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THE ROLE OF EDUCATION IN ROMANIA'S TOURISM SECTOR: FROM LEVEL DESCRIPTORS TO LEARNING OUTCOMES

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Abstract: Tourism is generally and globally acknowledged as one of the few economic sectors that has more than significant growth prospects and is characterized as a catalyst for peace and prosperity. At the same time, this sector is known for its high turnover of staff, persistent lack of qualified personnel and rapidly changing skill needs. If Romania wants to be a competitive tourist destination, we must assure a high quality of the tourism services and the people who deliver them.

The most important labour shortage in Romania's tourism is at the management level (top and middle management) and entrepreneurs. There are several reasons for this. For a long time, Romania's tourist industry was dominated by large public enterprises. Most often, top and middle management were not appointed and promoted according to their education and capabilities, but according to other non-professional criteria. Education at all levels, especially higher education, has not been producing a competent labour force. Management education has been especially weak, with no specialized education for management in tourism. Some available programmes were of too general and with little practical training. Although there are several institutions of higher education which provide education for tourism, all of them need to modernize their programmes with a greater emphasis on management, foreign languages, ICT, and practical training.

Today, Romania started to reform education. This is a significant challenge for the entire education system, including higher education in tourism. This year a consultation process was started to identify the most important competences that should be formed or developed in a degree programme. The outcome of this consultation process will be reflected in the set of reference points – generic and subject specific competences – identified by 10 subject areas, including tourism.

Key words: competences, education, labour force, learning outcomes, level descriptors, tourism.

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INTRODUCTION

The development of human resources includes the employees' training and professional development. The general targets of this activity proceed from the internal needs of a certain company and they are subordinated to its general needs. They refer to the elimination of discrepancies between the real level and necessary level of the staff's knowledge and abilities, to the creation of training opportunities for each and every employee, so as learning should turn into a permanent activity of every person within the company.

Professional training stands for a learning/instruction process, through which the employees acquire theoretical and practical knowledge, new technical abilities that should make more effective the activity they carry out. Professional training represents a more complex process, for training managers or other specialists so as they should take upon themselves increased responsibilities in the framework of their present and future jobs.

The main training knowledge and needs of the different categories of labour force indicate that tourism is still characterized by a labour force with a reduced aptitude level, for the greatest part of the jobs, within the basic sub sectors.

The relation between tourism and human capital is complex, inter-conditioning, every one of the two elements playing at the same time the role of cause and effect. Therefore, stimulating the evolution of tourism stands for an important means for relaunching labour force, however the development, respectively the stoppage of the development of tourism takes place according to the existence or non-existence of human resources within the territory under reference².

1. CHARACTERISTICS OF TOURISM EMPLOYMENT

Employees are the most important assets in a tourism organisation and they are the key to the success of service-sector companies, because of their critical role in customer interactions³.

Although the development of the tourism industry creates new employment opportunities, critics contend that tourism employment provides predominantly low-paid and low-skilled demeaning jobs. The negative aspects of tourism employment focus upon the physical demands of the job, poor conditions of work, job insecurity, low pay, long working hours, high labour turnover and lack of training.

Labour turnover in the tourism industry is generally accepted as an inevitable and natural process. Some perceive labour turnover to be beneficial as it

² Minciu, R., *Economia turismului*, Editura Uranus, București, 2004

³ Haven-Tang, C., Jones, E., *Human resource management in tourism businesses*, in *The Business of Tourism Management*, Pearson Education, 2006, p. 90-91.

enables manipulation of workforce size according to demand and thus enables the control of labour costs⁴.

Nevertheless, labour turnover is a cost to tourism business and can create severe operational difficulties. High labour turnover affects the quality of services and goods, incurs high replacement, recruitment and selection costs as well as training costs, which can subsequently reduce profitability and affect organisational morale⁵.

The tourism industry provides a **labour-intensive service** at the customer interface and, while demand is fairly steady and predictable, peaks and troughs in demand do occur. These peaks can only be met through temporary increases in labour at the point of contact, via functional or numerical flexibility. Part-time employment is the usual solution to uneven work distribution, providing employers with a reserve of peripheral workers, to supplement (full-time) workers.

