



EULEP

WP2 – MARKET ANALYSIS

QUALITATIVE FOCUS GROUPS ON NEEDS AND RELEVANT SKILLS REQUIRED BY COMPANIES IN THE TOURISM SECTOR AND ITS SUPPLY CHAIN ABOUT SOCIAL INNOVATION

FINAL REPORT

*EULEP - European Learning Experience Platform
Connecting Centres of Vocational Excellence to develop and deliver
innovative transnational C-VET training in AI, VR, social innovation*



**Co-funded by the
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Project Name: European Learning Experience Platform - Connecting Centres of Vocational Excellence to develop and deliver innovative transnational C-VET training in AI, VR, social innovation

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Introductory note

This document reports the conclusions of two Focus Groups organised by the Italian partnership of EULEP project, in the framework of the activities of WP2 - Market Analysis. The Focus Groups were aimed at investigating the knowledge and use of SI and related skills needs, from the point of view of different players of the tourism sector. Meetings were held online (via Zoom platform) on March 30th (panel "Experts/Training-University" and panel "Enterprises") involving participants from the business world, universities and sector experts, lasted two hours each and were led by external moderators: a tourism expert (Mrs. Flavia Coccia) and an expert in Focus Groups' moderation (Mr. Fulvio Pellegrini). The Focus Groups were recorded, while internal Unioncamere staff members acted as back-up note-takers. Please refer to the individual reports attached for details.

Aim of EULEP project

EULEP (European Learning Experience Platform) is a four-year European project (1st June 2022-31st May 2026), funded by Erasmus+ Programme. It brings together 20 organisations from 8 countries (Belgium, Austria, Cyprus, Spain, France, Italy, Latvia, Turkey), working together to make C- VET (Continuing vocational education and training) more attractive for lifelong learning, offer businesses new and tailor-made training modules that correspond to their skills needs in innovation oriented subjects (Artificial Intelligence, Virtual Reality and Social Innovation), establish or reinforce knowledge triangles at regional and national level thanks to the triangulation business - VET provider - European Digital Innovation Hub (EDIH), embed VET in regional economic development strategies and reinforce its governance, putting it on a sustainable path.

The project activities directly target VET providers, companies, potential VET learners from different horizons, EDIHs, public authorities and other stakeholders involved in the VET governance process or dealing with VET more widely.

We invite you to explore the project website, even to follow later the activities of EULEP learning experience Platform: <https://eulep.eu/about-eulep/>

Aim of Work Package 2

The aim of Work Package 2 was to lay the ground for the development of the training modules of the EULEP platform, through four specific goals:

- to identify the level of awareness and training needs of companies in the fields of Artificial Intelligence (AI), Virtual Reality (VR), Social Innovation (SI);
- to check the extent to which existing training modules meet companies' training needs and to come up with the best possible training scenario that meets companies' needs;
- to lay the basis for the future recognition of the newly developed training modules at national level (either as standalone modules or as part of larger curricula);
- to define common criteria for the development of transnational VET training modules.

Training needs of companies in the fields of AI, VR and SI were highlighted following a bottom-up and user-centred approach, through surveys and desk research in the participating countries.

Moreover, Italian country hub organised additional qualitative Focus Groups to study in depth skill needs of companies in the tourism sector and its supply chain on the selected topics. The FGs were attended by representatives of SMEs (Chambers of Commerce, entrepreneurs and managers), HEIs (ITS networks and universities), VET and tourism sector experts.

The results of the survey, analysed and shared with the project partners, are presented in this report, which will form a basis for further review at education/VET provider level and for discussion in the VET councils.

Topic addressed

During the Focus Groups, the moderators sought to bring out the speakers' opinion in relation to the skills gap and training needs on highly innovative topics such as those identified by the EULEP project. They stimulated discussion and guided the debate through topics deemed indicative of tourism sector development, in relation to the level of knowledge, use and understanding of the tools.

In particular, they aimed to detect:

1. what Social Innovation in tourism means: its perimeter, scope, applications;
2. who makes Social Innovation?
3. goals related to Social Innovation in business strategies;
4. obstacles/opportunities in applying Social Innovation in tourism enterprises (internal and external);
5. adopted models of Social Innovation in tourism;
6. how to stimulate the adoption of Social Innovation solutions/models;
7. financial investment for innovation;
8. networks for entrepreneurial risk reduction;
9. how to activate the Learning Chains

Findings

What Social Innovation in tourism means: perimeter, scope and applications

The definition of Social Innovation used in the EULEP project was proposed in advance to the speakers, who accordingly provided their own definition. The aim was to enable a comparison between different interpretations of social innovation as a process.

According to EULEP project, Social Innovation can be defined as the development and implementation of new ideas (products, services, and models):

- to meet social needs
- to create new social relationships or collaborations.

Social Innovation is aimed at improving human well-being. Social innovations are innovations that are:

- social at both their ends and their means
- not only good for society but enhance individuals' capacity to act".

The account of participants' professional experience helped us to extract some important cross-cutting factors that allowed us to better contextualize the social innovation process, through its founding principles.

Below are the definitions of Social Innovation provided by our interlocutors.

Social innovation:

- creates sustainable solutions
- creates value for both market and the local community, beyond merely economic dynamics
- is a multi-level process with multiple components that must be integrated with the territorial network system. Tourism should not be looked at as an assemblage of commercial activities, but as a process of activities geared at enhancing territory
- in tourism, it is a process that allows citizens in a local community to meet visitors interested in learning about their reality (and that can thus be defined "temporary citizens")
- is a phenomenon that enables and amplifies relations among people (community, permanent citizens, temporary citizens) and generates social sustainability, positive relations, shared values
- is an interpretative framework that highlights responsible innovation processes related to environmental impacts and development of social relations fostering participation and cooperation in a local community
- is not characterised by a specific entrepreneurial mandate. However, it can contribute to overcoming social challenges, through products and services, including market, but especially through the creation of new partnerships
- day-to-day, it can help change the business model through non-charitable forms of professional and social inclusion (e.g., type B cooperation).

Some risks have also been highlighted, due to an “omnibus” use of two polysemous terms: innovation and social (terminological toxicity).

On the one hand, there is the risk of identifying “innovation” with digitisation. On the other hand, digitisation is useful and necessary to qualify innovative paths by improving their effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability and transferability, but in no case coincides with innovation itself.

The term “social”, for its part, run the risk of being understood as merely “welfare” and the generic creation of opportunities for sociality or inclusion. For our interlocutors, this can represent an opportunity to bring people together again and, in terms of community, create paths able to generate income, work, meaning, and happiness (Maslow).

Entrepreneurs particularly pointed out the topic of social fragility and companies’ specific tasks to deal with it. Social Innovation appears, therefore, as a process that starts from the ability to refer to a specific social fabric in a given territory, towards which it acts with “experimental” and not completely replicable practices, to:

- promote social and professional inclusion of fragile subjects
- improve attractiveness and full satisfaction of "fragile" users’ tourist experience.

Again, the combination of the words “innovation” and “social” make the concept of social innovation evocative and heuristic, that is, not yet fully defined.

