pine & Gilmore (2013), where education also entails learning and personal growth. According to Ritchie *et al.* (2003), both cultural tourism and ecotourism may belong to the "tourism first" segment. This can be possible, but also their inclusion in the "education first" segment can be suitable, above all if the learning practice is considered as "an act of participation in complex social learning systems" (Wenger, 2000: 225). For instance, with reference to ecotourism, the role of stakeholder engagement with the commitment of local community, volunteers, NGOs, government and tourism actors can actually contribute to strengthening the educational component of the ecotourism for tourists and for all the participants in general (Fennell, 2008; Wardle *et al.*, 2018). Ecotourism practices may lead to a transformative change in terms of environmentally friendly attitudes and behaviours and be characterized by strong emotional and cognitive engagement, as well as an experience of some sort of shock (Walter, 2016), occurring through the first-hand experience of nature and the consequent learning (Fennel, 2008; Bertella *et al.*, 2019). As for cultural tourism and agritourism, they attract tourists who want to be informed about the culture and to experience folklore, customs, natural landscapes, and historical landmarks, perhaps also enjoy other activities in a rural setting such as nature walks, adventure activities, sports, festivals, crafts, and general sightseeing. In these terms, cultural tourism, especially if community-based, can make the destination suitable for education, entertainment and enrichment purposes for both tourists and the communities themselves, thus creating experiential learning opportunities and commitment for all (MacDonald & Jolliffe, 2003).

1.4.1 Travel and experiential learning

Travel can be considered a highly individual experience, context-based and meaning-constructing, a part of the life-long process of accumulating experiences that can influence the individual's life in a long-term perspective (Falk *et al.,* 2012). While travelling, tourists are actively involved in their cognitive, emotional and bodily dimensions (Crouch, 2000).

Experience plays an important role in the tourism activity, allowing learning outcomes. Educational tourism is related to both travel and experiential learning (Dewey, 1938; Boydell, 1976; Kolb, 1984). Learning becomes possible through the direct experience which is "meaningful discovery" (Boydell, 1976). The moment of reflection on the experience is part of the learning process: passing through observation, creation of new general concepts and abstraction, it is possible to apply the knowledge gained to new experiences (Dewey, 1938; Kolb, 1984). The experience is personal, engaging and memorable, potentially transformative when it has the power to change the personal worldview and to develop personal capabilities (Pine & Gilmore, 1998). Transformative education can happen in formal or independent travel, in journeys that are goal-directed or in travel experiences in which personal development occurs through serendipity (Liang *et al.*, 2015).

As Freire (1970) affirmed, learners should play a co-creative role to produce the knowledge that contributes to the changes in the world in which they would like to live.

In their empirical study about the implications for educators related to the educational impact that travel can have on university students, Liang *et al.* (2015) referred to the transformative learning theory by Mezirow (1991), for whom the learning process starts from a "crisis" that leads to a change of perspective (disorienting dilemma) through several steps such as reflection, exploration of new possibilities in search of a new identity, negotiation with one's beliefs, and change in behaviours and worldview (Mezirow, 1991).

Again, Liang *et al.* (2015) focused on the importance of the motivations for travel, the departure from one's comfort zone, the reflection during and after travel, and the accumulation of an individual travel biography for facilitating learning.

They also highlighted the role of educators in the learning process:

> "Educators, who have the opportunity to get to know individual students more closely and to work with them repeatedly in thinking about travel and learning in advance of a trip, in digesting the trip as it is happening, and in reflecting on it after they return, are in an even stronger position to facilitate students' growth through travel and to direct their awareness towards ways their learning may be turned in the service of social transformation."

> (Liang *et al.*, 2015: 236*)*

Moreover, in tourism education, such experiences could represent an opportunity to gain knowledge about the functioning and impacts of travel.

According to Pine & Gilmore (1998), there are four experience realms -- education, aesthetics, entertainment and escape -- which can be considered within the four dimensions of active vs. passive, and absorption vs. immersion. Education provides active and absorbing experiences.

Experiential learning in the tourism context has been studied by several scholars (Ritchie *et al.*, 2003; Stone & Petrick, 2013; Falk *et al.*, 2012). Pitman *et al.* (2010) surveyed tourists and providers about

adult educational tourism and found that customers linked the travel experience to learning, which is here related to the exploration of a country through its history, art, food and culture.

Intentional learning to open one's mind and reinforce knowledge, context-related experiential involvement, and the combination of travel and a structured educational programme are three key elements in educational tourism (Pitman *et al*., 2010). The learning experience in educational tourism involves providers, practitioners and learners and it goes beyond the actual touristic experience: it includes pre-travel considerations (product development, personnel recruitment and learner preparation) and after-travel moments related to the learning communities and the maintenance of learner social links. Moreover, spending some time during the experience to absorb and share it with the other actors enhances reflection and thus learning (Pitman *et. al*, 2010). In another study (Pitman *et al.*, 2011), the same authors affirmed that universities can play a pivotal role in teaching ethics beyond the context of academic education by providing moral education that supplements professional skills and using the entire world as a stage for pedagogy. By applying mixed strategies, such as practical and experiential learning at a local level, and by exposing students to real life, it is possible to increase the links between the university and the community. According to the authors, "educational tours are an interesting site of study, first, because they are explicitly about learning, and second, because they provide an opportunity for universities to reach beyond their walls and directly teach members of the broader community" (Pitman *et al.*, 2011: 6).

Student engagement was explored by Koseoglu & Doering (2011) in their case study of a hybrid educational program about environmental sustainability in the Arctic, an experience of distance learning in which students learned about this topic as they followed the adventures of scientists in the field. The authors measured the relationship between the level of engagement and emotions, and the effectiveness of the learning experience. On the basis of their findings, the authors developed a framework for designing highly engaging educational experiences (Figure 9), which includes:

- Authenticity: bringing real-life experiences into the classroom;
- Diversity: providing a variety of tools for understanding and knowledge construction;
- Social aspect: creating opportunities to build social relationships;
- Fun as a central aspect: mixing relationships with the learning experience;
- Transparency: creating a transparent window into the lived experience
- Meaningfulness: giving appropriate contents for learners' abilities and interests;
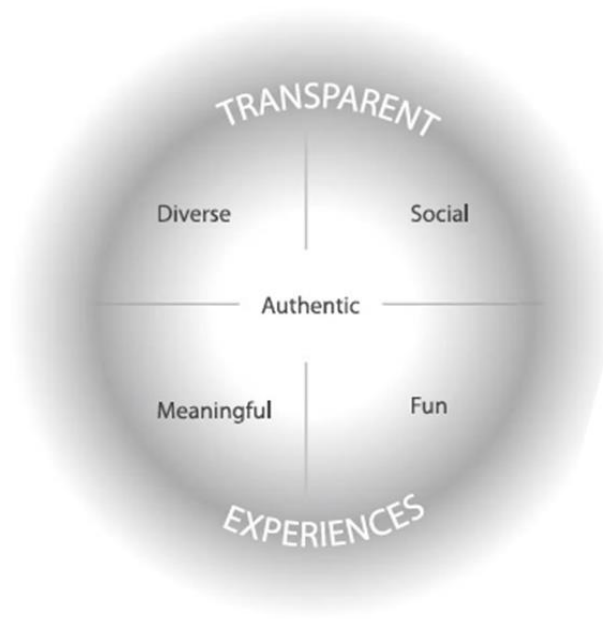
1.5 The role of higher education institutions in fostering educational tourism in rural areas

In recent decades, the commitment of universities to civic society has become more and more important, above all in rural areas. Higher education institutions (HEIs) have increasingly built relationships with local stakeholders and worked in co-creation initiatives to achieve sustainable economic development at the local level (Trencher *et al.*, 2013). Many HEIs are now involved in place-based projects involving several stakeholders, to identify specific needs and propose innovative solutions to real problems (Atterton & Thompson, 2010; Ward *et al.* 2005; Trencher *et al.*, 2014). In rural areas, universities combine global knowledge with local co-production and exchange of knowledge (Charles, 2016). The knowledge provided by the traditions and values of local rural communities should be considered when talking about sustainable development and innovation, as culture is one of the societal areas to which the university rightfully contributes (Goddard *et al.*, 2016).

1.5.1 The Civic University: Quadruple Helix and Mode 3

In the Civic University paradigm, "teaching has a strong community involvement with the long-term objective of widening participation in higher education and producing well rounded citizens as graduates" (Goddard & Kempton, 2016: 13). Based on the results of dialogue with local stakeholders, HEIs should train future graduates able to provide answers to the real challenges of the territory in terms of innovation. They integrate teaching, research and engagement with the outside world: each element enhances the other (Goddard & Kempton, 2016).

Goddard and colleagues identified seven dimensions of the civic university, summarised in Table 1 (Goddard *et al*., 2016).

Table 1 - The Civic University dimensions (Goddard et al., 2016)

Dimensions	Description
SENSE OF PURPOSE	Having an impact on society by addressing societal challenges or specific problems, both global and local. Creating benefits to defined groups, networks and communities and considering them as co-investigators and a source for knowledge.
ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT	Collaboration and dialogue to achieve social and economic development goals and enhance teaching and research. Internal collaborations: among academics in different disciplines. External collaborations: with other public and private organisations (education institutions, governments, business and cultural organisations).
HOLISTIC APPROACH	Engagement is an institution-wide activity that enriches the core work of academics and enhances teaching and research. Students may benefit from it and be involved with the local community to improve knowledge, employability opportunities and active citizenship.
SENSE OF PLACE	The civic university is well integrated in the local setting: the place is a "living laboratory" providing specific work opportunities and a cultural and social impact.
WILLINGNESS TO INVEST	Projects are designed to enhance the impact of university beyond the academy and campus, by involving the academic and working staff in activities funded by internal or external resources.
TRANSPARENT AND ACCOUNTABLE	Civic responsibility: there are indicators and benchmarks to assess performance; its mission, vision and impact on stakeholders are communicated clearly.
INNOVATIVE METHODOLOGIES	Societal challenges are addressed through innovative methodologies and approaches: academics collaborate with each other and non-university organisations, entrepreneurship programs are offered, social innovation is fostered.

The university can be conceived as an active agent able to create networks between local systems of knowledge and broader national and international circuits of knowledge and expertise (Atterton & Thompson, 2010). This is also in line with the Smart Specialisation Strategy (S3) promoted by the European Commission (Rinaldi *et al*., 2018), where the university plays a pivotal role in innovation

for society, by becoming a means of cross-fertilisation and co-creation in different thematic areas and for different actors. It can support the achievement of sustainable development in the knowledge economy by contributing to the generation of knowledge that is trans-disciplinary and practice-based. Arbo & Benneworth (2007), for instance, referred to a regional innovation system by highlighting the relationship between the knowledge production sector (universities, research laboratories and commercial research facilities) and the knowledge using sector (high technology firms and commercial development facilities) to create innovation, as in Figure 10.
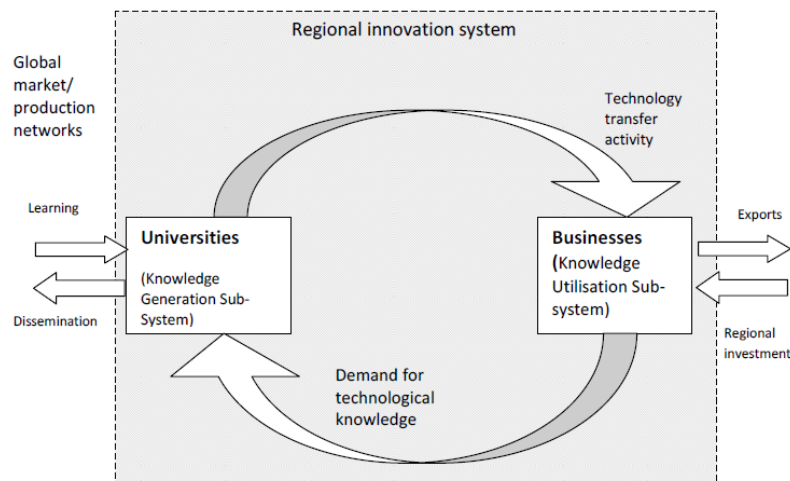
Figure 10 - Regional Innovation System (Arbo & Benneworth, 2007)

The Quadruple Helix and the Mode 3 system (Carayannis, & Campbell, 2006; 2009; 2010) also consider the strong role of universities in producing knowledge and creating innovation. The authors define innovation as the act of converting knowledge creation and production to knowledge application, diffusion and use. The creation of innovation broadens society's concept of knowledge. Thus, knowledge is also a social process. In fact, while the Triple Helix (Etzkowitz & Leydesdorff, 2000) considers the relationship between government, universities (higher education) and industry, the Quadruple Helix adds a fourth element: the "public". In this sense, social processes of knowledge production consider the culture and the values of a specific society (Carayannis & Campbell, 2009; 2010). For this reason, Carayannis & Campbell (2006) proposed Mode 3, an advanced knowledge system based on the integration of different knowledge and innovation modes through co-evolution, co-specialization and co-opetition. Mode 3 presents the following characteristics, among others:

- Pluralism and diversity, co-existence and co-evolution, and mutual cross-learning of different knowledge and innovation modes;
- Encouragement of interdisciplinary thinking and transdisciplinary application: hybrid thinking in different systems (e.g. "social ecosystem"); hybrid thinking and acting in different systems (e.g. "social ecology; "sustainable development");
- Hybrid combination and/or use of different technologies.

It enhances "creative learning" and a "creative co-evolution" by cross-linking human rights, human development and the environment, thus opening to co-evolutionary learning (Carayannis & Campbell, 2010). Looking at the Quadruple Helix and the Mode 3 in the context of regional development, it is important to note that each actor has a vision about its future and that of the whole region, and consequently its own strategies. Achieving a unified vision might not be possible, but joint processes could be set up for shaping shared visions for the region (Kolehmainen *et al*., 2016), as represented in Figure 11. In order reach these objectives, the actors involved need to undertake concrete actions, as collective and collaborative activities based on regional knowledge resources and competences (Kolehmainen *et al*., 2016). Finally, there is also a social level of engagement in which universities inculcate moral values in their learners and encourage their reflective learning, related to practical wisdom (Pitman *et al*., 2011). Social innovation can involve socially innovative practices: the civic university can play a transformative role in terms of change in the organisation of a social function to be collectively coordinated by new institutions able to change social power relations (Benneworth & Cunha, 2015).
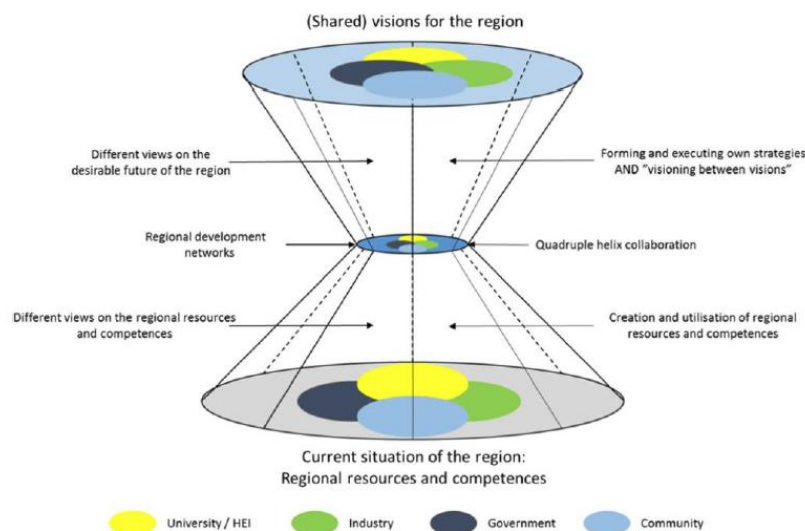
Figure 11 - Shared vision for knowledge-based regional development (Kolehmainen et al., 2016)

1.5.2 Universities and Educational Tourism

In the context of hosting educational tourism, universities can achieve their civic purposes by expressing the 7 dimensions sketched in Table 1. They could run place-based research and extend teaching to address the challenges faced by local society, also in terms of valorisation of inner rural areas. The holistic approach and sense of place could lead them in creating new connections with other universities and with local stakeholders, and in involving students in local activities. This could be done through specific projects and by using new methodologies and approaches. An intriguing example is a proposal to organise educational tourism at GadjahMada University in Indonesia, given

the interesting architecture on campus, the Biology museum, and the natural beauty of the surrounding areas (Nugroho & Soeprihanto, 2016).

To pursue these objectives, university and tourism stakeholders need to create tourism programs and learning materials. The government should be involved in policy planning, identification of resources and management of infrastructures. The community should also play an active role in the planning and should inform the other actors about the local culture, engage local residents in social commitment, and develop the human resources of its members, so that educational tourism can continue in the area with continuity.

Universities could satisfy both governmental and the tertiary sector's needs and address policy and market challenges (Pitman *et al.*, 2011). Moreover, in this way it would be possible to reach not only students enrolled in formal programs of study, but many other young and adult learners among the local community, thus creating a multi-stakeholder learning community that could also address societal and ethical issues.

In order to be sustainable, the development of educational tourism practices in a destination, where the university always plays a coordinating role, should be the result of the combination of the 3E principles (Sharma, 2015):

- *Environmental factors*: provide tourists with knowledge-based information and educate them to respect the local environment. Sustainable actions promote the preservation of biodiversity and enhance attention to the cultural heritage;
- *Engagement*: active participation of tourists is central, in order to make them feel fully immersed in the context and to cultivate their special interests;
- *Exploration*: to make tourists authentically experience the place, by contributing to the *in-situ* learning-by-doing practice.

Universities can be an active part of "Learning Tourism Destinations" (Schianetz *et al.*, 2007), that is, any tourism city, town, village, and surrounding area that, by agreeing on common objectives, aims at achieving sustainable development. They have the capacity to anticipate environmental changes and economic opportunities and adapt accordingly. LTDs

1. use lifelong learning as an organising principle and social goal for community, organisations, and individuals;
2. promote collaboration of the tourism, civic, voluntary, and education sectors; and
3. provide an infrastructure to collect new information, disseminate, process, and apply gained knowledge.

In this context, universities can serve as providers of the lifelong learning component, as a learning organisation (LO).

In their strategic planning and promotion of organisational learning, Learning Tourism Destinations may benefit from System Dynamics Modelling (SDM). A framework for the LTD is presented in Figure 12.
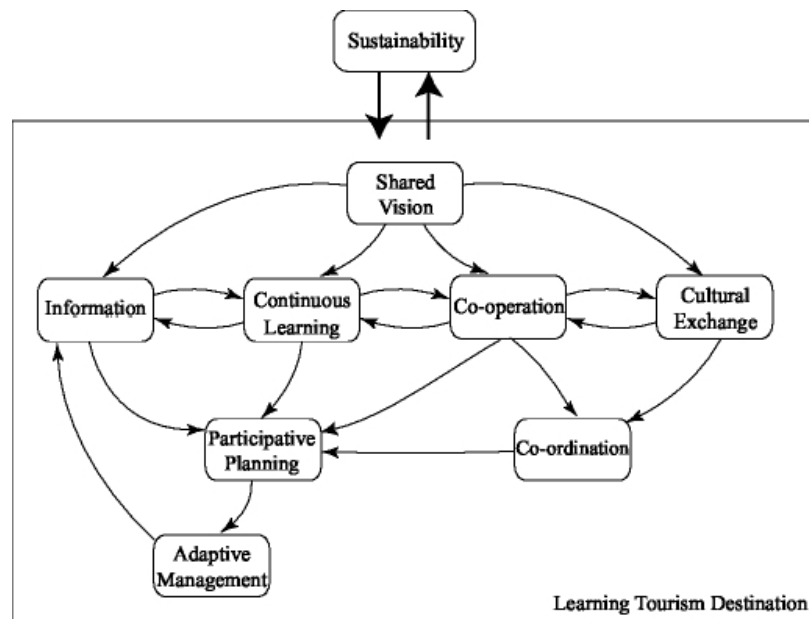
Figure 12 - LTD framework (Schianetz et al., 2007)

Key elements of this framework for System Dynamics Modelling for an LTD are

1) Shared Vision: an LTD creates corporate identity in a process of continuous definition of common goals and adaptation of shared vision;

2) Information system: dissemination of knowledge processed by universities, environmental agencies, NGOs + feedbacks from the areas of reflection and application (businesses, planners, tourists);

3) Continuous learning and co-operative research: all stakeholders involved enhance and adapt education programs. It involves cross-sectoral research, which is collaborative: the educational component provides skills in graduates useful for business needs (De Lacy & Boyd, 2000).
Systems thinking is at the base. It seeks to overcome differences with individual, organizational, communal learning. Its purpose is the identification of research areas and the improvement of understanding for the necessity of research investment;

4) Co-operation: informal collaboration. Systems thinking: Aims at overcoming lack of information and reciprocal understanding of needs and goals among stakeholders;

5) Co-ordination: formal collaboration. Workshops for the analysis of complex problems and enhancement of system awareness within the network;

6) Cultural Exchange: expression of different beliefs, culture and spirituality. Systems thinking aids the dialogue;

7) Participative planning and decision making: planners and developers share their goals and strategies and involve other stakeholders in taking part in the decision-making process. Transparency;

8) Adaptive management: central in LTD. It describes management components and relationships. Acknowledgement of uncertainties → Continuous testing and adaptation (collective learning process) → Continuous collection of information.

