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## LIFE-LONG LEARNING STRATEGIES IN TOURISM AND HOTEL INDUSTRY

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**Abstract:** Tourism is the phenomenon of great social and economic importance. It is the biggest and the fastest growing industry which is developing 1.5 faster than the other industries. Additionally, tourism represents a mass movement of people which makes strong impact on many destinations, traditional or emerging ones. This has both economic and social influence on developing destinations, creating employment opportunities and economic benefits for those involved in tourism activities. Tourism development has positive influence on infrastructure development, as well as on the service industry (especially SMEs related to tourism). International economic impacts of tourism are numerous. Countries are attracting tourists and tour operators to use services, which consequently contribute to its balance payment. Services, beside tourist attractions, natural and cultural diversity, create visitors' opinion about destination. Changing nature of tourism (moving from mass tourism to niche tourism and new experiences) has a strong influence on educational process and skills which service providers in tourism have to attain. The intention of this paper is to put a light on the connection between the fast-changing tourism trends and educational processes which are crucial component in providing market with capable and efficient human resources. Be it tourist guide or agent, hotel manager, handicrafts provider or restaurant owner, person involved in tourism is under the pressure to cope with changes and adjust to new trends. Which strategies should companies and individuals use to gain or update their knowledge? Could life-long learning strategies support their efforts in tourism and provide answers to these questions?

*Key words:* Life-long learning; Tourism; Services; Hotel industry, Educational strategies.

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## INTRODUCTION

Tourism is the phenomenon of great social and economic importance, the biggest and the fastest growing trade which is developing 1.5 faster than the other industries. It provides support to development in many countries, enables cultural and spiritual enrichment and provides economic benefits to individuals and societies. More than a hundred million people from all over the world are directly or indirectly employed in tourism, mainly in SMTEs (Small and Medium Tourism Enterprises).<sup>2</sup>

Additionally, tourism represents a mass movement of people which makes strong impact on many destinations, traditional or emerging ones. Destinations are being transformed in order to attract tourists, which can have both positive and negative impact for them and people living there. Emergence of new tourist places, which were not traditionally visited by tourists, especially countries in transition process can make significant difference to country balance payment. It is obvious that many countries see tourism as a short cut to better life and as a mean to fight poverty. In taking this way out, countries tend to be over optimistic about their capabilities (provision of quality services, richness of their natural and cultural resources, overall destination attractiveness etc.), or to see things as they would wish them to be, rather than what they really are. It is therefore crucial to be realistic, but in the same time visionary in planning tourism development in non-traditional tourism countries. Otherwise, disappointment following unfulfilled expectation can be painful.

Focus of this paper is the provision of services, namely in tourism and hotel industry. Improving services in reaching quality standards is a continuous process parallel to services provision, and that brings a challenge to providers. Trends in tourism additionally influence this field of work and forcing tourism stakeholders to redefine their roles. In these efforts to serve their guests well and to satisfy their needs and expectations, services providers (hotels, tour operators, agencies, transportation companies...) need to learn along the way, continuously adopting new knowledge and information in their operations. Paper will include comparative analysis of needs of hotels and small family hotels, as well as various possibilities of life-long learning for their staff, in attempt to provide some answers to challenges of dynamic market.

## 1. TOURISM - INTRODUCTION

The substantial growth of the tourism activity clearly marks tourism as one of the most remarkable economic and social phenomena of the past century. The number of international arrivals shows an evolution from a mere 25 million international arrivals in 1950 to an estimated 806 million in 2005, corresponding to an average annual growth rate on 6.5%.<sup>3</sup> Tourism development has positive influence on infrastructure development, as well as on the service industry. Tourism also forces

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<sup>2</sup> World Tourism Organization, *Tourism Highlights 2007*, [www.unwto.org/facts/eng/methodological.htm](http://www.unwto.org/facts/eng/methodological.htm) (accessed 11/30/2007)

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

governments to develop infrastructure of the country, roads, railroads, airports and other facilities which are prerequisite for successful tourism development.

