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From Observations and Pictures to Images: Learning Lab@PP2 in Tourism Classes

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Abstract

Learning Lab@PP2 is a pedagogical tool that has been applied in a degree course in tourism at the Polytechnic Institute of Beja, specifically in classes of Professional Practice II. It advocates that the learning process should occur in the complex context of society, organizations and professional relations that characterize the tourism industry. The goal is to contribute to the development of professional skills in tourism and educate students as citizens who must be aware of their role in today's increasingly global world. Within Learning Lab methodology, this paper aims to share the benefits of using practical methods in tourism education environments, in this case based on two participatory exercises: (a) visual-based methodologies (photovoice); and (b) participant and non-participant observation as a method of analysing situations. The results from using this methodology will be also presented in addition to a discussion about the educational benefits framed by the experiential learning paradigm.

Keywords

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Acknowledgements

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Abstract

Learning Lab@PP2 is a pedagogical tool that has been applied in a degree course in tourism at the Polytechnic Institute of Beja, specifically in classes of Professional Practice II. It advocates that the learning process should occur in the complex context of society, organizations and professional relations that characterize the tourism industry. The goal is to contribute to the development of professional skills in tourism and educate students as citizens who must be aware of their role in today's increasingly global world. Within Learning Lab methodology, this paper aims to share the benefits of using practical methods in tourism education environments, in this case based on two participatory exercises: (a) visual-based methodologies (photovoice); and (b) participant and non-participant observation as a method of analysing situations. The results from using this methodology will be also presented in addition to a discussion about the educational benefits framed by the experiential learning paradigm.

Keywords: Experiential Learning, Learning Labs, Participant-Observation, Photovoice, Professional Practice, Tourism Degree, Visual Methods

Introduction

The Learning Lab@PP2 (LL) concept is based on the premise that the learning process for 2nd year students of tourism at the Polytechnic Institute of Beja, specifically in classes of the subject Professional Practice II, should occur in the complex context of society, organizations and social and professional relations that characterize the possible areas of tourism work. It is properly structured, contextualized learning, incorporating technical operations in tourism (in the areas of accommodation, travel agencies and tourist information) and based on a set of activities intended to be entrepreneurial, interdisciplinary, experiential and social. The intention is to provide the student with skills not only in the technical domain (the so-called "hard skills"), but also social and human skills ("soft skills"). The goal of the Learning Lab concept is to contribute to the development of professional skills in tourism and also the students as citizens who must be aware of their role in today's increasingly global world.

Thus, the methodologies developed under the concept of Learning Lab intend to explore and design transformational environments that will comprise the future situation of tourism students, framed by new educational contexts, such as experiential or transformative teaching (Brancard & Quinnwilliams, 2012; Cranton, 2006; Jones, 2015; Kolb, 2015). Learning Lab includes a practical (though not only) component, and a concern with always properly framing

it with theoretical knowledge that helps students understand the more operational procedures within exercises based on reflection and critical thinking. The activities proposed include five thematic areas: 1. Fieldwork (visual methodologies & participant observation) the example of this paper; 2. Workshops (always with a practical component); 3. Seminars & talks; 4. Watching documentaries/videography with reflection and discussion; 5. Congress & event hosting.

Within this Learning Lab rationale, this paper aims to present and share the benefits of using practical research tools in tourism education environments, based on two exploratory pedagogical exercises (Rodrigues & Amaral, 2019): (a) the use of visual-based methodologies (e.g., photovoice); and (b) the use non-participant observation as a method of collecting and analysing situations. The goals of each exercise, the whole pedagogical procedure and methodology and the corresponding results will be presented. The authors of this paper (both tourism teachers for about 20 years) strongly advocate that the use of innovative pedagogical tools such as image and participatory-based exercises such as these provide sufficient stimulation to engage learners in knowledge discovery, and simultaneously develop new skills that are truly important for tourism students. As stated by Mitchell, "*at the heart of visual work is its facilitation of reflexivity in the research process (...)*" (2008, p. 374). Thus, employing visual and participatory-based methods inside and outside the classroom potentially makes the classroom more dynamic and motivated, facilitating understanding of the topics, concepts and phenomena under study and the education process itself. In an educational context, visual-based methods encourage students to strengthen their critical thinking, cognitive flexibility, reflexivity and awareness about today's world. They allow the student to transform their observations and pictures into memorable narrative images that will shape their future as tourism workers.

