

# The Purchasing Decision-making Process in Scholastic Educational Travel

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**Abstract :** In the tourism market, the educational segment has experienced significant growth, and a continued increase is expected in the future. Field research was carried out on this important phenomenon in which tourism and education collide. This study investigates the demand side of educational travel, particularly the purchasing decision-making process in Sardinian schools. The model of "buying centre", theorised by Webster and Wind (1972) for the industry sector, is considered suitable for this research. This study examines schools as buying centres, and the individuals intervening in the decision-making process and their roles in Sardinian schools are tested using questionnaires and two focus group discussions. This analysis is important for the selection of educational products suitable for the school actors that intervene in the decision-making process, and it provides a model that may be applied in other school environments around the world.

**Keywords:** Educational travel; Purchasing decision-making process; Buying centre; Sardinian schools

## Introduction

Educational travel for kindergarten, primary and secondary school students represents an important opportunity for their personal, social and cultural growth. The pedagogic value of these experiences is recognised in the literature (Gmelch, 1997; van 't Klooster et al., 2008). Educational travel is part of the larger phenomenon of educational tourism. Ritchie (2002) considers international and domestic school tourism as one of the major educational tourism segments. In Italy, educational travel is scheduled within each school's annual educational plan, and regulations define what travel is appropriate and how each school should implement this aspect of the students' education.

The economic and social effects of educational travel (van 't Klooster et al., 2008) and the fact that this issue is under-researched have stimulated our empirical and descriptive research in the context of Sardinian schools. This paper focuses on the purchasing decision-making process of educational travel in kindergarten, primary and secondary schools. The paper investigates whether educational travel can be identified as a product that each school purchases. Therefore, when a school buys educational travel, the school itself should be considered a community, and the purchase of travel would be the result of a process of negotiation among the different stakeholders that form that community.

The objectives of the study are to identify the components (actors) of the purchasing decision-making process, the different phases of the process and the interaction between these components. Actors are the variegated customers inside the school, such as teachers, students, the head or the head's delegate, who are all active components in the purchasing process of the educational product. Specifically, this paper considers the role of each school's actors within the different phases of the decision-making process.

Studies related to the school context are not present in the literature on purchasing behaviour. Consequently, general theories on purchasing behaviour have been considered in this paper. The model of the "buying centre", created by Webster and Wind in 1973 for industrial business-to-business relationships, appears appropriate for analysing and understanding the purchasing decision-making process involved in educational travel. The main research question of this paper seeks to verify this initial hypothesis: can the school be considered a "buying centre" in the purchase of educational travel?

The study context is 630 schools across Sardinia, and the methodology applied involves the use of questionnaires and two focus group discussions (Krueger and Casey, 2000; Calder, 1977). The derived information and data refer to the period of May-December 2008.

## **Literature Review**

Tourism demand is composed of people leaving their usual residence

for various reasons and includes educational travel by primary and secondary school students.

The fundamental need that initiates the demand for educational travel products is a social one, as is generally true for the tourism industry (Murray, 1938). Educational travel also seeks to develop non-conventional processes of knowledge. Some authors (Abbott 1955, Lambin, 2007) distinguish between generic needs and derived needs. The generic need to go on an educational trip determines derived needs, such as the need to visit an historic or natural site or to use a specific form of transportation. Derived needs become specific requirements when they are supported by resources. Resources, being limited, represent a constraint to satisfying needs and therefore influence the way a derived need transforms into specific requirements. The demand for educational travel follows this dynamic, but it also has a contingent and complex nature. These travels are influenced by the following factors: actors, with respect to typology and individuals; formal organisational context, referred to as the rules, values and roles of that organisation; informal organisational context, related to the behaviours, individual values and communication system of that organisation; and other macro-marketing variables (Kotler and Keller, 2009; Lambin 2007; Perreault, Cannon and McCarthy, 2009).

The generic need to partake in scholastic educational travel involves many different people. This study attempts to identify the client of scholastic educational travel. The client is not the single student, or teacher, despite being fully involved in the process. Rather, this study considers the entire school to be the client. The school is a composite entity within which individuals have different interests, needs and requirements.

