

PROBLEM-SOLVING METHODOLOGY - THE ILUSTRE CASA DE RAMIRES PROJECT PROPOSAL

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Abstract

Higher education is facing more and more challenges in training students for the job market. In fact, the constant vicissitudes arising from competition, economic and social crises and the need to develop solutions based on efficiency and sustainability, require the professionals of the future to have a critical thinking capacity and skills that enable them to use the abstract scientific and technical knowledge they have acquired to solve concrete situations and problems. These are the skills that organizations expect from higher education training.

The project proposal we present in our paper, was developed as part of the Cultural Management unit assessment, in the Tourism, Cultural and Heritage Management degree. Its main objective was to challenge the students to apply the knowledge they had acquired and to develop feasible proposals for the preservation and profitability of the built cultural heritage.

Keywords: Problem-solving, Cultural management, higher education.

1 INTRODUCTION

Defining cultural management is complex (in some countries we talk about cultural management, but in others we talk about arts management). Based on the meaning of the words that make up the concept - "management" and "culture" - it would consist of managing certain resources, in this case, a cultural asset or product/service. In general terms, cultural management seeks to promote, encourage, design and carry out cultural projects. Cultural and heritage management, therefore, plays a key role in preserving and promoting a nation's culture and heritage [1] [2]. It is an interdisciplinary field dedicated to the administration, preservation, promotion and enhancement of a nation's cultural heritage [3]. This includes tangible and intangible assets such as monuments, archaeological sites, museums, traditions, crafts, music, dance and much more. Cultural and heritage management plays a crucial role in maintaining a society's cultural identity and strengthening the connections between past, present and future [2] [4].

Cultural policies, therefore, must go through several stages, from formulation to implementation and evaluation, and these stages are fundamental to the success and effectiveness of these policies [5].

The first stage of cultural policies is formulation. At this stage, cultural policymakers identify society's needs and demands in relation to culture. This involves conducting surveys, public consultations and analyzing data to understand cultural dynamics and community priorities. At this stage, we should promote a participatory approach to formulating cultural policies, involving civil society, artists and other relevant actors. After formulation, the next stage is the implementation of cultural policies. This involves allocating resources, creating programs and carrying out the planned actions. During this phase, it is essential to establish partnerships with cultural institutions, civil society organizations and the private sector, as well as the resident community, to ensure that the policies are effective and achieve their objectives. The involvement of these agents/stakeholders is essential for the effective and successful implementation of cultural policies, which can be seen in the economic development and innovation that can be measured in a region. The third stage of cultural policies is evaluation. At this stage, we should be concerned with a critical analysis of the results achieved by cultural policies. This involves collecting data (quantitative and qualitative), measuring the impact on communities and identifying areas that need adjustment and/or improvement. Monitoring the effectiveness of cultural policies is extremely important, given the limited resources available, and will allow for a more efficient allocation of resources in future initiatives and projects. We would also stress the importance of the monitoring and evaluation process to accompany all stages of implementation [5] [6] [7].

Due to this subject complexity and the need of multidisciplinary knowledge and approach, the use of collaborative methodology to teach cultural management, based on problem-solving and project methods, constantly guided by the teacher, enabled students' confidence, through collaborative learning, to accomplish the project proposal, according to the actual data collected.

Therefore, in this paper we present not only the learning path taken throughout the semester, but also the results achieved. We also intend to demonstrate how the construction of the cultural management project contributed to consolidating the students' knowledge of the content covered and to increasing their confidence in preparing them for the labor market.

We believe that the use of problem-solving and project methodology in this unit helps students to develop critical thinking skills and real-world application abilities, as well as promotes independence and self-confidence in problem-solving in them, as future qualified professionals. In this sense, the result of the applied research is the development of a project proposal to improve the cultural management of the Ilustre Casa de Ramires, located in the municipality of Resende, which is part of the Douro demarcated wine region, a world heritage site, since 2001, in Portugal.