This paper thus aims to share the benefits of using practical methods in tourism education environments, in this case based on two participatory exercises: (a) visual-based methodologies (photovoice); and (b) non-participant observation as a method of analysing situations.

Literature Review

Experiential Learning Theory

According to Corker and Porter (2015), experiential learning allows gains in deep learning, practical competence, persistence rates, civic engagement, appreciation of diversity and professional networking. In fact, according to these authors, learning and career development were significantly enhanced by doing more experiential learning. Higher education institutions that promote and frame learning experiences are not a precursor to learning but rather part of the learning itself. Experiential learning theory (ELT) provides a holistic model of the learning process, which emphasizes the central role that experience plays in the learning process (Kolb, Boyatzis, & Mainemelis, 2001). Kolb (1984) defines ELT as "the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience. Knowledge results from the combination of grasping and transformation experience" (p. 41). The emphasis here is often on a direct sense extracted from the experience and in-context action as the primary source of action (Kolb, 1984, 2015).

A four-stage learning cycle (see Figure 1) based on Kolb´s model (1984) mentioned that concrete experiences (experiencing) which constitute data generating are the basis for observations and reflections; these reflections (reflecting) allow the integration of new experience with past ones and are assimilated into abstract concepts as a search for patterns that allows generalizing and can therefore be applied to other situations and contexts; these

implications can be actively tested and new experiences created based on applied knowledge (Kolb, Boyatzis, & Mainemelis, 2001; McCaslin & Flora, 2013). As Wurdinger and Allison (2017) state, "experiential learning is popular with students as it is considered more enjoyable and leads to deeper learning when compared to didactic approaches" (p. 15).
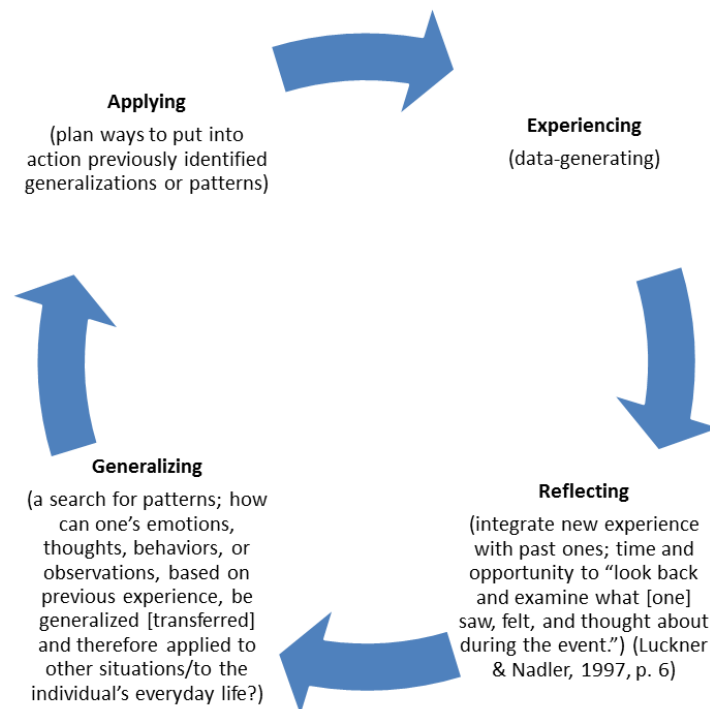
Applying
(plan ways to put into action previously identified generalizations or patterns)

Experiencing
(data-generating)

Generalizing
(a search for patterns; how can one's emotions, thoughts, behaviors, or observations, based on previous experience, be generalized [transferred] and therefore applied to other situations/to the individual's everyday life?)