The business-to-consumer theories often used to explain the motivation to purchase are not appropriate for understanding scholastic needs and requirements. Business-to-consumer theories refer to a single individual and his or her freedom of choice, independent of others. In the case of scholastic educational travel, the decision to purchase is the result of the action of a plurality of actors. The literature includes a model that can

explain the purchasing behaviour of a composite entity similar to a school. This model is the key to interpreting the complexities of the purchasing process in scholastic educational travel and looks at the needs and motivations of the industrial client (Chickery, Celuch and Curry, 2004; Ross, Canning and McDowell, 2007; Smith and Taylor, 1985).

Industrial enterprises make purchases based on a process that involves a plurality of individuals. Each of these individuals has a specific role within the organisation. Based on his or her role (Anderson and Narus, 2004; McMillan, 1973; Webster and Wind, 1972), each individual intervenes in the purchasing decision-making process (Bunn, 1993) of products or services necessary for industrial activities, interacts with other individuals and is influenced by values and rules determining the functionality of the organisation (Robinson, Faris and Wind, 1967). Consequently, every person inside the organisation can have totally different values, needs, motivations, interests, objectives and behaviours. Decisions are often the result of a process of negotiation, which is difficult to forecast. Individuals involved in the process of negotiation have been defined by Webster and Wind (1972) as a "buying centre" (Håkansson and Snehota, 1995 and 2002; Johnston and Bonoma, 1981; Spekman and Gronhaug, 1986). According to Webster and Wind, "organisational buying is a decision-making process carried out by individuals, in interaction with other people, in the context of formal organisation. The organisation, in turn, is influenced by a variety of forces in the environment" (Webster and Wind, 1972, a, p. 13). In this context, the purchasing process and the behaviour of different actors refers to individual, social, organisational and environmental variables. The buying centre operates on the basis of the individual behaviours of actors that take part in its processes. Nonetheless, these individuals are influenced by elements related to those four variables (Ward, Webster Jr., 1991).

To understand the manner in which the purchasing decision centre functions, it is necessary to do the following:

- a) To identify the roles played by each actor within the buying centre;

- b) To identify the relationships between the components of the centre and between the components and other actors outside of the organisation;
- c) To consider the centre as a whole.

The identification of roles principally derives from the formal organisational structure, while the relationships between actors depend on both individual characteristics and the formal (organisational) and informal (social) relationships between them. A network of relationships, rather than an individual, emerges and makes the behaviour of the buying centre possible. This can be considered a systemic effect of the action of different actors (McQuiston, 1989).

Therefore, a buying centre is a group that collaborates and makes a purchasing decision, while the authors define each role according to the following six categories (Webster, Keller, 2004, p. 394):

- Initiator: defines the buying situation and starts the buying process;
- Buyer (purchaser): defines the purchasing conditions, selects service suppliers and negotiates contracts;
- User: consumes the product;
- Influencer (prescriber): can dictate criterion choices and influences final decisions;
- Decider: has authority to choose from alternative buying actions;
- Gatekeeper: can control information and influence the decision-making process.

The functioning of the buying centre considered as a whole is influenced by five variables: a) the individual members' goals and personal characteristics; b) the nature of leadership within the group; c) the structure of the group; d) the task performed by the group; e) the external influences originated by other organisations and, in general, by the environment.

According to the authors, "in the final analysis, all organisational buying behaviour is individual behaviour" (Webster, Wind, 1972, b, p. 18).

The behaviour of the buying centre is influenced by the different roles of the actors involved, their values and motivations, their knowledge and their tension to learning. All these elements occur in every purchasing situation and determine the outcome from time to time. However, the actor that makes the decision is an individual but is influenced by interactions with the other components of the buying centre.

To understand the behaviour of the different actors involved in the purchasing decision-making process with respect to each phase of the process and the different roles of each actor, the study was in need of a model that allowed for the analysis of the different values (Smith, Colgate, 2007) that inspire each actor in each phase. This investigation is based on the theories of customer needs analysis represented in the literature and considers the theory of consumption values by Sheth, Newman and Gross (1991) suitable for application. The behaviour of actors can be influenced by the following values: functional - perceived utility of an alternative able to play a functional, practical or physical role; social - perceived utility is connected to positive or negative associations to social groups, for example, socio-demographic or ethnic-cultural groups; emotional - utility of alternative choice depends on the capacity to create feelings or affective reactions; epistemic - perceived utility is based on the capacity to generate curiosity and to satisfy knowledge needs; situational - utility is influenced by a situation or a specific decisional context.