2 METHODOLOGY

The methodology used to develop the cultural management project was based on the collaborative teaching methodology, with the problem-solving method and the project method. In other words, collaborative learning methods can help to achieve complex skills that cannot be achieved through individualistic and competitive methods. It is based on active task interdependence, in which students work in groups. The problem-solving method, and project method, among others, can be used to teach academic subjects and develop interpersonal skills and behaviours. Positive task interdependence increases student motivation and fosters collaboration within groups. Positive reward interdependence exerts peer pressure to achieve better academic performance [8].

In short, problem solving is the act of defining a problem; determining the cause of the problem (gathering information); identifying, prioritizing, and selecting alternatives for a solution; evaluating solutions; and implementing a solution [9]. In turn, project-based learning consists of student-centered learning that is organized on the basis of project construction. The acquisition of new skills occurs through a project that students complete in groups to solve complex problems [10].

In concrete terms, the following path was followed during the unit's practical sessions: 1) presentation of real cases of heritage, which are abandoned or are not being monetized, risking cultural and economic loss for the region; 2) identification of the problems that needed to be tackled; 3) diagnosis, by gathering of information (on the regional environment) through the PESTEL and SWOT analysis; 4) identification of the key issues and objectives of the proposal; 5) and construction of a viable intervention project (at infrastructures, human resources, and budget level).

To gather and organize all the information, we used the PESTEL and SWOT analysis tools, in order to understand all the obstacles and opportunities that would influence any project proposal that we could develop.

Regarding the construction of the project proposal, we defined the following topics/areas: project summary; goals; project justification; accessibility; action plan; technical specifications and milestones; human resources; budget; communication and dissemination; impact and evaluation.

The group of students, according to the work programme defined by the teacher, carried out their research in two main phases. Firstly, they collected and processed all the information needed to develop the diagnosis, using the tools mentioned above. Secondly, in accordance with the project structure presented in the next section, they developed a cultural management project proposal, where they were able to demonstrate the preservation of cultural heritage and, at the same time, the economic viability of the proposal. After developing the entire proposal, the same students presented their proposal orally, with this public presentation also counting towards their final assessment.

3 RESULTS

At the beginning of the unit, students were presented with a set of real-life situations related to cultural heritage, challenging them to come up with a project proposal that could turn that cultural facility into an asset for territorial development, at an economic and socio-cultural level. The cultural facility chosen was the " Ilustre Casa de Ramires", located in the municipality of Resende, in the northern region of Portugal.

Based on the information gathered about the municipality of Resende, the legal requirements in terms of the requalification of built heritage, as well as the opportunities in terms of funding and support for the tourism sector, a project was developed that proposes making the property profitable by offering various services, from accommodation to catering and cultural education.

3.1 Project proposal

The property that inspired Eça de Queiroz's novel "A Ilustre Casa de Ramires", it is actually named the House at Torre da Lagariça, and includes a medieval house and tower. The tower began to be built in the 12th century and served as a lookout post and prison. Later, in the 16th century, the surrounding houses and gardens were built.

Its current state is one of total degradation and abandonment (Fig. 1), which makes it impossible to make the most of this built cultural heritage, which could become a major factor in boosting tourism and, subsequently, an engine of socio-economic development in an inland municipality where it is urgent to find sustainable growth solutions.

The property is currently privately owned, and it is our understanding that it should be exploited by private initiative and investment in the future, to promote revenue, local employment and tourism attractiveness increase.



Figure 1. House at Torre da Lagariça property current state.

3.1.1 Project summary

The aim of this project is to rebuild the building and its surrounding area. It will include a diversified range of services for visitors. Both human and material resources will be used so that it is possible to present a well-restored building that can be appreciated and enjoyed by residents, visitors and tourists.

The main services to be offered will be accommodation, catering and a museum about Eça de Queirós and his literary work.

