Introduction

Based upon the presentations of some of my colleagues on the Spanish team of the FAME project, I intend to work here with the seven factors related to vocational identity presented by Martínez (2002), using also the discourses that emerge from the perspectives of the teachers (Ros, 2002) and the students (Navas, 2002) in the sector in the Valencian Region. We will finally relate them to the typology of discourses of the employees provided by Martínez (2002).

We will therefore use the material emerging in the discourses of employees, employers, teachers and students, even though we are well aware that those materials have been raised through different research tools and methodologies, which brings about some problems. Yet, because the issues addressed are pretty much the same, we think it pays the effort to see what are the common and differential elements in those views, even at the risk of generalizing to a larger extent that might be appropriate—because of the methodology used, we have been able to identify up to five different

---

1 This work is presented within the framework of the research “Vocational identity, flexibility and mobility in the European labour market” (HPSE-CT-1999-00042), funded by the 5th Framework Programme of the European Union.
patterns of discourse among employees, while we have only excerpted one discourse for each of the other groups: employers, teachers and students.

We originally intended to search for the interactions that might happen among the different actors, in order to do so, we relied very much upon the belief that vocational identities are negotiated –this is very clearly the case between employers and employees, as it is certainly the case too for teachers and students-. Yet, we have not been able to reach the point we desired: to see those actors interplaying, particularly at the moment when students enjoy work experience placements in which they have to confront all other groups within the same time frame.

Despite this failed attempt to get into the very core of the processes of identity formation and reformulation and development, we have been able to find in our research different sources for identifying a collective identity; and we will present those below.

These elements of a collective identity in the sector of tourism apply to how they perceive the changes and challenges in the sector, how they face them, and what expectations are raised in each of the groups.

Methodology

The main objective of this part of our research consisted of analysing the construction of a collective discourse on vocational identities in the sector of tourism in the Valencian region, and to see how the actors of different ages and positions were developing a common set of ideas related to the profession, its demands and rewards, its challenges and limitations. We were also looking for the contradictions within such a discourse, not only among the different position groups but also within them.

We therefore focused on 10 hotel companies in Valencia city, (2 or more stars), where we carried out 10 focused interviews to employers; 31 focused interviews to employees; the 16 schools which offer vocational training for the sector in the region, where we gathered 49 questionnaires; and case studies, questionnaires and a classroom debate in the 9 schools that offer level 3 VET for either restoration or hotelry. Among these students, we got information from 50 women and 36 men, ages 16 to 45. We also got a reply to the questionnaire from 27 teachers from 11 schools (18 of these teachers have worked in the sector; their ages ranging from 27 to 57).

Our attempt was to identify the discourse patterns that shape basic types of professional identity, and in order to do that we used the definition of key factors in
vocational identity discourses that emerged from the systematic and comprehensive analysis from the qualitative categories that were raised from the interviews as well as the theoretical contributions we were handling for the project. Therefore, we have taken the results from the in-depth interviews with employers as an axis around which all other discourses have been allocated, in order to see the interplay among all of them. This exercise has proved to be pretty effective, maybe partly because some of the teachers and, very particularly, the students from which we obtained information, are also currently working in the sector, which allows the perspective of the employee to be a particularly useful and appropriate one.

**The worker in the employer’s discourse**

a) Involvement in the profession (stability/satisfaction).

Employers tend to think that all of their employees are pretty satisfied with the job, showing relevant technical knowledge and a vocational sense of the work. They think that good working conditions that the company offers promote employees’ loyalty to the company. For employers, there are clear possibilities of promotional mobility and training according to the employees’ own interests.

They also acknowledge the importance of temporary work, as well as they reckon how arbitrary the promotion criteria are, despite they clearly underestimate the weight of bad working conditions.

b) The Significance of Work.

There is a feeling of pride of a “job-well-done” as a key factor towards quality.

Personal satisfaction is related with a vocational work. The ‘professional type’ is again dominating in this regard.

c) Group references.

We may talk here of a ‘community model’: there is strong corporate identity linked with personal identity.