Reflecting
(integrate new experience with past ones; time and opportunity to "look back and examine what [one] saw, felt, and thought about during the event.") (Luckner & Nadler, 1997, p. 6)

Figure 1. Experiential Learning Model. Source: McCaslin and Flora (2013), adapted from Kolb's model (1984)

It is within ELT that the benefits of using participatory methodologies, such as image-based pedagogical tools (e.g., photovoice), provide sufficient stimulation to engage learners in knowledge discovery, and simultaneously develop new skills that are truly important for students. As previously mentioned, ELT requires reflection and critical thinking. Therefore, participatory methods, as will be explained in the next section, are aimed at generating self-reflection around specific concepts learned in subjects. This critical reflection element might also activate the learners' "motivation," or internal drive for learning.

Qualitative Research Approaches

Why choose a qualitative approach in education environments? According to Banks (2001), a qualitative approach is used when there should be an interest in investigating experiences, interactions and phenomena in their natural context, giving space for particularities, specificities and details for analysis to emerge. As stated by Denzin and Lincoln (2011), "qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world" (p. 3), undoubtedly the approach that best suits to education environments, putting the student in a position of a profound observer of the world that surrounds him. In fact, the researcher is assumed as a fundamental "piece" of the research process seriously integrating contexts and case studies. As Mason (2018) mention, much of the effort during the research process should involve self-questioning activity. The goal is to explore, define and refine concepts during the research process. To this end, when choosing a qualitative approach, the researcher assumes that theories and methods should be appropriate to the object of study, and if not, they must be

adapted, or new approaches explored. Much of qualitative research is based on texts (from field notes, descriptions, reflections), but since we are dealing with complex social situations, all data that might help us to understand it more deeply is most welcome.

This is particularly interesting for educators and teachers in their classes when the student's interest is in the processes of understanding complex social phenomena (as is the case of tourism), their meaning and experience, and it opens opportunities to apply different types of methods (e.g., observation) and data (such as the visual).

Alternative Education Methodologies: Visual-based and Participant and Non-Participant Observation

Concerning visual research methods, the authors defend that "The value of visual research methods is usually claimed to be revelatory: that is, images can show things that other forms of analysis cannot" (Rose, 2016, p. 327). One might say that researchers today have a set of data at their disposal. Visual support, such as paintings, photographs, films, drawings and diagrams, among others, have allowed the introduction of new interpretive elements that enrich the analysis and understanding of its object of study. And why should we adopt visual elements in qualitative studies? According to Banks (2007), in our contemporary society, images are omnipresent, since humankind is becoming increasingly image-based.

It is exactly grounded on this assumption that all visual representation must potentially be considered for scientific studies of society. That is, image is everywhere and cannot be "apart" from research projects that focus on the study and understanding of the world lived in. Aires (2015) stated that "any scientific activity falls within a set of spatio-temporal and socio-historical coordinates that condition and justify its methodological options" (p. 4). And it is important to highlight that we live in a world of images, a visual construction of the social field (Mitchell, 1994) or an age of "ocularcentrism" (Jay, 1993, cited in Mirzoeff, 2009), a centrality in the apparent visuality of Western societies. In sum, a modern world, very much a 'seen' phenomenon embedded in a visual culture that is everywhere and nowhere (Mirzoeff, 2009). According to Mirzoeff (2016) "one of the most notable uses of the global network is to create, send, and view images of all kinds, from photographs to video, comics, art and animation" (p. 4).

A study of images, particularly in the field of education, might reveal new insights and perspectives that are not accessible through the use of other data, such as textual. Conversations are full of verbal references to images and the use of words alone cannot express all the elements (Pink, 2004, cited in Mason, 2018). In this line of thought, "the visual turn has generated a plethora of approaches, from data gathering to the visual representation of big data, to the exploration of visual manifestations of social phenomena" (Clark & Morris, 2015, p. 31). Therefore, qualitative research has a new and insightful universe in terms of analysis and interpretation of social reality (Rodrigues & Costa, 2017; Rodrigues, Souza, & Costa, 2017). The use of visual methods thus emerges as a field of study, defined by Rose (2016) as "visual research methods" (VRM), which is in an initial, but developing phase of qualitative research (Athelstan & Deller, 2013). The use of the visual medium for research was first proposed by Collie in the field of anthropology and social scientists started to realize that interviewees respond to photographs without hesitation (Hurworth, 2003). This is an interesting field to be explored in education.