While **labour flexibility** may be a positive attribute, it can also be detrimental. The high proportions of casual and part-time staff employed within the industries may be less inclined to view the tourism industry as a long-term career option, perceiving it to be a transient job. Subsequently, part-time and casual employees may be unwilling to invest in industry-related qualifications.

One factor likely to contribute to poor qualification attainment within the tourism industry is the willingness of employers to recruit people without the necessary **qualifications**. A clear career structure is also important and the tourism industry generally suffers a lack of clearly defined routes to supervisory and managerial positions.

The low entry threshold for tourism entrepreneurship leads to a dominance of micro-business in the tourism industry. Some owner-managers are seriously deficient in management skills. This affects the viability of small tourism business as well as impacting on their ability to offer an attractive career package for ambitious employees.

2. GENERAL TRENDS AND SKILL NEEDS IN THE TOURISM SECTOR IN EUROPE

Tourism is still a very specific sector, so specific knowledge about the sector is required. For the workforce, however, there are still general and basic skill needs for everybody. For example, lack of knowledge of foreign languages has been recently recognized by national tourism organizations of some European countries as a lasting problem and even as a competitive disadvantage. Entrepreneurship – a concept still vaguely defined – is taken more actively on board by education providers who are

⁴ Torrington, D., Hall, L., Taylor, S., *Human Resource Management*, 5th edn, Financial Times Prentice Hall, 2002, cit. in *The Business of Tourism Management*, Pearson Education, 2006, p. 92.

⁵ Idem.

working on this notion and thinking of implementing this even at the compulsory school level⁶.

There are also specific skill needs defined by labour category. At management level, these are rather transversal skills; hence tourism managers often have an educational background in accountancy, marketing, law, economics, etc. Nevertheless, managers are expected to possess the following skills and competences: computer skills, business and strategic planning, strategic alliances, management skills, management through visions and values, yield management, accounting, product development, innovation, human resource management, destination management, project management, management skills to cope with globalization influences, change management, marketing and sales skills⁷.

Other labour categories can be defined: supervisors, skilled craft workforce and the semi-skilled. Supervisors in tourism need basic computer skills, human resource management, hygiene and HACCP, accounting, supervision and training skills. Personal skills, problem solving and basic computer skills are especially important for the skilled craft workforce.

Nowadays, further demands are placed on semi-skilled tourism staff in terms of both personal skills and specific technical knowledge (e.g. bar attendance, cleaning, catering). Being aware of challenges and trying to overcome them are essential to successful training or education. Some useful suggestions for tourism include⁸:

- (a) Make the learning process job-related;
- (b) Where possible, apply the mentor model;
- (c) Get strong support from both management and workers;
- (d) Try to integrate learning in the career path of the employee;
- (e) Embed the learning process in a strong framework supported by the organization or company;
- (f) Include basic skills (language, behavior, culture, organization) in this learning process;
- (g) The whole process needs passion, or at least motivation, with continuing stimulation from both sides;
- (h) Learning plans need to be transparent to the users;
- (i) Learning (still) needs to be fun for everybody;
- (j) It is very important to establish goals and measures to evaluate results and outcomes;
- (k) Importance of social dialogue is not to be neglected;
- (l) Partnership in general is crucial for the success of every kind of learning process.

⁶ Cedefop. Panorama. *Trends and skill needs in tourism*, Olga Strietska-Ilina, Manfred Tessaring (eds), Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, 2005, p.7-12.

⁷ European Commission, DG Enterprise. *Improving training in order to upgrade skills in the tourism industry*. Final report of Working Group B. Brussels: European Commission, 2001, p.26.

⁸ Junggeburst, J.H.F. et al. *Training and development under construction. Hospitality and the changing environment*. The Hague: Hotelschool the Hague, 2004, p.32-34.

3. THE ROLE OF HIGH EDUCATION IN ROMANIA'S TOURISM SECTOR

The concerns related to the education's quality and the provisions of the new legislative framework are premises to assure an adequate correlation among the educational objectives and the needs for economic and social development specific to a knowledge-based economy⁹.

The most appropriate environment to gain abilities and knowledge in order to fulfill certain tasks related to each occupational category has proven to be a combination between training in school and at the place of work, which suggests that trainers and employers should work together more often in order to elaborate training programs.