Schianetz *et al.* (2007) presented 6 case studies and concluded that the application of SDM can foster learning in a tourism destination and improve sustainability and stakeholder engagement as part of a system, through:

- Consensus building
- Dialogue
- Understanding of system
- Acceptance of uncertainties
- Changes in thinking

They reported that the contribution of SDM is evident in emerging tourism destinations, where LTD is useful for fostering shared vision and development strategies and for enhancing cooperation, commitment, and the exchange of information. They also observed its value in mature tourism destinations, where integration of the 8 elements into existing systems helps tourism development by providing direction towards sustainability, offering a tool for facing uncertainties, and improving learning and resilience.

1.5.3 International students as educational tourists

Ritchie *et al.* (2003) considered international students as educational tourists within the education first segment. While living and studying abroad, they also take part in tourism experiences and boost the local economy with their expenditure on tourism-related items such as transport, visits to cultural attractions, restaurants and local food. Instead, Huang (2008) noted that most academic tourism theories do not consider international students as tourists, unless their study period at the destination lasts less than one year, because they spend time in non-tourist settings, and if they choose to live in private homes with locals, they immerse themselves in the language and culture of the destination acting as temporary inhabitants. In contrast, he argues that if we consider the full experience of international students, not only the academic one, we should not define them only as students. Travel

is important in their choice. Thus, international students can be seen as special interest or niche tourists:

> "The whole international student experience—touching, smelling, hearing, tasting and also seeing—in foreign countries, perfectly matches the 'tourism as an embodied practice' argument."
>
> (Huang, 2008: 1008)

Educational tourism can be conceived as a learning experience and, as such, it is personal, memorable and transformative (Falk *et al.*, 2012). The educational tourist learns while experiencing, and for this reason is a co-creator of meaning. According to Aristotele's conceptual framework, already mentioned in this work, the learning outcomes of such an experience are the result of a unique and individual combination of what is seen, read, heard, felt or reflectively considered rather than a simple transfer of information. Learning outcomes may include definable changes in the skills (*techne*) and knowledge (*episteme*) of visitors, or evidence of longer-term practical changes in visitor behaviour or other expressions of practical wisdom (*phronesis*).

1.5.3.1. Motivations for educational tourism among international students

Most of the studies on educational tourism have focused on the push and pull factors determining the choice of international students to attend study abroad programs. The destination is significant and its image and reputation (Huang, 2008; Nyaupane *et al.*, 2011; Lee, 2014) are primary factors in the student's choice; other factors include the safety and political stability of the destination, its cultural and tourism attractions, the events and leisure activities offered, the weather, the natural environment and the local lifestyle (Michael *et al.*, 2004; Huang, 2008; Glover, 2011; Lesjak *et al.*, 2015).

The image and reputation of the destination university is another important motivational factor: students consider the quality of its teaching programs and academic staff, its infrastructure and services, the availability of scholarships and the costs (Michael *et al.*, 2004; Huang, 2008; Nyaupane *et al.*, 2011; Lam *et al.*, 2011; Abubakar *et al.*, 2014; Tashlai, & Ivanov, 2014; Lee, 2014; Rahman *et al.*, 2017). Other key factors in choosing the destination and the university are the geographical and cultural proximity, the presence of social ties, recommendations from trusted people, or even worth of mouth (Michael *et al.*, 2004; Abubakar *et al.*, 2014; Lee, 2014). Fortunately for researchers, students often record the reasons for their choices. Stone & Petrick (2013) wrote a literature review identifying several aspects of educational tourism and analysing motivational factors. Table 2 summarises their list of motivational factors and provides a reference to the scholars who discussed them.

Table 2 - Motivational factors for educational tourism (from: Stone & Petrick, 2013)

Motivational factors	Authors
A search for new experiences	Juvan & Lesjak 2011

	Sanchez, Fornerino, & Zhang 2006
	Taylor & Rivera, 2011
A good opportunity to travel	Sanchez, Fornerino, & Zhang 2006
	van Hoof, 2006
To live in or learn about another culture	Chieffo 2007
	Lamet & Lamet, 1982
	Van Hoof, 2006
The desire to be somewhere different	Juvan & Lesjak 2011
Exposure to a different culture/language	Doyle *et al.* 2010

In addition to the motivations listed by Stone & Petrick (2013), there is the desire for personal growth and increased independence to be gained by expanding one's horizons and worldview, and through the improvement of personal skills or capacities, the opportunity to travel (Glover, 2011; Castillo Arredondo *et al.*, 2018); the wish to immerse themselves in another culture and language (Chew & Croy, 2011; Lee, 2014; Abubakar *et al.*, 2014; Liang *et al.*, 2015), gaining academic knowledge and (Lam *et al.*, 2011) understanding of the host country (Sie *et al.*, 2018) and living a complete social experience (Huang, 2008; Sie *at al.*, 2018). Another strong motivation is related to the future opportunities given by study abroad, also with reference to professional and career development (Glover, 2011; Nyaupane *et al.*, 2011; Lam *et al.*, 2011; Abubakar *et al.*, 2014; Tashlai & Ivanov, 2014).

1.5.3.2 Benefits of educational tourism for international students

Study abroad can have immediate benefits, such as learning or improving skills in a language, gaining knowledge in academic disciplines, and growing socially and emotionally, as students become more independent, mature, and self-confident, and improve their interpersonal skills. Students who study abroad can also acquire intercultural competence (Meyer-Lee & Evans, 2007), that is, gain specific knowledge about the host culture, come to an understanding of cultural differences, overcome prior stereotypes, and develop broader awareness of the world around them. The study abroad experience gives them opportunity to practice critical thinking and reflect on the learning experience. It can influence their affections and attitudes. Living in a foreign context, they may be prompted to re-evaluate their own cultural identity and personal values, and may change their worldview, belief systems, and vocation. Study abroad can also contribute to modifying the students' attitudes and feelings about other cultures, and help them become more tolerant of ambiguity, or learn to adapt to it. They may grow in their observation skills, develop new styles or strategies for learning information, improve their academic achievement, and learn to function more effectively in

multicultural groups (Meyer-Lee & Evans, 2007). To sum up, the most common benefits are: intrapersonal and interpersonal development, also in terms of interculturality and cultural self-awareness; academic and career benefits; growth in knowledge and skills; social engagement and active citizenship. (Dwyer, 2004; Paige *et al*., 2009; Stone & Petrick, 2013; Tashlai & Ivanov, 2014; Liang *et al*., 2015; Cohen, 2016; Sie *et al.*, 2018).

1.5.3.3 Non economic benefits that international students bring to host countries

The benefits of study abroad programs are not limited to the students, as these visitors can have a positive impact on the host country as well. For example, if they engage in activities related to the sustainable development of the host countries, there can be an exchange of benefits. A few scholars have explored the social interactions between tourists and hosts in educational tourism (Riggs, 2005; Wright *et al.*, 2007). Moscardo (2008) described knowledge-sharing and capacity-building to help communities interact positively with tourists. If several stakeholders organise educational tourism activities together, this may lead to "the realisation of a step change in the strategic implementation of a curriculum aimed at enhancing students' professional and practice-based learning by offering an innovative programme which facilitated access to resources, knowledge exchange, capacity-building, cross-cultural and philanthropic collaborations and, as part of the university corporate commitment to sustainability, a contribution towards sustainable development practices in the wider community" (Novelli & Burns, 2010). Stable international programs benefit the university and the destination by increasing the internationalisation of the university, creating fertile terrain for the formation of new partnerships, fostering conditions for multiculturality and integration, and attracting new students, tourists and investors in the long term. Moreover, the students' presence at local level would lead to cultural exchange between residents and international students and influence the attitude of local communities towards students in socio-cultural terms (Samah *et al.*, 2012).

1.6. Economic impact of educational tourism on the destination

As detailed in part I, background context, the benefits to host countries are also economic. The presence of study abroad programs provides more opportunities for local entrepreneurs, economic benefits for small businesses and employment opportunities for local people. The level of interaction with international students fostered by these may influence the perception of residents. An interesting study about Malaysia (Samah *et al*., 2012) showed that the presence of international students at an educational tourism hub could improve the quality of life for residents, as it would provide more opportunities for local entrepreneurs and bring economic benefits to small businesses and employment opportunities for local people.

In addition to the assessments of the economic impact of foreign students in the U.K. and of American study abroad programs in Italy, provided in the part I background context, a few other contributions explore the economic impact of international study programs on destination countries, by considering several aspects of local expenditure.

According to Obrien & Jamnia (2013), international students can contribute to the local economy through:

- on-campus spending directly related to their studies;
- off-campus spending on housing, food, books, transportation, clothing, and entertainment;
- contribution to the local tourism industry through domestic travel and other tourist activities;
- non-educational tourism spending by students, visiting friends and relatives (VFR) and return visits of alumni.

Therefore, international educational tourism can lead to increase in sales of goods and services, and related tax revenue, as well as job creation (Obrien & Jamnia, 2013).

Rezapouraghdam *et al*. (2018) described the benefits brought by international students in Northern Cyprus but noted some drawbacks as well. Not only do these students spend on food, stationery, and transportation, but they also channel more business to travel agencies and, if they bring their own cars, to local insurance agencies. Construction businesses profit as "dead" areas are exploited for the construction of new accommodations. Banks benefit from loans taken out by businesses that are able to expand because of the influx of business from international students, as well as from financial services to students, such as money transfers, checking and savings accounts, and currency exchanges. Finally, student expenditures also bring in tax revenue.

Rezapouraghdam *et al*. (2018) also reported on negative aspects in terms of costs to residents, among them:

- higher prices for accommodations and shop rentals in the university area, compared to the suburbs;
- fewer part-time and full-time jobs for local people, as international students take them at lower pay;
- decline of the local economy in the summer, when students are away;
- excessive competition in the market for services dedicated to students.

As mentioned above, international students have in impact on tourism in the host country. In Australia, according to a study by Weaver (2003), during their period of study, all the international students of the sample visited local tourist attractions or other regions, mostly independently.

Moreover, visiting friends and relatives (VFR) also can have an important impact on the local economy (Weaver, 2003), as they usually add tours of the destination and nearby regions. According to Asiedu (2008), these visits are one of the foremost motivators in tourism.

1.7 Suggestions for promoting educational tourism

Regional educational hubs can enhance the potential of educational tourism destinations (Borgioli & Manuelli, 2013; Matahir & Tang, 2017). To this end, policymakers should work with HEIs to optimise and expand their educational exchange programs and make them more attractive to students. International educational tourism programs could work in collaboration with university information centres in other countries to promote their offerings. In addition, higher education institutions and actors at tourist destinations could collaborate on marketing strategies to communicate a positive image of both the institution and the destination, through outlets such as airline on-board magazines and materials of other transportation companies, and could collaborate with DMOs (Obrien & Jamnia, 2013). Finally, alumni of study abroad programs can serve as "brand ambassadors" for the university and destination, making them known and recommending them when they return home (Obrien & Jamnia, 2013; Borgioli & Manuelli, 2013; Matahir & Tang, 2017).

1.8 Conclusions

This work has sought to ascertain whether the civic engagement of universities can play a role in fostering sustainable development through educational tourism in rural areas.

Statistical data show that the number of students studying abroad throughout the world is increasing, and studies indicate that their presence at a destination can produce significant outcomes, including their potential involvement in place-based activities, increased tourism business, and economic benefits to the host country (GDMAC, 2018; OECD, 2018; EUROSTAT, 2018; Universities UK, 2017). In turn, these educational tourists also benefit from their experiences personally and professionally (IES, 2002).

This paper has presented academic contributions that define educational tourism, explore the role of universities in enhancing educational tourism and thus promoting local development, consider international students as educational tourists, and describe the outcomes of educational tourism for students and destinations.

To better understand the potential contribution of the university to educational tourism and local development, the concept of civic university has been introduced (Goddard & Kempton, 2016; Goddard *et al.*, 2016) taking into consideration its 7 dimensions, which also explain the relationship between the university and its contribution to the economic and cultural improvement of the local area: sense of purpose; active engagement; holistic approach; sense of place; willingness to invest;

transparent and accountable; and innovative methodologies (Goddard *et al.*, 2016). This paper links these concepts to the idea the people engage in educational tourism motivated by an anthropological interest in immersing themselves in the destination culture, by experiencing all of its expressions (Kalinowski & Weiler, 1992). The educational tourism experience (Huang, 2008) connects travel and learning (Bodger, 1998; Ritchie *et al.*, 2003; Falk *et al.*, 2012), in particular, experiential learning (Dewey, 1938; Boydell, 1976; Kolb, 1984), which can have transformative effects on the student/tourist (Richards, 2011; Pitman *et al.*, 2010; Pitman *et al.*, 2011; Pine & Gilmore, 2013; Liang et al., 2015; Sie *et al.*, 2016) in terms of behaviour, beliefs and skills development (Gibson, 1998; Falk *et al.*, 2012; McGladdery & Lubbe, 2017). This work has explored the significant role universities can play in educational tourism destination design, and also introduced the new concept of Learning Tourism Destination (Schianetz *et al.*, 2007). Through strategic planning, universities and local stakeholders can foster learning in a tourism destination and improve the sustainability of the local economy. The holistic approach of civic universities includes student engagement in place-based activities (Goddard *et al.*, 2016), increasing the value of the experience (Pine & Gilmore, 2013) (Wenger, 2000). Stakeholder engagement in the destination could promote commitment by students and local actors and increase environmental and social sustainability. Educational tourism engages not only the university, but also government, industry and local society (Trencher *et al.*, 2014), actors who can contribute to the enhancement of educational tourism destinations, in consideration of the impressive economic impact of educational tourism, through the implementation of regional educational hubs (Borgioli & Manuelli, 2013; Matahir & Tang, 2017). The government could work with HEIs and DMOs (Obrien & Jamnia, 2013) to optimise and expand educational exchange programs and make them more attractive for students, consequently improving the levels of internationalization of universities and the creation of new international partnerships, to the benefit of the university's image and reputation. This co-operation should also consider planning for tourism activities by students and their visiting friends and relatives (Weaver, 2003; Asiedu, 2008), and create a more comprehensive tourism offer for them.

Many useful insights in these publications have enhanced knowledge in the field, but further work should be done. Most of the literature focuses on the personal experiences of students, highlighting the push-pull factors that lead decision-making processes for educational tourism. Not many papers attempt to assess the potential of educational tourism, especially its sustainability for rural destinations. Further research is needed to investigate the environmental, economic and social impact of this phenomenon. Statistics and reports by universities and organizations involved in educational tourism offer some insights, but more data is required for a fuller understanding.

CHAPTER 2
Perceptions of company representatives about competition and profitability in the Educational Tourism Industry in the Marche Region (Italy): an analysis of two local Italian language and culture schools based upon Porter′s Five Forces.

2. Introduction

Educational tourism (Ritchie *et al*., 2003; Sie *et al*., 2016) is a growing industry with a number of specialisations[6], among them language tourism (Laborda, 2007; Iglesias, 2016; Boekstein, 2017). Language education providers, the main actors of both educational and tourism services (Iglesias, 2016), can potentially play a role in giving value to less known tourism destinations by attracting a large range of educational tourists interested in language learning and in cultural activities such as experiential learning in informal contexts that allow them to practice the language and experience the local culture and way of life through meetings and interactions with local people, as well as through visits to historical sites and participation in cultural events and festivals (Boekstein, 2017). In the Marche Region, 14 Italian language and culture schools provide both educational and tourism services, of whom 4 also offer accommodation. They mostly work in the educational tourism industry and more specifically in the language tourism supply, offering short-term classroom-based Italian language and culture study abroad programmes including experiential activities such as excursions and cultural activities in the afternoon (Engle & Engle; Peterson, 2007; Iglesias, 2016). Some of them are accredited for language certifications and for-credit university programmes and also offer tailor-made programmes for special-interest tourists and professionals.

Porter (1979; 1980; 2008) developed a framework for gaining a general understanding of an industry by identifying the forces controlling competition and profitability, and this has been applied to the tourism industry by several authors (Andriotis, 2004; Dobrivojević, 2013; Nurlansa & Jati, 2016; Iturralde & Guerrero, 2018). This framework helps companies develop a strategy for competing in the market, based on identification of the geographical scope of the competition, evaluation of the forces that shape the industry, and analysis of the level of profitability in the industry (Porter, 2008). This exploratory paper investigates the forces and factors influencing competition and profitability in the Educational Tourism industry in the Marche Region, with a study of two Italian language and culture schools that provide accommodations and tourism activities in rural areas near Macerata. Using Porters' Five Forces framework (Porter, 2008), semi-structured qualitative interviews were

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[6] Cultural tourism, ecotourism, volunteer tourism, agritourism (Ritchie *et al*., 2003; Richards, 2011); study abroad programmes for higher education students, school excursions; exchange programs; language travel; adult and senior study tours (for course credits; for professional development; hands-on and experiential learning seminars for skills enhancement; educational cruises) (Ritchie *et al*., 2003; Sie *et al.*, 2016; Nugroho & Soeprihanto, 2016).

conducted to learn about the functioning of the Education Tourism sector in this rural area, to understand how competition and profitability are affected by market forces (competitors, buyers, suppliers, new entrants, and substitutes), and how in turn each of these forces can be influenced by changes in the other forces and by external factors such as technology, innovation, government policy actions, and complementary products and services, among others. Moreover, the perceived role of the university as a force was also explored.

This paper is structured as follows: the first section reviews the literature on educational tourism and language tourism, describes Porter's Five Forces framework, and reports on its application to the tourism industry. The second section explains the background context, with an overview about the language school educational tourism businesses in the Marche Region. Methodology, with the presentation of the face-to-face interview protocol elaborated according to Porter's framework is then presented, followed by findings, with the definition of the Industry resulting from the interviews and the description of the companies interviewed, their respective competitive advantages and performance, and their relationships and collaborations. These findings are discussed in the results section, and the Porter's framework related to the Educational Tourism Industry in the Marche Region is applied and discussed.

2.1 Theoretical Background

This study examines the Educational Tourism Industry related to the provision of Italian Language and Culture courses in the Marche Region, more specifically in the Macerata area, from the point of view of Porter's Five Forces. A literature review about educational tourism, with a focus on language travel, has been provided. A section describes the characteristics of Porter's Five Forces framework and its application, as a method of analysis, in the literature about the tourism industry.

2.1.1 Educational tourism

The relationship between travel and learning was described by Falk *et al*. (2012), who identified the characteristics of learning that can happen through tourism. They indicated that learning is a life-long and life-wide process yielding a highly individual product and is the result of the construction of a personal meaning about the many experiences lived in time and space, which do not exclude the component of fun. They affirmed that educational travel and study abroad programmes can foster intellectual and personal growth, intercultural awareness, foreign language acquisition and professional development.

An educational tourist can be described as a person who spends an overnight vacation or makes an excursion for the primary or secondary motivation to learn (Ritchie *et al*., 2003). Ritchie *et al*. defined types of educational tourism according to the goal: if the primary motivation to travel relates to the

educational aspect, this tourism activity can be described as "education first"; vice versa, when learning is considered as a part of the trip, but not the main motivation for travel, then it can be described as a "tourism first" activity. Educational tourism includes adult study tours, international and domestic student travel for educational purposes, tourism packages provided by language schools, and special-interest tourism such as cultural and eco-tourism (Ritchie *et al*., 2003). In their study on Australian adult learning in educational tourism, Pitman *et al*. (2010) noted that the educational tourism industry includes mature-age study tours, for-credit on-site university units, school group tours, and professional development tours. Similarly, these categories were considered by Sie *et al.* (2016), who, however, distinguished between the "education first" tourists, whose experiences are based on formal learning (student exchange programs, study tours for course credit, educational trips for professional development) and "educational tourists" *tout court* who are midway on the continuum between "education first" and "tourism first", the latter being where tourism is the core service.

Educational tourists are provided with both educational and tourism services in a non-formal learning environment, namely, self-directed learning while traveling (gastronomy and gourmet experiences, heritage experiences, wine, art, and music, activity or nature and sports experiences, and cultural and discovery experiences) (Sie *et al*., 2016: 108). For these tourists, "participation in activities, learning processes and experiences derived from the trip are influenced by the relationships and interactions between participants, tourism providers, local communities and the surrounding environment which is involved in attracting and hosting them" (Sie *et al*., 2016: 107).

2.1.2 Language tourism

While language travel and language tourism are mainly used synonymously, Laborda (2007) makes the distinction that the goal of language travel is language learning, while that of language tourism is a combination of learning and entertainment.

Some authors (Iglesias, 2016; Boekstein, 2017) defined language tourists following Ritchie *et al.*'s (2003) description. According to them, language tourism can be included in educational tourism, in a position between the "education first" and the "tourism first" segments. Iglesias (2016) defined the language tourist as a person who engages not only in language learning tasks, but also in tourism activities, and thus the language tourism product comprises a language learning component which is educational and a travel component which may include transport, accommodation, catering and leisure arrangements. The author considered three key elements of the language tourism product: 1) the product composition; 2) the marketing and management structure charged with planning, promoting, selling and providing the language tourism product and 3) the environmental and social resource base of the destination. These elements are described in Table 3.