In sum, there are several methods and techniques that use visual data to obtain information (Rodrigues & Costa, 2017) and the authors of this paper believe that image-based pedagogical tools, based on the previous discussion, could provide sufficient stimulation to engage learners in knowledge discovery, and simultaneously develop new skills that are truly important for students. This should be applied to the field of education, particularly in tourism

teaching practices (Rodrigues, 2017, 2018, 2020), since tourism is characterized by a complex and dynamic nature and is profoundly human-based, where the reflective thinking from tourism students is highly appreciated.

The rational here presented is grounded in Mitchell's (2008) line of thought about the use of visual methodologies in education environments when he states that "I seek to ensure that the term "visual methodologies" is not simply reduced to one practice or to one set of tools, and, at the same time, to ensure that this set of methodologies and practices is appreciated within its full complexity" (p. 365).

Therefore, there are several methods and techniques that use visual data to obtain information (Rodrigues, 2019; Rodrigues & Costa, 2017). Methods that are based on still images, such as photos, like photo-essay, photo-elicitation, reflective photography or photovoice, just to mention a few, will be described further; and methods based on dynamic images, such as videography. The goal of this study is simply to provide a sketch of the field and identify some important methodological illustrations.

For instance, photo-essay is strongly associated with visual anthropology due to the use of classic photographic essays (Lyon, 1971). It is a participatory technique for obtaining opinions, ways of thinking or feelings of the participant, based on a set of photographs collected, analysed, and commented on by the participant in conjunction with the researcher. This technique is used to analyse and understand phenomena in depth, mainly as a complement to other methods of collecting information, textual or visual, depending on the research objectives. Another example is photo-elicitation where sociologists Harper (2002) and Banks (2001) contributed greatly to the recognition of photo-elicitation as a visual method, based on the simple idea of applying and conducting an interview using photographs as a stimulus. In fact, photographs (more than words) evoke deeper elements of human consciousness. Finally, photovoice (the method used in this work) is a process by which people can identify, represent, and enhance their community through a specific photographic technique, based on the production of knowledge (Wang, 2006). Photovoice has three main goals: (1) to enable people to record and reflect their community's strengths and concerns, (2) to promote critical dialogue and knowledge about important issues through large and small group discussion of photographs, and (3) to reach policymakers.

Research by observation is used in such widely ranging areas and the major advantage of this method is its directness: it allows for the recording of behaviour as it occurs (Cargan, 2007, p. 142). According to Hall and Hall (2008) we can distinguish between two types of observation: non-participant observation and participant observation. In non-participant observation, the role of the researcher is that of an outsider, and at no stage do researchers join the group they are observing (p. 205).

Participant observation refers to naturalistic method and it is a classic form of qualitative research (Kottak, 2011). Some authors (e.g., Guest, Namey, & Mitchell, 2013) maintain that it "is in some ways both the most natural and the most challenging of qualitative data collection methods" (p. 75). With this method "…the investigator obtains information through relatively intense, prolonged interaction with those being studied and firsthand involvement in the relevant activities of their lives" (Levine, Galimore, Weisner, & Turner, 2009, p. 38). The researcher joins in with the group being studied and his/her task is to observe their behaviour.

Usually participant observation is used as a primary technique for ethnographically oriented studies. According to Becker and Geer (1969, cited in Ahola & Lucas, 1981), it is a method "in which the observer participates in the daily life of the people under study, either openly in the role of researcher or covertly in some disguised role, observing things that happen, Iistening to what is said, and questioning people, over some length of time" (p. 322). So, we can identify two roles: (a) the participant as an observer, a natural member of the group

being studied, a position which makes the researcher more apt to know about hidden motives and agendas; (b) the observer as a limited participant; in this role, the researcher is not a natural member of the group and he only interacts with members of the group for the stated purpose of studying it scientifically (Becker & Geer, 1969, cited in Ahola & Lucas, 1981).

How does the researcher collect data? In fact, the primary data are typically narrative descriptions by taking field notes, based on direct observations, which become the core data and the basis of the analysis and report. Usually, observation is also combined with informal conversational interviews and personal experience, but quantitative and more formal, structured data can also be collected through this method (Kottak, 2011; Levine et al., 2009).

