



INCOME Tourism

INCOME Tourism Webinar - COVID-19: Reflections on challenges for the T&H Sector

6 July 2020

On July 6th, 2020 a webinar was organized by the INCOME Tourism project to reflect on the challenges for the Tourism & Hospitality sector that have arisen due to COVID-19. The moderator of the webinar, Ricardo Lemos from CEVAL in Portugal opened the webinar by first giving a short introduction to the INCOME Tourism project and by giving some background information regarding the alternative ways of cooperation the learning trios had to develop due to the coronavirus disease.

A pilot test was expected to take place simultaneously in all the Universities that are participating in the INCOME Tourism project during the academic year 2019-2020. It was expected that the selected students, supported by in-company tutors and HEI tutors, would experience the new cooperative learning model, which involves the students going to the businesses, for a work-based learning experience.

However, when in February 2020 the propagation of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) in Europe began, this situation conditioned the implementation of the pilot test. Students could not go to the businesses, and the project had to adapt to the new circumstance. This did not stop the project partners from maintaining a close relationship with the businesses, and to find ways to help them to go through this situation.

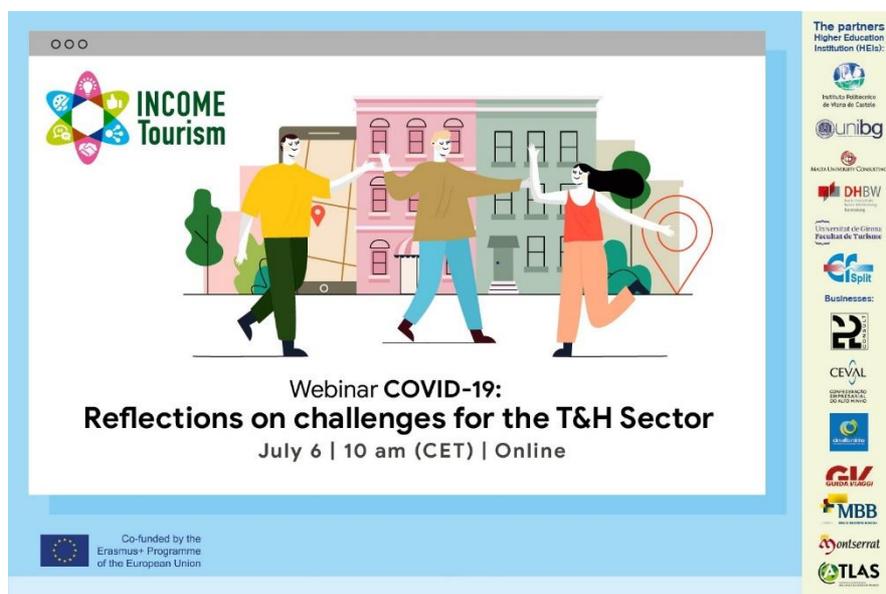


As such, the students were challenged to work on a joint reflection with HEI Tutors and entrepreneurs/in-company tutors, focusing on the needs, problems and challenges the businesses are facing because of the pandemic and ways to recover. As businesses from different countries are likely to face similar challenges, students from the five participating HEIs in Portugal, Spain, Italy, Malta and Croatia were stimulated to work together around the same topics and to exchange experiences. In this webinar presentations were given by students, in-company tutors and HEI tutors for the five sectors Destination Management, Food & Beverage, Accommodation, Travel Agencies & Tour Operators and MICE.



Co-funded by the
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Before listening to the reflections on these five sectors, both Conny Mayer-Bonde and Stefan Luppold from DHBW Ravensburg shared some perspectives on how dual education at their school is maintained in times of the pandemic. Since a lot of companies were closed or are still closed, students were mostly at home and did whatever was needed. This varied from dealing with cancellation and complaints, revising menus, updating websites, and sometimes also to helping in housekeeping. As head of the MICE programme, Stefan did not only have to maintain contacts with students, partner companies and lecturers, but also with the headquarters and other locations of DHBW, and international partner universities, as well as with authorities, politics and the chamber of commerce to exchange thoughts and discuss restart scenarios, the importance of the economic sector, and the requirements for financial support.