These values contribute to the complexity of the purchasing decision-making process. In scholastic educational travel, it is probable that each actor can privilege one typology of value or another along the process.

## **Steps of Research and Investigation Tools**

The research has been conducted through several steps:

- a) The first step involved a focus group with 10 teachers and 4 delegates

of the heads of 5 different schools: 3 high schools, 1 middle school and 1 primary school. This step was necessary for gathering information regarding the content of each phase in the decision-making process and for the development of the questionnaire. Schools were chosen based on their availability, and meetings were organised with the teachers and the head's delegate responsible for the organisation of educational travel within each school. Through these meetings, we were able to reconstruct the processes of planning, organising, realising and controlling educational travel;

b) Based on the results of the previous meetings, the questionnaire for the field study was designed and pre-tested in five schools located between the provinces of Cagliari and Oristano;

c) The questionnaire was sent to the 630 Sardinian schools by e-mail (Table 1), each with an identification code. The questionnaire consisted of three sections. In the first section, respondents were asked to provide general information about the school: typology, name, address, head's name, number of classes and students with the specification of classes and students who attended a school trip. The second section dealt with forecasting educational travel: who in the school identifies the need and proposes the trip, how do students participate in the process, who are the subjects involved, and what is the forecasting period. The third section focused on travel data: tools used in the acquisition of information, motivations driving the decision-making process, length of stay, destinations, student participation, and confirmation problems. Approximately 31% of the total questionnaires sent were collected (196), but 47 of these were rejected due to being incomplete. Completed and accepted questionnaires totalled 149 (Table 1) or approximately 24% of those initially sent.

d) The questionnaire was managed with software - *lime-survey* - adopted for online compilation and administration. All sections and questions were to be completed. A questionnaire database was generated, and an analysis was conducted.

e) The data analysis revealed the necessity of an additional step, and the opinions of students were collected using a selected focus group discussion. Twelve students from different Sardinian high schools made up

this focus group. They were asked about the role they play in the different phases of the decision-making process regarding the purchase of an educational tourism product.

**Table 1. :** Schools and percentage of completed questionnaires

Type of school	Total Sent	Completed Questionnaires	Response Rate
Kindergarten	136	10	7.5%
Primary school	193	54	27.8%
Middle school	171	61	35.3%
High school	130	24	18.5%
TOTAL	630	149	23.7%

## Findings

The results are presented considering the three fundamental phases that characterised the study:

- a) the first focus group to correctly incorporate the research into the scholastic context;
- b) the field research;
- c) the second focus group to verify some of the results obtained in the field research.

### *4.1. The first focus group results*

The first focus group allowed the authors to identify the actors involved in the educational travel decision-making process. In scholastic educational travel, the purchasing decision involves the school entity as a whole. Therefore, the consideration of the school as a buying centre seems appropriate. In this context, the purchasing decision centre actors consist of the following individuals or groups: students, teachers, head or delegate, administrative staff, and parents, guardians or family.

This focus group specified the content of the different phases of the purchasing decision-making process. Specifically, the process develops in a number of phases that can be applied to schools' educational travel as follows:



- **Emergence/Stimulation of the need:** The stimulation can happen in different ways, including its emergence through the suggestions and ideas of students, class teachers, the head or people delegated by the head to manage or be involved in this activity. Once the need has been identified, teachers should take the initiative to propose an educational trip.

- **Formalisation of the need:** Plans can be formalised within a classroom environment with student-teacher discussions of trip options, the didactic programme and the consequent choice of destination. As stated in Italian ministerial programmes, all educational tourism activities should maintain a principal didactic function. This phase assumes different characteristics based on the educational establishment involved and, consequently, even the role of single actors can differ.

- **Making the decision:** This phase is formalised in different ways based on the educational establishment involved. In kindergarten, primary or middle school, for example, actors include teachers, students and, in particular, parents or their representatives on the class council. In high school, the decision tends to mature within the class, and students interact more with teachers, especially with those teachers who are able to identify a connection between the proposal and the programme of study.

- **Acquisition of information:** A variety of information is gathered, including, accommodation at the arrival and other destinations, transportation options for reaching the destinations, the possible intermediaries to manage the booking and activities, and all related expenditures. This phase can be managed by administrative staff, by teachers delegated by the head, and by teachers who volunteer to carry out this function.