Language tourism key elements	Characteristics	Details
Product composition	Language learning component	Educational input
		Language learning complements
	Travel component	Transport
		Accommodation
		Catering
		Leisure
Marketing & management structures	Language education providers	
	Public administration institutions	
	Trade bodies	
	Travel planners	
Destination's environmental & social resource base	Local culture	
	Host community	
	Geographical context	
	Current situation (political, economic, social, technological, environmental & legal factors)	

For the purpose of this study, it is important to note that Iglesias includes language education providers in the marketing and management structure, and the local context plays a pivotal role. In fact, in his study about English learners, Boekstein (2017) showed that certain cultural activities such as meeting and interacting with local people, experiencing local culture and way of life, as well as visiting historical sites and attending cultural events and festivals were recognised by the respondents as very important.

The main suppliers for language travellers are formal language education providers usually organized in Study Abroad (SA) programmes, which can have varied in their duration and content. They usually have a standard design conceived for a specific market segment, such as youth, exam-takers, and business people.

Engle & Engle (2003) presented a classification of study abroad programmes based on seven defining components:

1. Length of student sojourn
2. Entry target-language competence
3. Language used in course work
4. Context of academic work
5. Types of student housing

6. Provisions for guided/structured cultural interaction and experiential learning

7. Guided reflection on cultural experience

From this classification, 5 levels were identified.

- Level One: Study Tour

- Level Two: Short-Term Study

- Level Three: Cross-Cultural Contact Program

- Level Four: Cross-Cultural Encounter Program

- Level Five: Cross-Cultural Immersion Program

The language programme, defined by Peterson *et al.* (2007) on the basis of the U.S. education system as a subcategory of a study abroad programme, and more specifically, as a classroom study abroad programme, has the main aim of language instruction. Language institutes, area studies programs, institutes for foreigners at host-country universities, and faculty-led programs offer classroom-based courses designed for non-native students. It can be considered a Level 2 - Short-term study (Engle & Engle, 2003) lasting between 3 and 8 weeks, with collective or home-stay housing, in which learning activities take place in-house or in institutes for foreign students. According to Engle & Engle (2003) this kind of programme does not provide cultural interaction or experiential learning activities. Nevertheless, there has been increasing demand for tailor-made thematic programmes, and providers have started adapting to specific needs. The traditional format consists in formal language classes in the morning and excursions, sports practice or visits to tourist attractions in the afternoon. Different activities, destinations or approaches have been introduced to facilitate connections among students and to get to know the local inhabitants and culture, or as experiential learning activities (Iglesias, 2016). Among the tailor-made proposals, home tuition makes students benefit from complete immersion in the culture of the host country and gives them the opportunity to gain self-confidence by continuously practicing the language: exam preparation, business communication, job interview skills or professional competences can be included in this kind of programme. Students who are planning to enter a university in the host country can participate to experience the local culture and academic systems (Iglesias, 2016). Language level accreditation is another important element sought by language tourists, through programmes to prepare for certification examinations.

2.1.3 Porters' Five Forces that shape Industry competition and profitability

In 1979 Michael Porter developed a framework for sustaining long-term profitability and responding strategically to competition in an industry, based on the analysis of four forces -- new entrants, suppliers, customers, substitutes, -- in addition to existing competitors. According to Porter (2008), understanding these competitive forces means revealing the underlying causes or roots of an

industry's current profitability, and can serve in the creation of a framework useful for formulating a strategy for anticipating and influencing competition and profitability over time (Figure 13).

New entrants present a threat in terms of pressure on prices, costs, and the rate of investment necessary to compete. This threat depends on the entry barriers for new entrants: if they are low, the threat of new entries is high and industry profitability is moderate, but if the barriers are high, especially if the existent operators are hostile to newcomers, some potential operators may think twice before deciding to become a new entrant.

Suppliers have the power to keep the value for themselves by charging higher prices, limiting quality or services, or shifting costs to industry participants. Switching costs in changing suppliers is a problem for existing operators, above all when they have invested in specialized ancillary equipment or in learning how to operate a supplier's equipment.

Customer buying power relates to their capacity to negotiate and force down prices, to demand better quality or more services and generally create competition among industry participants with consequences for the industry profitability. When customers or a group of customers are price-sensitive and buy in high volume, they can have a deeper influence. Customers are usually more price sensitive if the product they are purchasing is undifferentiated, if they consider it expensive and the product performance has low consequences. When the quality of the product is perceived as highly related to the price, then customers are usually less price sensitive.

Substitutes do not always have great influence if the products or services are perceived to be totally different than the industry product. They have the potential to put a ceiling on prices. The industry should diversify itself through product performance, marketing, or other means.

Rivalry among existing competitors is particularly destructive when only based on prices. Rivalry is higher when the number of actors in an industry is high, when the industry growth is slow, and the

competitors are ambitious to become leaders. Competition based on prices is higher with consequent cuts in prices, when the buyers provide similar products and services, when the fixed costs are high and the margins low, and when the product is perishable.

Some factors related to the environment of the industry should be considered in the industry analysis according to Porter (2008), but not confused with the forces.

These are:

- *industry growth rate*: fast growth does not always mean higher industry profitability;
- *technology and innovation*: advanced industries in terms of technology or innovation are not attractive in and of themselves. The profitability percentage can depend on the price-sensitivity of buyers, on switching costs, or on entry barriers;
- *government:* it is important to analyse government influence on competition. How do specific government policies affect the five competitive forces?;
- *complementary products and services:* they are used together with an industry's product. When the use of two products combined is greater than the sum of each product's value in isolation, then complements arise.

To analyse an industry correctly, Porter (2008) suggests it should be defined by identifying its products, considering the geographical scope of competition and the level of profitability, identifying the participants, analysing the forces that influence the competition and profitability, determining recent or likely future changes, and recognising the factors that influence the forces shaping industry competition and profitability. This could lead to the creation of a strategy to compete in the market by:

- positioning the company;
- exploiting industry change;
- shaping industry structure;
- defining the industry.

This framework has been applied in several studies analysing the tourism industry (Andriotis, 2004; Dobrivojević, 2013; Nurlansa & Jati, 2016; Iturralde & Guerrero, 2018).

2.2 Background context

In the Marche Region, according to the official regional tourism website[7], there are 14 Italian language and culture schools, most of which focus on teaching Italian as a general subject. In some cases, they provide courses for Italian language certifications (CILS and CELI) and special-interest courses, such as Italian gastronomy, arts and architecture, culture and traditions, refresher training for

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[7] http://www.turismo.marche.it/Guida/Scuole-di-Lingua (last retrieved: 26.10.2019)

teachers, technical language courses, for example, in Italian Law, and courses for students who want to be admitted to Italian universities. Some intensive residential programmes also provide tours to farms and cultural visits in the Marches and neighbouring regions, as well as weekends in the most popular cultural destinations in Italy such as Rome, Florence, and Venice. These kinds of schools usually offer their students support in finding accommodation. A description of the regional offer is presented in Table 4.

Table 4 - Italian language and culture schools in the Marche Region
(our elaboration based on regional tourism and official school websites)

Name of the school	City	Type of offer	Accommodation facilities
Pesaro – Urbino province			
Centro Studi Italiani	Urbania	**Italian language teaching offer** - Italian language courses - Special interest courses with experiential activities **Tourism offer** - Excursions embedded in the courses (half or full day in the Marche Region or to other regions)	Support in the search of an accommodation: - Selected local families - B&B - Self-catering apartments
Dante Alighieri	Mondavio	**Italian language teaching offer** - Italian language and culture courses - Special-interest courses/Technical language teaching **Tourism offer** - Study holidays with experiential activities (daily excursions/cultural visits with overnights outside Marche/events)	Support in the search of an accommodation: - Selected local families
Lingua Ideale (university spin-off)	Urbino	**Italian language teaching offer** - Italian language and culture courses - Intensive course for American university students* - Marco Polo – Turandot project (Chinese students who want to apply to Italian universities) **Tourism offer** - Daily excursions in the Marche and in the neighbouring regions/weekends in the main Italian cities*	Provision of accommodation and meals*
		The services reporting the "*" refer to the Intensive Course for American University Students	
Ancona province			
Centro Culturale Conero (CCC)	Camerano	**Italian language teaching offer** - Italian language courses - CILS and CELI exams preparation - Special-interest courses/Technical language teaching **Tourism offer** - Cultural tours - Culinary workshops - Farm and winery field visits (half days)	Support in the search of an accommodation: - Selected local families - Hotels/B&B - Self-catering apartments - Country houses

Embassy – Scuola di Lingue	Falconara Marittima	- Italian language and culture courses - Special-interest courses/Technical language teaching	/
Poker di lingue	Fabriano	**Italian language teaching offer** - Italian language and culture courses **Tourism offer** - Cultural tours (locally) - Local festivals and events	Support in the search of an accommodation: - Hotels/B&B/Country houses
Victoria International House	Ancona Jesi	- Italian language courses	/
		Macerata province	
Campus Magnolie	Castelraimondo	**Italian language teaching offer** - Italian language courses - CILS and CELI exams preparation - Special-interest courses/Technical language teaching **Tourism offer** - Cultural tours (2 – 4 days, other regions) - Daily excursions (Marche and neighbouring Regions)	- Accommodations in the campus - Country house (agreement with the owners)
Dante Alighieri – Campus L'Infinito	Recanati (before the 2016 earthquake the school was located in Camerino)	**Italian language teaching offer** - Italian language courses - CELI and DILS-PG certifications - Special-interest courses **Tourism offer** - Study holidays with experiential activities, excursions and city trips - Cultural tours (in/out Marche) - Participation to local festivals	- Self-catering apartments provided by the school - Hotels/B&B Country houses
Edulingua	San Severino Marche	**Italian language teaching offer** - Italian language courses - CILS exam preparation - Special-interest courses/Technical language teaching **Tourism offer** "Civado Tours" Tour Operator - Cultural tours (overnight, other regions) - Daily excursions (Marche and neighbouring Regions)	- Shared apartments provided by the School - Rooms in the School's historical building - Hotels/B&B/Country houses (agreement with the owners)
Italiano & Co.	Macerata	- Italian language courses - CILS exam preparation - Special-interest courses/Technical language teaching	Support in the search of an accommodation: - Selected local families - Hotels/B&B/Country houses - Self-catering apartments/rooms
Le Antiche Torri	Sarnano	**Italian language teaching offer** - Marco Polo – Turandot project (Chinese students who want to apply to Italian universities) - Special-interest courses/Italian culture workshops - Living the Italian - Study Holiday (CILS exam preparation) **Tourism offer** - Study Holiday with excursions in Marche and in the main Italian cities	Support in the search of an accommodation: - Selected shared self-catering apartments/rooms; - Hotels/B&B/Country houses

Victoria School	Civitanova Marche	- Italian language courses - CILS exam preparation	/
Ascoli Piceno province			
Accademia Italiana	Ascoli Piceno	- Italian language courses - CILS exam preparation - High school students study holidays with experiential activities - Special-interest courses/Technical language teaching	Support in the search of an accommodation: - Selected local families - Hotels/B&B - Self-catering apartments

Only four schools, three of which are in the Macerata area and one in Urbino, provide not only Italian language teaching services but also accommodations and tourism activities as part of their offer to customers. In the following lines, a short description of the schools in the Macerata area is presented:

2.2.1 Edulingua – San Severino Marche[8]

Edulingua is a school and a training centre located in San Severino Marche, accredited as an educational body in the Marche Region in 2010, which organizes holiday-study itineraries, lessons, courses for teachers, and cultural events based on Italian language and culture teaching, which is also supported by a tour operator, Civado Tours and a real estate, Argo. The teachers also write books and design learning resources for students.

2.2.2 Campus Magnolie – Castelraimondo[9]

The school was first founded by Pierpaolo Casoni in 1990 as a training school for foreign students attending the University of Camerino. In 1993 it started to combine Italian language and culture teaching with cultural visits to tourism destinations in Italy. Several companies managed the school over the years. *Campus Magnolie*, which opened in 2014, has innovated its offer and improved the facilities.

2.2.3 Dante Alighieri, Campus L'Infinito – Recanati[10]

Dante Alighieri and Campus L'Infinito were initially two different schools involved in the Italian language teaching sector. The first one, previously located in Camerino, was founded long before the second one in Recanati, an initiative of ELI Edizioni, internationally known editors for language studies. After the 2016 earthquakes in the Marche Region, the buildings that housed the Dante Alighieri School in Camerino were damaged, so an agreement was signed between the two schools to move all the students to Recanati. Dante Alighieri – Campus L'Infinito is now located in Recanati and provides Italian language and culture courses which can be officially certified (CELI; DILS) for classes of about 15 students each. Italian gastronomy and architecture courses are also activated.

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[8] https://en.edulingua.it/ (last retrieved: 18.11.2019)
[9] https://www.campusmagnolie.it (last retrieved: 18.11.2019)
[10] http://www.scuoladantealighieri.org/ing/index.htm (last retrieved: 18.11.2019)

Moreover, the school organizes study-holidays which include visits to the main Italian cultural destinations, including Rome, Florence, Bologna, Assisi, Siena, and Venice, cultural excursions in the Marche region (castles, ancient villages, beautiful countryside, etc.), participation in traditional events and celebrations, gastronomic fairs and folk festivals, weekends in the mountains or the seaside with sports activities and shopping evenings. All these offerings provide students with the opportunity to interact with locals and other students to practice the language. Special-interest cultural activities can be provided on request. The schools offer accommodation in self-catering shared apartments in the town centre, sometimes located in historical buildings, but if students desire other housing solutions, the school provides support in finding them.

2.3 Methodology

In order to investigate the Educational Tourism Industry related to the Italian language and culture schools in the Marche Region, desk research was conducted to identify the actors and the services they provide. Then, narrowing the focus to the Macerata Area, interviews were conducted with representatives of two of the three Italian language schools that also provide tourism activities and accommodations. The director of the third school was unavailable for interview due to work commitments abroad.

The two schools studied offer the following services:

Edulingua

Language teaching services:

- Intensive course in Italian language and culture (4-week programmes with residential Italian language and culture course + daily/weekend excursions to the Marche or other Regions (the main destinations in Italy);

- Thematic courses:

  o Italian in the kitchen;

  o Italian in art;

  o Italian law;

  o CILS/CEDILS certifications;

  o Work-study;

  o Preparation courses for entering Italian universities

- Teaching training;

- Personalized courses, for example a Sustainability programme with Arizona State University

Tourism activities:

The school collaborates with Civado Tours, a tour operator that provides the following services:

- Trips included in the course package;
- Optional trips and mini-tours (in addition to those included in the course package);
- Scholastic and cultural tourism;
- Italian in the kitchen (farm visits; food & wine tastings);
- Italian in art (guided visits to cultural sites).

Accommodation services:

The school offers shared self-catering apartments with double rooms (single rooms available on request with an extra charge) in the town centre. Moreover, in the historical building which houses the school, Palazzo Servanzi Confidati, 23 bedrooms are also available at an extra charge.

The school also has agreements with hotels, B&Bs, farmhouses, vacation houses, and religious accommodation facilities, all in the area of San Severino, Marche.

Campus Magnolie

Language teaching services:

- Intensive course of Italian language and culture (4-week programmes with residential Italian language and culture course + daily/weekend excursions in the Marches or other Regions (main destinations in Italy);
- Preparation courses for entering Italian universities;
- IT certificate exam preparation courses;
- CampusLAB – refresher training for teachers;
- Cooking classes;
- Individual lessons/lessons for small groups;
- Itinerant lessons (included in the course);
- Cultural lessons (included in the course: Italian hand gestures, food and wine, music, cinema, history…);
- Events (thematic parties; dinners; cocktail hours…).

Tourism activities:

The school organizes tours included in the courses and daily/weekend excursions in the Region and in the main destinations of Italy.

Accommodation services:

The school has 36 self-catering apartments in the campus where the classrooms are located, with double-rooms solutions, for a total of 160 beds. Other solutions, such as Villa Casablanca, a country house that also hosts the cooking and art classes, or hotels and B&Bs, are also provided at an extra charge.

This paper follows the purposeful sampling technique, which is widely applied in qualitative research because it is effective in identifying exemplary cases through selection of individuals or groups directly involved in the phenomenon of interest and can provide information through their knowledge and experience (Patton, 2002; Cresswell & Plano Clark, 2011).

A semi-structured interview was elaborated following Porter's Five Forces for Industry Analysis (Porter, 2008).

The interviews consisted of 21 open-ended questions divided into four sections. They were conducted face-to-face, recorded and then transcribed. The first section of 13 questions requested information about the company, the second one of 2 questions aimed at defining the sector, the third section of 9 questions was useful for understanding which forces influence competition and profitability in this field, while the fourth section with 1 question asked about the factors that influence these forces and thus competition and profitability in the field. The questions are presented in Table 5.

Table 5 – Contents of the interview based on Porter's Five Forces (Porter, 2008) to analyse the Educational Tourism Industry in the Marche Region

SECTION 1 –INFORMATION ABOUT THE COMPANY

QUESTION N.	QUESTION
1	In which industry (tourism/language teaching/educational tourism…) does your company work?
2	Can you tell me something about the history of your company? (Foundation? Mission/Vision? Number and type of employees?)
3	What is your company's competitive advantage?
4	Could you give some examples about the services you provide?
5	How many courses on average do you activate per year? What kind? (Who are the prospective clients? What activities do the courses include?)
6	How many students do you involve on average per year?
7	Do you collaborate with local companies or other stakeholders in the area? If yes, how?
8	Where do your customers come from?
9	Do you activate courses with universities? If yes, what kind?
10	Do you collaborate with local universities? If yes, how?
11	What geographic area do you cover with your activities?
12	What is the geographic scope of competition, related to your company?
13	What is your company's level of profitability?
	SECTION 2 – DEFINING THE INDUSTRY
14	Which products and services are offered by your industry? Which ones can also be considered in another sector? In which one?
15	Do you have any idea about the level of profitability in the industry at the regional level?
	SECTION 3 – DEFINING THE FORCES INFLUENCING COMPETITION AND PROFITABILITY IN THE INDUSTRY
	Considering the regional level as the geographic scope of competition…
16	In the industry in which you work…
16.1	Who are the customers or groups of customers?

16.2	Who are the suppliers or groups of suppliers?
16.3	Who are the competitors?
16.4	Who are the substitutes?
16.5	Who are the potential entrants?
17	Which of these forces support and/or limit profitability in the industry? (threats of potential entrants/substitutes; bargaining power of customers/suppliers; competitor rivalry)
18	Do you think that a change in one of these forces could lead to a reaction in another one? If yes, could you give an example?
19	Do you think that the industry has recently changed (positively or negatively) in relationship to these forces? Are any changes possible in the future? If yes, of which kind?
20	Do you consider the university to be among these forces? Please, in answering, also consider your company's perspective. Can you explain your answer?
SECTION 4 – DEFINING THE FACTORS INFLUENCING PROFITABILITY AND COMPETITION IN THE INDUSTRY	
21	How do you think the industry growth rate, technology and innovation, policy actions, and complementary products and services could influence competition and profitability in the industry?

The results of content analysis are represented in a graph, based on Porter (2008). It provides a preliminary overview of the Educational Tourism sector in the Marche Region and, more specifically, in the Macerata area, related to the potential of Italian Language and Culture Schools offering both education and tourism.

2.4 Findings

The interviews revealed that the schools share a common past, when, 25 year ago, an Italian language school was established in Castelraimondo to support foreign students studying at the University of Camerino. Over the years, workers in this first experience went on to create 6 other schools throughout the Marche and neighbouring Regions. They decided to innovate the offer by providing intensive residential programmes with on-site accommodation and by creating tourism services to give students the opportunity to experience the Italian lifestyle and language in the Marche Region and in the main Italian destinations. *Campus Magnolie*, which remained in Castelraimondo and carried on the heritage of the first school, and *Edulingua* in San Severino Marche are among the schools with a link to this first experience.

2.4.1 Description of the companies and definition of the industry

Edulingua is a collaboration of three companies: the school provides educational services and lessons in Italian language and culture, Civado Tour Operator, created 5 years ago, provides transportation and logistics for the excursions, and Argo, a real estate company formed 6 years ago, handles accommodations. Asked to identify the industry within which the company works, Giorgio Massei, the director, said there was no one industry, as *Edulingua* provides a number of transversal services in different sectors. Similarly, Claudio Pelagalli, administrator of *Campus Magnolie*, said that the activities at the campus are related to the educational, tourism and real estate sectors, and thus used

Educational Tourism as an umbrella definition for the industry in which the company works. For the purpose of this study, Educational Tourism promoted by Italian language and culture schools is the Industry of reference to be analysed, since it involves several sectors. The geographical scope of the competition is the Marche Region, specifically the Macerata area. Three schools out of four in the region, located in the Macerata province, (the fourth school is in Urbino, a province almost two hours away) provide intensive Italian language and culture programmes including accommodations and excursions. Representative of two of these three schools were interviewed, respectively the director and the administrator of the campus.

Both representatives said that at the national level, the industry is composed by various actors who can offer different services or even the same services but only partially. Within the industry, competition can take place among language schools that only offer courses but, in a more direct way, it happens with schools that also provide accommodation and tourism activities. The profitability in the sector is mostly related to the additional tourism activities provided, which can be 15-20% of the revenue.