At the macro level, tourism is an important generator of foreign exchange, which counts towards the export of the country, although, is mainly created and implemented inside the country. International tourism receipts represented in 2003 approximately 6 per cent of worldwide exports of goods and services. When considering service exports exclusively, the share of tourism exports increases to nearly 30 per cent.<sup>4</sup> International tourism spending is an export earning, yet unlike any other export the spending tourists deliver themselves to the product. While earnings for international tourism are classified as “invisible earnings”, the effect of any significant fall in such earnings would be all too visible.<sup>5</sup> Tourism demand depends above all strongly on the economic conditions in major generating markets. When economies grow, level of disposable income will usually also rise. A relatively large part of discretionary income will typically be spent on tourism, in particular in the case of emerging economies. Europe and Americas were the main tourist-receiving regions between 1950 and 2000, representing a joint market share of over 95 per cent in 1950 and 76% in 2000.<sup>6</sup> Additionally, tourism can assist in financing the development of social tourism at home.<sup>7</sup> Foreign tourists use the product on spot, which means that the cultural context is being assessed too. Some of the practices and customs which are part of the local culture can be seen completely different in eyes of the foreign beholder. That does not mean that local culture needs to be changed or adjusted to tourists’ expectations. It means that hosts have to make extra effort to bring these customs closer to tourists.

International tourism top spenders markets are Germany, USA, UK and France which accounted for one third of market share in 2006.<sup>8</sup> Tourists usually prefer to get a feel of community, to understand and respect local context. It is therefore apparent that successful tourism planning requires the involvement and participation of the residents of the destination areas. It is important that the development of tourism is not wrongly blamed for inadequacy in other aspects of community life.<sup>9</sup>

Services are not to be understood so openly as cultural context. Customer seeks product which fits to its needs and have more bargaining power than before. These needs are more requesting than before, and it becomes a common sense thing to fulfill these requests. Internationalization of tourism offer and the induction of standards (ISO 9001:2000, HACCP etc.) balance the common understanding of the provision of the services, and no one can be anymore excused if parts of the services are omitted or failed to satisfy expectations. This can rarely be justified with “local habits” excuse. The interaction between the tourists and personnel employed in tourism is an integral part of complete tourist experience, and for that reason services have to be at the highest level possible.

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<sup>4</sup> World Tourism Organization, op.cit.

<sup>5</sup> Lickorish, L. J. and Jenkins C. L., *An introduction to Tourism*, Oxford, Butterworth – Heinemann, 2003.

<sup>6</sup> World Tourism Organization, op. cit.

<sup>7</sup> Costa J. and Ferrone L., “Sociocultural perspectives on tourism planning and development”, *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, Vol. 7, No. 7, 1995, pp. 27-35

<sup>8</sup> World Tourism Organization, op. cit.

<sup>9</sup> Costa J. and Ferrone L., op. cit. p. 32

There is a huge shift in tourism in the past decade, moving tourists experience from “sun and sea tourism” to new niche products in different fields: gastronomy, culture, heritage, adventure, outdoor, enology, ecotourism etc. Tourists are keener to learn about other cultures, countries, customs and people. Various types of routes are being created to enrich visitors’ experience (wine routes, cheese routes, heritage trails...) and make them repeat the visit or promote the products to family and friends. In 2004., in Italy as an example, there was a less concentrated demand for traditional products, while the niche ones (itineraries, enogastronomy, sport tourism...) had more than 25% of market share.<sup>10</sup>

This kind of “experience – based” tourism heavily relies on people, their warmth and openness, their welcome smile and obviously their capacities in work they do. The way one was treated on destination (by accommodation providers or others) can make visitor’s opinion of the destination and therefore make positive or negative influence on destination’s image. The tourism industry is a labor – intensive service industry, dependant for survival (and at best, competitive advantage) on the availability of good quality personnel to deliver, operate and manage the tourist product.<sup>11</sup>