Such coordination is extremely important if we consider the need for international mobility of work within the present context of tourism market's globalization and the standardization of processes, technologies and business. A competitive tourism industry determines the development of channels for dialog and cooperation between national authorities, the tourism sector and training institutions.

The issue on which a general consent exists refers to the need for qualified human resources, capable of guaranteeing the offer of quality services in tourism – a sine qua non condition for competitiveness.

A recent Report was drawn up by the World Tourism and Travelers Council (WTTC), collaborating with Oxford Economic Forecasting and the National Authority for Tourism in Romania and named „ROMANIA. The impact of tourists and travelers on jobs and economy”. It points out that the most important thing is that the training institutions within the tourism industry collaborate and communicate in order to be sure that training and courses are relevant and in line with the demand on the market. The industry may help and support the institutions and students in this matter by taking part to training courses, by offering practice bases and by communicating the importance of some high standards in the services field¹⁰.

This year, the National Authority for Tourism aims at developing a framework in order to increase the quality of the tourism services by financing the personnel within the tourism sector and for this sector, for hotels, restaurants, respectively by the project-based co-financing of activities integrated within the objectives mentioned in the Program for adults' training within tourism and for tourism and for supporting tourism education - 2007¹¹.

The program has as an objective the change of the social partners within tourism, the increase of the degree of making the interested persons fully aware as related to the importance of training and investing in professional training, in order to

⁹ Romania's Government (2005) – *The National Development Plan 2007-2013*, p. 130.

¹⁰ W.T.T.C. (2006) - *ROMANIA. The impact of tourism and traveling on work places and economy*

¹¹ www. mturism.ro - A.N.T. – *The program for adults' professional training from tourism and within tourism and support for the touristic education – 2007*.

transform the work force within tourism, hotels, and restaurants in a „strategic resource”.

In this direction, the National Institute of Research-Development in Tourism from Romania has done an inquiry among the top management of the units which operate in the field of tourism, respectively accommodation units, catering units, tourism agencies and professional tourism associations, with a view to investigating the quality of the graduates' education in the field of tourism¹². The questionnaire that has been applied has been structured so as to allow the investigation of the following aspects:

- the level of theoretical education of the recently graduates in tourism;
- the level of practical knowledge the recently graduates in tourism;
- the level of complying with the work duties the graduates in tourism;
- the importance of high education for the activities carried out in accommodation units, in catering units, in tourism agencies and other (ministries, research institutes, professional associations)
- suggestions with respect to the improvement of the students' education who attend the courses of tourism faculties.

Among all results obtained as a consequence of the inquiry, we have deemed as playing importance the ones with reference to the *importance of high education for the activities carried out in accommodation units, in catering units and in tourism agencies*.

Table 1: Importance attached to high education by managers of tourism agencies

Mark	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulated percentage
Little important	5	4,8	4,8
Important	29	27,9	32,7
Very important	38	36,5	69,2
Non-declared	32	30,8	100,0
TOTAL	104	100,0	

The persons having answered the interview have been questioned with respect to the importance played by high studies/education in order to carry out an activity within a tourism agency. As for the answers, they have been structured as follows:

¹² I.N.C.D.T. - *Probleme actuale ale cererii de forță de muncă din turismul românesc în contextul aderării la Uniunea Europeană* – Faza I, II, III.

- 36,5% among the interviewed persons have deemed high education as extremely important in order to carry out an activity within a tourism agency;
- 27,9% among the interviewed persons have appreciated high education as important in order to carry out an activity within a tourism agency;
- 4,8% have deemed high education as less important in order to carry out an activity within a tourism agency;
- A percentage quite high (30,8%) have declared nothing.

Table 2: Importance attached to high education by the managers of the tourism accommodation units

Mark	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulated percentage
Little important	1	1,0	1,0
Important	43	41,3	42,3
Very important	33	31,7	74,0
Non-declared	27	26,0	100,0
TOTAL	104	100,0	

The persons having answered the interview have been questioned with respect to the importance played by high studies/education in order to carry out an activity within a tourism accommodation unit. As for the answers, they have been structured as follows:

- 31,7% among the interviewed persons have deemed high education as extremely important in order to carry out an activity within a tourism accommodation unit;
- 41,3% among the interviewed persons have appreciated high education as important in order to carry out an activity within a tourism accommodation unit;
- 1,0% among the interviewed persons have deemed high education as playing a less important part in order to carry out an activity within a tourism accommodation unit;
- In this case, too, there has been noticed a quite high percentage (26%) who have not expressed their point of view.