- **Evaluation:** This phase is carried out by the school secretary or the head's delegate.

Finally, the first focus group allowed the investigation of the elements that were to be considered in the questionnaire.

#### *4.2. Data analysis and results from the questionnaire and the student focus group*

We analysed data related to the second and third sections of the questionnaire. The first questions explored those who recognise the need to take a trip, who formalise the need, and who then translate the need into action.

With regard to those who recognise or stimulate the need for the trip (Table 2), the results show that this is performed by individual class teachers the majority of the time (59.2%), followed by students (21.1%) and finally, with a lower percentage, the head's delegate (10.1%). If we look at the roles played by each actor in this phase, it is apparent that when this phase is completed by the teacher or the head's delegate, then these individuals assume the role of Initiator. When the stimulation comes from students behaving as Initiators, they are also assuming the role of User. In this phase, when teachers or the head's delegate assume the role of Initiators, the other actors involved become Influencers.

During the two focus groups, values emerged that stimulate the behaviour of the actors in terms of how each exercises his or her role. For the teacher, the values that inspire these roles are functional, social and epistemic, while, for the students, they are principally social. For the head's delegates, the values are functional; there is a ministerial disposition that favours these opportunities along with the fact that schools have financial resources to utilise for such purposes. We obtained confirmation of this result with the student focus group, in which it emerged that values inspiring the need to take a trip are different if we consider teachers, who are moved by formal and social (and also epistemic) values, and students, who have a tendency to be inspired by social and emotional values.

If the data are broken down with respect to each type of Italian school, it confirms that for all types of school, the recognition of the need to travel comes primarily from teachers. Students become more important in the process in high school, but still rank below the teacher. The role played by the head's delegate and the team responsible for educational travel management is generally lower. However, in kindergarten, the educational travel management team has more influence.

**Table 2-** People who perceive the need for educational travel

Type of School	Students	Class Teachers	Head's Delegate	Educational Travel Management Team	TOTAL
Kindergarten	16.7%	50.0%	8.3%	25.0%	100%
Primary school	12.5%	75.0%	6.9%	5.6%	100%
Middle school	24.2%	53.8%	11.0%	11.0%	100%
High school	30.2%	46.5%	14.0%	9.3%	100%
<b>AVERAGE TOTAL</b>	<b>21.1%</b>	<b>59.2%</b>	<b>10.1%</b>	<b>9.6%</b>	<b>100%</b>

With regard to the phase relating to the formalisation of the need within the class, we asked who takes the initiative to encourage support for the trip. It also emerged that individual teachers play a crucial role, while the teaching staff as a whole, students and the other groups (Table 3) play a less important role. In kindergarten, the teaching staff plays a more important role than in other grade levels. In this case, as before, teachers tend to be motivated by functional, social and, sometimes, epistemic values.

**Table 3 -** People who encourage support for educational travel

Type of School	Literary Subjects	Scientific Subjects	Technical and Practical Subjects	Others	TOTAL
Kindergarten	0.0%	27.3%	45.5%	27.3%	100%
Primary school	38.9%	33.3%	1.9%	25.9%	100%
Middle school	62.3%	8.2%	1.6%	27.9%	100%
High school	62.5%	8.3%	8.3%	20.8%	100%
<b>AVERAGE TOTAL</b>	<b>49.3%</b>	<b>18.7%</b>	<b>6.0%</b>	<b>26.0%</b>	<b>100%</b>

To understand the role of single actors within the buying centre and their motivations in the context of a scholastic environment, we need to know which subject areas are primarily responsible for soliciting the stimulus and proposing destinations that would encourage student development.

As we can see from the results (Table 4), literature and science teachers are more involved in decision-making, but teachers in "other" fields, such as anthropology, cultural and environmental issues, and interdisciplinary subjects, are also involved. In kindergarten, technical and practical subjects rank

highest, whereas there is an equal distribution between all subjects in primary school, largely because there are three teachers that cover all of the main subjects between them. In middle and high school, literature ranks highest. This can be explained by the fact that literature teachers spend the most of their hours in the middle and high school classroom, while technical and practical subjects dominate the syllabus in kindergarten.