### **1.1. Trends’ Influence of Service Providers**

Above mentioned trends make significant challenges and influence to hotels and lately often rising types of SMTEs (family hotels and motels, B&Bs...). Many areas of hotel business are influenced by these trends, and in order to be properly positioned, hotels have to take action which will contribute to:

- Exceed of guests’ expectations (providing superb services; perceive and understand increased customers’ needs; most importantly contributing to creation of remembering experience)
- Establishing of effective market connections (connecting with recognized international tour operators; connecting with niche services providers such as divers, mountaineering guides etc.; connections with other accommodation providers to create joint offers and guests exchange ; connections with tourism boards and tourist info centers)
- Creation of customer-friendly electronic environment (on-line booking; web presentation; promotion; on-line payments)

Staying competitive in fast-growing tourism industry is not an easy task. There is variety of reasons for travel: business, pleasure, religion (pilgrimages), education, health etc. In 2006, just over half of all international tourist arrivals were motivated by leisure, recreation and holidays (51%) – a total of 430 million. Business travel accounted for 16%, while 27% represented visiting friends and relatives (VFR), religious reasons/pilgrimages, health etc. The purpose of remaining 6% was not

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<sup>10</sup> Tronfio, M., Petruzzellis, L. and Nigro, C. “Tour operators and alternative tourism in Italy: Exploiting niche markets to increase international competitiveness”, *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, Vol. 18, No. 5, 2006, pp. 426-438

<sup>11</sup> Amoah, V. A. and Baum, T. “Tourism education: policy versus practice”, *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, Vol. 9, No. 1, 1997, pp. 5-12

specified.<sup>12</sup> It is necessary to gain better understanding of destination-choice process. Connection and interdependence of accommodation providers with tour operators is crucial in that sense. The major mass tourism countries are more likely to depend on the tour operators to sell capacity of existing tourism facilities.<sup>13</sup> Alternative, non-mass tourism requests different approach to market, through establishing and maintaining contacts with specialized tour operators. These operators meet demand for a lower volume but a higher per capita spend tourists.<sup>14</sup> Tour operators create final product to be offered to market, transforming attractions and services into products with tailored personality. Specialization in this field of travel has changed the structure of travel industry and hospitality.

The skill in leisure marketing lies in creating value, in packaging and promoting the experience so that customer feels that it has to buy it, and buy it from you rather than your competitors. Services are intangible, inseparable, variable and perishable, and what is the most significant, they are competing for the customer's spare time and disposable income.<sup>15</sup> Accommodation usually holds the major part of total turnover in the tourism industry. Therefore is very important for accommodation provider to make its services available to tour operators and to become a part of tourism value chain.

In attempt to make its offer more attractive, hotels add some services to existing offer. Beside regular services (cleaning, ironing, room service, swimming pool, massage...) which depend on hotel categorization, hotels would sometimes also offer other services: wellness programs, tour organizing, transportation, booking, specialized trainings in diving, skiing, climbing etc. Hotels organize these services by themselves or in cooperation with other stakeholders, eventually contributing to clients' satisfaction. Traditional hotel and human resources management are changing its path, trying to employ and keep multitasking, problem-solving oriented staff.

Family hotels, motels, B&Bs (Small and Medium Tourism Enterprises - SMTEs) have distinctive and valuable role in tourism development. They base their existence and work on affordable services, focusing on establishing the close relationship with guests. "Feeling at home" is the ultimate vision of these establishments for their guests. Advantages of such establishments are following:

- Personal relationship with enterprise stakeholders (can be a main source of competitive differentiation)
- Market niche advantages (ability to tailor new niche products)
- Flexibility and reaction (flat hierarchy allows quick decisions on market changes)
- Flexible labor force (overcoming seasonality, busy periods or payments delays)
- Continuity (good reputation as a competitive advantage)<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> World Tourism Organization, op.cit.