2.4.2 The competitive advantages of the companies

Edulingua's school director said their distinctive advantage is the quality of the education offered, as the school was founded by teachers whose primary passion is their educational mission, even before that of entrepreneurship. They apply a variety of methodologies in the classroom to best meet the needs of their target customers, emphasise the learning context, and develop and provide high-quality teaching tools.

A second aspect highlighted is the importance of networking as a marketing strategy for building loyalties and reaching new potential customers. They maintain a direct relationship with other teachers in the world, shore up existent connections through events and through the worldwide sale of their books and manuals for learning and teaching Italian, and work to create new contacts with universities and educational bodies.

The *Campus Magnolie*, whose mission is to welcome people from a number of countries to facilitate Italian language learning, offers two competitive advantages. First, classroom activities take place in the same building as accomodation and the administrative offices, so these aspects are more easily managed. Second, they have a rich offer in tourism activities, as their packages include several daily or weekend excursions, and they also offer the option of more visits in the Marche or other regions on request, at an extra charge. Their marketing strategy targets students attracted by packages for both language courses and numerous tourism activities and sets more competitive prices than those of their competitors; this focus on extra tourism services bolsters the company's income.

2.4.3 Companies':

- <u>Employees</u>. Both schools employ about ten people. The *Edulingua* school employs the three company members, six permanent contract teachers and two fixed-term teachers. Argo, the real estate firm, and Civado, the tour operator, work with around twenty employees in total, who have different kinds of contracts, among them on-call contracts drivers and cleaners.

Campus Magnolie employs between seven and fifteen people, according to the period. There are permanent contracts for managers of the campus and the didactic aspects, the secretary, the cleaning services, and three teachers employed year-round, while the. while other teachers are hired as necessary with short-term contracts.

- <u>Activities</u>. *Edulingua* activates courses for all the CEFR[11] levels up to C1 (advanced) every month. Moreover, the thematic courses with a minimum of participants are activated several times a year. On average, in one year the school activates:

- four or five culinary courses;
- two or three art courses and
- two or three Italian law courses.

The *Edulingua* director pointed out that the target market of the school is heterogeneous: the Italian language and culture course usually attracts passionate adults interested in gaining knowledge and having experiences during a visit to Italy. The culinary course draws both amateurs and professionals, especially students from foreign gastronomy schools who want to learn the technical language. Similarly, the art course is interesting for both amateurs and Art History students. The technical language courses, such as Italian law, or the courses on demand in architecture and science, as well as the refresher training for teachers usually appeal to students attending specialist schools or professionals in those fields. The director added that in the language learning for specific fields, practice is needed to build up the student's command of the vocabulary step by step, working through a series of specific objectives.

The *Campus Magnolie* administrator said that the Italian language and culture course is always active from January to November, and attracts clients ranging from 14 to 60 years old who want to visit Italy and learn the language. Their main motivation for travelling is the desire to get in direct contact with the Italian culture through hands-on activities. For this reason, the activities in the intensive programme include a day a week dedicated to an itinerant lesson in some small local villages or at the market, to stimulate students to interact with local people and practice Italian, but also to help them experience the difference between small-town life and that of the big cities they visit on week-

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[11] https://rm.coe.int/1680459f97 (last retrieved: 09.11.2019)

end excursions. Since 2018, the *Campus Magnolie* offer has also included preparation courses for students desiring to enrol in Italian universities, and the CampusLAB for teachers. In one year, seventy-five Italian language and culture courses and eight university preparation courses are usually activated.

- Numbers. Both companies attract about one thousand students a year, on average. For both companies, the customers come mainly from such Central and South American nations as Mexico, Brazil, Colombia, Peru, Argentina and Costa Rica, but both companies also have contacts in Europe and North America. For example, *Edulingua*, provides a course on Sustainability for Arizona State University, with students usually coming to Italy at the beginning of the summer season. Its European customers mainly come from Spain, Germany and Belgium, and it has some connections with Australia, Russia and Lebanon. *Campus Magnolie* is working to attract customers from Australia and already have contacts with U.S. universities, through direct contact with professors teaching there. *Campus Magnolie* European customers come from Spain, the Netherlands, Finland, Iceland and the European side of Russia.

- Competition. The direct competitors of *Edulingua* in the Marche Region are the Macerata area schools with whom they share a starting point and a common path. On the national level, the competition is with firms that offer similar services, such as teacher training, or that draw clients from the same countries. *Edulingua* offers lower prices than other schools in the national market, but higher prices than those of other Marche Region schools, as it focuses more on the quality of the services than on the number of customers. The competitors for the *Campus Magnolie* are the other regional schools offering similar services, above all those in the Macerata area, but they also think about competitors in other regions such as in Apulia, Calabria and Tuscany. As is the case with *Edulingua,* the competition is based on the similar provenience of the customers. Even though the agreements and the contacts are different, the countries are the same, mainly from Central and South America, whose people prefer to travel in groups.

- Profitability. For both schools, profit mostly comes from tourism services. The *Edulingua* director noted that the most interesting percentages in terms of profitability are related to the tourism activities in the strict sense. Nevertheless, he added that this could not happen without the school's good offer of high-quality courses, which provides the right visibility to attract educational tourists. The *Campus Magnolie* administrator also agreed that their profitability is mostly related to the tourism activity offered. They choose to set lower costs for courses and accommodation than those proposed by other competitors, in order to attract a higher number of customers, and thus their profit comes from the additional tourism activities offered. According to him, high numbers do not always mean a better profitability percentage: it is important to create a balance between the cost of suppliers, the numbers

of customers and the revenue from the services sold, which means that they have to manage the bookings well. Through customization and flexibility in the offer, the company works to earn the loyalty of its clients.

2.4.3 Relationships and collaborations

Relationships with universities Both *Edulingua* and *Campus Magnolie* have agreements with universities abroad to offer their students Italian language and culture courses that the university will recognize with credits. *Edulingua* highlighted relationships with universities in the U.S., Russia and Lebanon, while *Campus Magnolie* has agreements with universities in the U.S., Russia and Colombia. Both companies indicated that they value networking with local universities. *Edulingua* has a strong relationship with the University of Macerata, with whom it has an agreement for the provision of human resources for teacher training courses, research and marketing activities. Through the university, the school is also able to recruit teachers to employ. In general, schools like *Edulingua* and *Campus Magnolie* also activate special interest courses according to the learning needs of the local universities, in the context of master's programmes in didactics or scientific Italian courses, and thus university students are their clients. *Edulingua* runs short projects with the University of Camerino. It has agreements with Ca' Foscari University in Venice for a teacher training course, and the University of Siena for official certifications. For its part, *Campus Magnolie* has a stronger relationship with the University of Camerino, with whom it has an agreement providing discounts to students attending Italian language courses. Moreover, in 2016, when earthquakes damaged UNICAM dormitories, the *Campus* hosted foreign students who needed accommodation. The school also organized an international teacher training course in collaboration with teachers from the University of Camerino, Modena, Pisa, and other cities.

Relationships with local stakeholders Both *Edulingua* and *Campus Magnolie* are particularly interested in offering students, opportunities for direct contact with local communities (respectively San Severino and Castelraimondo), and direct their students to local restaurants, grocery stores, and other services with whom they have formal and informal agreements. The daily excursions are organized in nearby villages and cities such as Macerata, Civitanova Marche, Loreto, and Fabriano. In particular, *Campus Magnolie* usually organizes its itinerant lessons in the nearby villages of Gagliole and Pioraco, where they visit local museums, farms, wineries and restaurants. For their weekend excursions to larger cities such as Rome, Florence, and Venice, but also to Northern Italy and the regions of Apulia and Sicily, they choose to hire local guides. Both schools employ local suppliers for transport, cleaning services, advertising and promotional materials.

2.5 Results

Both *Edulingua* and *Campus Magnolie* are educational tourism providers specialised in the language tourism sector (Laborda, 2007; Iglesias, 2016; Boekstein, 2017). The schools offer Italian language and culture courses as a core service, but as *Edulingua* is particularly concerned about the high quality provision of the language teaching services and *Campus Magnolie* considers the variety of tourism activity provided to students as a distinctive advantage, it is possible to distinguish them, respectively, as "education first" and "tourism first" experience providers (Ritchie *et al.*, 2003) albeit with similar programmes and activities. In fact, both schools promote educational and tourism services in a formal and non-formal learning environment, as Sie *et al.*, 2016 observed for this sector, with wine and gastronomy experiences, cultural, natural and discovery experiences, and participation in local events. Their relationship with local communities is an important and strong aspect of the offer, an element of educational tourism underlined by Boekstein (2017) and Iglesias (2016). For example, *Campus Magnolie* organises visits to the local market to provide opportunities for students to practice Italian and immerse themselves in the local daily life, as well as visits to local museums and small villages in the Region. These schools offer traditional short-term classroom study abroad programmes (Engle & Engle, 2003; Peterson *et al.*, 2007) which normally provide language and culture classes in the morning and daily excursions in the afternoon (Iglesias, 2016) with week-end trips in the main Italian destinations. They also pay attention to the accreditation aspect and provide tailor-made services according to the specific learning needs of their customers.

Edulingua, Campus Magnolie and two other schools stand out from the rest of the Italian language schools in the Marche Region because they provide full packages combining an educational (Italian language and culture courses) and a travel component (accommodation and tourism activities).

Porter (2008)'s suggestions have been applied in interviews to collect data about the Marche Region educational tourism industry focused on Italian language and culture. The following sections report the results from parts 2, 3 and 4 of the interviews, namely, defining the industry, defining the forces influencing competition and profitability in the industry, and defining the factors influencing profitability and competition in the industry.

2.5.1. Porter's Five Forces to analyse the Educational Tourism Industry in the Marche Region

The school representatives were asked to identify the actors in the industry and to analyse how they these forces positively or negatively shape competition and profitability.

2.5.1.1 The customers

According to the interviewees, Italian language and culture schools in Italy mainly attract students from the U.S., Japan, Germany, France and China. In particular, many U.S. university students choose

Florence as a destination. In the Marche Region, some schools attract students from specific areas, such as Central and South America, but also customers from the U.S. and Northern Europe. Schools in the Macerata area have many Chinese students interested in enrolling in Italian universities. The Ancona area draws many clients from Germany and Switzerland. The Marche Region educational tourism programmes advertise to Italian associations abroad, Italian language and culture schools abroad, and universities and colleges that prefer to offer their students experiences in the Region's lesser known destinations, as the prices are lower, but students can nonetheless visit the main tourist attractions.

2.5.1.2 The suppliers

In general terms, in the Marche Region, suppliers to educational tourism businesses are:

- publishing companies, which provide the learning materials and which, in the case of *Edulingua*, directly collaborate with the school to create manuals and books to be sold worldwide;

- transportation services: *Edulingua* works with Contram, a bus company based in Camerino that provides local public transportation as well as busses for hire for longer journeys, and transportation from the main airports to San Severino Marche; *Campus Magnolie* works with a local transportation company in Caldarola with a semi-exclusive agreement;

- hospitality facilities: even though both schools provide their own housing for customers, they also give students the opportunity to choose different accommodation at an extra charge, and have established agreements with local B&Bs, hotels and country houses. In the Marche Region, not all the schools provide accommodations to students, and thus work with external hospitality facilities;

- catering and dining services: Customers of *Edulingua* and *Campus Magnolie* arrange for their own meals, but upon request a canteen service can be arranged. Other schools in the Marche Region generally outsource these services for their customers;

- cleaning services: While *Edulingua* and *Campus Magnolie* have their own cleaning staff, other schools sometimes outsource these services;

- advertising and marketing agencies, suppliers of merchandising gadgets and advertising materials;

- agencies for finding customers: These services are commonly used by schools that do not directly create their own network. In contrast, *Edulingua* and *Campus Magnolie* build their own relationships with potential customers autonomously.

2.5.1.3 The existing competitors

According to both schools, the Educational Tourism industry related to Italian language and culture schools is a growing sector which can be threatened by other schools providing similar services in other regions of Italy, potentially attractive from a cultural and touristic point of view. The *Edulingua* director mentioned schools in Cilento, Bari and Abruzzo areas as potential competitors, but said they do not really feel threatened by them because of *Edulingua*'s focus on the quality of their courses. He pointed out that while other schools were founded by entrepreneurs mainly interested in profit, the *Edulingua* founders are school teachers with a strong vocation for excellence in didactics who later became entrepreneurs and thus combine these two souls in the same activity. Thus, competition could perhaps arise in terms of prices or other aspects that are not specifically linked to the values behind the offer. However, they feel less threatened by their competitors because *Edulingua* has the advantage of having built and cultivated relationships with customers over the years, and their passion and excellent services have become a guarantee. Word of mouth recommendations bring them many new customers. In fact, many of their students are return customers. Instead, the administrator of *Campus Magnolie* noted that their most direct competition comes from schools whose founders started in Castelraimondo and then moved elsewhere in the Marche and other regions. Thus, they have the same kind of contacts with customers built from the beginning.

2.5.1.4 The substitutes

The representatives of both companies conceded that, since educational tourism is a transversal industry embracing sectors of education, tourism and real estate, it is not difficult to find potential substitutes. Hospitality facilities, such as country houses, could potentially offer workshops or short courses on wine and gastronomy and local culture in the Italian language.

2.5.1.5 The potential entrants

According to both interviewees, potential entrants are tourism operators, hospitality facilities, or new Italian language and culture schools that are widening their horizons by considering the opportunity to branch out into educational tourism. This kind of activities could create an opportunity for themselves by restoring and using abandoned historical villages or buildings.

2.5.1.6 Forces influencing the industry

After the interviewees identified the actors involved in the industry, they were asked about rivalry among existing competitors, the bargaining power of customers, the bargaining power of suppliers, the threat of new entrants and the threat of substitute products or services (Porter, 1979; 1980; 2008), as forces that could positively or negatively influence competition and profitability in the sector.

The *Edulingua* director said potential new entrants could be a threat if they tried to enter the market with prices that undercut *Edulingua*'s, rather than creating a competitive advantage through a niche offer or through superior marketing. If there were to be a price war among the schools, it would lead to a general impoverishment of the sector because all the schools would have to reduce the quality of their services in order to stay in business. The director said they face this potential competition with the completely opposite strategy, having chosen to raise their prices even when it might have caused them to lose some clients; they opted to confirm their image of a quality school. This actually led to higher profit and the opportunity to enter new markets.

The *Campus Magnolie* administrator said that the educational tourism industry in the Marche Region could be affected by price competition among rival schools and the bargaining power of customers. Customers of schools in the Marche Region and, in particular, the Macerata area, come from much the same areas. Students from Central and South America give importance to the price and for this reason schools choose not to raise prices in order not to lose customers. A solution could be to focus on new markets and niches that can afford higher prices.

According to the interviewees, changes in one of the forces can affect the actions of other forces. The *Edulingua* director pointed out that the arrival of new entrants could affect rivalry among current competitors, because it would lead to an overabundance of services and products, impacting prices and provision of services. This could also have an impact on the choice of customers and enhance their bargaining power for optimum prices. The *Campus Magnolie* administrator noted that a change in the marketing strategy and networking activity could somehow change the relationships between supply and demand, observing, like the *Edulingua* director, that this could affect customer choice, given greater bargaining power, and intensify rivalry among current competitors.

Instead, speaking about the bargaining power of suppliers, both companies agreed that their choices to hire their own in-house staff for strategic services such as administration, teaching and cleaning, and only outsource a few services, such as transportation, gives stability to the educational tourism companies and creates solid relationships with the local area, reducing the potential bargaining power of suppliers.

2.5.2 The university as a force

According to both school representatives, universities play an important role in the educational tourism sector as suppliers. First, in terms of services and products, the university together with the schools build educational services and products. For example, new quality products based on new models and methods are created through PhD scholarships co-funded by the companies and the university, in which recipients engage in cutting edge research and development. The university can also be a supplier in terms of human resources. For example, universities supply specialised teachers

for the school's special interest courses, such as the refresher training for teachers. Universities can also be seen as suppliers of customers, providing new students for the school.

Moreover, collaboration between schools and universities can create new experiential activities for school customers, through the international networks of the universities and the possibility of accreditation.

2.5.3 Factors influencing Porter's forces

The external factors of industry growth rate, technology and innovation, policy actions, and complementary products and services can potentially influence the behaviour of the above-mentioned forces, shaping the educational tourism industry in different ways. According to the director of *Edulingua*, the rapid changes in communication technology and the massive use of social media in marketing strategies gives visibility above all to new entrants who can be more aggressive in their advertisement, with cheap promotional offers. Virtual communication, more than traditional media, allows real-time interaction with customers and immediate connections in a larger geographical area. On the one hand, this can be threatening for the companies already affirmed in the market, but, on the other hand, this change can be an opportunity for them to be proactive in using new tools to upgrade their offer, for example by organising webinars and MOOCs for both education and marketing reasons.

Both representatives of *Edulingua* and *Campus Magnolie* pointed out another influential aspect: the factors related to economic changes in the countries of their students. For example, currency devaluation or economic crisis could make the cost of travel prohibitive for customers, such that they would not come at all, or would be forced to choose the least expensive language school, which would have an impact in terms of competition among schools. Schools have devised creative responses to such situations. For example, to meet the needs of Brazilian customers, the *Campus Magnolie* allowed them to pay in advance by instalments, thus avoiding the risk of unfavourable changes in exchange rates that could force them to sacrifice travel. Another economic factor that could negatively impact the industry could be unfavourable policies of the Ministry of Education or the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Italy or the countries of origin of the customers, such as cuts in public funding for language teaching or for scholarships. Also, the Italian Ministry of Education could conceivably impose specific taxes on businesses that open new language schools or other such initiatives.

In a situation of economic crisis, some companies may choose to offset the loss of their traditional customer base by moving into the territory traditionally seen as the market of other companies, establishing contacts with the customers of their competitors and trying to "steal" them.

According to the *Edulingua* director, one way to face this kind of risk related to external factors can be to build strong relationships and propose new ideas and opportunities for collaboration in the local

area. To summarize, Figure 14 shows the application of Porter's framework to the Educational Tourism Industry in the Marche Region, showing which forces interact in the industry, which changes in one force could influence others and which factors have potential impact on the forces.

Figure 14 - Application of Porter's framework (five forces + factors) to Educational Tourism Industry in Marche Region
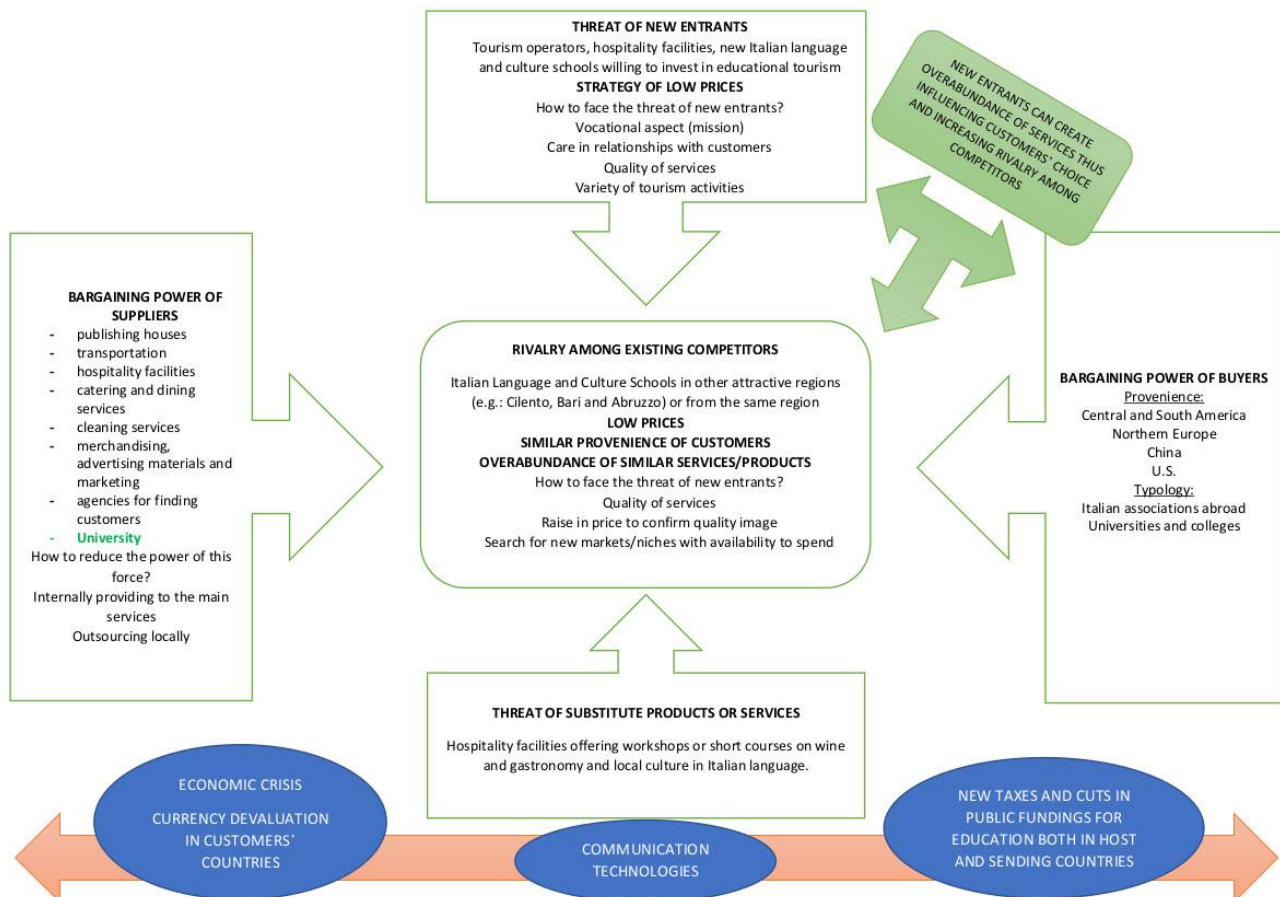
2.6 Conclusions

The objective of this paper was to investigate the forces and factors influencing the competition and profitability of the Educational Tourism Industry in the Marche Region, by exploring the perspective of two of the three Italian language and culture schools in the Macerata area that provide participants with both tourism activities and on-site accommodations. Following Porter's framework (1979; 1980; 2008), the geographical scope of competition was identified as regional, that is, the rural area around Macerata in the Marche Region. Profit in the sector comes not so much from the Italian language and culture courses as from the tourism activities included in the package. Information about the companies, their respective competitive advantages and performance, and their relationships and collaborations proved useful for learning about the context and the market in which they work. Both representatives of these schools highlighted a key element: the importance of building good

relationships and collaborations with local stakeholders in order to reciprocally benefit from existing and future opportunities for growth and local development. The interviewees particularly highlighted this aspect in the context of describing strategies for facing their competitors and the bargaining power of suppliers, and for dealing with external factors, such as economic disadvantage in Italy or in the school itself or in the countries of their customers. In this context of relationships, local universities, considered both as collaborators and suppliers, can play a significant role.