**Table 4 - Subjects involved in decision-making**

Type of School	Literary Subjects	Scientific Subjects	Technical and Practical Subjects	Others	TOTAL
Kindergarten	0.0%	27.3%	45.5%	27.3%	100%
Primary school	38.9%	33.3%	1.9%	25.9%	100%
Middle school	62.3%	8.2%	1.6%	27.9%	100%
High school	62.5%	8.3%	8.3%	20.8%	100%
<b>AVERAGE TOTAL</b>	<b>49.3%</b>	<b>18.7%</b>	<b>6.0%</b>	<b>26.0%</b>	<b>100%</b>

The student focus group confirmed these results and also reinforced them by highlighting, for example, that accompanying teachers influence travel decisions related to destination choice and are guided by functional, social, epistemic and, sometimes, situational values. When they are not accompanying teachers, typical functional values prevail.

Students, therefore, primarily intervene in the buying centre as Users and Deciders, at least with reference to some phases of the purchasing process. Their values are generally the following:

- As Users, the first value that emerges is functional, which is fundamental for the students' participation in the trip. Cost is the principal element that impedes students from participating in trips. (Table 5) For kindergarten, the percentage of students not participating in trips due to cost is 33%, and the percentage is 32.5% for primary schools, 50.3% for middle schools and 73.5% for high schools. After cost, the values that guide the students' behaviour are mainly social and emotional. This tendency emerges in all of the evidence gathered from the focus group, to the point that even in situations normally considered disagreeable, students still overwhelmingly wish to experience new situations far from home, as they can learn to look after themselves, often without teacher interference or control.

**Table 5 - Percentage of non-travelling students who do not travel with the school due to cost implications**

Type of School	Abroad	Within National Boundaries	Within the Region	Within the Province	AVERAGE TOTAL
Kindergarten	33%	33%	33%	33%	33%
Primary school	35%	43%	30%	22%	32.5%
Middle school	70%	67%	43%	21%	50.3%
High school	100%	100%	67%	50%	79.2%

• As Deciders, students participate in the choice of destination, although their role in this decision is not always fundamental or based on their own values as they interact principally with more influential teachers. With regard to the choice of destination, it is clear that a functional element that influences this choice in Sardinian schools is the language barrier. Consequently, the most preferred destinations abroad include Spain (33%) and France (27%), which have languages similar to Italian. Students are not generally involved in the other phases of the decisional process that involve the choice of intermediaries, transportation and accommodation.

A particularly important issue concerns the role of the students, motivated by social, emotional and sometimes epistemic values (as found with the focus group), who are the Users and main beneficiaries of travel activities. With reference to the degree of participation in the choice of travel destination, Table 6 shows that when examining schools with older students (middle/high), the degree of student participation increases. In fact, high school students are involved to a medium-high and higher degree, while kindergarten students are involved to a low-lower degree. This figure, measured using the "Itemised Rating Scale" (Givon and Shapira, 1984; Grigg, 1980), was determined in our quantitative research using interviews conducted with teachers.

**Table 6 - Degree of participation of students in choice of travel destination**

Type of School	1	2	3	4	5	TOTAL
Kindergarten	44%	33%	11%	11%	0%	100%
Primary school	39%	22%	22%	9%	7%	100%
Middle school	16%	16%	31%	25%	11%	100%
High school	4%	4%	50%	21%	21%	100%
<b>AVERAGE TOTAL</b>	<b>24%</b>	<b>18%</b>	<b>30%</b>	<b>18%</b>	<b>11%</b>	<b>100%</b>

Another important phase of the purchasing decision-making process is the research of travel information. Individuals from the buying centre who research information related to the travel destination are known as Gatekeepers. The people seeking information about travel destinations are the head's delegate or the educational travel management team (61%) and teachers (32%). It is only in high schools that students seek information about the travel destination (23%), while other staff members (10%) carry out this research in middle schools (Table 7).

**Table 7 - People researching travel destinations**

Type of School	Head's Delegate/Educational Travel Management Team	Teachers	Students	Other	TOTAL
Kindergarten	67%	33%	0%	0%	100%
Primary school	55%	45%	0%	0%	100%
Middle school	67%	23%	0%	10%	100%
High school	54%	31%	12%	4%	100%
<b>AVERAGE TOTAL</b>	<b>61%</b>	<b>32%</b>	<b>2%</b>	<b>5%</b>	<b>100%</b>

The people responsible for the research of other aspects related to the trip can be included in the role of Gatekeeper but also considered for the role of Decider and Buyer when participated in administrative duties.

