

PRACTICAL ACTIVITY IN THE TRAINING OF HOSPITALITY STUDENTS: The experience of volunteer collaborators in the organization of the VI International Tourism Congress of the Far South (Cites)

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ABSTRACT

This paper investigates the inclusion of practical activities in the professional qualification of students being trained to work in the area of hospitality, through the experience of the volunteers that participated in the organization of the VI CITES (International Tourism Congress of the Far South). This event was promoted by the Tourism Planning Laboratory that integrates Tourism, Hospitality and Events courses, and is taught at FURG/SVP. The specific objectives of this paper were: to verify the decision making process in the organization of the event by the volunteers; to identify the perception of the activity as part of the professional qualification; and to link the theory learned on the course with professional practice. Besides bibliographic research, a case study was conducted, which included 0direct interviews and the use of surveys. The results indicated the importance of the practical activities in professional qualification, especially in a trade that is still in its infancy.

Keywords: Hospitality, Professional Practice, Professional Qualification, CITES, Santa Vitória do Palmar

INTRODUCTION

This study analyzes the importance of practical activities for academic qualifications in the area of hospitality area. For this, the following specific objectives were established: to verify how the decision-making process was established in the event organization by the collaborators; to identify whether the activity was perceived as part of the professional training; and to understand the link between the educational process and professional practice.

For Silva and Miyashiro (2007), authors of “Tourism and Hospitality in Brazil: a study about the Hospitality Workers” research, is precisely in the educational field of professional qualification that it becomes essential to intensify the fight for a propaedeutic and professional education, free and of high quality, as a right of workers and an object of negotiation with the State and businessmen.

The central point of the research concerns “teaching, reconsidering” the learning/education process, for which we rely on the view of Paulo Freire, when he affirms that: “teaching is not about transmitting knowledge, but creating the possibilities for its production or its construction” (Freire, 1996). Following Freire’s thought, respect to knowledge, stimulation of the student, the use of research, and respect for ethics and dialogue are all considered fundamental requirements for the learning/education process.

This study is a continuation of a previous study that resulted in the expanded abstract “Extension projects and training in professional events organization: a study of the project “Events Management Team” - FURG/SVP”. On that occasion, the objective was to evaluate the impact generated by practice in planning and operating several events, with the academic community and the local community working together, in order to contribute to the training of the students of the Technology in Events course. This participation allowed the team members to put into practice the theoretical knowledge learned at university. The present article will address the academic training of future professionals in the area of

hospitality, and determine the development of their competences through activities promoted by the Higher Education Institution.

The analysis method was a qualitative, exploratory and descriptive study, with the direct application of surveys aimed at all the teachers and students that were part of the organization team of the VI International Tourism Congress of The Far South (CITES). The VI CITES, was hosted by the Universidade Federal do Rio Grande (FURG), Santa Vitória do Palmar Campus on November 30, and December 1 and 2, 2016. It sought to analyze the importance of the participation of the students of Tourism, Hospitality and Technology in Events courses in the planning and execution of the event, in relation to the training of professionals to work in the area of hospitality.

As a result of this research, it was verified that there was a need for FURG to offer more practical activities for hospitality students, bearing in mind that the city of Santa Vitória do Palmar still does not have a consolidated hospitality industry.

THEORETICAL FRAME OF REFERENCE

Events management and operationalization

Studies related to the events field are consolidated, as the impacts they cause and the positive benefits of these studies for society are recognized, hence the term Eventology (Goldblatt, 2010). The development of the events field has led to an expansion of this area of knowledge, resulting in a professionalization of events education.

Getz and Page (2016) point to the factors that have led to the development of events education, namely: studies on the rise of the events demand, market professionalization, events commercialization on a global scale, the possibility of participation of the local community, and visitors/tourists flow insertion. It should be noted that events management and operationalization requires the involvement of a trained and qualified team (Giacaglia, 2011).

For an employee to act in a motivated way, and be able to perform activities successfully, there is a need to provide safety and autonomy so they can develop skills to fully perform their activities in a motivated way. However, it is essential for the organizational environment to use these prerogatives for the events management and operationalization to succeed (Griffin & Neal, 2000).

The human element is paramount for the events planning and organization, as the activity requires the use of technical effort and material resources, as well as satisfying the target audience. Thus, for better organization and productivity, an event can be classified according to its typology or modality, its generating factor, its coverage, etc. (Zanella, 2011).