On the one hand, making innovation means enabling a positive evolution of reality, starting from the needs of the weakest and most distressed people, who represent the benchmark of change strategies and those who can validate the effectiveness and positivity of an innovative practice.

On the other hand, the social dimension of tourism evokes concepts such as “sociality”, local society or socialization of experiences, which take the form of processes in which 'change' and 'social/interpersonal relations' are constantly present together.

There is no innovation without a change in people's behaviour, whether they are producers or users of tourism experience.

This presupposes a strong focus on the social history of the territory, to its peculiarities, opportunities and challenges. Thus, all participants perceive themselves as champions and witnesses of this approach, each through their specific business experience.

Who makes social innovation?

When it comes to defining the optimal size of the enterprise acting in the field of social innovation, the debate highlights a strong dichotomy between small and large enterprises.

Even if “small is not always beautiful”, a significant predilection for small size resists, due to specific reasons:

- entrepreneur biography
- start-ups organizational profile
- preference for a face-to-face sociality, fuelled by close, on-sight relationships.

A specific personal characterization of innovative entrepreneurs also emerged, who, in order to "control" and encourage the rooting of innovation, need to maintain a 360-degree view, and this fits better in the small-sized company. The medium/large size introduces elements of management complexity and variables that, by increasing the entropy of the entrepreneurial system, deeply modifies and fragments the management of the experience.

One might conclude, as one of the speakers did, that *if participation is the lens through which to observe operational effectiveness, it's also the main factor in extending participation to other potential recipients.*

Goals related to Social Innovation in business strategies: is it a reason for a birth or a market opportunity (mission vs. market strategy)?

One of the main knots related to possible business strategies in tourism is the way of understanding the territory.

Territory has opportunities, local culture, histories, ways of seeing the environment and its infinite resources.

The red thread that binds entrepreneurial experiences is linked to the concept of sustainability as sustainable use of territorial (human, instrumental, financial, relational) resources.

Even when it comes to digital, the focus is on building an ecosystem where digital takes on a growing but not exclusive importance, making previously unimaginable processes and paths possible.

Speakers agree that competitiveness is linked to digital but also to participatory processes aimed at involving as much as possible tourists as temporary citizens, in an experience that starts from territory and the whole offer of territorial tourist assets, including digital ones (where available).

This means that competitiveness is made up of size-related ingredients:

- political
- managerial
- technological ones.

But that is not all. Competitiveness goes hand to hand with a broader and richer vision of territory, that tourism companies, with their specific value, help to create. In this vision companies' social innovation paths are grafted, which look at environmental, social, economic and technical sustainability. Through the latter an attempt is made to combine the demand for tourism and its use supported by new technologies.

This process makes use of widespread entrepreneurial systems in which "social" is combined with "entrepreneurial" to build a new paradigm of sustainable tourism. This paradigm is based on:

- adaptability to the environment
- sustainability
- social participation.

In the current phase of tourism development, alliances, joint working platforms and the growth of skills are crucial.

In the corporate vision, barriers to entry of new competitors are not considered important, thanks to the uniqueness and intrinsic and often unrepeatable characteristics of the promoted innovation.

Some of the good practices observed in the focus groups have the merit of creating job opportunities for disadvantaged people. For companies that target fragile audiences this is part of the corporate mission and integral to the very concept of social innovation.

Demonstrating that in one's own sector and/or profession there are no insurmountable barriers to access for any type of physical, psychic and/or sensory difficulty, becomes fundamental.

Tourist experience can act as a lever for changing the system of opportunities in two ways: for those who work in the sector and for those who use specific dedicated services.

This makes the quality of hospitality an identity factor of the tourism offer as well as a value more in general.

A hospitality made up of experiences and that can be defined as "sensitive hospitality": sensitive to change, diversity, personalized demand, personal growth through experience.

Innovative practices addressed to fragile and/or needy people thus become an "exercise" to test activities that can be addressed to all clients in the future.

Fragile clientele is the bearer of a demand for specialization in tourism offer, for dedicated goods and services. However, such niche requests contain the seeds of a deeper change, fostering the transition from sporadic or incremental innovation to a real paradigm shift, where it will be possible to better interpret the elements of break with the previous paradigm.

Thus, many elements addressed during the debate are still "experimentations" that cannot be generalized now.

Very different systems and experiences coexist in the background, where:

- the information gap on the experience's dissemination
- the rarefaction of the contamination processes,

delay the developments of the experiences.

Our interlocutors complain that, although useful to the overall development of the system, innovators are not determinants or drivers in tourism general transformation at the territorial level, but can provide virtuous examples, in some cases successful and/or economically profitable.

In any case, innovative tourism enterprises are credited with empathy, intuition, ability to bind to the social history of the territory (wealth and fragility), resourcefulness and creative thinking. Small size, as noted above, acts as a glue and a prerequisite for "feasibility."

Obstacles/opportunities in applying Social Innovation in tourism enterprises (internal and external ones)

Tourism is one of the productive sectors where a change of vision at a territorial level (sustainability and innovation) can be faster and more visible. This triggers entrepreneurial and relational paths that may be easily perceived as different, challenging and engaging.

Tourism companies that make social innovation are recognized for distinctive and valuable features, such as empathy, intuition, ability to bind with the territory, resourcefulness and creative thinking.

However, talking about the accommodation industry, speakers underlined that hotels are lagging far behind in adapting to sustainability needs and compliance rules (including those expressly provided for by law).

Moreover, one of the most difficult problems to overcome in the long term is a persistent lack of overview of tourism evolution (inputs and outputs) in terms of sustainability and of social innovation. Even environmental sustainability should not be limited to the protection of the existing environment (as it is reductively interpreted today) but aimed, above all, at its improvement.

The decisive role of intermediate bodies is recalled by all present:

- to make innovations possible for small companies characterised by widespread financial fragility (through institutional funding)
- to disseminate and consolidate a widespread cooperation that promotes trust and collaboration between local players (territorial social capital).

For entrepreneurs participating in the focus group, coming from social tourism experiences, one diriment factor is the sharing of the corporate mission by employees, which allows to overcome the bottlenecks of temporary cash crunches also due to tourism seasonal nature.

Furthermore, a progressively favourable social fabric for innovation and proactive public administrations, capable of enhancing experiences, are other essential factors.

The concentration of innovation experiences in already widely exploited tourist areas demonstrates that it is the result of contamination and territorial contiguity: just think of the Romagna Riviera or contiguous areas, where entrepreneurship, while moving along a border line, is always able to exploit existing experiences and identify ever wider and more significant fields of innovation.

Among them the hotel stands aimed at seasonal operators, designed to solve the housing problem of tourist operators in the high season. The offer of decent and low-cost residential services has significantly improved the quality of professional life of these operators, with consequent positive effects on the quality of services rendered.

The possibility of spreading similar experiences in other attractive Italian destinations should be explored. No doubt that their replicability is severely limited by organized crime, that presides over the economic development of tourist territories, and, last not least, by the lack of change awareness in Public Administrations and intermediate bodies, whose willingness to invest would assure a kind of public venture capital

Adopted models

Speakers' different backgrounds, both cultural and technical, did not allow for the definition of working models, but rather of shared visions and watchwords.