The literature review presents us with three key elements of a participant observation study (Guest et al., 2013, p. 76): (a) getting into the location of whatever aspect of the human experience the researcher wishes to study, which means that the participation observation is usually conducted in situ, so the method is applied where the action goes on (e.g., people's communities, homes, workplaces, recreational sites, places of commercial interaction, sacred sites); (b) building rapport with the participants, which means that people who will be observed must accept the researcher and their trust must be inspired, because the purpose is to learn about the things people do in the normal course of their lives, with authenticity; c) spending enough time interacting to get the data needed which means that the use of this method relies on an observation over a long time period to have a sufficient range of experiences, conversations, and relatively unstructured interviews.

In recent decades, tourism has undergone rapid changes in the focus of research and participant observation offers some advantages for tourism investigation: it improves the quality of data obtained during field work; it improves the quality of interpretation of the data; and it stimulates the formulation of new research questions and hypotheses based on the observed scene (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2002, cited in Marujo, 2012). According to Smith (2010, cited in Marujo, 2012, p. 5) this method involves more than just observing a tourist attraction or participating in a festival during which the data collection takes place, it comprises fieldwork in which the researcher is immersed in the culture under study. Therefore, the authors of this papers asked themselves: why not use it with our students who are learning tourism in our classes?

Methodology

The methodology developed under the concept of Learning Lab intends to explore and design transformational environments that will comprise the future situation of tourism students, framed by new educational contexts, such as experiential or transformative teaching (Kolb, 2015). Learning Lab includes a practical (though not only) component, and a concern with always properly framing it with theoretical knowledge that helps students understand the more operational procedures within exercises based on reflection and critical thinking.

There are several reasons that justify the use of Learning Lab methodology in Professional Practice II (2nd year) in tourism classes and they are related with three purposes/characteristics:

a. Exploring students' awareness, sensitivity and the sense of curiosity – the classes seek to give an overview and explore various dimensions of tourism knowledge (e.g., technical, human, social and intrapersonal), seeking to enhance different perspectives and perceptions. We understand that these skills are essential to reshape challenges, find deep causes, develop possible solutions and mobilize networking resources that can help to implement effective real-world work solutions (e.g., event host activities). This methodology also allows students to use knowledge and skills learned throughout the degree. In addition, several topics of a more global

character (global skills) are transmitted, mainly via workshops and documentaries (videography), which aim to foster students' interest and curiosity to gain more knowledge, motivating them to research more.

　　　b. Practical real work component – Learning Labs methodology aims to provide a learning space in: (i) real work context, where students are called upon to perform real tourism professional tasks (e.g., event and congress host), which gives them the opportunity to acquire and exercise skills such as interpersonal relationships, care and reception, stress management and last-minute changes, monitoring decisions of a more organizational and strategic nature; and (ii) "learning lab" context or mode, through activities involving observation, reflective thinking, experimentation, and even production in a given area of study or work, and sometimes even the practice of a particular procedure or skills (e.g., participant observation in a tourism office) or with workshops, documentary visualization and reflecting, visits and photovoice exercises.

　　　c. Promoting and facilitating change in thinking and vision – The methodology adopted in Learning Labs aims to promote, encourage and facilitate a participative, interactive, networked and open discussion teaching model, based on processes that can lead to the student's own personal transformation. This can change their vision and their thinking in relation to certain aspects related to the professional environment in tourism (e.g., adaptation to change, relationship with the client, understanding of tourist behaviour). With this purpose, self-reflective teaching methods, techniques and tools are used (e.g., reflective photography, photovoice, participant and non-participant observation, videography). With this pedagogy, teachers take the role of "skilled facilitators", creating a safe, free, relaxed, collaborative and experimental space and context, promoting open discussion with and among students.