Our project will be called "EçaMires - revitalising and preserving a nation's memory", with the following logo.



Figure 2. Project's logo proposal.

To ensure the economic and financial viability of our project, we will apply to European funds and private and public partners and investors, resulting in a value around €3,800,000, to get the project underway.

3.1.2 Project justification and main goals

Above all, the Eçamires project will develop the Resende region, both economically and culturally. In fact, the project aims to tackle the high rate of non-literate individuals in this region, as well as to promote the preservation of the region's cultural and natural heritage.

One of the key points of this project includes job creation in the gastronomic and tourism sectors, specifically in the typical food restaurant, the museum on the life and work of Eça de Queirós and the local accommodation that will be built on the site.

The restoration of the building is important because it helps to preserve living heritage and keep it in good condition for future generations, so that it is not lost in time; and also in the development of the region so that it is increasingly well recognised, both nationally and internationally.

3.1.3 Accessibility

The inclusion of all citizens is a top priority in our project. With the installation of lifts in the building, we want to answer to the people with reduced mobility need, so that they can access any section of the building very easily. Every room of the house and museum will also have braille signs and audio guides to help people with visual and/or hearing disabilities.

We will also intend to print and stick two QR Codes in each room, one that gives access to the audio guides and the other for sign language, in five different languages at the beginning (Portuguese, English, Spanish, German, and French), through which the tourist/visitor can watch an explaining video about each compartment of the building, without the need of any app installation.

3.1.4 Action plan and milestones

Our action plan has been developed for the first four years of the project (2025-2029), in which time we plan to restore the entire property (2025-2026) and open the services (2026-2029) in a sustainable and financially viable way. In this sense, we present in Table 1 the action plan.

Table 1. Action Plan.

	Activities	Initiatives	Milestone / timetable
Measure 1 – Property restoration	Property purchase	Negotiation and purchase	By march 2025
	Reconstruction work	Award of the contract Monitoring the restoration work	By November 2025
	Room decoration	Purchase of furniture and spaces decoration	By the end of December 2025
Measure 2 – Leisure activities	Pedestrian itineraries	Property walks, sightseeing, etc.	At least, 45 sold services, per year
	Gastronomic tours	Gastronomic experience, with showcooking and local producers	At least, 45 sold services, per year
	Traditional games	Several traditional games, with the help of locals	For free, whenever weather conditions permit, to enrich the experience of all visitors
	Guided tours	Museum Property and garden tours To the Douro region and local attractions	From February to November At least, 30 sold services, per year
	Documentary screening	At the Museum to enrich the cultural visit/tour	The entire year At least, 400 sold tickets, per year Free service for local schools and children
Measure 3 – Restaurant	Show cooking experience	Invitation to renowned cooks and chefs	At least, once a month At least, 30 participants per event
	Typical themed dinner parties	Partnerships with local producers	At least, once a month At least, 30 participants per event
Measure 4 – Accommodation on service	Dissemination and customer loyalty	Publicising accommodation on electronic channels and networks Sponsorship of regional / national events Participation in tourism fairs	TripAdvisor, Booking, etc. At least, 4 events per year At least 2 national and 2 international fairs
Measure 5 - Museum	Interactive workshops with Eça de Queiroz novels	Invitation to local students Partnership with Higher education institutions	At least, 500 students per year 2 partnerships

	Cultural events	Negotiation with Higher education institutions to promote history and heritage discussion and scientific knowledge	At least, 1 event per year
Measure 6 – Monitoring and evaluation	Monitoring	Definition of those responsible for monitoring each activity / initiative Monitoring indicators by analysing registration documents	Quarterly
	Final evaluation	Annual report	Annual

3.1.5 Human resources

For each of the project's core measures, a human resources team has been defined which, in addition to respecting the legal requirements for each position, is also characterised by qualification and excellence. To this end, all human resources will be selected by the management team according to strict criteria. In addition, specific training will be provided for the entire team (foreign languages, customer service, inclusion and strategy), ensuring that all employees feel part of the project to be implemented.