The slide is titled "Webinar COVID-19: Reflections on challenges for the T&H Sector" and is scheduled for July 6 at 10 am (CET) online. It features the INCOME Tourism logo and an illustration of three people holding a smartphone. The slide also lists partners, including Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and businesses.

The partners Higher Education Institution (HEIs):

- Instituto Politécnico de Valencia de Castellón
- unibg
- MEDIA INNOVATION CONSULTING
- DHBW
- Université de Gironne Faculté de Tourisme
- SpIR

Businesses:

- CEVAL
- CONSEJO REGULADOR DE DOCELS PÁNDICO
- GL
- MBB
- ontserrat
- TLAS

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Destination Management

The first presentations focused on how the destination business handles the challenges caused by COVID-19. The students reflected on questions such as “How would you attract customers and highlight the destination’s advantages over competition? What marketing activities would you undertake now?”, and “How will people regain confidence in public transport?”



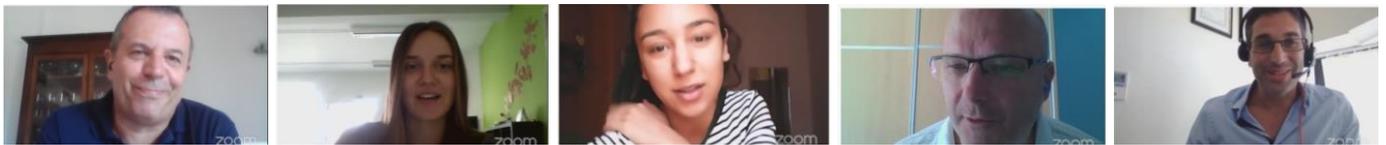
Due to travel restrictions and more generally to the desire of staying in the home country, or the comfortable feeling of travelling near home, domestic tourism is expected to recover more quickly than others. Destinations must analyse their new target demand, characteristics, objectives and needs, in order to understand what the ideal target for the destination is. Promotion campaigns are fundamental strategies in order to communicate tourists what the

destination can offer and how. Also DMO's should be and are much more active on social media where they have to start or continue promoting recognizable destination values.

DMO's should involve all agents of the destination (stakeholders) in tourism development decision making and product creation and the communication should take place in a coordinated and interconnected way. Travel companies should focus their promotional and advertising campaigns on the actions they are taking to provide travel safety and safeguard the health of the population. The communication about safety, health and hygiene is very important to not only reassure tourists, but also to make sure that the local community is at ease with tourists coming (again). A crucial component for national companies to restore confidence in public transport is to strictly follow national and regional transport security protocols. Training will be essential and in all these communication activities soft skills are fundamental.

Food & beverage

The students in this sector have examined questions such as “How would you redesign the guest access to, service delivery, and payment process in the restaurants and bars?”, “How would you transform the procedures for receiving, inspecting, and verifying F&B deliveries from suppliers?”, and “What are the training needs of personnel of restaurant operators?”.



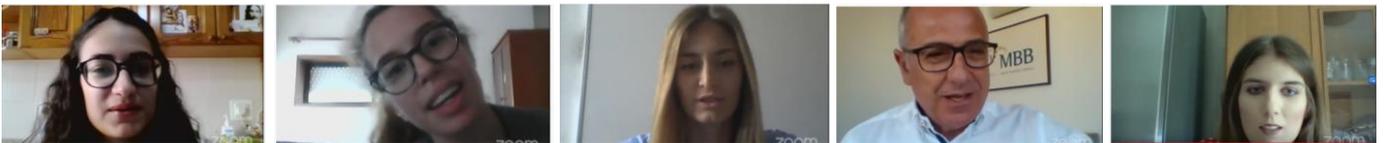
Again it was mentioned that communication with the customers is crucial to explain the measures that are being taken to provide social distancing, such as mandatory reservations, use of masks and hand sanitizer, digitalized menus, distance between tables. Especially in light of social distancing, this communication requires soft skills, such as creativity, politeness, and clear and calm communication. These soft skills are obviously also essential in the communication with supplying companies about the safety measures that should be followed.