Yet, there is a need of a stable worker able to identify with the company and to committ with the objectives of the company, feeling that he is working for his own future and interests.

d) Personal labour capital

Technical knowledge is highly valued, particularly new skills related to the use of information technologies, languages and customer relation skills.
The employer also values vocation, ambition, professional attitude towards work, communication and teamwork and satisfaction with a job well done among the employees.

e) Perception of the hierarchy

There is a functional understanding of the hierarchy: all the roles are relevant, playing their own functions for the global organization.

The management team appears as a coordinated working guarantee in the global organization. Intermediate managers must be trusted persons, which share the culture and objectives of the company; they also have to be experimented professionals.

f) Sense of involvement in the product

The worker, in the view of the employer, is strongly committed with his job, having awareness of being part of a collective effort. Company objectives are assumed as the worker’s own goals (he feels like working for his own interest).

In intermediate managers the autonomy level demands strong personal commitment.

g) Education and training

Experience is a more valued factor than training, as a guarantee of professional behaviour. The importance given to formal professional training depends of the post in the organization.

Continuous training seems relevant because it also allows facing company production needs, as well as worker promotion and career possibilities.

The worker in the teachers’ discourse

a) Involvement in the profession

Teachers tend to view, and so they recommend to their students, that workers in the sector have to be ready to move and to work hard and to accept what the profession brings. They have to be patient to find something that matches their expectations.

b) Significance of work

High competition is fostered, though the company is portrayed as a social agent caring for all of its members.

‘You don’t work for money here’, you have to be creative and innovative, and care for your team.

c) Corporate references

Self employment is seen as a goal in the long term, particularly in the case of
cooks.

d) Labour capital

The following ethical values are considered a key for optimal performance: honesty, cleanliness, responsibility, being a good colleague, patience, kindness, willingness to improve, seriousness, punctuality, discipline.

Technical knowledge is also valued as labour capital, but it is taken for granted—maybe because teachers take it for granted as that is their most important role in VET schools—.

e) Experience of the hierarchy

Teachers portray before their students the idea that superiors expect from them the same as clients do—thus fostering the notion of the ‘internal client’ that proves to be so useful for the purposes of the companies in the sector.

It is their own responsibility—of students as future workers—to adapt to the circumstances: the sector has its own rules and you have to take them.

f) Involvement in the product

‘Your own performance is your best reward’, contributing to your self-esteem and recognition among colleagues.

g) References to training

Teachers stress the importance of theoretical knowledge as well as practice. They also value the will to learn, to improve, being motivated, being aware of innovation.

It is the student’s own responsibility—and it takes important efforts—to keep up to date: ‘Your call makes you get involved in training’.

The worker in the students’ discourse

a) Involvement in the profession

Students believe that you have to be ready to move and to work hard and to accept extra hours, long working days, working on holidays, etc.: ‘If you work hard and you are good, they will know and you will be able to promote’.

b) Significance of work

‘This is a call, you have to feel it’. You find your rewards in satisfying the client and in the very fact of working with people.

c) Corporate references

Working for a well known chain is good for the conditions, not always the
prestige.

Self employment is perceived as a goal for some, particularly cooks.

d) Labour capital

The values of the vocation must show here for they are the key to professionality: cleanliness, responsibility, being a good colleague, patience, kindness, willingness to improve, seriousness, punctuality, discipline — honesty is the only one which does not appear here, as it did in the case of employers—.

You have to master the trade, which implies dedication, spirit of constant improvement, being ready to assume sacrifice.

e) Experience of the hierarchy

Superiors may cause problems and they are perceived as a source of conflict.

f) Involvement in the product

‘Your work for yourself, then you do good for the client’. When your work is acknowledged, that keeps you going.

The quality of your work is what pays for the working hours and low wages.

g) References to training

It is important having a qualification; yet work experience is what counts mainly. Nevertheless, most of the students are attending VET to compete in better conditions.

Training is perceived as a load but it comes with the trade.