We can summarize them as follows.

Development of social innovation paths in tourism is based on:

- the history of community and the ways of using collective assets, artefacts and territorial experiences. In this sense, experience is strongly centred on a "local" dimension;

- community chain as a value, rediscovery of community ties of which tourist experience may be the glue, in a new conceptualization of the tourist asset;
- productive effects generated by the enrichment of the tourist asset in a social sense, characterized by the relationship with the host community.

The concept of sustainability is enriched and becomes a real cultural approach and a new imprinting of the tourist experience.

Social innovation must therefore be “shaped” and made consistent with local cultural, social, technical and relational needs.

This amounts to offering a high-quality product, but it is not the same as tourism for “excluded” people.

Such conceptual premises enable to build a holistic, unified and non-fragmented vision of the tourist experience.

Rather than models, our interlocutors gave us back recursiveness linked to a strong value dimension and a perception of the “frontier” of innovation.

First, fragile people placement represents both an opportunity and a working model. Indeed, the speakers suggested considering the cases presented as evidence of their feasibility and replicability: just think of severely disabled workers (i.e. waiters in social restaurants) who directly deal with customers.

According to our interlocutors, these realities bring a double empowerment:

- for workers, who can become aware of their professional experience
- for tourists, who meet a new reality, learning about a social problem and its solution, offered in a very interesting two-way "educational" perspective.

Within these professional experiences, emphasis is placed on the need to overcome precarious forms of engagement (e.g., internship) in favour of stable ones, that can activate motivational drives essential to undertake an experience of change, even on a personal level.

The need to foster experiences’ contamination through platforms where businesses can meet and develop positive projects and economies is, likewise, recalled.

Besides the problem of innovators, issues related to overcoming seasonality and developing internal areas, which suffer from depopulation more than others, were widely present in the debate, alongside the proposal to focus on a widespread and "interstitial" entrepreneurship, aimed at enhancing or bringing to light existing professional and/or entrepreneurial experiences, starting from old experiences, new needs and ad hoc skills.

From this point of view, social innovation is not so much something “new” as something “renewing”, capable of keeping alive the social and economic history of a territory in its own way. i.e., through non-generalizable experiences: this confirms the very specific and local, even if strongly visionary, fibre of innovators.

"Social tourism", "sensitive hospitality" become guides for the construction of work and business models, enriched by the contribution of all the companies that share the same territorial mission and an idea of social innovation conceived as an extension of rights, including tourist experience, to all

audiences. This is the case of a company working on a software for classifying tourist offer from the point of view of facilities' accessibility: this tool is not only a map of fruition opportunities for a specialized (fragile) public, but a push to define a benchmark which, starting from those who have the most difficulties, extends to all, from the point of view of "usable universal territorial good".

Other niche practices emerged, related to the mobility of people with disabilities as well, such as Destination for all (protocol) that give people with special accessibility needs the role of consumer/user; or more systemic experiences, such as the creation of Accessibility Guidelines for the 2026 Olympics.

Finally, innovative Smart village models were mentioned, geared towards the growth of digital infrastructure in small villages and the creation of co-working areas for temporary residents/citizens. Such experiences draw a framework of opportunities that, at the moment, focuses on the enhancement of specific urban realities (villages, art towns, inland areas), through public support to technological infrastructure of the territory and specific opportunities and products for periodic and temporary forms of tourism.

How to stimulate the adoption of Social Innovation: companies providing models vs jealousy of their own solutions or barriers to competitors' access?

For years the tourism holistic view has been contradicted by the great success of specific niche tourism experiences (e.g. walking tourism). These must be brought back to unitary and integrated paths to reconnect territorial resources, widespread and innovative entrepreneurship.

The competition among these "pieces of tourism" should gradually be brought back to a more conscious, coherent and orderly approach (sustainable tourism policies), even it is not just negative, as it:

- makes small locations protagonists
- expands the user market
- highlights the beauty of places and artifacts.

Speaking of social innovation, the main reasons for delay in the diffusion and development of social innovation models seem to lie in the lack of stable business-to-business cooperations and in the inability to imagine longer and more articulated investment scenarios.

Many innovations endure thanks to the stubbornness/capacity of isolated innovators. The others, those who follow, usually proceed in an imitative and incremental way. Their participation in the innovation market finds no barriers other than the availability of the elements that made the path they are trying to reproduce/imitate possible.

Dissemination of good ideas/practices does not limit or weaken those who innovate first, but provides a very useful support for spreading ideas, paths and models that can become common heritage, consolidating new visions and sensibilities.

Innovation, even the one that works well commercially, is generally still other-directed and hard to disseminate adequately. Therefore, talking about barriers to the entry of new competitors may be inappropriate.

Financial investment for innovation: how much does Social Innovation cost?

Financial investment is an issue for innovators, especially for small businesses with a development horizon limited in time and space, even if the main problem seems to be the information barrier to the dissemination of success stories.

This also severely limits the driving role of public institutions, which struggle to intercept successful experiences (scouting for innovations) and to promote their positive effects (good practices) in other contexts.

Moreover, reproducibility is limited by the specificity and singularity of innovations introduced. In addition, the ability to innovate and acquire resources for innovation goes hand in hand with the possession of valuable business skills (management skills, risk appetite, ethics, technical and technological skills, social responsibility) and the availability of an adequate human capital reserve.

These skills are key characteristics of innovators and, when they are lacking, the impact of innovation is dramatically reduced.

The business risk of innovative companies is still very high and no forms of innovation rewards exist that could encourage its diffusion.

Networks for entrepreneurial risk reduction

Co-creating entrepreneurial experiences through an exchange of skills and resources can be a modus operandi for reducing business risks.

In case of social innovation anchored to inclusive tourism processes for both users and employees, networks are more easily built through:

- sharing good ideas
- sharing ethical approach
- social and corporate mission
- corporate social responsibility.

Promoting associations and sharing entrepreneurial paths to reduce business risks is the task of local administrations, but it requires territorial tourism policies to significantly improve in quality.

If cooperation and creation of stable network represent valid instruments for the development of business solutions, incremental and imitative proceeding of social innovation, on the one hand, and the poor appeal of the public proposal, strongly lacking in terms of building opportunities for the territory, on the other, tend to confirm and reinforce a self-referential and pioneering vision of innovation, with all the risks this entails for the very survival of innovative enterprises.

At this stage of industry development, alliances, platforms for joint work and the growth of both common and niche skills are crucial.

The metaphor of the isolated innovative entrepreneur is still dominant in our interlocutor's imagination, culturally open to change, that does not mean construction of common opportunities.

Moreover, from a social market perspective, the above-mentioned double condition (absence of a public entrepreneurial proposal and strong characterization of the private or private social entrepreneurial proposal, e.g., Type B Cooperation) makes talking about barriers to entry for new competitors quite rhetorical. This argument, now, fails to anchor itself on a friendly market, supportive of social innovation paths. Opportunities to enter the market of innovative tourism services, for example, are limited to participation in public offers, always in the context of additional services, and cannot completely emancipate from unique and/or niche experiences, except in a few cases.