For all other aspects of the trip (Table 8), including organisation and costs, the people responsible for researching this information are the head's delegate or the educational travel management team (44%) and the administrative office (36%), while teachers and other staff of the school are less significant. In kindergarten and primary schools, the administrative office typically studies all the other aspects of the educational trip. In middle and high school, the people in charge are usually the head's delegate or the educational travel management team.

**Table 8 - People researching organisation and costs**

Type of School	Head's Delegate/Educational Travel Management Team	Teachers	Administrative Office	Other staff	TOTAL
Kindergarten	44%	0%	56%	0%	100%
Primary school	31%	22%	39%	7%	100%
Middle school	56%	8%	31%	5%	100%
High school	42%	8%	38%	13%	100%
<b>AVERAGE TOTAL</b>	<b>44%</b>	<b>13%</b>	<b>36%</b>	<b>7%</b>	<b>100%</b>

We enquired about the existence and function within schools of a person or educational travel management team responsible for the phase related to the evaluation of alternatives and the decision-making process for all aspects of the trip. We discovered that in 74% of schools, this responsibility usually falls on one person, typically the head's delegate, while in 50% of schools, there is a collegial body in which teachers and administrative staff are involved. In some cases, the collegial body substitutes the person responsible, and, in other cases, the collegial body supports the delegated person and provided assistance in different functions.

The collegial body is typically made up of teachers, administrative staff and the head. Sometimes, particularly in middle school, students and parents are also involved.

The functions carried out by the head's delegate are different depending on the typology of school. However, based on the answers we received about demand for these functions, it emerged that inside the buying centre, the head's delegate, in addition to acquiring information, also decides on the details and conditions of the trip (travel agency, transportation, hotel, etc.) and is often responsible for formalising the decision (Buyer).

Table 9 shows the main functions of the head's delegate or other person in charge. They receive teachers' proposals (37%) and then check each proposal's organisational management (28%), consistency with the curriculum (19%), and economic and financial management (6%). They also encourage teachers and students to take part in educational trips (9%). Therefore, the head's delegate only plays the role of Buyer and Decider in 6% of schools. These tasks also vary by the type of school in question, but there are a few significant differences. The collegial body exists in only 50% of schools, primarily middle schools.

**Table 9 - Functions of head's delegate or person in charge, when present**

Type of School	Encourages Teachers and Students to Travel	Receives Teachers' Proposals	Checks Proposals for Consistency with the Curriculum	Checks Proposals for Organisational Management	Checks Proposals for Economic and Financial Management	TOTAL
Kindergarten	9%	36%	27%	27%	0%	100%
Primary school	7%	40%	16%	29%	8%	100%
Middle school	10%	36%	22%	26%	6%	100%
High school	13%	35%	16%	29%	6%	100%
AVERAGE TOTAL	9%	37%	19%	28%	6%	100%

The collegial body has almost identical functions to the head's delegate (Table 10), except when it checks the proposals for economic and financial management (16.4%). Therefore, the collegial body plays the roles of both the Buyer, as it defines purchasing conditions and selects suppliers, and the Decider, due to its higher level of responsibility (16.4%).

**Table 10 - Tasks performed by the collegial body**

Type of School	Encourages Teachers and Students to Travel	Receives Teachers' Proposals	Checks Proposals for Consistency with the Curriculum	Checks Proposals for Organisational Management	Checks Proposals for Economic and Financial Management	TOTAL
Kindergarten	0.0%	25.0%	50.0%	25.0%	0.0%	100%
Primary school	6.1%	28.6%	14.3%	30.6%	20.4%	100%
Middle school	8.8%	35.0%	15.0%	23.8%	17.5%	100%
High school	15.8%	31.6%	26.3%	21.1%	5.3%	100%
<b>AVERAGE TOTAL</b>	<b>8.6%</b>	<b>32.2%</b>	<b>17.1%</b>	<b>25.7%</b>	<b>16.4%</b>	<b>100%</b>

In both of these cases, we can assume that in the majority of cases, the motivations of the Decider and Buyer when making decisions - whether the delegate or the collegial body - tends to be influenced by functional and, less frequently, situational values.