Professionalization of education for Events Organization has led to different career opportunities for professionals in the events market. Goldblatt (2010) mentions some types of careers in events: attractions director, food and drinks director, logistics manager, cruise ship events director, events qualification events, fundraising events promoter, festival promoter, fitness and health events manager, tourism events manager, academic and student events director, among others.

Faced with the diversity of the events market and addressing the object of this study, it is observed that a tourism congress with international coverage of scientific base, according to Cros and Jolliffe (2014) falls within the “Business and Trade” category. Getz and Page (2016) emphasize that in the management of these events, the production and elaboration team must ensure that the event planning is focused on the internal management of people, and the external management relating to the scope of the parties involved, seeking to add value to the event, according to the needs and expectations of the target audience.

Based on the assumptions presented in events management and operationalization, the relevance of reflection about the educational process and the training of competent professionals to act in the events market is addressed in this study.

Education and professional practice

Following the rapid economic expansion of the hospitality industry, there is a growing concern to train managers and technicians to work in the area. It is essential to think about the training process required to produce qualified professionals. This is based on the principle defended by Paulo Freire (1996) who understands the practice of teaching not only as a means of transferring knowledge, but a way of creating the opportunities for its production or its construction, i.e. to develop capacities.

In this regard, it is understood that the process of professional qualification occurs not only in the theoretical sphere, but also covers a wide range of practical activities that allow the student to build their knowledge. According to Pimenta and Lima (2005, p. 7),

the exercise of any profession is practical, in the sense that it is about learning to do “something” or “action” and therefore, the learning will happen “through observation, imitation, reproduction, and, sometimes, the redevelopment of the existent models in practice (Pimenta & Lima, 2005, p.7).

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The process of motivating the individual during the learning should also be mentioned. According to Palacio and López and Nieto, (2006, p. 224), this is integrated with the individual’s intellectual context, and is directly related to the skill level that the subject attributes to themselves, and the ability to develop their own learning. In other words, it is the motivation to overcome their own weakness when learning. The authors also emphasize the need to master the techniques to carry out the actions and operations specific to this area of activity. But the development of abilities is not always enough to solve different problems that will be faced in the labor market (Pimenta & Lima, 2005, p. 8). Thus, the importance is understood of an academic qualification that seeks to be as close as possible to the professional reality, through practices rooted in commitment and intentionality. It is understood then the relevance of the academic qualification that seeks to be as close as possible to the professional reality through practices rooted in the commitment and intentionality.

Thus, two motivational systems that reflect on the individual during the learning process are included: competitive and cooperative. In the first one, during the learning process, the subject is motivated to stand out over the others, with the personal success providing the motivating. In the cooperative motivating system, personal success is highlighted while at the same time, the employee it is expected to contribute with the team as a whole. So, this is one is pointed out as the ideal motivation system between students, due to the commitment to the act of learning (Palacio & López & Nieto, 2006).

Conducting different practical activities is, according to Sônia Maria Guedes Gondim (2002, p. 300):

assessed as alternatives to meet the requirement of a multidisciplinary profile and to provide personal maturity and the professional identity necessary to act in a situation of unpredictability, to which current organizations are subject.

Gondim's words clearly portray the requirements of the profile expected from professionals intending to work in the field of hospitality precisely because of its unpredictability.

METHODOLOGY

This research aims to analyze the importance of practical activities as part of the process of academic qualification in the area of hospitality. This was done through bibliographic research and a structured on the study of the VI CITES. According to Sampieri and Collado and Baptista (2010) qualitative research allows the research universe to be widened, analyzing the phenomenon as a whole, within the specific context of qualification and professional performance in the events field based on the practical experience of organizing a congress.

In terms of objectives, this research is classified by an exploratory aspect that, according to Gil (2002), is used to explore a studied phenomenon in a general way, allowing the delimitation of the theme. It also has a descriptive aspect, which for Falcão and Andrade (2002), ensures the description of the researched theme and which, according to Raupp

and Beuren (2003), enables relations to be traced within the information obtained in the exploratory stage, through the description.

A semi-structured survey was conducted, to facilitate recognition of the experiences of the volunteer students of the Bachelor's Degree in Tourism, Hospitality and Technology in Events of the Universidade Federal do Rio Grande, who participated in organizing the VI CITES event. The event organization drew up a survey consisting of 20 open and closed questions, which sought to identify, within teaching practice, the link between education and professional practice. The survey addressed questions such as decision-making in events organization, professional qualification, and the link with theory and practice.