<sup>13</sup> Tronfio, M., Petruzzellis, L. and Nigro, C., op. cit., p. 428

<sup>14</sup> Lickorish, L. J. and Jenkins C. L. op. cit., p. 4

<sup>15</sup> Morgan, M. *Marketing for Leisure and Tourism*, London, New York, Prentice Hall, 1996, p.17

<sup>16</sup> Peters, M. and Buhalis, D. "Family hotel businesses: strategic planning and the need for education and training", *Education + Training*, Vol. 46, No. 8-9-, 2004. pp. 406-415

However, in service provision, these businesses can face problems with human resources, since they have mainly family members serving as a staff. Lack of experience or education for tourism work can seriously undermine efforts of being a good host. Already mentioned dependence on tour operator, lack of planning and market research, as well as relationship with family employees are usually identified as the main disadvantages of family business. To overcome gaps in human resources management, a non-formal education, trainings and seminars on how to run B&Bs or other types of rural accommodation is being offered.

Both hotels and family hotels have to make efforts in bringing their services to high level. Formal generic education which they have about tourism work would not be sufficient in a long run. Fast-changing trends in tourism and/or inception phase of tourism development in some places make tourism workers very dependant of ongoing educational processes. Involvements in life-long learning activities present tourism workers with opportunity for continuous growth and personal development.

## 1.2. Education and Lifelong Learning in Tourism

Fast- changing nature of tourism (moving from mass tourism to niche tourism and new experiences or similar) has a strong influence on educational process and skills which service providers in tourism have to attain. "Learn or burn" paradigm is more than ever present in the tourism sector, since those who are not ready to learn and change are notably being excluded from business. Accepting and adopting new concepts of work becomes a must for any player involved in tourism. Be it tourist guide or agent, hotel manager, handicrafts provider or restaurant owner, individual involved in tourism is under the pressure to cope with changes. Learning and applying new knowledge is what services are about.

Hospitality and tourism management education has played to very different conditions over the past 30 years. The nature of economy has changed drastically, as has the role of higher education and individual students and their career ambitions.<sup>17</sup> Education programs have emerged in response to following needs for human resources development in a challenging environment:

1. Keeping the industry abreast with the latest technology and trends.
2. The availability of qualified replacement staff at all times.
3. Raising the image if careers in tourism
4. Staffing new and growing tourist industries
5. Employment regulation
6. Responding to increasingly demanding service and communications requirements of customers<sup>18</sup>

New trends consider emerge of three domains in formal tourism education, in order to satisfy evolving needs of stakeholders:

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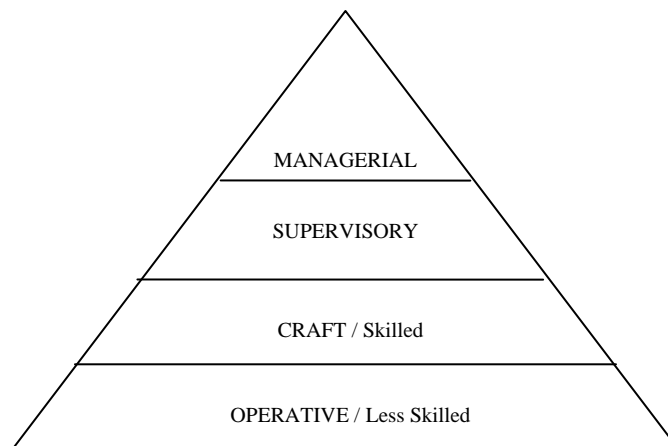
<sup>17</sup> Littlejohn, D and Watson, S. "Developing graduate managers for hospitality and tourism", *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, Vol. 16, No. 7, 2004, pp. 408-414

<sup>18</sup> Amoah, V. A. and Baum, T. op. cit., p. 5

1. Generic degrees (offering broad understanding of tourism industry, with no particular area with specific attention)
2. Functional degrees (service-oriented areas such as IT, marketing, planning in tourism etc.)
3. Market/product-based degrees (focus on nature and development of particular niche products which require specialist knowledge for effective delivery).<sup>19</sup>

Many authors (Formica, 1996; Amoah and Baum, 1997) share concern that tourism education has not kept pace with changing nature and diversity of the industry and as a field of study. Tourism courses shall be more flexible, responsive to needs of the stakeholders, more efficient and pragmatically oriented. Key question for formal tourism education is whether tourism degrees should be developed to enable graduates to be perceived as employable outside the tourism industry or should tourism courses produce highly-skilled graduates for specialist positions in the industry, thus enhancing their employment opportunities.<sup>20</sup> An answer could be somewhere in between these two: generic education enriched with continuous professional development opportunities up-take.