Common aspects in discourses of the different agents

a) There seems to be a ‘pride’ of working for the sector, and this is a topic explanation to justify its peculiarities

b) Students as well as teachers are aware of the sector trends

c) Students as well as teachers are aware of the working conditions in the sector

d) The role of teamwork is important in the sector, insofar ‘we are all in the same boat’

e) Because of the emotional aspects of discourse, socialization seems to be very strong

f) In the case of cooks, there seems to be a particular community of practice differentiated from the rest

g) Many factors seem to contribute to the development of a ‘sense of belonging’ to the profession
h) There are opportunities in the sector and therefore professional expectations are raised at all levels

**Discussion of findings**

a) There seems to be a strong influence of discourses of employers embedded in all other agents

b) Such dominant discourse provides elements anchoring workers’ identities: it is not strange that that discourse is that named as the ‘professional’ in the employee’s typology

c) Socialization is purposefully promoted in both formal and informal ways, particularly fostering that notion of the ‘professional’ and what being a professional in the sector means: carrying it with you

d) The occupational role as well as the position in the hierarchy ladder have an impact upon identity discourses

e) Tensions are found between sources of satisfaction and insatisfaction. Anchors to solve those tensions are: the calling, the occupation ethics, common effort, identification of all with the service provided

f) We perceive a growing importance of formal education and of having accreditations, despite experience is what counts more and there is not much use of continuing training

g) We can also talk about the individualization and fragmentation of labour relations; there are no corporate discourses and workers assume this, despite the weak situation in which they find themselves. Also students and teachers take this for granted

h) Employers seem to ignore the existence of precarity in the sector, but also workers and students perceive it as caused by lack of professionality and search for identity anchors, like the ‘calling’, to justify this

**Concluding remarks**

For the sources of information we have been able to produce seven factors related to vocational identity in the sector of tourism which we have applied to the interviews with employees, thus giving room to five different discursive types, and we have also
used the same factors to develop a ‘typical’ discourse of employers, teachers and students: with these three actors we had different sources of information.

We are working with discourse, so we may build typologies which show main discourse patterns. The types are tools for our analysis, not an exhaustive analyses in themselves: there may be more types, but those are the ones which have evolved from the interviews we have conducted in Spain.

The elements of the professional type as vocation and a certain ‘natural’ satisfaction seem to be present in the discourses of all sort of agents. And this is the one assumed by teachers and students, who don’t seem to realise about the other chances. It might be expected that VET would aim at that type not the others, as this is the ‘most professional’ one.

The technician/bureaucrat with responsibilities, a type which appears in large companies and hotel chains, is also present in various discourses: It is professional, but it is job in the end: they expect promotion and that is considered as the payback. Personal labour capital is the main element in this type: Attitudes are similar –not abilities-, but the sense of submission is increasing here, and it will even grow as the typology evolves into other types which don’t enjoy the same benefits as the professional does. There may be some traces of overqualification in the sector –which nonetheless does not mean that there is a workforce appropriately trained-. There is yet work in the sector which does not require qualification. Training, on its side, is fostered when provided by the company itself, otherwise it is not regarded.

The reference group also has an important weight in many discourses: the community model is widely extended. Yet, the hierarchies are very well defined and each one addresses the immediate superiors or people below. There is more division of labour than real teamwork, yet the discourse of the teamwork is the one that dominates. The justification of extra tasks and hours is explained via the ethic of work, but it is also that extra work what allows for sufficient earnings that the original wage does not permit.

As the typology advances, there are less vocational elements and more inner obligation and assumed duties: and it is here that the community model vanishes. Not surprising that there is more talk on continuing than on initial training.

The employer only considers staff those who are valuable for the company for their expertise, but the employer seems to ignore in his discourse the existence of thenon-qualified workforce which are part of the secondary labour market. It is not
strange either that the employer tries to foster the professional and vocational model among all workers. There are certain constant elements in how workers see their roles, but it does not work in the case of peripheral workers. We don’t know how the corporate culture deals with them, with those ‘down the ladder’. Despite there is no unemployment in the sector, but there are certain elements which seem to point to the existence of underemployment.

**References**