Conducting this research and the methodological systematization promoted understanding of the educational process, through the practical professional experience gained in the organization of VI CITES.

RESULTS AND DATA DISCUSSION

Characterization of the object of study

The International Tourism Congress of the Far South – CITES is directly connected to the construction of a university campus in Santa Vitória do Palmar, RS/BRASIL, by the Universidade Federal do Rio Grande (FURG), in partnership with the city hall, with the creation of the Bachelor's Degree in Binational Tourism.

The first event was held in 2010, with the theme of "Tourism, History and Culture" and was promoted by a professor of History with the Institute of Humanities and Information – ICHI. In the events that followed, the organization was taken over by Professors of Tourism, from the courses in Tourism, Hospitality and Events. In this period, the themes of the congress were: Regional Development and Tourism (2011); Prospects for the future of Tourism (2012); Tourism Regional Planning in the Context of Frontiers (2013); Scientific Research in the Sphere of Tourism (2014).

In 2016, the congress was planned and promoted by the Tourism Planning Laboratory, working alongside the Bachelor's Degree in Tourism, Technology in Events and the Bachelor's Degree in Hospitality from FURG. The work teams involved professors, technicians and students from the three courses. The theme of the event was: Planning of Destinations: Policies and Sustainability.”

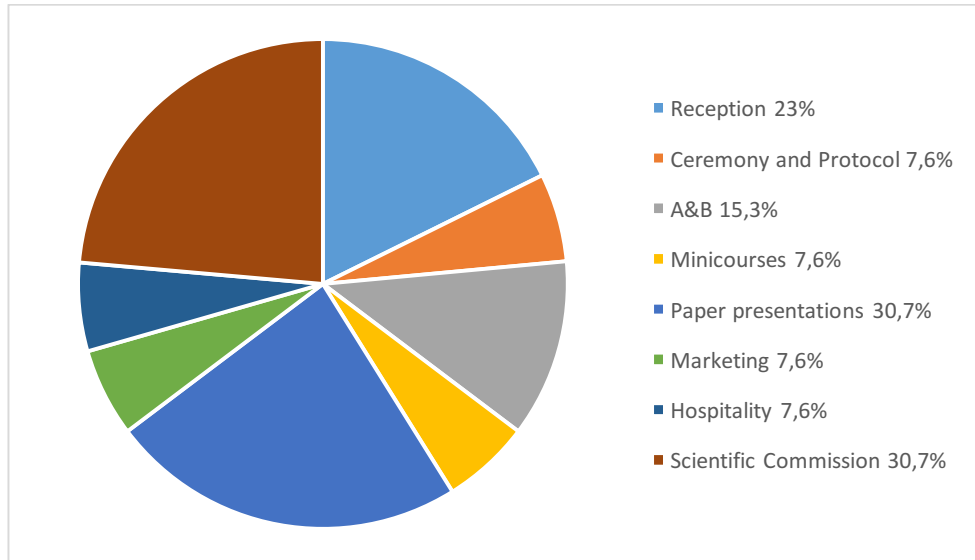
Data analysis

A series of graphs and figures were produced for the analysis of the research results, which helped to clarify the data obtained from the direct interviews with the VI CITES collaborators. There were 30 team members in all, three of them being the developers of this research. The survey was applied in person and via e-mail, because some of the professors had left the institution to work on their PhDs and some of the students had already graduated.

A total of thirteen surveys were validated for inclusion in this study. The group of respondents included nine professors and four students. In relation to the respondents' area of training, nine were from the Bachelor's Degree in Tourism and three were from the Bachelor's Degree in Hospitality.

Graph 1 shows the working areas during the “planning and execution steps” of VI CITES. It should be noted that the students participated in every committee that was held as part of the event planning and organization.