　　　To sum up, the activities proposed for tourism students of professional practice classes included five thematic areas (see Figure 2): 1. Fieldwork (visual methodologies & participant observation) the example of this paper; 2. Workshops (always with a practical component); 3. Seminars & talks; 4. Watching documentaries/videography with reflection and discussion; 5. Congress & event hosting.
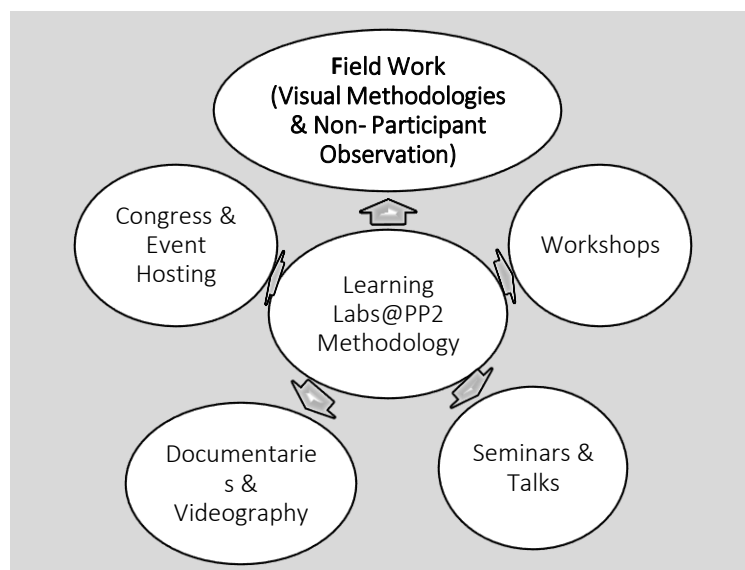

Figure 2. Learning Labs methodology in Professional Practice II, Tourism Degree, Double-Blind peer Review.

The aim of this work is to demonstrate the results and benefits of working with two participatory-based exercises (i.e., visual and observation practices) grounded in a set of methodologies and procedures used in classes. Only these two exercises were considered for this study (i.e., a photovoice and an observation exercise). In each case, students were introduced to the topic in its theoretical dimension in order to consolidate concepts. After that, a practical exercise was carried out by them.

Photovoice Exercise

This participatory technique is used in order to obtain opinions, ways of thinking and feelings from the students, based on a set of photographs collected, analysed, and commented on by them as participants in conjunction with the teacher, with the purpose of reaching tourism policymakers. The idea is to reach the person who has the power of decision to act, based on suggestions and recommendations from the students through their photos, in order to contribute to changing the mindset and proposing practical measures to improve tourism activity in a region/locality. With this purpose in mind, photovoice is the visual-based participatory method strongly recommended in this case.

Therefore, the goal was to take pictures that illustrate the student's impressions of the positive and negative aspects that affect a tourist experience in a particular place chosen by that student. The photo is the generator/stimuli of feelings and a way of extending opportunities for testimonies and experiences, providing new data for analysis. The idea is to generate students' self-reflection around specific concepts learned in this subject such as: destination, tourism experience, tourism system, tourist behaviour and models of tourism experience, through a process of taking pictures and selecting them. Specifically, the goals of the exercise were the following:

1. To apply the theoretical and practical knowledge acquired in the subject of Professional Practice;
2. To promote a process of reflection and selection of photographs to analyse, stimulating critical and reflective thinking;
3. To promote an approach to visual data for students as a pedagogical and didactic instrument, highlighting its advantages for stimulating critical and reflexive thinking;
4. To extend levels, perspectives and sensitivity of tourism; tourism experience, satisfaction, etc.; and
5. To foster a critical perspective, understanding, and interpretation of images (photos) taken by the student himself with a given objective.

This study specifically uses reflexive photography as a visual technique to extract data (Rodrigues, 2017). Photographs produced by the participants correspond to "reflexive photographs" (Harrington & Lindy, 1998). This term was coined by Harper (1987) and interviews that go along with these photographs are usually named "photo-elicitation interviews." Therefore, in order to examine the perceptions of a group of tourism students, a volunteer sample of students was recruited from the 2nd year of the tourism degree course at IPBeja and mobile devices were used to take pictures that would illustrate their impressions about a particular place.

In conclusion, a visual method exercise (photovoice), based on the use of a visual methods approach was used to explore and identify advantages of using visual methods to consolidate knowledge and develop decision-making. The thinking that leads to the photovoice

exercise has the main purpose of exploring impressions, perceptions, ideas and acting (with proposals) in a given territory.

Observation Exercise

Considering the need to introduce the students to a variety of basic skills in research design and data collection and knowing the use of observation exercises in tourism research fields, it is important for tourism students to use and operationalize the observation method. Both classroom and "real" field setting experiences are meant to introduce students to a variety of basic skills related to it.