3.1.6 Budget

Table 2. Budget (1st year).

<i>Description</i>	<i>Quantity</i>	<i>Cost</i>	<i>Subtotal</i>
Human Resources			
Project Manager	1	1300€ x 14 months	18.200€
Managing Director	1	1600€ x 14 months	22.400€
Accommodation: 3 receptionist 3 cleaning staff	6	820€ x 14 months 850€ x 14 months	34.440€ 35.700€
Museum 2 collaborators	2	1.000€ x 14 months	28.000€
Restaurant: 1 chef 1 sous chef 1 kitchen helper 2 waiters 1 room leader	6	1.250€ x 14 months 950€ x 14 months 820€ x 14 months 850€ x 14 months 1.000€ x 14 months	17.500€ 13.300€ 11.480€ 11.900€ 14.000€
Equipment			
Vehicles: 1 passenger vehicle (hybrid) 1 goods vehicle	2	38.000€ 23.000€	61.000€
Office equipment	---	25.000€	25.000€
Traditional games tools	4	100€	100€
External services Supply			
Communication	1	5.000€	5.000€
Equipment rental	1	1.530€	1.530€
Furniture	---	80.000€	
Maintenance	1	1.000€	12000€
Tourism Guide	2	1.000€	28.000€
Security	1	1.100€	13.200€
Other	---	1.500€	18.000€
Construction works			
Property purchase	1	800.000€	800.000€
Reconstruction work	1	2.550.000€	2.550.000€
Total			3.800.750€

3.1.7 Communication and dissemination

In order for this project to be recognised at both national and international level, we will approach a number of communication channels that are essential for its dissemination. First of all, we will adopt strategies to publicise it through a morning television programme on RTP (public channel). After that, we will develop a local strategy (face-to-face marketing). Digital platforms specific to the project will also be created. With regard to the press, a number of national and international journalists and specialised magazines will be contacted so that they can come to the region to enjoy all the services available.

3.1.8 Impact and evaluation

This project will be financed with public and private funds totalling around €3,800,000. This support will be used for the reconstruction and implementation of the planned activities and services. In order to ensure the profitability and viability of the project, we will focus on income from local accommodation, the museum and the restaurant. These will be boosted by investing in entertainment and leisure activities (nature itineraries, guided tours, cultural events, etc.). We will also establish partnerships with public and private organisations in the region so that our services reach as many people as possible.

This project will be evaluated by two means of assessment: the periodic assessment (which monitors each of the existing services in detail) and the final assessment.

As far as the periodic evaluation is concerned, quarterly interim reports, registers and workbooks will be used so that there can be a detailed record of each evaluation for each of the company's types of service.

In terms of the existing services in this project, the restaurant service will be evaluated periodically by TripAdvisor, The Fork and a suggestion book, where customers can write down their opinions about the plating of the dishes prepared by the chef.

With regard to local accommodation, a periodic evaluation will be carried out on the Booking, TripAdvisor and Trivago websites and through a suggestion book. In the case of the museum, it will undergo an evaluation using satisfaction surveys, as well as an evaluation on TripAdvisor.

Lastly, the final evaluation will be carried out by means of a report that explains all the steps taken.

4 CONCLUSIONS

Higher education is facing more and more challenges to prepare future professionals for the real demands of a constantly changing labour market. The management of tourism and culture reflects these same challenges. Therefore, when we manage to combine theoretical and conceptual knowledge with action and problem-solving skills, we support future professionals in taking abstract knowledge and trying to solve concrete situations.

This project demonstrates how methodologies based on collaborative teaching enrich students' academic preparation, making them more proactive and motivated in the learning process. Given the depth and creativity of the project developed, we believe that these students will be better prepared to respond to any challenges that arise in their professional future.

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