Graph 1: Sectors of activity

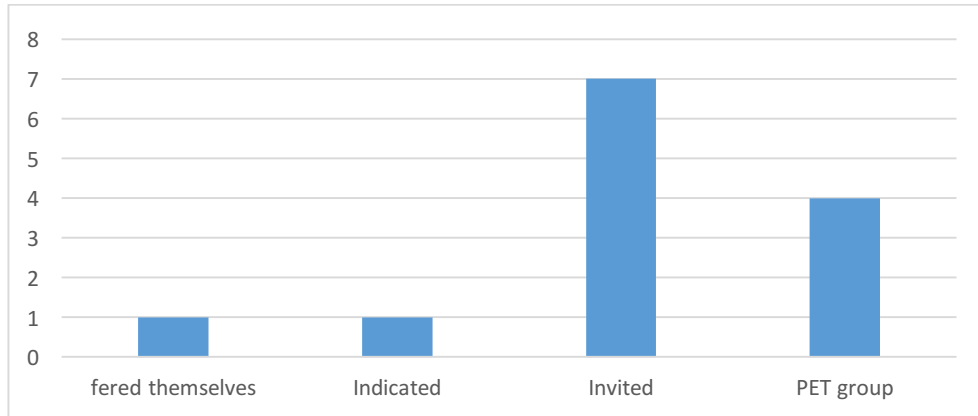


Source: direct research, 2017

The participants were asked about the personal motivations that had prompted them to be part of the work team. As this was an open questionnaire, diverse answers were obtained, though some of the respondents gave similar responses. Some of the expressions used by the respondents were: search for knowledge, challenge, teamwork, opportunity, learning, experience and academic growth; collaboration; personal interest; fee waiver for application; and complementary hours.

Graph 2 shows that only one of the participants offered to compose the organizing team. Another four participants participated in the Tutorial Teaching Program (PET) of the Bachelor's Degree in Tourism. The others were indicated or invited by professors and technicians.

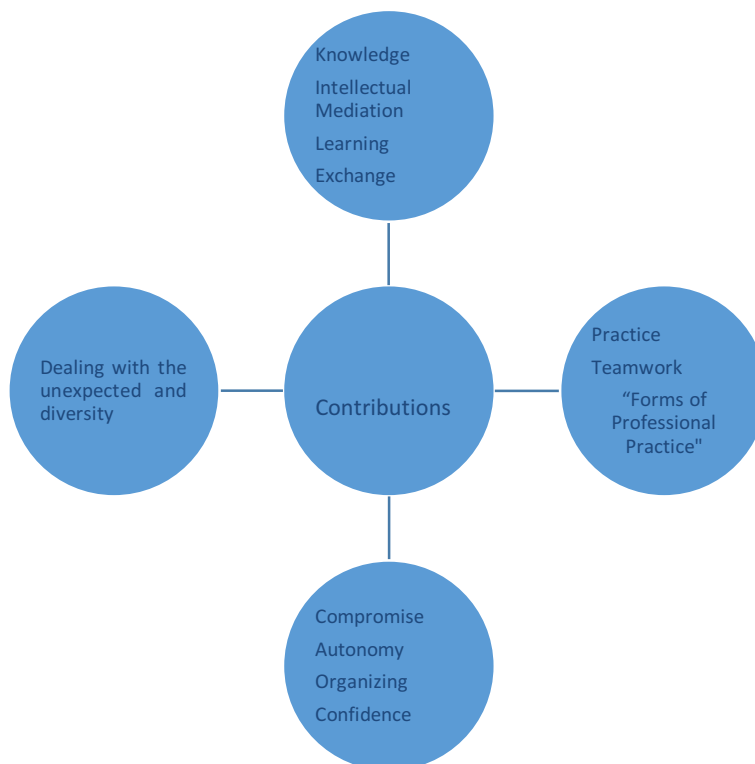
Graph 2: Form of insertion in the team



Source: direct research, 2017

When asked about the contribution of taking part in the organizing committee of the VI CITES for their professional training, the answers were positive. Only one member believed that they it did not make a direct contribution. Figure number 1 shows the responses obtained in relation to this aspect.