Students were invited to perform a set of observation practices (non-participant) related to their professional future in order to make them reflect on real work contexts. So, teachers proposed several observation opportunities in fairs and festivals (e.g., medieval fair; Roman fair, Ovibeja fair); tourism office, accommodation; historical city centre; guided tours in local museums and on walking routes. To register the memory of the observation, students should elaborate and use an observation grid, collect descriptive information and make a photographic record. The intended result was to do a critical reflection supported by visual registration and a set of proposals for improvement.

Specifically, and considering the object of observation, the goals of the exercise were the following:

1. Fairs and festivals – students should observe and reflect on the organization of the event; marketing structure; visitors' behaviour;

2. Tourism office – students should observe, describe and reflect on the day of work of the professional. This activity only lasted a few hours and should be complemented by an informal interview related to the main details of daily tasks (e.g., visitors' demands; bureaucratic activities), and image registration about tourism office space;

3. Accommodation – students must observe, describe and reflect on important daily tasks of the observed accommodation manager. This activity must be complemented by an informal interview;

4. Guided tours – students participate in guided tours to observe, describe and reflect about this activity. The details and criteria are developed below (exercise 1); and

5. Historical city centre – students must observe, describe and reflect on Beja's historical centre in a class visit. The details and criteria are developed below (exercise 2).

To better understand these observation activities, the authors chose two of them and decided to describe the main actions to better perform them. First, students had theoretical classes about tourism research methodologies and especially about what observation method to use. In these classes, students learned more about observation planning and data collection strategies. After that, students were given the opportunity to learn some of the applications of the method in two exercises carried out in practical tourism professional daily working life. The exercises were:

Exercise 1: a visit to the Museum House in Cuba (Beja – Portugal) and following a tour guide professional on a walking tour (see Fig. 3 as an example);

Exercise 2: a tourism class to visit the historical centre of Beja and observe some important touristic elements (see Fig. 4 as an example);

In the first exercise, and previously to the visit, the tourism students had to develop several procedures: (a) prepare readings about guided visits in the museums; (b) draw up an observation grid including three important variables – purposes, action and data collection. The objectives of the observation exercise relied on: (i) understanding how the guide captures the visitors' attention; (ii) understanding visitors' behaviour; and (iii) understanding how tour guides previously prepare the visit.

Exercício realizado

Exercício de Observação sobre a Visita à Casa Museu- Quinta da Esperança.

Para este exercício foi-nos proposto criar uma tabela com vários objetivos sobre a visita guiada e refletir se foram ou não cumpridos.

Objetivos	Ação	Informação a recolher
Perceber como o guia capta a atenção dos visitantes	Observar a forma como o guia tenta captar a atenção dos visitantes	A guia manteve um discurso fluído, compreensível e interessante. Aproveitou os detalhes históricos sobre a casa e a família que lá habitava.
Compreender o comportamento dos visitantes	Observar a forma como os visitantes procedem ao longo da visita	O grupo foi e não dispersou muito mantendo a ordem.
Entender se as visitas são preparadas previamente	Questionar se as visitas são preparadas previamente	As visitas não são preparadas mas seguem sempre a mesma linha de discurso e raciocínio. Os guias gostam de fazê-las com diferentes dinâmicas,

Figure 3. An example of a non-participant-observation grid about Museum House in Cuba from a student's work.

In the second exercise, tourism students did a visit to the historical centre of Beja at the most popular touristic points (e.g., castle, church). The purposes of this exercise were: (a) before the visit – to build a grid with observation goals; b) during the visit – to collect descriptive information and make a summary and a photographic registration; (c) after the visit – to analyse the collected data (see Figure 4).

Purposes	Criteria	Questions to answer
1. Observe historical city centre	Signage	Is it easy to get to the historic centre? Does the signage identify it correctly?
	Accessibility	Path conditions for pedestrians, drivers, persons with reduced mobility
	Parking	Access for people with reduced mobility; buses
	Classification of existing tourist supply	Accommodation, bars & restaurants; tourism office.
	Identification of existing heritage	Timetable; presence of guide; state of conservation; classification of heritage; Languages?
	Dynamics of the historical centre at the time of observation	Who are the visitors? – foreigners; Portuguese; what is their behaviour?
	Atmosphere/environment for tourist experience	Details of spaces (positive and negative)
	Conservation of private patrimony.	
2. Data Registration	Various methods: diary, informal interviews; photograph	

Figure 4. Observation exercise in the historical centre.

