

Strengths of Action learning in Higher Education: Experiences from an International Study Excursion

Andrej Kohont

University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Social Sciences

Abstract

During the Covid-19 pandemic, HEI cooperation with organizations, like practical training, apprenticeships, study excursions, and collaborative learning were very limited or impossible. Consequently, the development of interaction, transactive communication, knowledge, and professional and work-based competencies building (Laal & Ghodsi, 2012; Schnaubert & Bodemer 2018), through problem-solving groups of students was limited.

After the pandemic, the University of Ljubljana initiated projects for the development of a research-oriented curriculum in cooperation with different employers in the private and public sectors. As a part of it, we organized two courses (Strategic human resources management and Economic sociology) in cooperation with a company and local stakeholders in the hospitality sector in Cres, Croatia. The courses were implemented through lectures, field research, and an international study excursion.

We evaluated the research-based study process and excursion focusing on 1. The guidance of students (individually and as a group) during the study process. 2. Acquired research, professional and social competencies of students. 3. The interdisciplinary course cooperation. 4. The link between the research, and theoretical grounds of both courses, and the explored companies` HRM problems. 5. The gains of the proposed solutions for the company in the investigated HRM setting.

Outcomes of evaluation confirm theoretical grounds and previous research, and provide insights for the implementation, and further improvement of study excursions, and research-oriented curricula in HE settings. Learning through research in real work settings contributes to students` competency, strengthens the group learning dynamics and knowledge exchange, and represents an important psychological pillow after the pandemic confinement.

Keywords: action learning; higher education; research-oriented curriculum; study excursion