Table 3: Importance attached to high education by managers of catering units

Mark	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulated percentage
Little important	12	11,5	11,5
Important	35	33,7	45,2
Very important	13	12,5	57,7
Non-declared	44	42,3	100,0
TOTAL	104	100,0	

As for the answers, they have been structured as follows:

- The greatest weight is carried by the persons who have not expressed their opinion with respect to the theme under debate;
- 12,5% among the interviewed persons have deemed high education as extremely important in order to carry out an activity within a catering unit;
- 33,7% among the interviewed persons have appreciated high education as important in order to carry out an activity within a catering unit;
- 11,5% among the interviewed persons have deemed high education as playing a less important part in order to carry out an activity within a catering unit.

As a consequence of the results we have obtained from the inquiry carried out as a national level, there may be noted that, as a whole, the managers deem important the fact that their employees in certain jobs within the framework of these units should have graduated university studies.

Strongly connected to these aspects, we have also started a research within the companies which are offering tourism services in Braşov.

The research had as an objective the identification of the demands of companies that are offering tourism services in Braşov as related to the theoretical knowledge and to the practical skills (the competences and the capabilities) of graduates of the Economics Faculty, specialization „Economy of Commerce, Tourism and Services”¹³.

The sample on which the research was performed is represented by all the tourism units (hotels, villas, boarding houses, tourism agencies and restaurants) from Braşov and Poiana Braşov, registered at the Companies' Office, the County Statistics Direction Braşov and the Center for tourism information from Braşov, meaning 274

¹³ Ispas, A., Petcu, N., Competences and capabilities of graduates of the specialization Economy of Trade, Tourism and Services from the perspective of employers in the touristic sector, in Proceedings of The 4th International Seminar on the *Quality Management in Higher Education*, 9-10 june 2006, Sinaia, Romania, pag. 67-72, Ed. PERFORMANTICA Iasi

tourism units. **The length of the sample** on which the research was performed is of 40 units. In order to form this sample, we have used a proportionally pre-determined stratified sampling. The first stratification variable was the unit type (hotel, boarding house, travel agency, alimentation unit), and the second one was the size of the tourism unit as related to the employees number.

Among **the hypotheses of the research** we have included: the graduates of the Economics Faculty, specialization „Economy of Commerce, Tourism and Services” from Braşov are part of the employees of the companies that are offering touristic services from Braşov; the information received by the students during the academic studies are enough in order to be hired within tourism; the practical experience of an university graduate within tourism is necessary in order to be hired within this field; the implication of the tourism units from Braşov in training the future university graduates of a tourism profile is a must.

The research also had as an aim the establishment of the criteria on the basis of which they are hiring the personnel. The main selection criteria used by the tourism companies related to the activity profile for hiring the personnel, are presented in table 4.

Table 4: Selection criteria for hiring the personnel

Selection criteria	Absolute frequencies	Relative frequencies
HOTEL		
Experience	3	21,6%
Knowing foreign languages (international)	2	14,3%
Seriousness	2	14,3%
BOARDING HOUSE		
Knowing foreign languages (international)	8	19,6%
The communication skill	8	19,6%
Pleasant look	4	9,8%
TOURISM AGENCY		
Knowing foreign languages (international)	3	13,1%
The communication skill	3	13,1%
Pleasant look	3	13,1%
RESTAURANT		
Experience	7	23,4%
Seriousness	6	20,1%
Pleasant look	4	13,4%

The experience gathered in time and foreign languages knowledge is the main requirement for receiving a job within a hotel unit. Equally, the communication skill and knowing a foreign language are aspects of great importance when hiring a person either in a boarding house, or in a tourism agency. As related to getting a job within an alimentation unit (restaurant, fast-food, pizza house), experience, seriousness and a pleasant look are the main requirements.