In kindergarten, the main function of the delegate or collegial body is to check the proposal in terms of consistency with the curriculum (50%). The other functions are to receive class teachers' proposals (25%), and to check the proposals for organisational management (25%). In this case, functional values tend to be the most influential. The main function of the delegate or collegial body is different for primary schools. The collegial body checks the proposals for organisational management (30.6%), and, in this case, the main motivational value is functional. However, we also analysed other important tasks, including receiving class teachers' proposals (28.6%) and checking them for economic and financial management (20.4%). In middle and high schools, the main function of the delegate or collegial body is also to receive the teachers' proposals. The second function for middle schools is to check the proposals for organisational management while, in high schools, it is to check the proposals for consistency with the curriculum. In both of these cases, the main motivational value is functional.



## **Conclusion**

Students travelling for education have become more numerous, and this number is expected to increase in the coming decades. Research within the fields of learning and educational travel has been taking place in recent years, and this study has examined the demand for scholastic educational travel and the role of the school as a buying centre with different actors, roles, motivations and values.

The objective of this research has been to describe the purchasing process of scholastic educational travel in Sardinian schools.

This study started from the consideration of the school, which projects, organises and realises educational travel, as a buying centre, as defined by Webster and Wind in the context of business-to-business relationships. The school as buying centre represents the client that expresses complex needs based on the actors involved, their roles along the different phases of the purchasing process, and the values that inspire them.

The first part of the study looked at the phases of the purchasing decision-making process. A focus group made up of teachers and heads' delegates permitted the isolation of a set of queries for the questionnaire. Afterwards, the questionnaire was prepared, tested and submitted online to 630 schools in Sardinia. Finally, a focus group discussion with students allowed for the verification of the role they play in the different phases of the decision-making process.

The study questions that sought to reveal the role and values of the different actors involved in the purchasing decision-making process are the following: how does the need to purchase educational travel products arise; who are the actors that stimulate the need; which subjects are more involved; how is the purchasing process conditioned by financial resources; who acquires the information necessary for decision making; who is responsible for making the purchasing decision regarding the different elements of the educational travel products.

The results confirmed the initial hypothesis that the purchasing decision-making process of scholastic educational travel is a complex process within which single actors make decisions that are influenced by the values and personal motivations of the role they play and decisional situation in which they act.

The results also show that different actors can interpret different roles, and the same actor can play more than one role. This occurs, for example, when an individual participates in the purchasing process of a number of school trips. An individual may play the role of an accompanying teacher or may only participate in the discussion. Alternatively, the teacher may not be on the class council and would therefore not participate in discussions, but may, through their relationships with colleagues and students, play the role of a provider of information, an advisor, etc. Actors can often find themselves functioning within composite organisms, such as the class council, comprised of teachers and representatives of students, parents, and administrative staff. Within such organisms, there are interactive dynamics that are influenced by both formal and informal factors that affect any decisions made.

In Italy, this important educational experience is governed by regulations that control the procedures of the decisional process. Nonetheless, every school can determine their own organisational aspects of the programme.

Applying the model of the buying centre by Webster and Wind to the school setting has found robust confirmation. However, the comparative analysis between the buying centre of industrial firms and that of the schools shows some differences. The first difference is the nature of hierarchic liaisons among the actors involved. These liaisons are weaker in the school, especially those that involve students and their families. Nonetheless, the need to conduct the purchasing decision-making process in a unitary way exists within the school. Another difference pertains the extension of the action; in the school, the configuration of the buying centre with the elements previously described only concerns the purchase of educational travel and does not consider other purchases made by the school. In the industrial enterprise, all the purchases pertain to the buying centre. A third difference concerns the stability of the various components of the buying centre; in the school, students and their families are the actors that will change periodically as each student's studies in each type of school ends, while, in the buying centre of the industrial enterprise, this temporal term does not exist.

The complexities of the form of tourism examined provide implications for the types of tourism products being offered and for destinations' marketing and management strategies. The existence of a buying centre - the school - requires the identification of all the components involved in the purchasing

process, that is, the roles and values inspiring the choice process, to direct the specific educational product to the appropriate actors and markets. Scholastic educational packages need to be consistent with the values, motivations and needs that emerge from each school system.

We have identified that we can adapt our research methods to gain a deeper understanding of the roles of the actors involved in purchasing decisions and their motivations. We plan to continue to develop the questionnaire and extend our study to target other groups of actors that form buying centres, i.e., students, and extend our analysis to other regions of Italy.

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