**Figure 1:** Level of employment in the tourism industry<sup>21</sup>



Taking up the tourism education for prospective students is difficult due to lack of good understanding of range of jobs and opportunities available for them. Current higher education can provide incentives for fulfillment of top level positions. Production of managers, capable to overcome and use challenges of competitiveness and globalization is a key to health of hospitability and tourism.

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<sup>19</sup> Dale, C. and Robinson, N. "The theming of tourism education: a three domain approach", *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, Vol. 13, No. 1, 2001, pp. 30-34

<sup>20</sup> Ibid. p. 33

<sup>21</sup> McDonald, M. L. and Hopkin, R. O., "The future of hospitality education in Grenada", *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, Vol. 15, No. 3, 2003, pp. 156-160

Possible scenarios for graduate profiles include: professional developers, portfolio strategists or pragmatic mavericks. There has been increased up-take of higher education noticed, with a greater emphasis made on vocational degrees.<sup>22</sup>

Competency model, as an approach to vocational training and education is focused on skill acquisition as a major component of competency and readiness for employment. This type of training is focused only on actions and sequences that are teachable and objectively assessable. Model was under the criticism that it does not match well with expectations of employers, since the knowledge produced in such a way would rarely be sufficient and context - oriented. The assumption that the core skills learned in this way by trainees are generic skills which can be used in the same job class in industry was not proven by the experience. The nature of the establishment where person works is also strong factor, since there are many niche market segments for which trainees are not well prepared.<sup>23</sup>

Present challenges for hotel and hospitality management are: how to attract the best candidates for lower levels (supervisory, craft and operative); what kind of additional education of professional development do they need; how to improve implementation and quality of their services; and eventually how to prevent fluctuations and have employees stay active in company. Sadler-Smith *et al.* believe that changing social, economic and political environments are often cited as a justifying lifelong learning to remain competent (maintenance role) and continue as valued and productive members (survival).<sup>24</sup> In order to support their own efforts, entrepreneurs shall learn to sometimes refrain for the daily business and to perform some long-term business development.<sup>25</sup>

Employers' selection of new employees is based on several aspects. Employers are interested in the knowledge and competence of the learner, not only in technical skills, but also in social and learning skills<sup>26</sup>. Selection process is based on the two wide areas of evaluation: 1. Adequacy of skills to particular operations of business 2. Personal attributes of employee (flexibility, personality, people skills, grooming, strong work ethics). It is much easier to involve people who have these skills and attributes in the learning process and have them become a part of learning company.

In attempts to find the most proper solutions to these challenges, different authors suggest different approaches to the education subject. Jones argues for curriculum which would combine the natural and social sciences in order to educate students better as to the physiological and social needs of customers. Balancing predominantly vocational and action-oriented curriculum with appropriate liberal and reflective parts is the main challenge in this process, and it should represent a

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<sup>22</sup> Littlejohn, D. and Watson, S. op. cit. , p. 409

<sup>23</sup> Chapman, J. A. and Lovell, G. "The Competency model of hospitality service: Why it doesn't deliver", *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, Vol. 18, No. 1, 2006, pp. 78-88

<sup>24</sup> Littlejohn, D. and Watson, S. op. cit., p. 410

<sup>25</sup> Peters, M. and Buhalis, D. op. cit., p. 413

<sup>26</sup> Poikela, E. "Developing criteria for knowing and learning at work: towards context-based assessment", *The Journal of Workplace Learning*, Vol. 16, No. 5, 2004, pp. 267-274



relationship of co-existence.<sup>27</sup> The most essential point in producing learning and knowing is not what happens on different levels (individual, group, organization), but what occurs between these levels. It is also very important to take into consideration the context in which actions occurs.