How to activate the Learning Chains

Digital innovation opens new spaces for learning and is a necessary condition for tourism development in general, regardless of company size or mission.

If technology supports change, it must also be supported by social innovation.

“People” is a diriment factor in tourism experience and can make tourism experience repeatable over time. In fact, the quality of work and of work performance is immediately transformed into product quality and, in general, into tourism supply quality. It constitutes, therefore, the pivotal factor in the rating of tourist experience.

Italy lags far behind in digital training, staff skills gaps are wide, especially in tourism, for which seasonality is a strong brake to investment in training.

Overcoming seasonality, through the diversification of the tourist offer, goes hand in hand with broadening operators’ skill set and their ability to progressively incorporate different professional experiences.

In this sense, our interlocutors express the need for a massive investment in the development of systems of highly territorialized and rationalized skill systems.

Training offer at the local level is generally considered adequate, but it needs a more sensible skills needs assessment. Even visibility and methodological systematisation of existing innovations are considered fundamental (methods, knowledge, and skills necessary for replicability).

In many territories, overcoming tourism seasonality starts from the bottom, i.e. from the ability of suppliers to imagine a “continuous cycle” tourist experience.

This path takes advantage of the transformation of “tourist” into “temporary citizen”, who wants to identify with the local history and opportunities and knows how to make full and careful use of its attractions, throughout the year.

A final mention was made by our interlocutors to the development of AI related skills, able to highly customize and diversify tourist packages: such skills are not immediately available and require, above all, success in attracting specific investments, but such an ability is not in the DNA of Italian entrepreneurial system.

The centrality of the person is a recurring theme in speakers’ narrative when it comes to learning issues.

Employees need to be enabled to express their full potential, and training has the task and duty to respond to this need.

This approach is the basis for an evolution of companies training behaviours, which goes beyond the logic of assistance and opens to the logic of production. Teaching a job and providing high-level training are assets to be spread unreservedly.

However, self-referentiality in public training offer is highlighted, which is not always able to respond to the most innovative working realities needs. It therefore appears rigid and is often perceived as inadequate, incentivising in-company training paths.

Currently, there is a strong recourse to do-it-yourself training which, beyond objective limits, has the value of providing professional growth functional to business needs, but risk, in the long run, not achieving the expected results, in terms of stability and adequacy of skills needed by the company.

[Annexes](#)

Annex 1: 30th March 2023 Focus Group Report, Panel “Experts/Training-University”

Annex 2: 30th March 2023 Focus Group Report, Panel “Enterprises”



This document was edited by Unioncamere – Unione Italiana delle Camere di commercio, industria, artigianato e agricoltura, and reviewed by IFOA, INAPP and University of Genova

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FOCUS GROUP ON SOCIAL INNOVATION IN TOURISM
PANEL “EXPERTS/TRAINING-UNIVERSITY”

(March 30th 2023)

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Introductory note

This document reports the conclusions of the fourth Focus Group held by Italian partnership of EULEP project, specifically dedicated to tourism, a high priority industry in Italy's economy.

The Focus Group was held on March 30th, 2023 and aimed at investigating the knowledge and use of Social Innovation and related skills needs, from the point of view of experts/Training-University in tourism sector.

Social Innovation can be defined as the development and implementation of new ideas (products, services and models) to meet social needs and create new social relationships or collaborations, it is aimed at improving human well-being. Social innovations are innovations that are social at both their ends and their means. They are innovations that are not only good for society but enhance individuals' capacity to act.

Within the project, Social Innovation is being looked at as a tool for accompanying companies in their digital transitions, and in particular in the adoption of AI and VR.

The introduction of these new technologies can have a disruptive effect on enterprises human resources structure. Employees will not only have to be trained in the new technologies, but they will also be faced with changes in the enterprises structure leading potentially to changes in the workforce structure. Social innovation can help mitigate the effects of the changes and help employees navigate the changes successfully by inventing new forms of cooperation for instance.

The way EULEP intends to deal with Social Innovation is quite close to the concept of 'change management', with reference to two main components of innovation:

- *the changes due to the introduction of new technologies/processes (change management), in company internal environment;*
- *change linked to "corporate social responsibility", in company external environment (customers, social environment, suppliers, etc.).*

The results might indicate the best strategies for the evolution of the tourism sector, in Italy and in Europe, and provide strategic guidelines, useful to meet the demand for innovation promoted by the European Commission.

The training needs, detected with a bottom-up and end-user-centred approach, will be taken into account to develop some of the training modules of EULEP open learning experience platform, that Unioncamere will dedicate to innovative AI and VR topics applied to tourism sector and its supply chain.

Introduction of participants

Giulia Bubbolini is responsible for the coordination and operational management of CISE (Centre for Innovation and Economic Development), Special Agency of the Chamber of Commerce of Romagna - Forlì-Cesena and Rimini. CISE works to orient local development towards responsible and sustainable innovation, by networking skills in collaboration with the local innovation ecosystem. CISE is accredited by SAAS - Social Accountability Accreditation Services, for the issue of SA8000 certification, a voluntary standard that defines the requirements to be met by organisations committed to guaranteeing the quality of working conditions with a view to social responsibility. It produces, every two years, the Emilia-Romagna Innovation Observatory.

Olivia Carone is an architect, trainer and consultant expert in corporate sustainability and territorial development.

Virgilio Gay has been involved in territorial marketing for more than a decade, after a 20 years' experience in finance and marketing. For setting up a Participation Foundation start-up, he obtained awards such as the "Best Practices for Innovation" Award of Confindustria, "Eco and The City" of the Spadolini Foundation and the "Libero Bizzarri for Media Education" Award. His work is cited in a wide range of national and international literature. He is Managing Partner VP Territorial Marketing for Nestplan International, consultant for Lazio Innova for Micro Innovation Laboratories and Lab Turimo for training and coaching of DMOs in Lazio, contract lecturer for Bocconi Foundation Business School. His most recent publication was the Reference Practice 133_2022 of UNI - the National Standardisation Body for "the market orientation of profit and non-profit organisations".

Loredana Giani Maguire is Professor of Administrative Law at the European University of Rome (UER), where she is coordinating the degree course in Tourism and Territorial Development. Rector's Delegate for Inclusion and President of the Research Centre "Generative Welfare, Sustainability and Rights" and of the Administrative Chamber of Basilicata, she is currently consulor of Studio Carbonetti, member of the Technical Table of the Lazio Region Tourism Observatory, of the nucleus of experts for the evaluation of training plans presented on the FAPI - SME Fund notices and member of the FMS Federal Court of Appeal. She has been a member of numerous institutional Commissions, including the Commission for the study and in-depth study of issues relating to the reconstruction process in the municipalities of the Abruzzo Region affected by the earthquake of 6 April 2009. She is a member of the scientific committee of several Master's degrees, including the Master's degree in Law and Administrative Process, editor of a publishing series, a member of the editorial board of the journal "Nuove Autonomie" and of the scientific committee of several journals including "Il Processo", "Ambiente e Diritto" and "Diritto e Politica dei Trasporti". Author of over 130 publications in national and international journals and several monographic volumes.