Figure 1: Forms of contribution



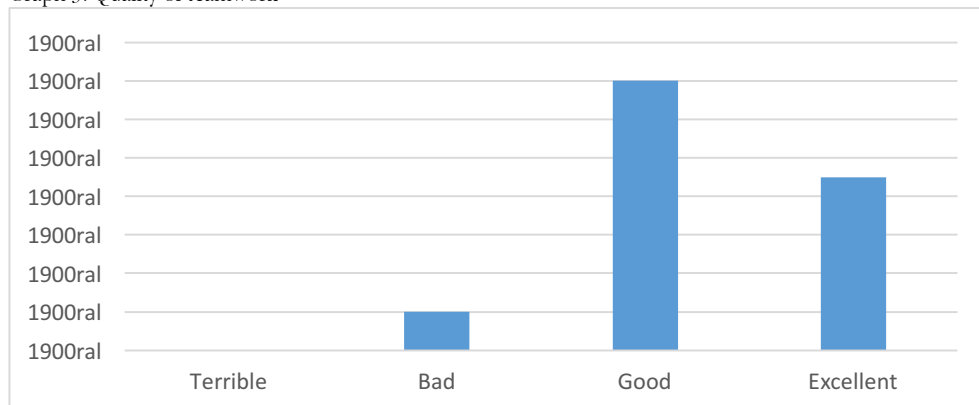
Source: Direct research, 2017

Although it is understood that participation in practical activities is relevant for their qualification, seven of the respondents believed that only one practical exercise like CITES is not enough to be prepared for the job market. Four others felt assured after this experience to act professionally. The rest did not answer the question.

It is curious that contrary to believing that they are still not prepared to act in the job market, specifically with events, most of the participants believed that participating in the organizing committee of an international event would promote their employability. In this sense, the exercise of planning and executing an international congress, in their area of training, allowed the participants to feel more confident to deal with the countless unforeseen events that can occur during an event. Moreover, it provided an understanding of the dimension of an international event and the intensity of its actions, as well as cultivating a professional attitude demanded in teamwork.

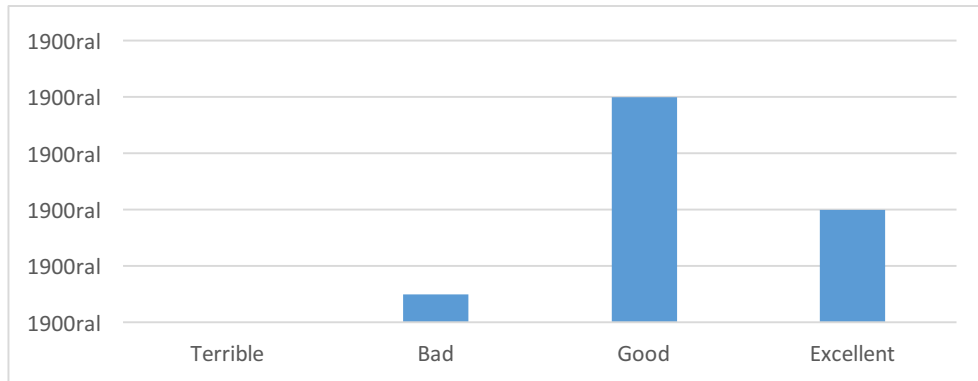
It is believed that one of the greatest difficulties imposed by the area of hospitality is interpersonal relations in jobs carried out as part of a large team. Thus, there were several questions aimed at investigating how these relations occurred during VI CITES. Graphs 3, 4 and 5 show the return given by the respondents.