In 1999 and 2000 Finnish vocational education system piloted learning and knowing criteria for assessment, with the goal of developing the skill test. Assessment grid included following: Social processes (assessing and understanding), Reflective processes (assessing and developing), Cognitive processes (remembering and understanding) and Operational processes (doing and acting) which were defined by field of knowing (client-centered services, collaboration in work with community, productive and technical skills, problem solving and decision-making, values and ethics) and measured on scale (satisfactory, very satisfactory and excellent). The excellent level is reached when the learner performs the basic tasks in an adaptive and innovative way, it interacts flexibly in different situations, is able to encounter problems by taking into account new aspects and ideas, it performs competently and skillfully in rapidly changing situations.<sup>28</sup>

## 2. LIFELONG LEARNING STRATEGIES IN TOURISM

Term “service management” is increasingly used to emphasize management imperatives in age of competing services and market challenges. Key characteristics of service management, as defined by Grönross (1994) include *employee professional development*. Other characteristics define service management as an overall management perspective; customer or market driven effort; holistic perspective. Managing quality is an integral part of service management.

*Lifelong learning (LLL)* and *continuing professional development (CPD)* can have a crucial role also in equipping individual with a personal mobility in the labor market. Optional or mandatory approach to CPD is being discussed. If under the threats to lose employment, employees should be more active in taking development opportunities. The Institute of Continuing Professional Development (ICPD) defined continuing professional development as “the process by which a professional person maintains the quality and relevance of professional services throughout his/her working life”.<sup>29</sup>

As Christou (1999) defined, there is concurrent drive towards the need for the students to learn how to learn and be flexible. Based on these trends the current educational policy makers, the managers of research institutions and the businessman alike must now realize that education and training can only be a catalyst for the economic progress, if the curriculum strikes a balance between updated knowledge,

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<sup>27</sup> Morrison, A. and O’Mahony G. B., “The liberation of hospitality management education”, *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, Vol. 15, No. 1, 2003, pp. 38-44

<sup>28</sup> Poikela, E. op. cit., p. 273

<sup>29</sup> Littlejohn, D. and Watson, S. op. cit., p. 410

active learning skills and core competencies.<sup>30</sup> Integration and dedication of all levels of education is crucial in serving the individuals needs for LLL and CPD.

Experiences from the practice of mass tourism destination shows there are certain regularities in hotel practices in relation to training opportunities they provide for their employees. Smaller hotels provide less training for their employees. It is interesting to see that hotels which are the part of big hotel chains as well provide less training for their staff, probably assuming that the chain shall take on that responsibility.

Training and CPD have been in positive correlation with: level in hierarchy; previous education level; human capital variables (longer relationship with hotel, steady contract, worker flexibility); and level of responsibility. Exception from this rule was overeducated staff which got less additional training opportunities. There have been also a positive correlation confirmed between the quality of hotels and staff development opportunities, since the higher quality hotels provided more training (mainly in field of kitchen and restaurant) than 1\* and 2\* stars facilities which provided less training for its staff (mainly in field of management, reception and kitchen).<sup>31</sup>

Similar data have been shown for the family hotel businesses. Although family hotels have problems in understanding benefits of collaboration and long-term partnerships with suppliers or other business functions providers (accounting, IT), it can not be said that they don't understand the benefit of good human resources management. Family hotels had shown a high interest in investing in establishment of long-term collaboration and integrating core employees.<sup>32</sup>

Bigger the business is, more time and money was invested in continuous professional development of employees. This is something which works both in big hotels and family hotel businesses. Different options can be used to support their willingness to invest in LLL and CPD programs. Four main categories of various activities from which CPD evolves defined by Fowler (1996) are the following:

1. Work-based activities
2. Courses, seminars and conferences
3. Self-directed and informal learning (e.g. planned reading, technology-based training approaches)
4. Personal activities outside work (e.g. voluntary work)<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Kroo, N. "The European House of Education: Education, Research, Industry", in Heinz, K. *The European House of Education: Education and Economy – a new partnership*. Conference of the European Ministers of Education: Budapest 24-26 June 1999, pg. 31