Stefano Landi is President of SL&A Turismo e Territorio, former Expert of the Permanent Committee for the Promotion of Tourism in Italy ex Art Bonus Law at the MIBACT, Director of the Artisan Laboratory of Narration of Italian Destinations srls, Lecturer of the Master "Economics and Marketing of Tourism and Communication of the Territory" at LUISS - "Guido Carli" University in Rome.

Findings

What Social Innovation in tourism means: perimeter, scope and applications

The definition of Social Innovation used in Eulep project was proposed in advance to the speakers, who accordingly provided their own definition. The aim was to enable a comparison between different interpretations of social innovation as a process.

According to Eulep project, Social Innovation “can be defined as the development and implementation of new ideas (products, services and models) to meet social needs and create new social relationships or collaborations, it is aimed at improving human well-being. Social innovations are innovations that are social at both their ends and their means. They are innovations that are not only good for society but enhance individuals’ capacity to act”.

Below are the definitions of Social Innovation provided by our interlocutors. During the Focus group, the request was more specific and aimed at extracting possible definitions of Social Innovation in tourism.

Social innovation:

- creates sustainable solutions;
- creates value for both market and the local community;
- creates value, not just an economy one;
- is a multi-level process with multiple components that must be integrated with the territorial network system. Tourism should not be looked at as an assemblage of commercial activities, but as a process of activities geared at enhancing territory.
- in tourism, it is a process that allows citizens in a local community to meet visitors interested in learning about their reality (and that can thus be defined “temporary citizens”). In this sense, social innovation is a phenomenon that enables and amplifies relations among people (community, permanent citizens, temporary citizens) and generates social sustainability, positive relations, shared values;
- is an interpretative framework that highlights responsible innovation processes related to environmental impacts and development of social relations fostering participation and cooperation in a local community. Social Innovation is not characterised by a specific entrepreneurial mandate. It can contribute to overcoming social challenges, especially through the creation of new partnerships.

Some risks have also been highlighted, due to an “omnibus” use of two polysemous terms: innovation and social (terminological toxicity).

On the one hand, there is the risk of identifying “innovation” with digitisation. On the other hand, digitisation is useful and necessary to qualify innovative paths by improving their effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability and transferability, but in no case coincides with innovation itself.

The term “social”, for its part, run the risk of being understood as merely “welfare” and the generic creation of opportunities for sociality or inclusion. For our interlocutors, this can represent an

opportunity to bring people together again and, in terms of community, create paths able to generate income, work, meaning, and happiness (Maslow).

Goals related to Social Innovation in business strategies: is it a reason for a birth or a market opportunity (mission vs. market strategy)?

In corporate strategies social innovation is connected to the way of conceiving territory.

Territory has opportunities, local culture, histories and ways of seeing the environment and its infinite resources. The red thread that binds entrepreneurial experiences is linked to the concept of sustainability as sustainable use of territorial resources.

Even when it comes to digital, the focus is on building an ecosystem where digital takes on a growing but not exclusive importance, making previously unimaginable processes and paths possible.

Speakers agree that competitiveness is linked to digital but also to participatory processes aimed at involving as much as possible tourists as temporary citizens, in an experience that starts from territory and the whole offer of territorial tourist assets, including digital ones (where available).

This means that competitiveness is made up of size-related ingredients:

- political
- managerial
- technological ones.

But that is not all. Competitiveness goes hand to hand with a broader and richer vision of territory, that tourism companies, with their specific value, help to create. In this vision companies' social innovation paths are grafted, which look at environmental, social, economic and technical sustainability. Through the latter an attempt is made to combine the demand for tourism and its use supported by new technologies.

This process makes use of widespread entrepreneurial systems in which “social” is combined with “entrepreneurial” to build a new paradigm of sustainable tourism. This paradigm is based on:

- adaptability to the environment
- sustainability
- social participation.

In the current phase of tourism development, alliances, joint working platforms and the growth of skills are crucial.

Obstacles/opportunities in applying Social Innovation in tourism enterprises (internal and external)

Tourism is one of the productive sectors where a change of vision at a territorial level (sustainability and innovation) can be faster and more visible. This triggers entrepreneurial and relational paths that may be easily perceived as different, challenging and engaging.

Nevertheless, speakers think that innovators are not decisive in driving sector's overall transformation, but often limit their contribution to providing virtuous examples, in some cases successful and/or economically profitable.

In other words, innovation still appears linked to the strategies of a single entrepreneur, isolated and often not transferable, if not with structural conditions (company size, vision, skills, widespread entrepreneurship) that are not easily replicable.

In any case, innovative tourism enterprises are credited with empathy, intuition, ability to bind to the social history of the territory (wealth and fragility), resourcefulness and creative thinking.

The delay of hotels in adapting to sustainability needs and compliance rules (including those expressly provided for by law) was underlined.

Moreover, one of the most difficult problems to overcome in the long term is a persistent lack of overview of tourism evolution in terms of sustainability and of social innovation.

Even environmental sustainability should not be limited to the protection of the existing environment (as it is reductively interpreted today) but aimed, above all, at its improvement.

The decisive role of intermediate bodies is recalled by all present:

- to make innovations possible for small companies characterised by widespread financial fragility (through institutional funding)
- to disseminate and consolidate a widespread cooperation that promotes trust and collaboration between local players (territorial social capital)

Adopted models

Speakers' different backgrounds, both cultural and technical, did not allow for the definition of working models, but rather of shared visions and watchwords. We can summarise them as follows.

Development of social innovation paths in tourism is based on:

- the history of community and the ways of using collective assets, artefacts and territorial experiences. In this sense, experience is strongly centred on a "local" dimension
- community chain as a value, rediscovery of community ties of which tourist experience may be the glue, in a new conceptualization of the tourist asset
- productive effects generated by the enrichment of the tourist asset in a social sense, characterized by the relationship with the host community.

The concept of sustainability is enriched and becomes a real cultural approach and a new imprinting of the tourist experience.

Social innovation must therefore be "shaped" and made consistent with local cultural, social, technical and relational needs.

Such conceptual premises enable to build a holistic, unified and non-fragmented vision of the tourist experience.

How to stimulate the adoption of Social Innovation: companies providing models vs jealousy of their own solutions or barriers to competitors' access?

For years the tourism holistic view has been contradicted by the great success of specific niche tourism experiences (e.g. walking tourism). These must be brought back to unitary and integrated paths to reconnect territorial resources, widespread and innovative entrepreneurship.

The competition among these “pieces of tourism” should gradually be brought back to a more conscious, coherent and orderly approach (sustainable tourism policies).

The main reasons for delay in the diffusion and development of social innovation models seem to be mainly due to the lack of stable business-to-business cooperations (which would allow for an adequate dissemination of innovations, as well as the ability to imagine longer and more articulated investment scenarios).

Many innovations endure thanks to the stubbornness/capacity of isolated innovators. The others, those who follow, usually proceed in an imitative and incremental way. Their participation in the innovation market finds no barriers other than the availability of the elements that made the path they are trying to reproduce/imitate possible.