Graph 3: Quality of teamwork



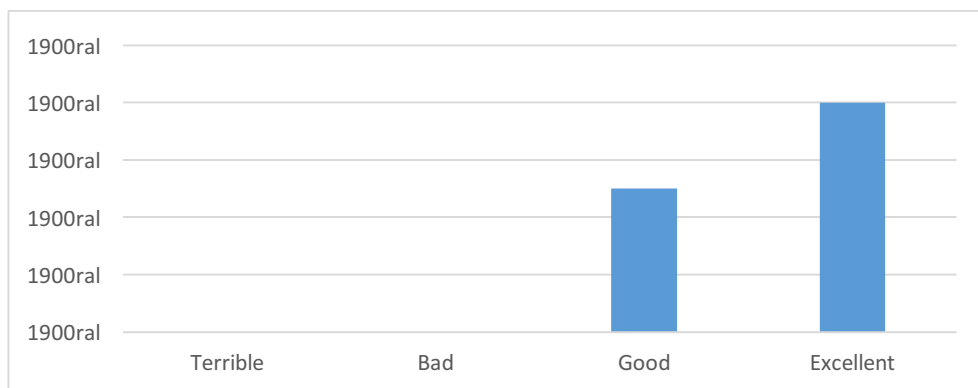
Source: direct research, 2017

Graph 4: Relation with the committee's coordination



Source: direct research, 2017

Graph 5: Relation with the General Coordination of the VI CITES

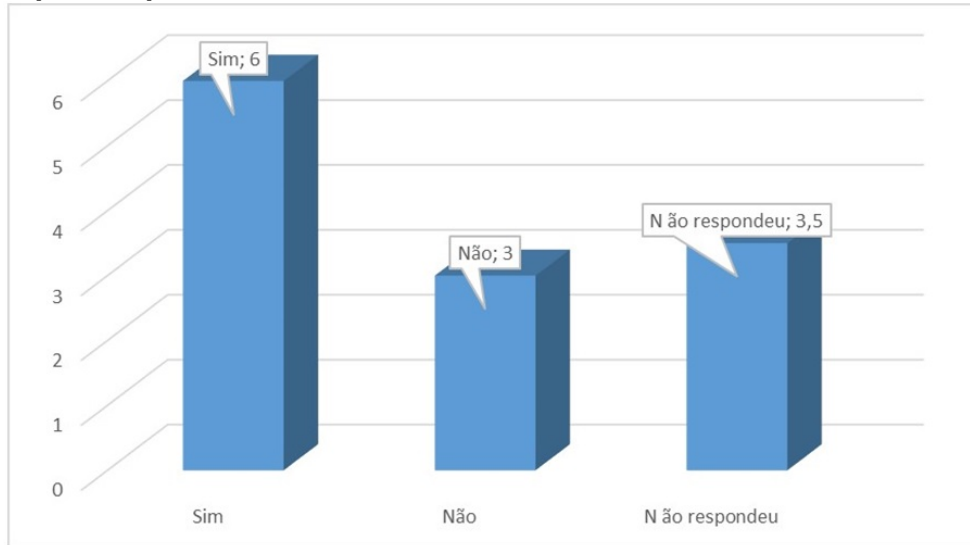


Source: direct research, 2017

Analyzing graphs 3, 4 and 5, it can be seen that the vast majority of the interpersonal relations were successful. Graph 6 shows that almost half of the participants felt capable of making decisions, while three said the opposite.

Regarding teamwork, five people were not sure whether there had been conflict or not. Of the remainder, half said yes there was, and half said no, there wasn't. Concerning the resolution of these conflicts, the respondents said that these were solved together with the team, and that dialogue was part of the resolution. Some divergences were clarified after the event.

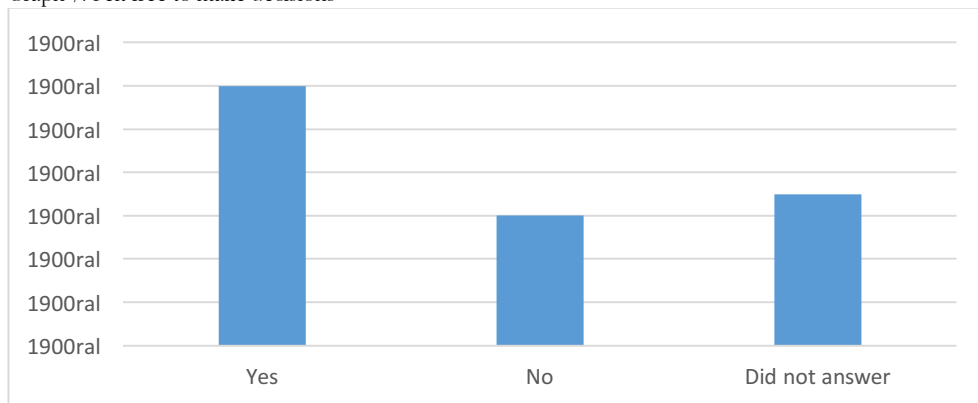
Graph 6: Felt capable to take decisions



Source: direct research, 2017

In relation to decision making (graph 7), five respondents believed that they had the freedom to do so, and four disagreed. The rest did not answer the question. Also on this question, the participants were asked if they could comment to the organization of the congress. At least six of the respondents affirm that yes, whilst three say that no. The rest did not answer the question.