<sup>31</sup> Ramos, V., Rey-Maqueira, J. and Tugores, M. "The Role of training in changing an economy specializing in tourism", *International Journal of Manpower*, Vol. 25, No. 1, 2004, pp. 55-72

<sup>32</sup> Peters, M. and Buhalis, D. op.cit., 410

<sup>33</sup> Littlejohn, D. and Watson, S. op. cit., p. 410

## 2.1. Individual Continuous Professional Development

**Work-based activities** such as membership in project teams or advising on new or difficult tasks enable employees to gain experience in different specialized jobs. Membership in project teams is one of the possibilities for work-based activity, it is directly related to work, includes feedback from the team leader. Advising on new or difficult tasks is related mainly to manager education and development, through rotation system in the company.

**Courses, seminars and conferences** are important activities for tourism workforce development. Main problems occurring from courses / teaching as type of CPD is that these are one-way communications and that it lacks possibilities for individualized approach to learning, which is based on individual differences in capabilities, interest and personality.<sup>34</sup>

Conferences can be the significant part of education focused on company problems, new ideas, theories, technologies and new approaches to business and it can be organized in or outside the company.<sup>35</sup> Teleconferencing could be, due to the global nature of tourism, could be one of the most efficient ways for professional development.

**Self-directed and informal learning** (e.g. planned reading, technology-based training approaches) has been introduced as a means to decrease educational costs. One of main considerations when deciding whether or not to implement self-directed learning strategies is the effective utilization of instructor's time.

Many of factors are identified as being influential on both learner willingness and ability to engage in self directed learning. The influence of educational institutions is perceived as external to the self-directedness of learners (fundamental in the process of self-directed learning), through the provision of appropriately-structured learning strategies, and access to suitable resources.<sup>36</sup>

Self-directed learning appears to provide an appropriate response to changing societal and educational demands and it fits well with individual's efforts.

**Personal activities outside work** (e.g. voluntary work) can show motivation and a caring personality. The concept of voluntary work is usually explained as "all activities of general interest performed by individuals".

There is also need for solid foundation of **basic competencies** such as: literacy, problem solving skills, team work, communication in mother tongue, foreign languages and with IT that effectively furnish the individuals to benefit from the process of Life-long learning.

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<sup>34</sup> Bahtijarevic-Siber, F., *Menadžment ljudskih potencijala*, Zagreb, Golden marketing, 1999. p. 749.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid. p. 751

<sup>36</sup> Boekaertes, M., "Self-Regulated Learning: A new Concept Embraced by Researchers Policy Makers Educators Teachers and Students", *Learning and Instruction*, Vol. 7, No. 2, 1997, pp. 161-186

## 2.2. Hotel / Educational Institutions Partnerships

**Influencing Life-long learning curriculum and schemes at national level:** they should be defined, maintained and monitored for its quality. They need to be flexible enough to include parts of skills outside the sole competence model (for instance, soft skills development, effective communication etc.). In this way, the variety of different private and in-house training offered can be included in the wider frame and eventually influence overall tourism industry of the country. This action, along with clustered service – oriented initiatives of education providers, can give a solid base for effective teaching and learning process for new tourism trends. Inclusion of small and big hotels in curriculum design is crucial in that sense.

**Tailor – made training programs:** Training programs in family hotel business should be developed to address the specific requirements of the family business. Professionalizing of family business, through comprehensive training will assist small and family hotels to identify their competitive advantage and develop strategic plan.<sup>37</sup>

Educational institution could organize teams and provide in-house assistance to service providers. Joint actions of both hotels and educational institutions can contribute to decrease of costs of training activities (training part can be organized jointly, and in-house part separately).

**Extending reach to suitable candidates:** Presentation of carrier in tourism and hospitality can be jointly organized by hotels and educational institutions, in order to attract the most suitable candidates for education / vocational training and work in companies involved in initiative. This activity can be very important in the emerging tourism countries with lack of good previous practice and tourism education.