Dissemination of good ideas/practices does not limit or weaken those who innovate first, but provides a very useful support for spreading ideas, paths and models that can become common heritage, consolidating new visions and sensibilities.

Therefore, talking about barriers to the entry of new competitors may be inappropriate.

Financial investment for innovation: how much does Social Innovation cost?

One of the main problems seems to be the information barrier to the dissemination of success stories. This also severely limits the driving role of public institutions that struggle to intercept successful experiences and promote their positive effects (good practices) in other contexts. Moreover, reproducibility is limited by the specificity and singularity of the innovations introduced.

On the other hand, the ability to innovate and acquire resources for innovation is accompanied by the possession of valuable business skills: management skills, technological resources, risk appetite, ethics, social responsibility, technical skills, and availability of an adequate human capital reserve.

These skills are key characteristics of innovators and, when they are lacking, the impact of innovation is dramatically reduced.

Networks for entrepreneurial risk reduction

The creation of a mechanism for the exchange of entrepreneurial skills, resources and experiences can be a *modus operandi* capable of reducing business risks.

In case of social innovation anchored in inclusive tourism processes for both users and employees, networks are more easily built thanks to the sharing of ethical approach, corporate mission and social responsibility.

Promoting associations and sharing entrepreneurial paths to reduce business risks is the task of local administrations, but it requires territorial tourism policies to significantly improve in quality.

If cooperation and creation of stable network represent valid instruments for the development of business solutions, incremental and imitative proceeding of social innovation, on the one hand, and the poor appeal of the public proposal, strongly lacking in terms of building opportunities for the territory, on the other, tend to confirm and reinforce a self-referential and pioneering vision of innovation, with all the risks this entails for the very survival of innovative enterprises.

How to activate Learning Chains

Digital innovation opens new spaces for learning and is a necessary condition for the tourism development in general, regardless of company size or mission.

If technology supports change, it must also be supported by social innovation.

“People” is a diriment factor in tourism experience and can make tourism experience repeatable over time. In fact, the quality of work and of work performance is immediately transformed into product quality and, in general, into tourism supply quality. It constitutes, therefore, the pivotal factor in the rating of tourist experience.

Italy lags far behind in digital training, staff skills gaps are wide, especially in tourism, for which seasonality is a strong brake in investment in training.

Overcoming seasonality, through the diversification of the tourist offer, goes hand in hand with broadening operators’ skill set and their ability to progressively incorporate different professional experiences.

In this sense, our interlocutors express the need for a massive investment in the development of systems of highly territorialized and rationalized skill systems.

Training offer at the local level is generally considered adequate, but need a more sensible skills needs assessment. Even visibility and methodological systematisation of existing innovations are considered fundamental (methods, knowledge, and skills necessary for replicability).

In many territories, overcoming tourism seasonality starts from the bottom, i.e. from the ability of suppliers to imagine a “continuous cycle” tourist experience.

This path takes advantage of the transformation of “tourist” into “temporary citizen”, who wants to identify with the local history and opportunities and knows how to make full and careful use of its attractions.

A final mention was made by our interlocutors to the development of AI related skills, able to highly customize and diversify tourist packages: such skills are not immediately available and require, above all, success in attracting specific investments, but such an ability is not in the DNA of Italian entrepreneurial system.

EUROCHAMBRES



This document was edited by Unioncamere – Unione Italiana delle Camere di commercio, industria, artigianato e agricoltura, and reviewed by IFOA, INAPP and University of Genova

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EULEP

WP2 - MARKET ANALYSIS
FOCUS GROUP ON SOCIAL INNOVATION IN TOURISM
PANEL “ENTERPRISES”

(March 30th 2023)

REPORT

*EULEP - European Learning Experience Platform
Connecting Centres of Vocational Excellence to develop and deliver
innovative transnational C-VET training in AI, VR, social innovation*



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Authors: edited by Unioncamere, reviewed by INAPP, IFOA, Università degli Studi di Genova

QUALITATIVE FOCUS GROUPS ON NEEDS AND RELEVANT SKILLS REQUIRED BY COMPANIES IN THE TOURISM SECTOR AND ITS SUPPLY CHAIN ABOUT SOCIAL INNOVATION. PANEL “ENTERPRISES” REPORT

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Introductory note

This document reports the conclusions of the fifth and last Focus Group held by Italian partnership of EULEP project, specifically dedicated to tourism, a high priority industry in Italy's economy.

The Focus Group was held on March 30th, 2023, and aimed at investigating the knowledge and use of Social Innovation and related skills needs, from the point of view of enterprises in tourism sector.

Social Innovation can be defined as the development and implementation of new ideas (products, services and models) to meet social needs and create new social relationships or collaborations, it is aimed at improving human well-being. Social innovations are innovations that are social at both their ends and their means. They are innovations that are not only good for society but enhance individuals' capacity to act.

Within the project, Social Innovation is being looked at as a tool for accompanying companies in their digital transitions, and in particular in the adoption of AI and VR.

The introduction of these new technologies can have a disruptive effect on enterprises human resources structure. Employees will not only have to be trained in the new technologies, but they will also be faced with changes in the enterprises structure leading potentially to changes in the workforce structure. Social innovation can help mitigate the effects of the changes and help employees navigate the changes successfully by inventing new forms of cooperation for instance.

The way EULEP intends to deal with Social Innovation is quite close to the concept of 'change management', with reference to two main components of innovation:

- the changes due to the introduction of new technologies/processes (change management), in company internal environment;*
- change linked to "corporate social responsibility", in company external environment (customers, social environment, suppliers, etc.).*

The results might indicate the best strategies for the evolution of the tourism sector, in Italy and in Europe, and provide strategic guidelines, useful to meet the demand for innovation promoted by the European Commission.

The training needs, detected with a bottom-up and end-user-centred approach, will be taken into account to develop some of the training modules of EULEP open learning experience platform, that Unioncamere will dedicate to innovative AI and VR topics applied to tourism sector and its supply chain.

Introduction of participants

Bagno 27 (Rimini) is a bathing establishment that has carried out inclusive policies over the years, both with reference to workers and customers. It was awarded the Responsible Innovators Award of Emilia-Romagna Region several times, in different categories.

Stefano Mazzotti, owner, participates for Bagno 27

Expirit (Macerata) is an innovative company with a social vocation that has chosen to take care of the needs and hopes of the communities of hidden Italy, villages, inland areas, betting on tourism as a sustainable engine to restart the present and future of these territories. It works side by side with local authorities, tour operators, suppliers of experiences and accommodation facilities to promote the identity, traditions and beauty of the territories.

The goal of "building destinations", to offer travelers an unprecedented experience and promote the development of the beauties of lesser-known Italian communities, is pursued by designing tourism development strategies shared with locals, training operators to welcome, building unique travel experiences and telling the beauty, stories and uniqueness of these lands. Expirit develops integrated projects by enhancing community resources, rigorously studying the territories and using highly innovative tools.

Antonio Ferraro participates for Expirit.