In the results section, Porter's framework related to the Educational Tourism Industry in the Marche Region was applied and discussed. The aspects that emerged are illustrated in Figure 2, which shows some interesting aspects. First, it emerged that changes in one force, such as a new entrant among the competition, can influence another force, the bargaining power of customers, because the new entry causes an overabundance of similar products and services, and thus impacts the rivalry among existing competitors, who deem they must lower their prices and try to make their services more attractive. Second, the behaviour of the forces, particularly the rivalry among existing competitors, is influenced by changes in external factors, such as economic crisis and currency devaluation in the target countries, taxes and cuts in public funding for education in both Italy and the target countries, and rapid changes in communication technologies, which influence the advertising and marketing strategies of the schools. The representatives of the companies said they face competition and manage profitability in a number of ways. They stressed the vocational passion of their teachers, the quality of the services they provide, their attention to network building, the rich variety of tourism activities offered, the relationships built locally, and their competitive prices that balance quality and economic advantage.

This study presents some limitations: it does not present a complete overview about the whole regional Language Tourism Supply. Even though the companies interviewed exemplify many aspects of the language tourism industry (Iglesias, 2016) in the Marche Region in their combination of the educational component and the tourism one, further research could be conducted with the other schools in the regional market, using qualitative and quantitative methods to achieve a more complete overview of the context, deeper knowledge about the performance of the companies and a clearer idea about the forces shaping competition in the Marche Region. Moreover, as Porter's framework helps in the elaboration of a strategy for companies in order for them to compete in the educational tourism market, once the framework is completed, further research to devise a strategy for each company could be done.

CHAPTER 3
Assessing the learning outcomes of food-related educational tourism events for university students: the case of the International Student Competition of Fermo, Italy

3. Introduction

In the "Future of the Job" Report, the World Economic Forum (2016) argues that in the near future, some behavioural soft skills will replace or be more important than other technical and professional ones. For example, emotional intelligence, creativity and critical thinking are expected to play a fundamental role in enhancing future professional profiles (WEF, 2016). In defining the Student Employability Profile (Rees *et al*., 2006, pp. 90-92) related to hospitality, the UK Higher Education Academy listed several skills and kinds of knowledge that a new graduate in this field should develop. Field-related skills include the ability to analyse and implement food, beverage and/or accommodation service systems, supported by ICT, mathematical and organizational skills. Important soft skills embrace interpersonal acumen as well as skills in communication and presentation, teamwork, critical thinking, and the ability to learn, especially from work experience.

The overall purpose of this study was to explore how and to what extent food-related educational events may contribute to provide students with the knowledge, expertise and soft skills needed for careers in the food tourism sector, thus improving their employability. The subject of this study was the International Student Competition on Place Branding and Mediterranean Diet held in Fermo, Italy, organized by the University of Macerata's Department of Education, Cultural Heritage and Tourism in collaboration with The Piceno Laboratory on the Mediterranean Diet, a local network of public and private stakeholders committed to the promotion of Fermo rural area as a touristic destination based on traditional gastronomy.

In Ritchie *et al*.'s (2003) description of an educational tourism experience, the learning component is a primary or secondary part of the journey. It can be related to the competences that students develop during their studies in order to face the challenges of the world of work. In the food tourism literature and, in particular, in relation to the development of food tourism, various types of competences have been identified as critically important (Bertella, 2011; Johanson *et. al*., 2010; Rees *et al*., 2006; Başaran, 2016). For example, Bertella (2011) identified scientific and local food knowledge, global and local managerial and political knowledge, and tourism knowledge.

The present article reports the results of a specific case study of a one week educational program developed in line with the main ideas of the experiential learning approach (Dewey, 1938; Kolb, 1984), the International Student Competition (ISC) on Mediterranean Diet and Place Branding, organized by the University of Macerata (Italy) in the rural area of Fermo in collaboration with an

association of government and private actors, The Piceno Lab on the Mediterranean Diet. During this week, students attend talks, meet with local producers, visit farms, taste local products, participate in cooking lessons, and learn how to use social media to promote an agritourism, restaurant, farm, tour operator, or other such enterprise. In the competition, teams of students work on case studies to formulate sustainable, original and innovative action plans for one of these operators, in the overall context of promoting the rural development of the Marches Region.

The article is structured as follows: the first part provides a review of the background literature on educational tourism, with a specific focus on short-term study abroad programmes, experiential learning and soft skills for employability in relation with food tourism. Next, the background context of the educational event is described, and the applied methodology is explained. Finally, the collected data are analysed and discussed.

Students perceived that the experience of working on real cases in a multicultural context helped them gain useful knowledge and skills that would improve their employability. They pointed to such knowledge as a general understanding of the territory and practical information about place branding and food tourism. They felt that they improved their skills in communication, problem solving and decision making, which, they said, can be adapted to other situations and workplaces as well.

3.1 Theoretical Background

The case study of the International Student Competition of Fermo offers four interesting aspects for contemplation. The event in itself is:

1. an educational tourism experience that,
2. through a competition, engages students in place and problem-specific experiential learning activities,
3. in order to provide them with employability-related skills useful for their future;
4. furthermore, it is a food tourism experience featuring the Mediterranean Diet and involved students in promotion of the local food culture and lifestyle, and thus of the value of the area.

The following sections present a quick overview of the literature on Educational Tourism, Experiential learning, Food Tourism and Soft Skills for employability.

3.1.1 Educational tourism

Ritchie *et al*. (2003, p. 18) defined Educational Tourism as a "*tourist activity undertaken by those who are undertaking an overnight vacation and those who are undertaking an excursion for whom education and learning is a primary or secondary part of their trip*" and indicates that it has several potential segments. In this study we consider the 'education first' or purposeful segments, which

primarily serve to promote education and learning, for example, school excursions and exchange programmes, stays abroad at language schools, and tourism related to university students. Stone & Petrick (2013) defined study-abroad programs, including short period programs, as touristic experiences perceived by the students as challenging and potentially enriching opportunities to travel, live and learn about another culture and language.

Kalinowski & Weiler (1992) wrote that educational travel is motivated by curiosity to learn about other people, their language and culture, and by interest in stimulating cultural and naturalistic topics. For them, educational tourism goes "beyond a curiosity, interest or fascination for a particular topic. It involves a travel experience in which there is organised learning, whether that be formal or experimental" (Kalinowski & Weiler, 1992, p. 17). Educational tourism abroad offers a number of benefits: it provides students with an opportunity to learn about the political and social issues, the people, geography, history and culture of another country (Chieffo, 2007). It also can push them to improve their organisational, communication and problem-solving skills, and thus foster their personal growth (Gmelch, 1997).

3.1.2 Experiential learning in tourism and hospitality degree programs

Experiential activities, as described by Dewey (1938), Boydell (1976) and Kolb (1984), can play an important role in a student's education, above all if set within specific learning programmes (Stone & Petrick, 2013).

As Bauer & Bennett (2003) explained, field research projects as part of a degree program in tourism management are important because students can learn more about tourism in this setting than by attending lectures and seminars or reading textbooks and articles. Bauer & Bennett described tourism as a multifaceted, multidisciplinary field, and argued that "hands-on" training that combines both theory and practice best prepares students for work in this complex arena. Similarly, Goh (2011) affirmed that fieldtrips in tourism education pique the interest of students, give them a better understanding of the specific subjects addressed in their program, and provide them with insights into future career pathways.

In this context, a well-rounded education is important: "*tourism-related educational organizations should build a curriculum that combines culinary culture and tourism, enhances the cooperation between academia and industry, and deepens the knowledge and learning of culinary culture*" (Horng & Tsai, 2012, p. 812). In particular, gastronomic studies are multi-disciplinary, as they include history, sociology, literature, languages, nutrition, philosophy, hospitality and cooking, and may give direction in the planning process of communities and businesses (Scarpato, 2002).

A well-rounded education also is served by the combination of learning modalities. Travel and discovery provide an opportunity for students to reflect on their experiences, and this reflection is a

vital part of learning (Mouton, 2002). Başaran (2016, p. 33), in his research about experiential learning in tourism education in North Cyprus, followed Kolb (1984)'s theoretical framework. He asserted that during work or training in the hospitality sector, students profit from their direct contact with stakeholders; reflective observation (RO) on the ideas they hear and situations they experience opens them to new perspectives. The opportunity to hear guest speakers such as business representatives and researchers, and engage in group discussions with them, enriches the learning experience as well. Of course, attending lectures and studying textbooks are important for the abstract conceptualization (AC) of the subject. In addition, active experimentation (AE) through presentations, simulation games, role play, and practical workshops can be used effectively to support experiential learning. Other modalities, such as location-based learning (Croy, 2009) and especially problem-based learning (Vygotsky, 1978; Paris, 2011) can be applied to business competitions, to help students enhance their employability by expanding their business knowledge, gaining work experience, and improving their abilities in problem solving and team work; students also may find that these experiences boost their motivation and build up their self-esteem, and encourage them to engage in life-long learning. And, not unimportantly, these experiences can be fun (Shah *et al*., 2015).

3.1.3 Knowledge in Food Tourism

Food is often an important aspect of rural tourism, as it allows the destination to express its own identity and affords tourists the opportunity to enjoy meaningful experiences, gaining in-depth knowledge about the local culture and cuisine (Bessière, 1998; Hjalager, 2003). Knowledge about food tourism is important for both tourists and tourism operators.

3.1.4 Knowledge in food tourism from the tourists' perspective

For tourists, food is a multifaceted cultural artefact to be enjoyed in many locations and through many activities such as food trails, events, festivals and visitor attractions (Everett & Aitchison, 2008). Hall & Sharples (2004, p. 10) defined food tourism as "*visitation to primary and secondary food producers, food festivals, restaurants and specific locations*," in order to experience a particular type of food or product of a specific region. Hall *et al.* (2004) considered food tourism as part of the local culture, "consumed" by tourists, an element of regional tourism promotion, a component of local agricultural and economic development, a key element to competitive destination marketing, an indicator of globalisation and localisation, and a product and service consumed by tourists with specific preferences and consumption patterns.

As Rinaldi (2017, p. 7) argued, "*food culture involves many different branding elements, including products (food and beverages), practices (eating and meals), the art and customs of preparing and eating (gastronomy), sensory elements (taste, smell, touch, visual), origins (organic food, ethical*

cuisine, locally produced food, etc.), preparation (ways of cooking), serving (fast food, slow food, street food, etc.) and the context in which food is served and consumed (restaurants, bars, markets, food quarters, streets, etc.)". According to Horng & Tsai (2012), in order to create a culinary tourism destination, it is necessary to identify the core resources and combine internal and external policies to support marketing strategies and to design products suitable to the target market, by creating a brand identity able to communicate the features and values of culinary tourism products. According to Richards (2002), tourists want to increase their cultural capital and consider gastronomy as a creative experience rather than just consumption. In this sense, food tourism belongs to the creative tourism sector and therefore specific knowledge and expertise are needed. Tourists are eager to learn about the ingredients used, the way they are grown, and how to cook them; they appreciate learning how culinary traditions have developed over time.

3.1.5 Knowledge in food tourism from the perspectives of tourism operators and students

Food tourism can influence the success of a destination in a competitive and rapidly changing tourism market. Local government assessors for tourism or rural development, tourism operators, local restaurants and hotels, as well as producers and sellers of local specialties must have the necessary food-related knowledge if they are to develop food tourism in their area. In addition, key elements for successful innovation and competition in this field are talent, knowledge retention and management skills (Hall *et al.*, 2004). Bertella (2011) analysed the role of knowledge in food tourism in agricultural and/or fishery areas and investigated several types of knowledge important for the development of food tourism in rural areas. These are:

- local food knowledge;
- scientific food knowledge;
- tourism knowledge;
- local managerial and political knowledge.

Food tourism can be boosted by the creation of networks among actors who detain different types of food knowledge in order to brand the destination.

In this context, education, training and research programmes may play an important role in regional development through food and tourism (Hall *et al.*, 2004). Specifically, hospitality education should include the study of gastronomy, in addition to management courses, to provide students with an understanding of the history, culture and traditions of the products and dishes of their own region or country (Santich, 2004). Furthermore, students should develop practical management skills, but also gain general understanding of various social science disciplines, and be equipped to manage the economic, social and cultural impacts of tourism on the residents of the host region.

3.1.6 Soft skills for employability in the tourism sector

The most accepted and shared definition of employability was articulated by Yorke & Knight (2004, p. 3), who described it as "*a set of achievements and skills, understandings and personal attributes helpful for graduates to gain employment and work successfully with a benefit for themselves, for the workforce, the community and the economy.*" Soft skills are "*desirable qualities for certain forms of employment that do not depend on acquired knowledge: they include common sense, the ability to deal with people, and a positive flexible attitude*"[12]. For the purposes of this study, soft skills are understood here as personality-specific skills related to one's character, attitudes and behaviour; they are intangible, non-technical and their application is not limited to one's profession. In addition, they are constantly developed in everyday life and the workplace. Soft skills can be transferred from one context to another (UNESCO-IBE, 2013), but can be also technical, as is the case, for example, with fluency in languages or expertise with computers.

Even if a universal set of transferrable and soft skills has not been agreed upon (Caballero *et al.*, 2011), some helpful reference frameworks have been developed: the European Union (2006) identified 8 key competences for lifelong learning and several relevant soft skills, as have some other international government agencies (Crawford *et al.*, 2011; the U.S. Department of Education[13]; the Australian Department of Education, 2002; Bacigalupo *et al.*, 2016). These are summarized in Table 6.

Table 6 - Key competences and soft skills: a comparison among international frameworks (our own summary)

European Union (2006) 8 Key competences for lifelong learning	1. Communication in the mother tongue; 2. Communication in foreign languages; 3. Mathematical competence and basic competences in science and technology; 4. Digital competence; 5. Learning to learn; 6. Social and civic competences; 7. Sense of initiative and entrepreneurship; 8. Cultural awareness and expression **Relevant soft skills:** communication; interpersonal and intercultural skills; problem solving; organisational skills; active participation; sense of initiative; creativity; emotional skills.		
Crawford *et al.* (2011) 7 Soft Skills Clusters for employability	1. Communication 2. Decision making/Problem Solving 3. Self-management 4. Teamwork 5. Professionalism 6. Experiences 7. Leadership		
ENTRECOMP (Bacigalupo *et al.*, 2016) 15 competences for entrepreneurship	Area 1 *Ideas and Opportunities* 1. Spotting opportunities 2. Creativity 3. Vision 4. Valuing ideas	Area 2 *Resources* 6. Self-awareness and self-efficacy 7. Motivation and perseverance 8. Mobilizing resources	Area 3 *Into action* 11. Taking the initiative 12. Planning and management 13. Coping with uncertainty, ambiguity and risk 14. Working with others 15. Learning through experience

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[12] https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/soft-skills (last retrieved: 30.09.2019)

[13] https://cte.ed.gov/initiatives/employability-skills-framework (last retrieved: 30.09.2019)

	5. Ethical and sustainable thinking	9. Financial and economic literacy 10. Mobilizing others			
US Employability Skills Framework (US-ESF website)	APPLIED KNOWLEDGE	*Applied Academic Skills* Reading Writing Math strategies/procedures Scientific principles/procedures	*Critical Thinking Skills* Think creatively Think critically Make sound decisions Solve problems Reasons Plan/organize		
	EFFECTIVE RELATIONSHIPS	*Interpersonal Skills* Understand teamwork and work with others Respond to customer needs Exercise leadership Negotiate to resolve conflict Respect individual differences	*Personal Qualities* Demonstrate responsibility and self-discipline Adapt and shows flexibility Work independently Demonstrate a willingness to learn Demonstrate professionalism Take initiative Display a positive attitude and sense of self-worth Take responsibility for professional growth		
	WORKPLACE SKILLS	*Resource Management* Manage time Manage money Manage resources Manage personnel	*Information Use* Locate Organize Use Analyse Communicate	*Communication Skills* Communicate verbally Listen actively Comprehend written material Convey information in writing Observe carefully · *Systems Thinking* Understand and use systems Monitor systems Improve systems	*Technology Use* Understand and use technology
Australian Employability Skills Framework (Employability for the future, 2002)	1. Communication 2. Teamwork 3. Problem Solving 4. Initiative and Enterprise 5. Planning and Organising 6. Self-Management 7. Technology 8. Learning				

Regarding employability in the hospitality sector, Baum (2002) called for curricula that develop skills in learning, communication, mathematics and IT, and teamwork, as well as competences in foods and beverages, and management.

Similarly, Johanson *et al*. (2010) indicated as important competences the basic functional areas of management, such as the ability to recruit, train, and motivate; financial skills, communication skills, and customer care, computer-related skills, and knowledge about workplace security and safety. They also included specific knowledge related to food preparation, such as ingredients, sauces and stocks, and basic culinary production processes.

As Ruhanen's (2006) case study showed, experiential approaches are useful learning tools for improving the employability of tourism and hospitality students. They can contribute to bridging the

gap between academic knowledge and the required practical knowledge and skills those in the workforce should have. They promote learning, interest and enthusiasm for the subject, work experience and industry practice. Lee (2008) reported that industry-based experiential learning enhanced the learning outcomes of hospitality students: it increased their understanding of how organizations work, helped them view their career expectations more realistically, developed their network of professional contacts, spurred their ability to take initiative, increased their ability to adapt to change, honed their leadership skills, and boosted their financial management skills. According to García-Rosell (2014), in order to work in and improve the tourism industry, tourism students should develop knowledge and competencies through problem-based learning (PBL) activities that stimulate critical approaches and reflexibility. Students should live and experience tourism and hospitality work rather than simply acquiring knowledge about it. Problem-based learning in tourism education allows students to develop skills like teamwork, creativity, problem solving and leadership and helps in developing the flexibility and adaptability needed to respond to the socio-technological changes affecting the tourism and hospitality industry.

3.2 Background context: The International Student Competition on Place Branding and the Mediterranean Diet

The week-long International Student Competition of Fermo (ISC) is a study-abroad programme based on the Mediterranean Diet brand. Established in 2016 by the Department of Education, Cultural Heritage and Tourism of the University of Macerata, in collaboration with The Piceno Laboratory on the Mediterranean Diet, a local network of public and private stakeholders committed to promoting the Fermo area as a touristic destination based on traditional gastronomy, it has attracted students from Italy and abroad every year since 2016 (http://www.laboratoriodietamediterranea.it/it/international-student-competition-2019).

The small rural hill town of Montegiorgio, near Fermo, 30 kilometers from the Adriatic Sea, was chosen to host the ISC because of its particular importance as a representative of the traditional Mediterranean diet and its link to longevity. In fact, since the town was marked by a high number of centenarians, and its traditional cuisine typical of the Mediterranean diet, a cohort of men from Montegiorgio was one of the sixteen enrolled in the long-term Seven Countries Study, conducted from 1958 to 1999, which compared data on heart and vascular disease with information on traditional eating patterns and lifestyles in the seven participating countries (USA, Finland, Italy, the Netherlands, Yugoslavia, Greece, and Japan).[14] Exploiting this claim to fame, local leaders chose to brand the Fermo area as the land of Mediterranean Diet in efforts to promote food tourism here. The

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[14] http://www.sevencountriesstudy.com/ (last retrieved: 23.11.2019)

Piceno Laboratory of the Mediterranean Diet played an important intermediary role among the local actors, linking the touristic offer to food, health and wellness, and engaging the support of the University of Macerata. One of the outcomes of this collaboration was the ISC, with the following objectives:

- for students: discovering connections between gastronomy, events and place branding; understanding the potential of food and gastronomy for a sustainable development; developing skills for destination management challenges; understanding the potential of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) for place branding activities; discovering Italian culture, lifestyle and gastronomy;

- for stakeholders and local actors: elaborating innovation and development paths to increase the international reputation of the destination, through an ICT-based real-time marketing of the territory (Cavicchi *et al.*, 2018).