The results of this exercise relied on: (a) critical reflection based on visual records; (b) proposals for promotion and intervention, and (c) placement of challenges.

Results and Discussion

The authors strongly advocate that the use of innovative pedagogical tools like these such as image and participatory-based exercises provide sufficient stimulation to engage learners in knowledge discovery, and simultaneously develop new skills that are truly important for tourism students. As stated by Mitchell, "at the heart of visual work is its facilitation of reflexivity in the research process (…)" (2008, p. 374). The implications of these types learning methodologies, such as employing visual and participatory-based methods inside and outside the classroom, potentially makes the classroom more dynamic and motivating, facilitating understanding of the topics, concepts and phenomena under study and the education process itself. In an educational context, visual-based methods encourage students to strengthen their critical thinking, cognitive flexibility, reflexivity and awareness about today's world. They allow the students to transform their observations and pictures into memorable narrative images that will shape their future as tourism workers. In this study the perceptions and opinions extracted from the photo voice and non-participant observation are strongly determined by the student's perspective, which is definitely a point in favour of this approach and this study.

The authors consider that it would be important to base an evaluation of the success/unsuccess of this pedagogical tool on the reading of the critical reflection which the students stated in their portfolios/reports and the application of a small survey at the end of the semester. Besides some limited answers (not all the 2nd-year students answered the query) the authors achieved some interesting conclusions concerning students' opinions about this pedagogy. Mainly, students highlight positive aspects such as: (a) the classes motivate students; (b) students get more experience in real work; (c) the topics were interesting; (d) good class organization and structure; (e) opportunity for outdoor visits or expert visits; (f) more relaxed environment; (g) more dynamic, variety of activities; and (h) putting theory into practice.

Conclusions

Employing participatory pedagogical methods within the classroom has the potential to make the classroom more transparent and less boring, potentially facilitating understanding of the topics, concepts and phenomena under study and the education process itself. In an educational context, visual-based methods such as photovoice presented above encourage students to strengthen their use of critical thinking, cognitive flexibility, reflexivity and awareness about the world today. It is important to highlight that one of the significant aims of education is to produce students who are well informed, able to understand and filter ideas that are highly significant, powerful, and useful and that can really change society for the better. Visual-based exercises are grounded on the premise that the pictorial element (e.g., photos, cartoons or videos) allows the visualization of the intangible dimensions of human activity, encouraging students to engage in classes more creatively and openly. In addition, the use of participant observation in tourism education fields allows to the students to perform a set of observation practices related to their professional future in order to make them reflect on real work contexts.

This study advocates that this type of exercises promotes and stimulates independent thinking, personal autonomy and reasoned judgment in thought and action, precisely what the tourism industry demands from professionals nowadays. In this case, the results of the photovoice exercise and participant-observation technique demonstrate the knowledge continuously derived from the experience of the learner. In both exercises, visual stimuli with reflective thinking allow an examination of the students' impressions and full comprehension of the concepts that are being taught in a particular subject. It corroborates the idea that images and direct observations in real contexts can help students to express their understanding about what they are really learning during the semester. These types of exercises might transform their observations and pictures into images and perceptions about topics learned in classes.

A discussion of emerging visual pedagogical methods and models will be undertaken in future work in order to demonstrate that nowadays teachers have access to a suite of tools which enable them to support greater learner choice, creativity, reflective thought and self-direction for students. The final goal is to continue to explore visual methods as a suitable tool for tourism education, with visual methods, such as photo-elicitation, photovoice, reflective photography, photo essay or videography as pedagogical examples. The purpose of this work was to merge creativity with rigour to illustrate alternative means for analysis and reflection with the students on concepts learned in classes, based on a participatory field experience. It is important to stress that the image itself might inform, elucidate, and enlighten the student in line with the pictorial turn (Feighey, 2003).

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