Pixelcoop (Rimini) is a community start-up, born as a spin-off of the Pro Loco in which the Viserbella tourist committee was transformed in 2016. The cooperative has rearranged a pension destined for bankruptcy and converted it into a residence at controlled prices for seasonal tourism workers, also as a response to the shortage of staff that was found in the past season.

Stefano Benaglia, administrator, participates for Pixelcoop

Village for all V4A® is a Tourist Innovation company, specialized since 2008 in Accessible Hospitality and Inclusion. Its founder and CEO, Roberto Vitali, has 30 years' experience of in Accessible Tourism at national and international level. Trainer, transformer, inventor, innovator, revolutionary, brave businessman, as he has been defined, Roberto helps companies, tourism businesses and touristic destination to increase their profits by increasing the accessibility of their facilities for people with disabilities, seniors, families with young children, without forgetting those who have food intolerances. His mission: "Disabled people who make tourism are tourists!"

Roberto Vitali, CEO, participates for Village for all

Findings

Introduction

All participants, except Expirit, have a strong "social" vocation and deal, on the one hand, with the employment of fragile people, on the other to the development of tourist opportunities for people in difficulty, with a view to "sensitive hospitality".

This has partly redefined the thematic boundaries and the approach to the proposed topics.

Furthermore, it introduced an important cross fertilization methodological view with reference to the issues of professional needs and fruition by different targets.

What Social Innovation in tourism means: perimeter, scope and applications

Providing a definitive and shared definition of Social Innovation was not a task of the Focus Group participants, nevertheless the account of their professional experience allowed us to extract some transversal factors that helped to better contextualize the vision of the social innovation process carried out.

Reflecting on their mission and corporate identity, our interlocutors see themselves as innovators, even if in different ways. This has made the search for a shared vision easier.

Social Innovation appears, therefore, as a process that starts from the ability to refer to a specific social fabric in a given territory, towards which it acts with "experimental" and not completely replicable practices, in order to promote social and professional inclusion of fragile subjects and, at the same time, to improve attractiveness and full satisfaction of "fragile" users' tourist experience.

The combination of the words "innovation" and "social" make the concept of social innovation evocative and heuristic, that is, not yet fully defined.

On the one hand, making innovation means enabling a positive evolution of reality, starting from the needs of the weakest and most distressed people, who represent the benchmark of change strategies and those who can validate the effectiveness and positivity of an innovative practice.

On the other hand, the social dimension of tourism evokes concepts such as sociality, local society or socialization of experiences, which take the form of processes in which 'change' and 'social/interpersonal relations' are constantly present together.

There is no innovation without change in people's behaviour, whether they are producers or users of tourism experience.

This presupposes a strong focus on the social history of the territory, to its peculiarities, opportunities and challenges. Thus, all participants perceive themselves as champions and witnesses of this approach, each through their specific business experience.

Who makes social innovation?

The debate, even if only hinted at, highlighted a strong dichotomy between small and large enterprises.

Even if “small is not always beautiful”, a significant predilection for small size resists, due to entrepreneurs’ biography or start-ups organizational profile or the preference for face-to-face sociality, fueled by close and tight relations.

A specific personal characterization of innovative entrepreneurs also emerged, who, in order to “control” and encourage the rooting of innovation, need to maintain a 360-degree view, and this fits better in the small-sized company. The medium/large size introduces elements of management complexity and variables that profoundly change the management of the experience, fragmenting it. This does not mean that broadening and strengthening initial business practices is not appropriate, but rather that in a people-based innovation, people must be able to connect continuously and constantly. Especially if dealing with people “in difficulty”, it is necessary to understand whether the innovation produces for them, not only in general terms, the expected replicability effects.

One might conclude, as one of the speakers did, that if participation is the lens through which to observe operational effectiveness, it’s also the main factor in extending participation to other potential recipients.

Goals related to Social Innovation in business strategies: is it a reason for birth or a market opportunity (mission vs. market strategy)?

The answer to these questions focused on some recurring elements.

First, the vision of work and the creation of job opportunities for disadvantaged people. In this case, social innovation is part of the corporate mission.

Demonstrating that in one own sector and/or profession there are no insurmountable barriers to access for any type of physical, psychic and/or sensory difficulty, becomes fundamental. Tourist experience can act as a lever for changing the system of opportunities in two ways: for those who work in the sector and for those who use specific dedicated services.

This makes the quality of hospitality an identity factor of the tourism offer as well as a value more in general. A hospitality made up of experiences and opportunities admirably defined by one of our interlocutors as “sensitive hospitality”: sensitive to change, diversity, personalized demand, personal growth through experience.

Innovative practices addressed to fragile and/or needy people thus become an “exercise” to test activities that can be addressed to all clients in the future.

Fragile clientele is the bearer of a demand for specialization in tourism offer, for dedicated goods and services. However, such niche request contains the seeds of a deeper change, fostering the transition from sporadic or incremental innovation to a real paradigm shift, where it will be possible to better interpret the elements of break with the previous paradigm.

Thus, many elements addressed during the debate are still “experimentations” that cannot be generalized now.

Very different systems and experiences coexist in the background, where the information gap on the experiences dissemination and the rarefaction of the contamination processes delay the developments of the experiences.

Our interlocutors complain that, although useful to the overall development of the system, innovators are not determinants or drivers in tourism general transformation at the territorial level, but can provide virtuous examples, in some cases successful and/or economically profitable.

In other words, innovation still appears linked to the strategies of a single entrepreneur, isolated and often not transferable, if not with structural conditions (company size, vision, skills, widespread entrepreneurship) that are not easily replicable.

In any case, innovative tourism enterprises are credited with empathy, intuition, ability to bind to the social history of the territory (wealth and fragility), resourcefulness and creative thinking. Small size, as noted above, acts as a glue and a prerequisite for "feasibility."

Obstacles/opportunities in applying Social Innovation in tourism enterprises (internal and external)

Company size and difficulty in replicating are double face factors of the experience reported by our interlocutors, in support of a representation of social innovation as a process characterized by a unique mix of experiences and skills, on the one hand, chance and contingency on the other, related to entrepreneurs' biography and local history.

Therefore, it is difficult to extrapolate from the experiences described models of opportunities or obstacles to the entrepreneurial development for social innovation-oriented businesses.

One diriment factor is the sharing of the corporate mission by employees, which allows to overcome the bottlenecks of temporary cash crunches due to tourism seasonal nature.

Furthermore, a progressively favourable social fabric for innovation and proactive public administrations, capable of enhancing experiences, are other essential factors.

The concentration of innovation experiences in already widely exploited tourist areas demonstrates that it is the result of contamination and territorial contiguity: just think of the Romagna Riviera or contiguous areas, where entrepreneurship, while moving along a border line, is always able to exploit existing experiences and identify ever wider and more significant fields of innovation.

Among them the hotel stands aimed at seasonal operators, designed to solve the housing problem of tourist operators in the high season. The offer of decent and low-cost residential services has significantly improved the quality of professional life of these operators, with consequent positive effects on the quality of services rendered.

The possibility of spreading similar experiences in other Italian attractive destinations should be explored. No doubt that their replicability is severely limited by a widespread and fragmented entrepreneurial fabric, by organized crime, that presides over the economic development of tourist territories, and, last not least, by the lack of change awareness in Public Administrations and intermediate bodies, whose willingness to invest would assure a kind of public venture capital.