The participants have come from universities in Italy, Norway, Belgium, Poland, Ukraine, Czech Republic and belong to different nationalities, and have different educational backgrounds (Tourism and Hospitality Management, Economics and Business Management, Agricultural Studies). In the following table (Table 7) an overview about numbers, universities and nationalities of participant students during the several editions organized is presented.

Table 7 - Data about participant students to the four editions of the ISC

University of origin	International students (of a different nationality than the host country's one)				Number of students per year			
	2016	**2017**	**2018**	**2019**	**2016**	**2017**	**2018**	**2019**
EPHEC Haute École Économique et Technique (Bruxelles- Belgium)						7	6	8
University of Łódź Marketing and Business (Łódź, Poland)	1 (Colombia)					2	1	
University of Poznań – University of Economics and Business (Poznań, Poland)					3			
Hogeschool PXL - Communication and Marketing (Hasselt- Belgium)	1 (Colombia)				7	5	11	2
VŠPJ College of Polytechnics Jihlava – Economics and Marketing (Jihlava- Czech Republic)	1 (Cambodia)				1			
HSN University College of Southeast Norway – Economics and Marketing (Norway)	1 (Iraq)				5			

University of Leicester – School of Business (Leicester - UK)			1 (Chile)				1	
Università Telematica San Raffaele - Nutritional Sciences (Rome, Italy)					2	4		5
University of Bologna – Department of Agrifood Sciences and Technologies (Bologna - Italy)						4		
Università Politecnica delle Marche – IT engineering (Ancona, Italy)								1
University of Macerata - International Tourism and Destination Management (Macerata, Italy)	1 (Ukraine)	6 (1 Russia, 2 India, 2 Ghana, 1 Ukraine)	4 (Ghana; Nigeria; Thailand; Russia)	2 (India; Ghana)	12	13	12	4
University of Macerata - Department of Economics and Law (Macerata, Italy)				4 (India; Azerbaijan; China; Russia)				4
Total					30	35	31	24

They attend seminars about Food & Wine Tourism led by researchers from Italy and abroad, set in ancient theatres and locations symbolic of the local cultural heritage. In addition, they attend cooking classes, visit local farms and have field trips, meet local producers and gain insights about food processes, local gastronomy traditions and culture. Participants are hosted in rural B&Bs and farmhouses, to offer them the opportunity to learn about local hospitality and become familiar with the landscape and its attractions.

Students worked in groups in close collaboration with local stakeholders to give them the opportunity to engage in real case studies. The participants in the first ISC in 2016 were asked to come up with an innovative idea to help the Piceno Laboratory of Mediterranean Diet elaborate a promotional strategy for the Fermo area using the Mediterranean Diet as a brand. The next year, participants were given two different assignments: 1) the application of the Business Model Canvas (Osterwalder & Pigneur, 2010) to two local firms, in order to implement promotional strategies based on their distinctive resources; and 2) the integration of the identified strategies within a sustainable tourism development plan for the area. In 2018, again, participants worked to elaborate a promotional strategy for the Fermo area using the Mediterranean Diet as a brand and in 2019, participants were asked to provide local stakeholders with a promotional video representing the characteristics of a gastronomic tourism experience in Fermo area.

Each year, students also helped promote the Fermo area by acting as "ambassadors," in a daily social media competition, sharing pictures and contents using official hashtags, the impact of which was

then analysed by staff at the Polytechnic University of the Marche in Ancona. Each day, the participant who had the greatest social media impact won a prize of local products. In doing all these activities, students "translated" theoretical ideas and tools into concrete plans for the local destination. Local students supported international students in the activities with local stakeholders. "Translation" also took the literal form, with Italian participants helping foreign participants communicate with local stakeholders.

3.3 Methodology

In order to investigate the learning outcomes of the ISC and, more specifically, what kind of knowledge and skills students might have developed through this experience, this study relied on the three data sources: first, a general questionnaire about motivation for participating, expectations for the event, and level of satisfaction with the event, administered to all the 2016 participants and some of the 2017 participants; second, follow up interviews with 13 of the 2017 students about knowledge gained and skills improved through the event; and third, information gleaned by the authors in the context of their various roles in planning, organising and running the ISC, during numerous informal conversations with students, teachers, tourism and hospitality entrepreneurs, and representatives of government agencies.

3.3.1 A preliminary assessment of the ISC experience

The goal of the first phase was to assess the motivations, expectations, and level of satisfaction of the students who participated in the ISC. They were asked to fill out a questionnaire organized on a 5-point Likert-type scale, by assigning values to affirmations such as "I wanted to meet other students interested in tourism," "I expected excellent lectures," "I feel that I have gained a good understanding of the job of local entrepreneurs/producers," "My participation in this competition is an important part of my total university experience," and "My satisfaction as a learning experience." Comparison among the means revealed that the Italian students appeared to be more interested in and satisfied with the learning experience related to food tourism, local traditions and culture than their colleagues from universities abroad. In fact, the majority of the respondents were students of the University of Macerata's Master's Program in International Tourism Destination Management, which includes the ISC as part of the second year of studies. They were familiar with the subjects addressed during the event, which were relevant to their education and preparation for future employment. On the basis of the questionnaire results, it was decided to undertake a second phase specifically with the University of Macerata students who had participated in the 2017 ISC, to gain more information about the outcomes in terms of knowledge and skills development.

3.3.2 Semi-structured interviews on learning outcomes of the ISC

The second phase employed a qualitative approach in which 13 open-ended questions were asked of these 7 young women and 6 young men, five from abroad (2 from India, 2 from Ghana, 1 from Russia), and the rest from Italy (3 from the Marche Region, 1 from Latium, 2 from Campania, 1 from Apulia, 1 from Sicily). Most of the 30-minutes interviews were conducted via Skype. Since the interviewer had participated in the ISC and knew the respondents personally, the interviews had an open and friendly tone and were marked by mutual trust. The students who could not Skype submitted their answers by email. The contents of the interview were elaborated following the frameworks of Bertella (2011) and Crawford *et al.* (2011), because they afford the opportunity to synthetize the characteristics of the other frameworks. Table 8 shows the soft skills clusters and related characteristics according to Crawford *et al.* (2011).

Table 8 - Soft skills clusters and descriptive characteristics (elaboration from Crawford et al., 2011)

Cluster	Descriptive characteristics	Relationship with other literature/frameworks
Communication skills	• Listen effectively • Communicate accurately and concisely • Effective oral communication • Communicate pleasantly and professionally • Effective written communication • Ask good questions • Communicate appropriately and professionally using social media	• Baum, 2002; • Johanson *et al.*, 2010;
Decision making	• Identify and analyse problems • Take effective and appropriate action • Realize the effect of decisions • Creative and innovative solutions • Transfer knowledge from one situation to another • Engage in lifelong learning • Think abstractly about problems	• Ruhanen's, 2006; • García-Rosell, 2014 • European Union, 2006
Self-management skills	• Efficient and effective work habits • Self-starting • Well-developed ethic, integrity and sense of loyalty • Sense of urgency to address and complete tasks • Work well under pressure • Adapt and apply appropriate technology • Dedication to continued professional development	• U.S. Department of Education • Australian Department of
Teamwork skills	• Productive as team member • Positive and encouraging attitude • Punctual and meets deadlines • Maintains accountability to the team • Work with multiple approaches • Aware and sensitive to diversity • Share ideas to multiple audiences	Education, 2002 • Bacigalupo *et al.*, 2016
Professionalism skills	• Effective relationships with customers, business and the public • Accept and apply critique and direction in the work place • Trustworthy with sensitive information • Understand role and realistic career expectations • Deal effectively with ambiguity • Maintain appropriate décor and demeanour • Select appropriate mentor and acceptance of advice	
Experiences	• Related work or internship experiences • Teamwork experiences • Leadership experiences • Project management experiences • Cross disciplinary experiences	

	• Community engagement experiences
	• International experiences
Leadership skills	• See the "big picture" and think strategically
	• Recognize when to lead and when to follow
	• Respect and acknowledge contribution from others
	• Recognize and deal constructively with conflict
	• Build professional relationships
	• Motivate and lead others
	• Recognise change is needed and lead the change effort

As mentioned in the literature review, Bertella (2011) identified some important kinds of knowledge in food tourism in agricultural and/or fishery areas: local and scientific food knowledge, tourism knowledge, and local and global managerial and political knowledge. Many scholars (Horng & Tsai, 2012; Baum, 2002; Johanson *et al.* 2010; Lee, 2008; Scarpato, 2002; Richards, 2002; Hjalager, 2002; Hall *et al.*, 2004; Santich, 2004) confirmed the importance of these competences, seen as essential in the perspective of regional branding and development of sustainable food tourism strategies. The interview was divided into different sections, as in the following Table 9.

Table 9 - Contents of the interview, developed on the basis of models in the literature (Bertella, 2010; Crawford et al., 2011)

**SECTION ABOUT LOCAL FOOD & WINE CULTURE**
1)	Which was your preliminary knowledge about food & wine tourism and about the territory visited, before the ISC?
2)	Do you think you learned something new during this experience? What?
3)	How do you think this kind of experiences related to local food culture (meeting producers and entrepreneurs, attending cooking classes and tasting sessions, seminars about food production processes, history and traditions related to food, etc.), you had the opportunity to attend to during the ISC, helped you in developing some knowledge about the territory and local food traditions?
4)	Do you think that this experience is useful for your future job in this context? Explain your answer?
	SECTION ABOUT LOCAL MANAGERIAL AND POLITICAL KNOWLEDGE
5)	During the ISC you met a lot of local public and private stakeholders and you had the opportunity to study specific case studies. Do you think it helped you in developing knowledge about socio-cultural aspects related to the territory and specifically about collaborative realities and networks?
6)	Do you think that after this experience you would be able to work with these realities for local development related to food & wine tourism? Explain your answer.
	SECTION ABOUT FOOD & WINE TOURISM KNOWLEDGE
7)	Do you think that the seminars about food & wine tourism you had the opportunity to attend to helped you in developing knowledge and perspectives in conceiving tourism as an experience that aims to give value and promote a destination and its local resources? If yes, in your opinion which are the most useful aspects that can be useful for getting a job in this context?
	SECTION ABOUT COMMUNICATION SKILLS
8)	Do you think that the ISC experience contributed to the development of communication skills (listen effectively, communicate accurately, concisely and professionally, effective oral communication, communicate appropriately and professionally using social media) that can be useful for your future job, specifically in food & wine tourism context? If yes, how do you think it happened and which skills you think you have gained?
	SECTION ABOUT PROBLEM SOLVING/DECISION MAKING SKILLS
9)	During the ISC, divided into groups, you had to work to a specific case study to solve. In which way, this working method based on a specific problem related to a local reality helped you in developing skills like: identifying and analysing problems, elaborating decision processes, identifying creative and innovative solutions, applying decisions to reality? What did you learn? Do you think that the knowledge you gained in this context could be adapted to another situation or to a similar case? Explain your answer.
	SECTION ABOUT TEAM WORK/LEADERSHIP

10)	Which role did you play inside your team during the ISC? While answering take into consideration these aspects: leadership, level of involvement and productivity as a team member, positive and encouraging behaviour, openness to sharing ideas, multiple working methods.
11)	In which way did you interact with other group members belonging to different cultures?
SECTION ABOUT SELF-MANAGEMENT	
12)	The team had to provide a final presentation with an original proposal that you had to prepare in a short time. How did you face the fact of working under pressure?
SECTION ABOUT EXPERIENCE	
13)	How an experience like the ISC (a group experience that is transdisciplinary and involves local communities) can contribute to develop knowledge and skills useful to a future job in the food & wine tourism context?

The interviews were recorded and transcribed, and content analysis based on theoretically derived codes was conducted.

3.3.3 Action research

Following an action research approach (Gilmore & Carson, 1996) the authors involved in different roles in the planning, organisation and training at the ISC, through their direct experience and conversations with the students and local stakeholders had the opportunity to collect data. A participant observation approach (Jorgensen, 2015) was applied, to note and interpret the physical and social context and the interactions among the participants.

3.4 Findings

The data collected showed that most of the students had little previous knowledge about the Fermo area and its local gastronomy and food tourism. Only those who had an educational background related to tourism management were more aware of these topics, mainly students from the Marche Region, who also had a broader knowledge of the area and the local gastronomy.

3.4.1 Knowledge and soft skills acquired during the ISC experience

Respondents deemed that the ISC experience had helped them gain knowledge and develop soft skills through direct contact with the local context and dialogue with local stakeholders, as well as through the seminars and the experiential learning activities held. Some themes emerged from the interviews.

3.4.1.1 Understanding of the area

More in general, students affirmed that during the ISC they learned about local food & wine, local management and politics, and food tourism.

The most evident aspect was the acquisition of general understanding of the area in terms of:

- in-depth knowledge about local food production and local, small food-related firms;
- awareness about the relationship between the land and food authenticity;

- the importance of considering food as a resource for local development (above all, after the 2016 earthquakes which hit the area);
- potential future work opportunities for students in the food tourism field in that area.

Two indicative statements were:

> "I had the opportunity to meet large and small local businesses, to learn first-hand their potential, their weaknesses and their unique features".

> "The ISC allowed me to explore the untouched beauty of the Fermo territory and to taste the local food and experience the richness of the Mediterranean Diet."

By achieving a more complete understanding of the area, participants could understand the specific context, analyse problems and needs, gain awareness about the objectives of the Piceno Laboratory on Mediterranean Diet, get closer to local businesses and understand how to plan promotional initiatives to brand them. The respondents could observe the commitment of local producers to guarantee quality products, see their passion for their jobs, and recognise the importance of local food for tourism.

The seminars on food tourism held by professors from different countries and the experiential learning activities (meetings with producers and entrepreneurs, cooking classes and tasting sessions, seminars about food production processes, history and traditions related to food, etc.), supported students in improving their knowledge of the local context. However, they need to pursue further knowledge about the fundamentals of food tourism, to be better equipped to promote local development through food tourism.

3.4.1.2 The dialogue with local stakeholders as a means for knowledge acquisition

Most respondents said they developed their knowledge about the territory and local food traditions through direct connection with local stakeholders. Through meetings and farm visits, they gained awareness of the context in which people work, the issues they face, the way they try to market themselves, and the processes implemented to create quality products, whether they were small family-owned firms or SMEs that also work as "ambassadors" of area. One of the respondents said that he understood why local people were passionate about and proud of their traditions and felt they should express these sentiments in their promotional activities.

Students also highlighted how this experience supported them in acquiring knowledge about the local socio-cultural structure and networking.

"It was a great experience to meet the stakeholders; it helped us understand how the tourism industry works, especially throughout the territory. It gave me a clear picture of the practical network of the significant stakeholders."

3.4.1.3 Experiential learning as a means for knowledge acquisition

The acquisition of knowledge about the territory and local food traditions was also related to the learning methods proposed during the ISC, such as experiential learning and problem-based learning, including field visits, cooking lessons, workshops, and teamwork activities.

Seminars were helpful, but experiential learning activities appeared to be more effective in the students' learning, as they provided first-hand experiences involving all the participants' senses, as indicated in these observations:

"[…] talking to producers, taking part in cooking classes and tasting the delicious local cuisine got me to live Le Marche region as I could have never done otherwise…";

"Apparently, the best way to learn something is to experience it, see, touch and taste it. It's a much more effective way of learning than reading theory, so ISC gave me a very profound and practical insight about local food and wine culture and cooking and sharing food traditions."

3.4.1.4 Seminars as a means for learning about food tourism and developing soft skills

Respondents indicated that the seminars held by international professors helped them gain technical knowledge about place branding and food tourism. Just like a puzzle, some said, this kind of activity provided all the pieces to have a complete overview of the food tourism topic related to the territory investigated. In their opinion, the main competition was a useful way to build upon the theoretical foundation through a hands-on approach; they also valued the aspect of working in teams to develop a real case study for the local area. Marketing, the use of social media as a promotional tool, and gastronomy as a brand and a tourism driver were considered the most interesting topics.

"Yes, the Place Branding, Cultural Heritage Management courses and the International Seminars gave me a quite comprehensive overview of what a tourist product should be. It was certainly useful because it helped me gain a new perspective and made me learn about innovative and unusual approaches, mainly presented during the seminars that week."

Students felt that they improved their ability to listen as well as their skills in public speaking during the seminars. Some of them appreciated the technical knowledge gained and the food tourism-related terminology learned throughout the event, which they could later use in their final presentations. The seminar about the use of social media for promotional aims was particularly appreciated. It helped hone their communication skills in terms of effective and professional communication.

3.4.1.5 Networking as a means for soft skills acquisition

During the week, participant students had the opportunity for networking with local stakeholders, their team members, the other participants, and their professors. They perceived to have gained several soft skills, especially through the dialogue with local stakeholders and through team work. An overview of these skills is provided in table 10.

Table 10 - The role of networking for soft-skills development (own elaboration)

NETWORKING WITH LOCAL STAKEHOLDERS		NETWORKING THROUGH TEAM WORKING	
Perceived skill acquisition		Perceived skill acquisition	
Communication skills	**Related quotes**	**Problem analysis/Decision making process**	**Related quotes**
interpersonal communication	"Sure, it gave us a practical insight into the real life and problems faced by entrepreneurs; how the situation could be improved. It helped us understand the roots of those problems and gain an overall impression of the SMEs' activity in the region, their advantages and what they lack."	brain-storming	"It's an adventure: you have to match the need to find something meaningful for your final work and meet the deadline at the same time. Brain-storming happens very fast."
effective listening		sharing of ideas	
technical language development		problem solving	
communication in English		collaborative and supportive approach	
public speaking		work in a multicultural context	"It allows you to have a direct contact with reality. It opens your mind because it gives you the opportunity to work in a multicultural context with people who have different backgrounds and compare your approach to the same experience with that of others. It is an opportunity to work on real case studies with a multidisciplinary knowledge you need to apply to the context. It's useful, from a future career point of view, thanks to the contact with several stakeholders and to the international and multicultural context in which participants are involved."
Problem solving/Decision making skills	"We learned the inner workings of the private and public stakeholders that helped us analyse them in the most practical way. It can absolutely be adapted to a similar territory; ideas and situations were learned, and the positive points can definitely be shared and developed."		
analysis of real issues affecting the territory			
proposal of suitable solutions		**Working under pressure and to meet a deadline**	
		Need for more time to work on the assignment	

3.5 Discussion

The findings of this study suggest that educational tourism experiences based on experiential learning and problem-based learning approaches (Dewey, 1938; Boydell, 1976; Kolb, 1984; Vygotsky, 1978; Paris, 2011) enable students to gain employability skills, business knowledge and work experience (Shah *et al.*, 2015). During the ISC, students learned about critical approaches and the reflexibility useful in the tourism industry, through the application of problem-based learning (García-Rosell, 2014). In line with Stone & Petrick (2013), the ISC can therefore be defined as a short study-abroad programme as well as an educational touristic experience. Students had opportunities for personal and professional growth through travel, experience, learning about the gastronomic culture of the Fermo area and its efforts to promote food tourism, and also enhanced their fluency in English, the official language of the event.

With regard to employability, students perceived to have gained:

1. Understanding of the territory: the dialogue with local stakeholders and the experiential learning activities offered students an overview of the socio-cultural and economic processes regulating the territory. Local networks embody local managerial and political knowledge and play a role in providing quality and coherence to the services and products offered (Bertella, 2011). These experiences may help students to start working at a local level for local development and place branding by identifying challenges and needs and by finding innovative and feasible solutions. However, they also acknowledged they may need to improve their knowledge about place branding and food tourism management.

2. Practical knowledge about local food, place branding and food tourism: according to Bertella (2011), food-related knowledge is one of the most important assets to promote and give value to a destination, and food tourism is a key element for destination development, local promotion and the valorisation of local resources. Technical knowledge about place branding and food tourism is essential to regional development in the food and tourism area, according to Hall *et al.* (2004). One of the main characteristics of the ISC is to link theoretical knowledge about place branding and food tourism to the practical experience gained through the experiential learning activities proposed. Participants gained practical insight into the field by attending seminars, visiting farms, sharing information with local stakeholders, and taking part in cooking classes and tasting sessions. This was also highlighted by students during the conversations with the authors. During the presentations of the final projects on the last day of the competition, the authors observed that the teams of students applied the knowledge acquired to a suitable proposal for the firms involved through the use of the tools provided (business model canvas).

3. Soft skills for employability. Students gave particular importance to the following soft skills:

   A. communication skills; the students noted that during the ISC experience, they improved their skills in listening and speaking effectively, formulating good questions and communicating appropriately and professionally using social media. In particular, all week the students communicated and interacted with people with whom they may not normally relate, such as students and professors from other countries, local farmers and business people, and government functionaries, for example. Similarly, the teams presented their final project for the competition to a heterogeneous audience of these people.