Especially relevant for this research is also the importance given by the respondents to the 10 aspects related to the competences that the university graduates within the tourism field must have in order to be hired within specialty units. After making the correlation between the type of the tourism unit and the importance given to each aspect, after calculating the average score, the situation presented in table 5 was the result.

Table 5: The importance given to aspects related to the graduates' competences and capabilities (calculated average score)

Aspect	Hotel	Boarding house, motel, villa	Tourism agency	Restaurant
1. Cognitive capabilities	3.8	4.0	4.1	4.3
2. Communication capabilities	5.0	5.0	4.2	4.8
3. Interpersonal capabilities	4.2	3.9	4.2	4.6
4. IT capabilities	3.8	4.1	4.2	4.0
5. Capabilities for working with figures	4.0	3.4	4.2	4.6
6. Managerial capabilities	4.3	4.3	3.8	4.1
7. Learning capacity	4.8	4.8	4.8	4.6
8. Qualification and practical experience	4.3	3.6	3.8	4.1
9. Flexibility	4.2	4.7	4.4	4.7
10. Foreign languages	5.0	4.9	4.7	4.4

We may notice that the biggest scores, for all the tourism units' types were registered by: the communication capabilities, foreign languages and the learning capacity. These capabilities are considered to be „very important” for the university graduates to be hired by tourism companies. Furthermore, the employers care much about flexibility („utility man”), so that they can reduce this way the costs for hiring specialists for certain activities, but also because of the rather small dimensions of tourism units. The cognitive and IT capabilities are considered to be „important”.

4. THE STRUCTURE OF TOURISM HIGHER EDUCATION IN ROMANIA

In 1977, when a dedicated specialization has been established, tourism has been included in the commerce higher education, becoming study subject in the framework of Commerce Faculty from Academy of Economic Studies. After 1980 it was considered that the actual society became a services economy, along with the commerce and tourism which are considered services categories. Consequently, the

general study of the entire tertiary sector has been integrated under the support of commerce education. The commerce higher education includes the stand alone commerce study, the science of commodities as well as tourism and services and we can conclude that the commerce higher education excel entirely.

Starting 2005-2006 academic year, the commerce, tourism and services is reconsidered in the field of **business administration**, in this way the study emphasizes on trade transaction with the quality of business quintessence - the sectors privileged will remain: commerce, tourism and services, science of commodities and quality management.

5. DESCRIBING THE COMPETENCES IN THE FIELD OF ECONOMY OF COMMERCE, TOURISM AND SERVICES

As most of the European countries, Romania has only fragments of university qualifications or of their descriptors and even those are not sufficiently comprehensive to be connected to the European meta-reference system – the European Qualifications Framework.

In 2005, the National Agency for Qualifications in Higher Education and Partnership with the Economic and Social Environment (ACPART) has been set up in Romania with the mission to perform this certification. According to GD no 1375/2005 ACPART, as national authority in the field, organizes the qualifications system in the Romanian higher education in partnership with education institutions at this level and with economic and social partners by:

- elaborating, implementing, updating and monitoring NQFHE that will allow for a wider recognition and certification of learning outcomes expressed in terms of knowledge, skills and competences;
- ensuring transparency of NQFHE at national and international level.

ACPART made a survey in all the HEIs operating in Romania in order to have a clear image of the concerns regarding the process of formulating the descriptors for a better understanding of the qualifications given to graduates¹⁴. ACPART has the difficult mission to assist the academic community, on one hand, and the whole society, on the other, to design a modern national framework for university qualifications. The qualification have to easily explain both for the diploma holder and the potential future employer, no matter if from the same country or from abroad, which is the expected level of knowledge and skills acquired in a higher education study programmed successfully completed.

Professional qualifications have various levels of complexity. The European Qualifications Framework (EQF) determines 8 levels of professional qualifications. Levels 1-5 are obtained by pre-university studies and levels 6-8 by university studies, as follows:

¹⁴ Korca, M., Describing university qualifications awarded in the field of economics and business administration, in *UNiversite dans la Societe UNISO 2006*, Editions Paideia, 2006, Bucarest, Roumanie, p.187.