Adopted models

Rather than models, our interlocutors gave us back recursiveness linked to a strong value dimension and a perception of the "frontier" of innovation.

First, fragile people placement represents both an opportunity and a working model. Indeed, the speakers suggested considering the cases presented as evidence of their feasibility and replicability: just think to severely disabled workers (i.e. waiters in social restaurants) who directly deal with customers.

According to our interlocutors, these realities bring a double empowerment: for workers, who can realize their professional experience, and for tourists, who meet a new reality, learning about a social problem and its solution, offered in a very interesting two-way "educational" perspective.

Within these professional experiences, emphasis is placed on the need to overcome precarious forms of engagement (e.g., internship) in favour of stable ones, that can activate motivational drives essential to undertake an experience of change, even on a personal level.

The need to foster experiences' contamination through platforms where businesses can meet and develop positive projects and economies is, likewise, recalled.

Besides the problem of innovators, issues related to overcoming seasonality and developing internal areas, which suffer from depopulation more than others, were widely present in the debate, alongside the proposal to focus on a widespread and "interstitial" entrepreneurship, aimed at enhancing or bringing to light existing professional and/or entrepreneurial experiences, by "hybridising" old experiences, new needs and ad hoc skills. From this point of view, social innovation is not so much something "new" as something "renewing", capable of keeping alive social and economic history of a territory in its own way. i.e., through non-generalizable experiences: this confirms the very specific and local, even if strongly visionary, fibre of innovators.

"Social tourism", "sensitive hospitality" become guides for the construction of work and business models, enriched by the contribution of all the companies that share the same territorial mission and an idea of social innovation conceived as an extension of rights, including tourist experience, to all audiences. This is the case of a company working on a software for classifying tourist offer from the point of view of facilities' accessibility: this tool is not only a map of fruition opportunities for a specialized (fragile) public, but as a push to define a benchmark which, starting from those who have the most difficulties, extends to all, from the point of view of "usable universal territorial good".

Other niche practices emerged, related to the mobility of people with disabilities as well, such as Destination for all (protocol) that give people with special accessibility needs the role of consumer/user; or more systemic experiences, such as the creation of Accessibility Guidelines for the 2026 Olympics.

Finally, innovative Smart village models were mentioned, geared towards the growth of digital infrastructure in small villages and the creation of co-working areas for temporary residents/citizens. Such experiences, alternatives to those of social inclusion most represented in the focus, draw a framework of opportunities that, at the moment, focuses on the enhancement of specific urban realities (villages, art towns, inland areas).

How to stimulate the adoption of Social Innovation: companies providing models vs jealousy of their own solutions or barriers to competitors' access?

The main reasons for delay in the diffusion and development of social innovation models seem to lie in the lack of stable business-to-business cooperations and in the inability to imagine longer and more articulated investment scenarios.

Many innovations endure thanks to the stubbornness/capacity of isolated innovators. The others, those who follow, usually proceed in an imitative and incremental way. Their participation in the innovation market finds no barriers other than the availability of the elements that made the path they are trying to reproduce/imitate possible.

Dissemination of good ideas/practices does not limit or weaken those who innovate first, but provides a very useful support for spreading ideas, paths and models that can become common heritage, consolidating new visions and sensibilities.

Innovation, even the one that works well commercially, is generally still other-directed and hard to disseminate adequately. Therefore, talking about barriers to the entry of new competitors may be inappropriate.

Financial investment for innovation: how much does Social Innovation cost?

Financial investment is an issue for innovators, especially for small businesses with a development horizon limited in time and space, even if the main problem seems to be the information barrier to the dissemination of success stories.

This also severely limits the driving role of public institutions, which struggle to intercept successful experiences and to promote their positive effects (good practices) in other contexts. Moreover, as already argued, reproducibility is limited by the specificity and singularity of the innovations introduced.

Innovative ventures business risk is high, and there are no rewarding formulas that could undoubtedly foster their diffusion.

On the other hand, the ability to innovate and acquire resources for innovation is accompanied by the possession of valuable business skills: management skills, technological resources, risk appetite, ethics, social responsibility, technical skills, and availability of an adequate human capital reserve.

These skills are key characteristics of innovators and, when they are lacking, the impact of innovation is dramatically reduced.

Networks for entrepreneurial risk reduction

Mention has already been made about building a platform where enterprises can meet and share their experiences, including the most effective and efficient ways to develop positive projects and economies. Indeed, at this stage, alliances, joint working platforms and the development of common and niche skills are crucial.

In the corporate vision, barriers to entry of new competitors are not considered important, thanks to the uniqueness and intrinsic and often unrepeatable characteristics of the promoted innovation. So,

co-creation of entrepreneurial experiences, in a circular perspective of exchange of skills and resources, can be a modus operandi that can reduce business risks.

In case of social innovation anchored in inclusive tourism processes for both users and employees, networks are more easily built thanks to the sharing of ethical approach, corporate mission and social responsibility.

If cooperation and creation of stable network represent valid instruments for the development of some business solutions, incremental and imitative proceeding of social innovation, on the one hand, and the poor appeal of the public proposal, strongly lacking in terms of building opportunities for the territory, on the other, tend to confirm and reinforce a self-referential and pioneering vision of innovation, with all the risks this entails for the very survival of innovative enterprises.

The metaphor of the isolated innovative entrepreneur is still dominant in our interlocutor's imagination, culturally open to change, that does not mean construction of common opportunities.

Moreover, from a social market perspective, the above-mentioned double condition (absence of a public entrepreneurial proposal and strong characterization of the private or private social entrepreneurial proposal, e.g., Type B Cooperation) makes talking about barriers to entry for new competitors quite rhetorical and demagogic. This argument, now, fails to anchor itself on a friendly market, supportive of social innovation paths. Opportunities to enter the market of innovative tourism services, for example, are limited to participation in public offers, always in the context of additional services, and cannot completely emancipate from unique and/or niche experiences, except in a few cases.

How to activate Learning Chains

The centrality of the person is a recurring theme in the speakers' narrative when it comes to learning issues.

Employees need to be enabled to express their full potential, and training has the task and duty to respond to this need.

This approach is the basis for an evolution in companies training behaviours, which goes beyond the logic of assistance and opens to the logic of production. Teaching a job and providing high-level training are assets to be spread unreservedly.

However, self-referentiality in public training offer is highlighted, which is not always able to respond to the most innovative working realities needs, therefore appearing rigid.

Italy lags far behind in digital training, staff skills gaps are wide, especially in tourism, for which seasonality is a strong brake in investment in training.

Overcoming seasonality, through the diversification of the tourist offer, goes hand in hand with the broadening of the skill set operators need and their ability to progressively incorporate different professional experiences.

In this sense, our interlocutors express the need for a massive investment in the development of systems of highly territorialized and rationalized skill systems.

Currently, there is a strong recourse to do-it-yourself training which, beyond objective limits, has the value of providing professional growth functional to business needs.

EUROCHAMBRES



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