   B. problem solving and decision making skills: the dialogue with local stakeholders and the brainstorming with the other members of the team helped the students develop some of the abilities embedded in decision making (Crawford, 2011), namely, identifying and analysing problems; transferring knowledge from one situation to another; proposing creative and innovative solutions; taking effective and appropriate action; and assessing the effect of a solution. The multicultural context of the mixed teams contributed to the development of several points of view useful for interpreting different situations and increasing the shared knowledge. Furthermore, all respondents said that it was possible to adapt the solutions they found to other contexts by applying several tools presented during the ISC. The problem-based learning approach showed them specific issues affecting the Fermo area. Rural areas often share similar problems and need similar solutions, which nonetheless need to be adjusted to each case.

   C. self-management and teamwork skills: students noted that working well under pressure (self-management) was a challenge but also a limitation and felt they would have benefitted from more time to do the final project (Crawford *et al.*, 2011). Self-management also has to do with efficient and effective work habits and a sense of urgency to complete tasks. These aspects had to be extended to the whole team, as the competition was based on teamwork. Regarding the characteristics of teamwork skills (Crawford *et al.*, 2011), students particularly highlighted their positive and encouraging attitudes and their productive approaches as well as the sensitivity to diversity, as the teams were multicultural.

Even if the respondents did not explicitly name them, some other skills related to the experience (Crawford *et al.*, 2001) emerged from the interviews: project management experiences; cross disciplinary experiences; community engagement experiences; international experiences. Similarly, students highlighted some of the leadership and professionalism skills outlined by the author. During

the teamwork activity they practiced skills related to respect for others and acknowledgement of their contributions, as well as dealing constructively with conflicts, a key aspect of leadership. The authors present at the event observed that student networking with local stakeholders and professors led to effective relationships with "customers, business and the public." Similarly, students practiced behaviour appropriate to the settings, accepted advice, gained greater understanding of their own role and refined their career expectations to be more realistic, all of which are professionalism skills.

While the ISC seems to have contributed to the students' knowledge and soft skills development, the findings showed the need for follow-up activities that can bring together local stakeholders and students in order to expand the knowledge and experience gained during the ISC.

3.6 Conclusions

This study explored how and to what extent food-related educational events may contribute to provide students with the knowledge, expertise and soft skills needed for employability in the food tourism careers.

It focused on student experiences at the week-long ISC event, arranged by the University of Macerata (Italy), an educational programme that facilitated the co-creation of food tourism knowledge by bringing together local stakeholders and students. Students worked at a local level to accomplish their competition assignment and learn about the reality of the Fermo area, gaining understanding of the context in which they would have to intervene. They perceived to have developed useful skills and knowledge for employability through their work on real cases in a multicultural context. Locals benefitted from the students' competition projects, which offered creative contributions for promotional activities and place branding that could be implemented to promote tourism in the area. Having participated in all the planned activities, the students felt they had gained a general understanding of the territory and practical knowledge about place branding and food tourism; in addition, they thought they had improved their soft skills in communication, problem solving and decision making, all of which are useful for enhancing their employability. They valued the opportunity to exchange knowledge, share ideas and work in a multicultural environment. All these learning outcomes can be adapted to other situations and can be useful in the workplace.

On the basis of student questionnaires and interviews, as well as conversations with local stakeholders, it emerged that the ISC event offers students a good opportunity to gain sector-related knowledge and skills. More in general, this kind of event linking academics and local stakeholders, education and tourism, and experiential and formal learning has potential for both students and people working for local development.

Even so, a need was noted for further follow-up events, to provide more experience and theoretical knowledge. More opportunities could be created to work at the local level, strengthening the connection between students and local stakeholders, perhaps through internships and students-led initiatives at the local level.

Some limitations also emerged from the study. First, the interviews were conducted only with 13 University of Macerata students of the 2017 ISC. Further research including the students from the other universities abroad could provide a broader perspective. Moreover, while the authors gleaned interesting input from the stakeholders during informal conversations, future, more structured work to encompass their perspective could prove useful. Finally, further research could be conducted to assess what or how much the local stakeholders learned, and whether the ISC provides a beneficial setting for knowledge exchange that can foster successful place branding and enhance the development of local food tourism.

CHAPTER 4
Community-Based Tourism engagement and wellbeing from a learning perspective

4. Introduction

This study explores engagement in rural tourism and in particular with reference to wellbeing. Its aim is twofold: on the one hand, this study aims to encourage a reflection on whether it is fruitful to adopt an experiential social learning perspective to explore the aforementioned phenomenon, taking a practice-based approach to tourism as a starting point. On the other hand, it aims to explore how tourism engagement in rural experiences can be relevant to the wellbeing of the individuals involved (tourists, tourism providers, members of host communities).

Tourism is understood as a place-based practice, where the term 'practice' refers to the process through which people engage, both individually and socially, with the world, do things and reflect on them (Crouch, 1999; 2002). The tourism practice is place-based as the destination is a central component: it does not only provide the context for tourism, but it also becomes experience. Moreover, tourism is viewed as a multidimensional practice that develops along the tourists' cognitive, emotional and bodily dimensions (Crouch, 2000).

With this underlying conceptualization of tourism, the aim of the study is to investigate engagement in rural experiences and its potential relevance in terms of wellbeing. Some previous studies already highlighted the reciprocal value of tourism experiences, especially in the case of rural destinations, thus making the case for tourists as well as providers and local community members to be included in the study of such phenomenon (Bimonte & Punzo, 2016; Kastenholz *et al*., 2013; Sherlock, 2001). The main idea is that in order to frame tourism in terms of sustainability it is important to focus on the experiential benefits both tourists and host communities may obtain (Bertella *et al*., 2018; Tasci & Severt, 2011). Such benefits may result from the host-guest interactions and might contribute to social groups as the ones described by Rihova *et al.,* (2013). Social groups as described above can vary according to inclusivity (for example, when considering tourists only as the "detached customers" group) and temporality (for example being limited to the duration of the experiences as the "temporary communitas").

One of the benefits principally taken into consideration by this study is wellbeing, which also allows a holistic approach to be considered in the experiential value that goes beyond the aesthetic, entertainment, educational and escapist realms identified by Pine & Gilmore (1998) and broadly adopted in the literature. The focus on wellbeing helps to include and explore the potential transformative aspect of experiences, identified by Pine & Gilmore (2013). Therefore, the concept of wellbeing as defined in the study embraces the fundamental dimensions of human experiences, that

is the hedonic and eudaimonic dimensions. Whilst hedonic wellbeing refers to immediate pleasure, eudaimonic wellbeing refers to personal growth and the perception of meaningfulness in relation to oneself and to others (Ryan & Deci, 2001). It can be noted that these concepts are strictly related to each other, as immediate pleasure can be experienced as the result of doing a meaningful thing and also in relation to the sense of belonging to an ideal community (Henderson & Knight, 2012; Waterman, 2008).

While previous studies about tourism engagement adopted a marketing perspective (Bryce *et al.*, 2015; Taheri, *et al.*, 2014), this study wants to adopt an approach based on experiential, social-learning theories, taking into consideration the close relation between tourism and learning. Furthermore, such an approach can be useful to uncover processes and factors potentially relevant to wellbeing. From this point of view, eudaimonic wellbeing related to learning as a process of individual and collective identity development, as identified in social learning theories, might be particularly relevant.

The theoretical approach of this study is thus based on scholarly contributions related to educational tourism and on central ideas from the practice-based and transformative learning literature. The abovementioned perspectives are presented in the next section, following an introduction to the concept of tourism engagement. The theoretical framework of the study is then summarized in the next section. The third section describes the method applied to investigate a case study including rural experiences related to one event in the Italian region of Marche. The main findings of the case study are presented in the 4th section and discussed in the following one. Finally, conclusions are drawn, highlighting the contributions and limitations of our work.

4.1 Theoretical focus and perspective

4.1.1 Tourism engagement

The concept of tourism engagement is strictly related to the concept of customer engagement, broadly discussed in marketing literature along with other concepts such as involvement, commitment, trust, participation and loyalty (Brodie *et al.*, 2011; Jaakkola & Alexander, 2014; Pansari & Kunar, 2016). The definition by Brodie *et al.* (2011) describes customer engagement as interactive and dynamic experiences that occur through relationships with a focal agent or object and develop along the cognitive, emotional and behavioural dimensions. We see this closely related to the benefits claimed in this volume for actively developing CBT.

Engagement is therefore context-determined and as the attention is limited to the case of community-based forms of tourism some scholars describe tourism engagement as a state of being involved with

and committed to a specific tourism offer/provider/destination and the related cultures and values (Bryce *et al.*, 2015; Taheri *et al*., 2014).

4.1.2 Tourism and learning

An emblematic expression of the connection between travel and learning can be found in Dante's Divine Comedy, where Ulysses reflects on his journey and tells his crewmates: "Consider well the seed that gave you birth: you were not made to live your lives as brutes, but to be followers of worth and knowledge". This expression shows that the idea of travelling as an opportunity to learn is rooted in our perception of tourism. A good example is the Grand Tour that used to be undertaken by rich or aristocratic European young men as an important part of their education (Towner, 1985). We have yet to see if these meritorious concepts apply systematically at community level.

The learning component is still a central element in some types of modern travelling. It is the case of educational tourism, which can be described in a broad way as including any type of travel where learning can be viewed as the primary motivator to travel and which occurs both formally and informally especially where those experiences are community-based and link in to the planning and development processes (Ritchie *et al*., 2003). Examples can be study tours, school and university tourism, ecotourism, and cultural tourism.

Research about tourism as a learning experience is a relatively new field of study (Falk *et al.*, 2012; McGladdery & Lubbe, 2017; Pitman *et al*., 2010; Stone & Petrick, 2013), which adds to the concept of learning understood exclusively as an organized and mainly cognitive activity. Several outcomes and benefits come from this perspective on travel, such as increase of factual knowledge, problem-solving skills, self-confidence, adaptability, cross-cultural competence and attitude change (Stone & Petrick, 2013). We would note that this learning can be a two-way activity as communities themselves also benefit from these increases in external capabilities as well.

Richards (2011) argues that educational tourism, such as ecotourism, cultural tourism and agri-tourism, can actually be related to transformative experiences, when also making reference to the revisited framework about experience value by Pine & Gilmore (2013). In the original framework by Pine & Gilmore, education is viewed as one of the four realms of experiences, along with entertainment, escapism and the aesthetic. More recently, education seen as learning and personal growth has been included in the study of experience economy, as described by the authors, and transformation is viewed as the ultimate state of being, more precisely the last developmental phase of value (Mehmetoglu & Engen, 2011; Pine & Gilmore, 2013). Transformative experiences are also widely commented on by Falk *et al.* (2012). Falk *et al*. describe learning in tourism as a context-dependent, highly individual, cumulative and life-long process of constructing meaning. The authors observe that learning through travel can be deliberate, premeditated, incidental and unintentional and

can include skills and knowledge as well as practical wisdom. The latter refers to reflexivity about our actions in the specific context and in line with our beliefs about right and wrong.

4.1.3 A practice-based approach to learning and transformative experiences

As mentioned in the Introduction, this study adopts a practice-based approach and explores tourism engagement and wellbeing from an experiential and social learning perspective in a community-based context.

This practice-based approach has been developed on the position by educationists Etienne Wenger and Jean Lave, according to whom learning is a practice of participation in social activities, through which we develop our own identity as individuals and members of one or more groups or communities (Lave & Wenger, 1991). As stated by Wenger (2000: 225), "knowing is an act of participation in complex social learning systems". Lave & Wenger (1991) use the term 'engagement' to refer to participation to social activities, which includes doing things (e.g. engaging in physical activities) as well as communicating (e.g. engaging in conversations). Engagement can vary among the group members, with some taking on more central roles in the communities compared to others. The latter therefore have a peripheral position in the social group, still engaging in participation of being a group member and, perhaps, becoming a more central member afterwards. Moreover, engagement and, consequently, learning are viewed as influenced by and at the same time influencing the context. Learning can thus be described as a situated or located practice.

According to such a concept of learning, engagement has to be accompanied by the process of reification, i.e. the production of tools, words, documents and stories in order to be effective. These artefacts are essential to the alignment of the specific practice towards a shared goal within the specific context (Wenger, 2000) and can be effectively developed in the processes of management and governance.

In addition to participation, communication, reification and alignment, three more elements are central to this concept of learning: imagination, reflection and identity. Imagination is about "creating images of the world and seeing connections through time and space by extrapolating from our own experience" (Wenger, 1998: 173). Imagination refers to the process through which we construct images of the world in order to reflect on our possible position in it. Along with reflection, imagination is relevant to identity development within communities. Ultimately, the practice-based approach adopted regards learning and the above-mentioned relevant processes as a "vehicle(s) for the development and transformation of identities" affecting individuals as well as the members of social groups (Lave & Wenger, 1991:13).

Some of the elements of this practice-based approach to learning can be found in experiential and transformative learning literature. Experiential learning refers to learning through personal

experiences that combine perception, cognition and behaviour (Kolb, 1984). Reflection over experiences, while they occur and after they have occurred, is a key component for learning (Dewey, 1938; Kolb, 1984) long recognised in communities. The adoption of the concept of transformative learning allows some scholars to make a step forward: transformative learning becomes a sort of deep learning through which our assumptions are revisited, so that a shift in our worldview occurs with changes in the cognitive, affective and spiritual perspective on ourselves and the rest of the world (O'Sullivan, 2002). Transformative learning experiences can be related to the aforementioned practical wisdom and the eudaimonic aspect of wellbeing, when such a shift in worldview is perceived as contributing to our self-realization.

Some scholars suggest that travel experiences can potentially contribute to transformations affecting not only the travellers but also the hosts (Coghlan & Gooch, 2011; Morgan, 2010; Stone & Petrick, 2013). Moreover, transformative learning in tourism experiences has been commented on also in terms of global citizenship, with some authors highlighting the possibility that knowledge and first-hand experience could contribute to promote compassion and, ultimately, global peace (McGladdery & Lubbe, 2017) through notions of active citizenship within local communities.

As the practice-based approach to learning identifies processes relevant to learning, the transformative learning literature describes the possible steps towards transformation. Those are summarized by Coghlan & Gooch (2011) in five core elements: prerequisite and context, dilemmas and confusion, dialogue and reflection, self-realization and reintegration in society. According to this position, transformative learning can be favoured by the context, such as in some of the cases of volunteer tourism investigated by Coghlan & Gooch (2011), and the cases commented on by Richards (2011) and mentioned above, i.e. eco-tourism, cultural tourism and agri-tourism where there are close links to values and identities of the communities. Again, according to Coghlan & Gooch (2011), transformative learning depends on some prerequisites and, more precisely, originate from the search by individuals for alternative frames of reference that can contribute to solve possible personal dilemmas and confusion. Transformative learning therefore occurs when new frames of reference are created through active dialogue and purposeful reflection and become part of the renewed individual. In their framework, Coghlan & Gooch (2011) use the term 'engagement' in a limited way referring to the cognitive processes relevant to learning; more precisely it includes learning through readings, lecture, discussion and critical thinking.

4.1.4 Conceptual model of tourism engagement from a learning perspective

The term 'engagement' is used in both the practice-based learning theory by Lave & Wenger (1991) and the tourism study about transformative experiences by Coghlan & Gooch (2011). In the first case, it refers to participation to social activities; in the second case, it exclusively concerns cognitive

processes. Despite their limitations, these scholarly contributions show some important insights in the relevant processes and can be useful to revisit the definition of 'engagement' as derived from the tourism literature mentioned at the beginning of this section. Tourism engagement can be therefore qualified as a located social practice of involvement with and commitment to a specific tourism offer/provider/destination/community culture. The terms 'involvement' and 'commitment' are described through the processes identified in the learning theories presented in the previous section, and in particular those by Lave & Wenger (1991). Involvement and commitment are about:

- Participation in activities,
- communication,
- reflection,
- reification,
- imagination, and
- alignment.

With the aim of understanding how tourism engagement can be related to the wellbeing of the tourists, the providers and the members of host communities, the aforementioned processes are explored with reference to their relation to hedonic and eudaimonic wellbeing. Whilst the first type of wellbeing (hedonic) is understood as pleasure, including sensual gratification and entertainment, the second type of wellbeing (eudaimonic) is viewed as a search for alternative and more satisfying frames of reference, as suggested by Coghlan & Gooch (2011). With regard to the latter, possible dilemmas and confusion can be the cognitive and emotional triggers for engagement, leading to a search for meaningful experiences that can contribute to self-development, in particular when they become part of the everyday life once tourists are back home.

4.2 Background context

This research outlines a case study about a tourism initiative, more precisely a rural event, organized by a community association, *Agritur-Aso*, founded in 2007 by the owners of six rural accommodation facilities and farms in Valdaso, a valley between the provinces of Fermo and Ascoli (Marche region). The area is characterised by picturesque landscapes with small medieval hill towns, strong culinary traditions and many typical local products.

According to the association's website (http://www.agritur-aso.it/), the aim of *Agritur-Aso* is to create projects to promote a better quality of life in the local communities based on solidarity and sustainable tourism. *Agritur-Aso* promotes the collaboration between several local stakeholders who operate in rural tourism offering different kinds of gastronomic products, hospitality services in addition to

environmental education (Bertella & Cavicchi, 2018). One of their projects is called *Marche in Valigia* (literally: *Marche in your suitcase*), whose aim is to promote the mobility of members such as owners of agrifood facilities, local farmers, and micro-entrepreneurs in the arts and crafts manufacturing sectors. They often organize cultural meetings abroad during the tourism low season, without any economic support from local governments. As explained in Bertella & Cavicchi (2018), the trigger for those meetings is often an invitation by those who travelled to Italy and are keen to share with friends and relatives their holiday experiences and participations in events and festivals in rural areas.

The local tourism initiatives by *Agritur-Aso* are experiences based on a combination of experiential tourism (Sundbo & Sørensen, 2013), relational tourism (Grolleau, 1987), and community-based tourism (Okazaki, 2008) perspectives. From the perspective of the organizers, the aim is to revitalize abandoned places and increase local community's commitment to actively face the problems and challenges of promoting the value of a place.

4.3 Methodology

The case study presented in the paper is the *Lavandaso* event organized by the aforementioned association *Agritur-Aso*. The case is investigated by applying an ethnographic approach that offered the opportunity to study *Lavandaso* organizers, residents and tourists participating in their natural setting, using the twin methods of participant observation and in-depth interviews (Brown, 2009; Fetterman, 1998). Furthermore, desk research of newspaper articles and posts from blogs and social media allowed data triangulation to be carried out.

4.3.1 Participant observation

In June 2017, a member of our research team volunteered at *Lavandaso*, together with tourists, members of the local community and international students hosted at the local University. As a PhD student, she helped local organizers to share information and coordinate activities about the event. In her role as a complete participant (Gold, 1958), she was a member of the group being studied. However, as lack in objectivity could be regarded as one of the disadvantages of her role, the participant observation was supported by in-depth interviews.

4.3.2 In-depth interviews

An interpretative narrative approach was adopted to collect additional primary data through 14 interviews. The sample included different targets depending on the role people played during the event: 4 organizers, who designed and managed the event; 4 collaborative participants, who helped to organize the event before and during it; 4 volunteers (3 students and 1 external), who took part in

the event and had an active role (speakers, activity providers, etc.); 2 tourists.

The interview conducted consists of 21 open-ended questions divided into 5 sections. The starting section is about the background of the interviewees, with the aim of collecting biographical info and asking them to introduce themselves and talk about daily life, work and free time and motivations/expectations derived from taking part in the event. The second section is about engagement and explores several aspects such as participation to activities, social engagement, place-based practice (these questions were asked only to those participants who did not come from Marche or who do not live near the destination). The last section sums up the interview and highlights memories and feelings about the event and the personal impact it may have had on the interviewee.

The interview guide aimed to analyse two main aspects related to the event: Involvement and Commitment, and Wellbeing. The analysis focused on participation to activities, communication, reflection, reification, imagination, and alignment. The presence of these aspects in the interview guide was highlighted by using them as categories and subcategories to be further interpreted in findings and discussion.

In addition, 2 more participants were asked to describe their experience by writing down their memories and feelings using the "photo elicitation technique" (Andersson *et al.*, 2016). They were sent three photos referring to different moments of the event: the first one showed a group of people harvesting lavender in the field, a reference to the social aspect of the event; the second one showed hands on a table preparing lavender decorations, a reference to the participation to activities; the last one showed a glimpse of the setting of the event and it refers to the place-based practice and the engagement with the destination. The interpretation of those texts followed the same method of the questionnaire analysis.

4.3.3 Desk research

Secondary data, such as newspaper articles and posts from blogs and social media provided by event participants, were collected. In particular, articles from local online newspapers such as www.cronachefermane.it and www.viverefermo.it, the Facebook pages of the *Lavandaso* event, other local NGOs and the incoming facilities linked with the project were included in the analysis. The findings of the case study are presented in the following chapter and then discussed adopting the concepts identified as relevant previously.

4.4 Findings

When fieldwork was carried out, in Spring 2017, the *Lavandaso* event celebrated its 7th edition. The event is a festival about the production and the uses of lavender. It is a touring event: the first three editions were set in an ancient, abandoned castle in the rural area of Marche, the following two

editions took place in an old mill and, in the last two years, the setting has been a small rural village where few people still live (only 3 in the historical centre). The philosophy of the event is to revitalize those places, promoting local producers and a natural and rural lifestyle. Every year, around 600 tourists from the nearby area and farther afield and some foreigners visit the event.