- level 6 of qualification is ensured through bachelor university studies;
- level 7 of qualification is ensured through master university studies;
- level 8 of qualification is ensured through doctorate university studies.

NQFHE will describe only level 6, 7 and 8 qualifications that can be correlated with one of the three cycles of university studies provided by Law 288/2004 on the organisation of university studies: bachelor, masters and doctorate.

Each qualification will be referred to the **learning outcomes** of the respective cycle of studies, expressed in terms of **competences** developed during the respective cycle of university studies.

Subsequently, qualifications and competences correlated to the learning levels have **various degrees of generality** that meet different professional requirements. The following three categories of competences will be identified¹⁵:

- *specific professional competences* – are those competences included in a study programme to enable the graduate to cope with the requirements of a specific profession;
- *general professional competences* – are those competences included in a study field that will further allow for performing professional roles in a wider field of activity;
- *transversal competences* – are the most general competences and, as a consequence, are needed and useful in several fields of activity.

The starting point for defining these competences will be the identification of occupations and professional roles that can be undertaken as a result of obtaining the certification of a level 6, 7 or 8 qualifications. Further, it will be noted that the performance of a professional role involves various competences, with different degrees of generality, each competence being, in turn, made of various elements or “applied units of competence”.

These elements are the foundation for developing NQFHE and the National Register of Qualifications in Higher Education (NRQHE) and will be used by ACPART for the monitoring and accreditation of new qualifications in higher education.

The Association of the Faculties of Economics in Romania (AFER) initiated a countrywide consultation process to make an inventory of all the bachelor and master programs delivered by HEIs in the field of economics and business administration. On this occasion, the faculties of economics and business administration have also presented the knowledge descriptors, the competences and skills that the graduate normally possesses.

The result of the consecutive rounds of discussions organized by AFER are summed up in a comprehensive table of the academic qualifications awarded,

¹⁵ ACPART, Methodology on the development of the National Qualifications Framework in Higher Education (NQFHE), Project, Available from internet, <http://acpart.ro/metodologiecncis.pdf>

structured on study levels in the field of economic sciences and of business administration (included Economy of Commerce, Tourism and Services), in which the following items are presented under the form of short statements: general and specific competences, general and specific knowledge outcomes. This scheme was adopted by AFER members as a reference instrument for each individual faculty to develop its specific descriptions of the university qualification awarded a graduate upon completing a bachelor degree study programme.

CONCLUSION

If we wish to build up an educational system within tourism, we must not forget that the sector's nature and the multitude of involved operators shall not allow that such a system is approached from only one perspective. We are facing not just one problem, but several as related to the optimization of the training offer.

The fast quantitative increase of the tourism demand in several countries encouraged the spontaneous, not-coordinated development of different initiatives within tourism, including those related to training. Indeed, the rhythm of this increase contributes to the fact that a great deal of the work places in tourism are taken by the seasonal workers from other economic sectors. This phenomenon strengthened the traditional dislike of many professionals within tourism to grant a higher importance to qualifications in tourism, and a higher credit to experience than to training. But this led to the differentiation of businesses within tourism from their employees' training and from the initiatives taken by the educational system.

Similarly, the relative youth of tourism as socio-economic activity and the predominance of small and medium enterprises within this sector – where a large number of managers do not have specific training within tourism – have limited the opportunities for a continuous training of the employees and limited the role of the associates who, in other sectors, had a positive contribution in the needs' identification, accelerating the involvement of public authorities in the employees' training process.

Nowadays, people being more and more fully aware of the fact that training represents a key factor in the struggle for becoming more competitive, represents the responsible fact for trying to replace the lack of interdisciplinary education within tourism with ad-hoc training sporadic, not-systematic schemes, whose targets are not part of a wider framework, cooperatively constituted so that they complete the efforts done by the different parties involved.

A competitive tourism industry determines the development of channels for dialogue and cooperation between the national authorities, the tourism sector and the training institutions. This is a difficult task, if we consider that a vertical integration of efforts – for instance Government – industry – education – may not be accomplished without a preliminary horizontal integration at different governmental levels, which is generally absent. All of these factors are obstacles when making the training demands within the tourism sector real and when transforming this knowledge in efficient educational programs and methods.

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