**Inclusion of know-how transfer in educational process:** Whenever possible, students and trainees shall be given opportunity to work for a short time period in other successful facility, outside the country or region of work. Short term practical work or study trips to best practices can be successful part of know how transfer to trainees, especially for the family small hotels employees.

Provision of such activities can be defined in partnerships between the hotels and educational institutions. International relationships of the educational institutions shall make these arrangements easier and more successful.

## 2.3. Hotel / Tour Operators / Service Providers Partnerships

**Strategic partnerships** between the hotels, tour operators and service providers (tourism agencies, specialized niche tourism providers) can bring many benefits to both sides. Hotels shall use capacities of partners to make orientation of staff about the practices of agencies and others, so they can better understand their work and challenges. Or, using the tour operators' destination improvement programs can be beneficial to hotels.

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<sup>37</sup> Peters, M. and Buhalis, D. op. cit. , p. 413

Tour operators, as intermediaries between tourist and tourism service providers can influence choice of consumers, the practice of supplier (hotels) and the development patterns of destinations.<sup>38</sup> Tour operator's support can be used in fields such as product development, promotion and staff development.

#### **2.4. Hotels' Support to LLL and CPD**

**HRM practices** of given establishment crucially define possibilities for further development and success of hotels. The fact mentioned before, that bigger the business is, more time and money was invested in continuous professional development of employees show that investing in employees eventually pays off to hotels. Obviously, hotel management should in any case continuously monitor level of salaries, benefits and working conditions to maintain satisfaction of employees. Professional development and promotion opportunities will add to that and contribute to employee satisfaction which is very important in service provision.

#### **CONCLUSIONS**

Nature of tourism strongly influences educational process and skills which service providers in tourism have to attain. "Learn or burn" paradigm is more than ever present in the tourism sector, since those who are not ready to learn and change are notably being excluded from business. Accepting and adopting new concepts of work becomes a must for any player involved in tourism.

Services are intangible, inseparable, variable and perishable, and what is the most significant, they are competing for the customer's spare time and disposable income. Accommodation usually holds the major part of total turnover in the tourism industry. In efforts to serve their guests well and to satisfy their needs and expectations, services providers (hotels, tour operators, agencies, transportation companies...) need to learn along the way, continuously adopting new knowledge and information in their operations.

Tourism heavily relies on people, their warmth and openness, their welcome smile and obviously their capacities in work they do. The way one was treated on destination (by accommodation providers or others) can make visitor's opinion of the destination and therefore make positive or negative influence on destination's image. The tourism industry is a labor – intensive service industry, dependant for survival on the availability of good quality personnel. In that sense, individuals are also dependant on new knowledge, approaches to work and services trends.

To overcome gaps, a non-formal education, trainings and seminars on how to work in new conditions are offered. Formal generic education which individuals have about tourism work may not be sufficient in a long run. Fast-changing trends in tourism

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<sup>38</sup> TOUR Operators Initiative, "Sustainable tourism: The Tour Operator's Contribution", Paris, France, Tour Operation Initiative, 2003

and/or inception phase of tourism development in some places make tourism workers very dependant of ongoing educational processes. Paper looked at the possible scenarios for Individual Continuous Professional Development, as well as the position of the hotels in value creation. Partnerships of hotels with educational institutions, tour operators and other service providers have been looked at as a way to improve possibilities for hotel staff development. Improved cooperation on destination is very important for overall tourist satisfaction. On site capacities for service delivery can also be raised through cooperation, as well as customer relations improved.

The approach of hotel to staff development programs can crucially define its success and role in the community. Learning and applying new knowledge is what services are about. Only satisfied customers will come back to use services again. Adopting and applying possible Life-long learning strategies and Continuous professional development is path for better future for all those involved in tourism and hotel industry. All these activities will eventually contribute to building competitive advantages of small or big hotel, and together with other service providers, to better image of tourism destination.

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