The *Lavandaso* event is anticipated by some pre-event activities for organizers and volunteers. For example, lavender harvest, the preparation of the decorations for the event and the preparation and consumption of meals together are regarded as very important activities. During the event, other activities include art exhibitions, painting contests, classical music concerts hosted in cultural sites, a street market to sell natural and handmade products, hands-on workshops, and an open meeting focused on the discussion of local development goals, opportunities and challenges.

Adopting the framework outlined, the event-related processes that were particularly relevant to hedonic and eudaimonic wellbeing are described in the following sections and then commented.

4.4.1 Engagement and hedonic wellbeing

In the interviews, interviewees commented the participation to the events always talking about common activities. These are often described referring to the pleasure of meeting people, new and already known, and the interaction with them. With regard to the *Lavandaso* event, some of the tourists did not know the organizers or the other tourists, while others had already met someone before the event. With regard to organizers, some of them had a larger network of contacts compared to others, which often included close connections. The pleasure of meeting and spending time with people clearly emerge from the data collected. For example, a tourist, who had been invited by a local student volunteering at the *Lavandaso*, said that the event gave him the opportunity to meet "some very friendly and exquisite people, both Italians and foreigners". The organizers and the volunteer students had met some of the event participants beforehand. According to one interviewee, this is a positive element as she felt "among friends" from the beginning, a feeling that was shared by several people who were involved in casual conversations during the observation of both events.

One of the organizers commented about the "fantastic people" she had the pleasure to work with, and in particular referring to their willingness to help and create the event together with them. This can be related to the process of alignment, that is enthusiastic individuals directing their efforts toward a common goal.

Communication is an important element strictly related to participation and conviviality. The data, and in particular the notes from the observation process, show that the people involved in the events engaged in numerous conversations that were usually very friendly, casual and informal. Conversations occurred across the different types of participants (organizer, tourist, local community

member). The observation helped to highlight some main topics of conversation: local culture, including several aspects such as rural lifestyle and local urban and natural landscape, and the individuals' opinion about the events and their implementation. An Italian interviewee reported some initial difficulties due to the language but specified that they could be easily overcome.

Communication during the events occurred naturally, also through body language. This type of interaction, including smiles, laughs, physical proximity, hugs and similar, was evident during the observation of the events. Some examples can be the sharing of the meals in both events and *Lavandaso* lavender workshops.

With regard to the bodily dimension, the data collected also suggest that the hedonic pleasure that emerged during the events was sometimes triggered by the simple act of being in the countryside and engaging in outdoor activities, feeling a nice temperature on the skin and enjoying the rural landscape. Sensory gratification was also experienced due to the consumption of food and drinks and the handling of lavender flowers in the *Lavandaso* event. The data collected through the interviews and the casual conversations with the organizers and the volunteers of both events suggest that several people experienced the activities as demanding and tiring but, at the same time, worth participating. The data also suggest that hedonic pleasure is something perceived after the event. Part of the data were actually collected after the events and the people interviewed and those who participated to the photo elicitation explicitly commented on the pleasure to take a trip down to memory lane to the time of the events, recalling in particular the friendly atmosphere. Moreover, it can be noted that some interviewees and some of the people involved in the conversation during the events seem to experience hedonic pleasure also in terms of future expectations, thinking about the possibility to join the events in the next years.

Finally, the data indicate that the social processes described above were facilitated by the limited size of the events and the presence of some people as active organizers. With regard to the size, two interviewees, providers of activities at the *Lavandaso* event, noted that the event is often attended by the same few people and this maybe, due to the peculiarity of the specific products on which the event is focused on. They suggested that the same peculiarity can represent a limitation, mainly in terms of commercial benefits, but it can be positive from an experiential point of view. One of them explained: "*Lavandaso* is an alternative path, and I consider it as an advantage. Other events, such as the fried fish festival, are attended by one thousand people. However, as Lavandaso is attended by far less people having a common interest (lavender) it is more likely to relate to most of them".

With regard to the role of some particularly enthusiastic and inspirational people acting as promoters, the majority of the interviewees recognize the crucial role of the leader of the association, a retired psychologist, and his charisma contributing to the success of the initiative.

Data therefore point to the conclusion that the experience of hedonic wellbeing (fun, pleasure, sensual gratification, pleasant memories) can be referred mostly to one aspect, that is a widespread feeling of conviviality. Consequently, the most relevant processes outlined in the theoretical framework of this study are participation and communication. The data also show that hedonic pleasure in terms of fun can concern alignment, especially for the organizers and volunteers who enjoy joining shared projects. With regard to these processes, the data suggest that the limited size of the events and the presence of few, particularly active individuals acted as facilitators. Sensorial gratification seems to be associated mainly to the generic environment, the physical stimuli and the food. Pleasure could be experienced both during and after the events, suggesting the importance of reification processes as a way to re-experience.

4.4.2 Engagement and eudaimonic wellbeing

The processes of participation and communication that are commented above in relation to hedonic wellbeing are relevant also for eudaimonic wellbeing. More specifically, they are associated to values that are perceived as particularly important: friendship and willingness to help. The latter concept is referred by the local people to the mutual assistance, viewed as an integral part of the local farmers' lifestyle and ethics. This is clear in the local dialect expression "*Lu rraiutu*", literally "re-help", according to which agricultural practices are shared on a voluntary basis between neighboring farmers (Bertella & Cavicchi, 2018).

Participation, and in particular the relationships developed during the activities, is often described referring to friendship. The data from the interviews and the observation revealed a shared agreement about the events contributing to the development of new friendships or the deepening of already existing ones. The terms "friend(s)", "friendship(s) and "friendly" are recurrent. In this context, conviviality acquires a deeper meaning and the related sense of togetherness, at least for several of the people involved, is not limited to the duration of the events: people enjoyed to cultivate those relations through occasional contacts on social media and with the promise to "meet again next year", which seems to have been fulfilled when considering the loyal presence of some people at the events. The data regarding the providers, who are small local entrepreneurs, also suggest that the events gave them the opportunity to meet colleagues, something that might be relevant to their professional identity and their role in the local economy. An entrepreneur reported that her participation to the event gave her the opportunity to meet other local entrepreneurs and learn more about the "small and interesting businesses of our area".

The feeling of engagement with and, more precisely, the dedication to the area they belong to is felt quite deeply by most of the entrepreneurs and local people in general, due to the typical challenges

connected to the abandoning of rural areas and also to the earthquake that hit the region in 2016 and 2017. The data about the communication during the events make it clear, with some of the conversations being focused on the economic valorisation of the territory, the risk of outmigration, and the job opportunities for the youth. In rural economies, social ties and resources are in fact crucial to job insertion and job creation (Lindsay *et al.*, 2005; Matthews *et al.*, 2009), and the role of volunteering in network building is widely recognised (Beggs & Hurlbert, 1997; Paine *et al.*, 2013; Hirst, 2011).The earthquake seems to have added some value to the events, as it caused a considerable amount of frustration and confusion but also an emerging willingness to overcome challenges. This willingness is perceived at a collective level, as explained by a local person who referred to the traditional practice of "*Lu rraiutu*".

These aspects of solidarity can also be related to potentially transformative experiences that are somehow embedded in the investigated event. The inclusion of some open meetings to discuss local challenges, goals and opportunities is a proof of it. During the meetings, the process of reflection, characterized by a strong sense of attachment and a genuine concern about the local problems further exacerbated by the earthquake, occurs as a collective process. Moreover, it seems that, through common reflections and discussion, local people are helped to go through rather comprehensive processes of imagination and alignment. In other words, interviewees showed a sense of meaningfulness related to the coordination of the activities, economic as well as recreational ones, aimed at building together a possible future for the local area. The investigated events, implying the involvement of both local and non-local people, are implicitly identified as particularly suitable activities that can contribute to this goal. In the case study, a considerable number of local elders, who are retirees but still very active, are included. The data suggest that for those people the engagement in the planning, implementation and also their participation as attendees to the event is a matter of identifying themselves as responsible citizens.

In general, a widespread sense of responsibility could be observed among the participants to the events who are not locals, which is also confirmed by to the fact that some of them come back to the event every year.

4.5 Discussion

4.5.1. Tourism engagement and wellbeing in a learning perspective

The developed framework, based mainly on the contributions by educationists and Lave & Wenger (1991) on Coghlan & Gooch (2011), has been an analytical tool useful to uncover important relations between engagement and wellbeing. This can be connected to the relevance assigned to the social aspect, which is something that can be particularly important and to a certain extent peculiar of the

type of tourism experiences investigated, that is community-based tourism, small-scale arrangements in rural contexts.

The findings show that the emergence of wellbeing, including personal growth and transformation, develop along the emotional, bodily and cognitive dimensions and can be described through the processes presented in Lave & Wenger (1991). Among those processes, only reification proved to have a limited role. Reification was found to be important, as it played a facilitator role during common activities, was a source of sensory gratification and a key factor with reference to the memories of the tourists. However, collected data do not suggest this process could play a particular important role, especially in terms of eudaimonic wellbeing. On the other hand, some of the other processes investigated were relevant for both forms of wellbeing, and some in particular for eudaimonic wellbeing.

In general, it can be said that participants developed a quite strong sense of belonging related to the experience of conviviality in the community, which will be commented in the next section. This can be due to the experiential value of tourism as an opportunity to learn through encounters (Richie *et al.*, 2003; Richards, 2011; Stone & Petrick, 2013). The case suggests that the social aspect and identity issues are strictly related to engagement understood as participation to the arrangements' activities as an occasion to meet people, communicate and interact with them, and as commitment to common projects and shared goals for the near and distant future.

Reflection and imagination can be regarded as premises for the process of alignment that can be a trigger for eudaimonic wellbeing. Alignment refers to tourism providers and volunteers working together toward the shared goal of organizing pleasant and memorable events, something that can be viewed as relevant to hedonic wellbeing. In addition to this, alignment can also be associated to the revitalization of the economic and socio-cultural life in small villages as it may contribute to the wellbeing of the community. In the case study investigated, alignment proved to be particularly important as it was identified as a sense of a shared willingness to care for the local environment to which the local community is emotionally attached.

Alignment with reference to non-local people also was important, as it was represented by an empathic response to the local challenges and a widespread willingness to help. According to the concept of the transformative potential of tourism experiences as proposed by Coghlan & Gooch (2011), the experience of a tragic episode (the earthquake) can act as a trigger within the community. However, it can be added that the state of confusion can derive from direct experiences, as for the local people, or indirect experiences, as for the tourists.

The findings also suggest that both hedonic and eudaimonic wellbeing develop along several of the identified processes, and, as suggested in the literature, they cannot be considered independent from each other (Henderson & Knight, 2012; Waterman, 2008).

Moreover, the adopted approach deriving from social learning and transformative perspectives highlighted that engagement can play a particularly relevant role not only with reference to sustainability, as suggested by some previous studies (Bertella *et al*., 2018; Tasci & Severt, 2017), but also to resilience, understood as an active reaction to unpredictable shocks and therefore the quality of life in the community.

Such an approach however did not cover one aspect that, nonetheless, emerged from the case study: the presence of one or few individuals among the community members, in some cases, but not always, directly involved in tourism, whose function is to be inspirational figures and promoters. Interestingly, the case investigated shows that those individuals can belong to the categories of people often viewed as marginal, such as the elders.

4.5.2 Tourism engagement and wellbeing in rural experiences

The case investigated suggests a strong relation between engagement and wellbeing, in particular eudaimonic wellbeing that develops through various processes and dimensions, as commented in the previous section.

The findings also shed light on the understanding of tourism and tourism engagement, which was defined a located social practice in the theoretical part of the study. In the observation and the interviews, the material characteristics of the destination proved not to have a key role in making the experience unique for the tourists, as those characteristics are mainly related to individual experience of hedonic wellbeing. Most of the characteristics concern the aesthetic gratification related to rural landscape, and the way the experience of such a pleasure emerged from the data suggests that this might not be peculiar of the specific destination. In addition to this, the bodily experiences, such as those derived from the weather, do not seem to be so unique as they could be referred to other rural Mediterranean destinations. An exception is food tasting. Although being clearly material, food tasting can also be related to the immaterial aspect of the destination, that is its culinary heritage. A question could therefore be raised about how "located" the investigated tourism experiences are and to which extent the physicality of the destination is important for engagement and commitment.

On the other hand, when considering the located aspect of the tourism experience as a social space, the data suggest a strong sense of engagement and commitment. The latter element, which is an important component of the adopted learning perspective in relation to identity issues of becoming member of a group, derives from the experience of eudaimonic wellbeing. In particular, data highlight

the centrality of values such as friendship, willingness to help and involvement in shared projects for the future of the local area.

Involvement can be related to the concept of "communitas" proposed by Rihova *et al*. (2013) and the case study suggests a possible integration of this concept with the concept of peripheral participation by Lave & Wenger (1991). In other words, tourists' engagement, although strong, may be seen as peripheral, and directed mainly toward the destination's culture and the specific providers and events. On the other hand, the engagement of local people, especially in its commitment aspect, is stronger and directed more clearly to the local area in all its aspects, both immaterial and material. The group of non-local people could be conceptualized not as a "temporary communitas" but as a "peripheral communitas". The latter can be described as composed by loyal tourists highly engaged with some of the community members of the destination and their culture. In the case study, members of such "peripheral communitas" include traditional tourists and students of the local University coming from other parts of Italy or from abroad. The type of engagement among local and non-local people can be regarded as an elastic bond between these two groups, local community and "peripheral communitas". These are two distinct but related groups and come close occasionally, for example through social media, and overlap during physical interactions.

Finally, the events investigated are quite limited in size and this might be an important aspect to be considered as restricted social groups facilitate communication and interaction with other people, both residents and tourists, and consequently the other relevant processes. Together with the dominant rural culture, such an aspect can promote wellbeing in both hedonic and eudaimonic terms, as suggested by some previous studies (Bertella *et al*., 2018; Kastenholz *et al*., 2013).

4.6 Conclusions

This study explored tourism engagement by adopting a learning perspective and conducting a case study about a rural event and the related experiences made by tourists and local community members, including but not limited to tourism providers. The adoption of a specific learning perspective centred on tourism as a located social practice of doing, belonging and becoming allowed tourism engagement to be described in relation to wellbeing. With reference to both hedonic and eudaimonic wellbeing, findings suggest that the social aspect of conviviality and the related process of participation, communication and alignment are important in the context investigated. For eudaimonic wellbeing, the process of reflection and imagination and a critical situation, which can become a source of confusion, may play an important role, especially if inspired and coordinated by one or more individuals. The latter aspect emerged from the data although it is not represented in the theoretical framework of the study. The case investigated and the reference to the theoretical framework taken

into consideration however helped to conclude that tourism engagement and its relation to wellbeing develop in an intertwined, multidimensional and mainly social way.

The findings also helped to highlight the possibility to reflect further on the conceptualization of tourism engagement as a form of 'elastic relation' among individuals belonging, from one side, to the local community of the destination and, on the other side, to a sort of "peripheral communitas" of loyal tourists. Within such a perspective, tourism engagement seems to be more relevant with reference to the people actively involved and the immaterial aspect of the destination rather than to the physical destination.

Those reflections about tourism engagement have some practical implications. Questions can be raised about what kind of impact this form of tourism engagement, mainly supported by social interactions, may have and although it could be said that there certainly is a positive impact from an experiential point of view, both in relation to pleasure and meaningfulness, it needs to be clear that the economic impacts might be limited on short term However, exploiting the potential for job creation might provide an increased impact on medium-term. On the other hand, it can be argued that loyalty in the long term might be positively affected and, ultimately, very desirable in terms of both sustainability and resilience.

The study clearly shows some limitations as its contributions could be restricted to the type of tourism investigated, that is small-scale and rural tourism. The approach adopted mainly emphasizes the social aspect of various typologies of individuals (tourists, tourism providers and local community members) and this aspect might be very limited in other contexts such as urban tourism in big cities.

Conclusions

This study had a twofold objective. On the one hand, it was an attempt to understand if Marche Region rural areas have the potential to become an educational tourism destination. On the second hand, it aimed at understanding the potential role of the University in the promotion of educational tourism in these areas. Three typologies of educational tourism have been analysed and cases from Marche Region were presented: the analysis of the competition and profitability of the regional language travel supply (more specifically, from Macerata Area); a short-term study abroad program for international university students in rural areas (the International Student Competition); the analysis (from a learning perspective) of a local festival on lavender which also engaged international students from (*Lavandaso* festival). These studies demonstrated that in Marche Region rural areas there are some opportunities for tourists interested in engaging in educational tourism experiences and in experiential learning place-based activities in off-the-beaten path destinations.

To answer to the first question, from the results it emerges that a competitive advantage for Marche Region as an educational destination could be the unique reciprocal exchange that is possible to create with the host communities. It creates positive effects from a socio-cultural and economic point of view for the local stakeholders (as mainly put in evidence in the 2nd Chapter, for what concerns the language travel) and with benefits from a personal and professional perspective for the tourists, also from a learning point of view (mainly highlighted in the 2nd, 3rd and 4th Chapters).

The interviews to the Italian language and culture schools providing educational tourism in rural areas pointed out that the students' engagement in place-based activities in informal settings (e.g.: the local market; local festivals) helps them in immerse themselves in the local culture, fostering their language learning in a different way than in a big city. The variety of tourism activities provided by the schools at local level has the main objective to stimulate these more spontaneous interactions in order to create a closer relationship between the customers and the host communities.

Similarly, from the International Student Competition experience, this strong exchange with the host community emerges, in addition to the learning component. Participant students perceived to have developed useful skills and knowledge for employability through their work on real cases in a multicultural context. It happened through their direct contact with the local culture, the dialogue with firms and representatives of the public institutions and of the host communities and through the concrete application of the theory learned during the seminars held by international scholars. Locals benefitted from the students' competition projects, which offered creative contributions for promotional activities and place branding that could be implemented to promote tourism in the area. Moreover, the format could be relevant from a sustainable point of view, even if specific studies to measure this aspect should be carried on: the number of participants is not high, so their presence

does not impact the carrying capacity of the destination. The students pay an all-included fee to be hosted in rural hospitality facilities spread throughout the territory: this allows a closer contact with their hosts and a more authentic experience of the territory, thus allowing a social exchange. In the same way, students eat at typical restaurants, visit cultural sites, farms and wineries. The income is, then, shared among a variety of local stakeholders with benefits for all the actors involved. Moreover, local public institutions economically support the event by also allowing the use of public spaces (e.g.: ancient theatres) for the learning activities.

Language schools apply a similar format: the interviews to the schools located in Macerata area showed that, even though they provide the courses, the accommodations and the tourism activities internally, they suggest additional local hospitality facilities, restaurants and local shops to sustain the local economy. Moreover, they organize visits and excursions to local tourism attractions and externalize locally the services they cannot provide internally.

Sustainability in *Lavandaso* festival is also pursued: the philosophy of the event is to revitalize abandoned rural villages promoting local producers and a natural and rural lifestyle. Learning and wellbeing are components of the event, and they happen through the relationship among participants and through the connections with the local context. Participants to this agri-tourism event can be described as "peripheral communitas", namely, as loyal tourists highly engaged with some of the community members of the destination and their culture, including both traditional tourists and students of the local University coming from other parts of Italy or from abroad. In this case, the University is present through the students' active engagement in the organization of the event.

To answer to the second question, the University of Macerata can be described referring to the civic university dimensions: it promotes active social engagement; it has sense of purpose and sense of place and applies a holistic approach, which entails the students' involvement in place-based activities; it invests in local and international projects to foster the surrounding territory in a sustainable tourism perspective; it applies a transparent and accountable approach and works through innovative methodologies based on the S3 and the Quadruple Helix of Innovation.

In the cases depicted in this study, the University respectively plays different roles. As for the case on language schools, it emerged that as one of Porter's Forces, it plays as a supplier and a collaborator, providing both trained teachers and customers. As a collaborator, it co-operates in designing joint projects.

For what concerns the International Student Competition, the University can be described as a co-organizer, as a trainer and as a facilitator for the exchange between participants and locals. It shared its international network of potential participant universities with the territory and designed a coherent

didactic program involving both international scholars and guests from the territory, usually representing best practice from the local context, in order to attract educational tourists.

In *Lavandaso* event, the University with its holistic approach, plays a role in stimulating experiential learning for students, giving them the concrete opportunity to learn about and in the local context and to actively contribute to the revitalization of rural areas, through the collaboration in the organization of the event.

In all the cases, the University can give a contribution to the systematization of the offer of educational tourism thematic services and products, by collaborating in the design of a strategic plan with all the actors of the Quadruple Helix involved in the field. It could be done through the creation of a regional hub, a Learning Tourism Destination, which promotes educational tourism in rural areas and improves the sustainability of the local economy. The presence of an already existing and expanding multi-stakeholder network with representatives from the government, from the industry, from the local community and from other universities and educational institutions in the Region, can be at the base of this approach, in order to facilitate co-creation, in a transdisciplinary environment.

This study clearly presents some limitations. It does not provide a systematic overview about the regional educational tourism supply. More data could be collected by widening the samples, and by considering other potential typologies of educational tourism that could be locally implemented. Further research could be carried out. On the one hand, the effectiveness of the sustainability of the industry could be further analysed. A focus on the economic impact of the current regional offer could be also done.

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