Graph 7: Felt free to make decisions

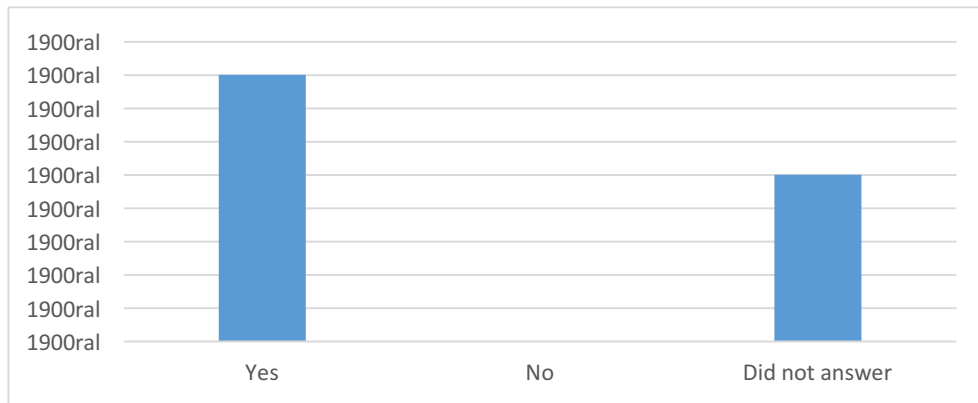


Source: direct research, 2017

In regard to the knowledge of their work, only two of the participants of the organizing committee affirmed that they did not receive any feedback from the management, whilst seven respondents answered positively. Four did not answer the question.

Graph 8 shows is particularly interesting, as it shows that approximately 62% of the organizing committee, i.e. eight people, believed the theoretical knowledge obtained in the classroom could be applied during the planning and execution stages on the VI CITES. This shows that the objective proposed objective of this paper was achieved.

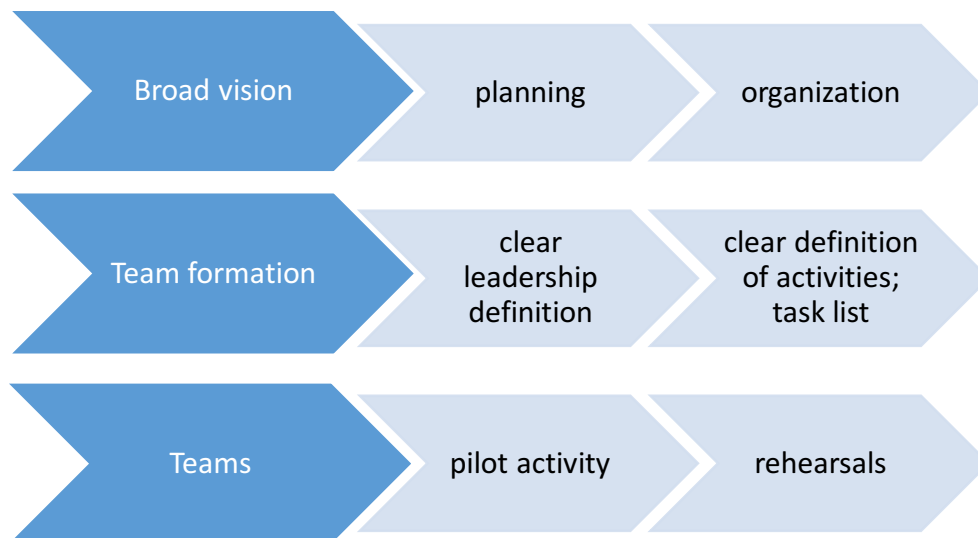
Graph 8: Believes that the classroom knowledge was applied in the CITES organization



Source: direct research, 2017

To complete the survey, the interviewees were asked to suggest practices in the people management to improve the next events. Figure 2 illustrates the feedback obtained, highlighting the need for greater clarity in the formation of the teams, and the assigning of jobs.

Figure 2: Suggestions for people management for future events



Source: elaborated by the authors, 2017

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

This study sought to analyze the relationship between theory and practice in academic training in the field of hospitality. Within this scope, we looked to several authors for theoretical contributions in the areas of tourism management, events management and, in particular, the pedagogical qualification of a professional.

The results of this study were based on a survey that was applied to professors, students and technicians who participated in the organizing committee of the VI International Tourism Congress of the Far South (CITES), and event hosted by the Universidade Federal do Rio Grande (FURG), Santa Vitória do Palmar campus (SVP). The results showed that for the development of professional competences, the practical exercise of planning and executing an event is of utmost importance, and effectively serves this purpose.

Based on the responses given to the survey, it was seen that at a certain point, the hospitality student develops critical capacity through practical exercise, based on the theory studied earlier. Thus, according to Freire, the student utilizes their knowledge to produce possibilities.

However, it was also seen that academic training is not enough to provide support for this practical experience, or to ensure that the student feels capable to act in the job market. It is essential to provide opportunities to put theory into practice, in order to complete the qualification of the future hospitality professional. This will give the student a better notion of the professional practice in their chosen field of study. The study shows also highlights a weakness in the educational system in the field of hospitality.

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