The training of staff about this new situation is very important and consists of various elements. Staff has to be trained about the change in operations and services, for example the serving of breakfast which is no longer offered as a buffet. The training also needs to focus on managing the expectations of guests. Some of them are scared and need to be reassured that they are in a safe environment, whereas others might find the regulations excessive and in these cases the staff needs to be assertive to make sure that rules are followed. The training also need to focus on the different perceptions of the team members as these might vary as well. Some staff members are very relaxed about the situation, whereas others are afraid or even traumatized, because they have experienced the coronavirus disease at first hand.

Accommodation

The questions for this sector focused for example on “How would you redesign the front-desk check-in/out procedures, breakfast, and the actual stay at the hotel?”, and “How can certain activities be automated to reduce physical contact with the customers?”

For all accommodations it is of importance to minimize physical contact with the customers. As far as check-in/out procedures are concerned, this can be achieved by requesting necessary information online in advance. During the actual stay extra cleaning and disinfection activities will be needed, but also practical actions like removing spare blankets will need to be arranged. Also special attention is required on how to serve breakfast. A buffet breakfast is obviously not advisable, but serving tables is more expensive in terms of staff costs and customers have to wait longer. Other options are to offer room service or packed breakfast or a custom buffet breakfast, where guests do not take their own breakfast, but it is placed on plates by personnel. All these adjustments mean an increase in the costs, as it might be necessary to hire extra staff.



Artificial Intelligence might be used as a competitive advantage and to reduce work. Computerized machines can imitate human action and can enhance service quality. However for small hotels with little financial resources AI might not be an option.

Travel agencies & Tour operators

For this sector questions such as “How would you handle the already confirmed reservations for the 2020 tourist season, “How would you keep the business alive and avoid permanent closure?”, and “What changes are foreseen in the excursions activity sector?” were investigated.

At the start of the pandemic this sector was extremely busy with getting tourists back home, and decisions had to be made about refunding travel packages that were paid in advance. With no flights there are hardly any tourists, and as mentioned before destinations will change to domestic tourism and nature and adventure tourism. This was illustrated by the example of Portugal where there is a huge drop in tourists to the cities of Lisbon and Porto and the Algarve, and more tourism is expected in the countryside. Also bookings for large hotels will drop against a higher interest in private properties.

Not only destinations change, but there will also be a fall in demand. Even though people are afraid the wish to travel will return, however the capacity will be reduced strongly. Excursions will have to take place in smaller groups due to social distancing regulations. Tourist guides will also have to take extra hygiene measures. Travel agencies and tour operators have to take all these changes into consideration and anticipate to this so that the negative consequences can somehow be reduced.

MICE

In the last presentations questions for the MICE industry were discussed, such as “How do you envision that meetings and conferences will be held in the future? Will things change and how for the MICE industry in the COVID-19’s aftermath?”, and “How do you plan a conference in the future?”.



Other than most tourism which is about location, conference tourism is about participation. This tourism industry is hit very hard now that there are no international gatherings. This also applies to other events, such as sport events or theaters. Most conferences have been cancelled, postponed or went online. In the future it is expected that there will be a significant increase in hybrid conferences, a combination of participants at the venue and online participants. Whereas last year hybrid conferences were unthinkable (less networking, no social programme), it has now become unavoidable. Revenues for hybrid conferences will have to be generated through the fee of actual attendants and online participants and via sponsors. Tourism authorities will have to play an important role by bringing this sector, which will be one of the last to recover, back into activity.



Maria Joao Rauch concluded the webinar by thanking everyone and by saying that the students have shown their value. They showed that young people can dive into the problem and can be creative. Their presentations have given an insight in the various sectors and the problems they are facing due to the coronavirus disease.