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## **HOSPITALITY MANAGEMENT EDUCATION AND QUALITY TOURISM**

*New global developments point towards a more demanding tourist and a preference for tailor-made travel arrangements. The competition is fierce and quality improvement a general trend. The most countries in south-eastern Europe have started tourism quality enhancement projects. The key element of these processes will be an internationally compatible system of professional education. In order to develop educational norms which will meet the needs of European tourism and hospitality industry, Faculty of Hotel Management Opatija has within the frame of the joint project with Manchester Metropolitan University Hotel & Tourism Management Education Development taken the first steps towards international accreditation of its curricula.*

*Key words: quality tourism, professional education, knowledge and skills, human resources, EFAH accreditation.*

### **1.0 GLOBAL TRENDS IN TOURISM AND HOSPITALITY**

New global developments are creating fierce competition within the hospitality industry. By the end of the century tourism will become the largest source of employment. A leading factor of tourism development will be a more 'knowledgeable and demanding customer': the demand for tailor-made travel arrangements is forecast to grow at a faster pace than pre-packed holidays (WTO 1992, 1997; MacCannell 1989; Macdonald 1997; Rojek 1997; Rojek & Urry 1997).

Increasing tourists' demands for value for money will lead to focusing on the quality-price balance of tourism offer. The general trend is, therefore, improving, diversification and upgrading of facilities, in short, improving quality. Understandably, the competition among destinations/regions/countries is intensified. Consequently, the most countries in south-eastern Europe have started tourism quality enhancement projects. Host countries, such as Croatia, are expected to be reactive and proactive through facility and amenity development in line with market trends towards individuality and activity (Oppermann & Chon 1997; WTO 1992, 1997).

A leading factor of quality will be the (reformed) process of education which goes beyond understanding tourism as a set of commercial activities and takes it in its complexity: tourism as leisure, recreation, consumption, travelling, discovering, adventure, behaviours, attitudes and learning.

Education in tourism and hotel management world-wide is undergoing transformation and implementing changes. Countries aspiring to serious participation

in the tourism game, this 'ideological framing of history, nature, and tradition' (MacCannell 1992:1) have already united planning, managing and teaching.

Hospitality education programs are being widely reassessed. A variety of approaches is available. Academic circles are confronted with a number of dilemmas: is tourism a discipline or not (Goeldner 1988; Cooper et al 1993; Hirst 1993); what is the appropriate balance between applied and pure research (applied research is usually limited in its scope; it is the conceptual research that significantly adds to the body of knowledge /Cooper et al 1994:126/); how to approach education for tourism and hospitality - to teach and develop general management knowledge or specific skills (Goodmann & Sprague 1991; Umbreit 1992; Ashley et al 1995)?

In the process of downsizing of hospitality management curriculum, the University of Central Florida invited 25 leading executives in the hospitality industry to participate in a brainstorming session which produced a list of the most valued qualities and skills of an employee. The top-ten categories were related to general management knowledge rather than specific skills: (1) people skills, (2) creative thinking ability, (3) financial skills (4) communication skills (for both written and oral presentation), (5) developing a service orientation, (6) total quality management, (7) problem-identification and problem-solving skills, (8) listening skills, (9) customer-feedback skills, and (10) individual and system-wide computer skills (Ashley et al 1995:76-77).

The key task in developing the new hospitality education program in the stated case was finding a balance between general knowledge and specific skills. The representatives of the industry insisted on the need for a new set of competencies, i. e. on a definite turn towards more general managerial skills. Training new employees in the specific skill area they preferred, as was clearly pointed out, doing themselves. The curriculum development pattern was as follows:

- Definition of the required product (professional activities, skills and competencies of a future employee) by the customer (hospitality industry);
- Translation of industry requirements into the language of education;
- Evaluation of the end product (graduate) by the customer.

The example of the University of Central Florida is relevant for all hospitality education systems for one reason: it showed that academic programs can only be defined using feedback from the hospitality industry.

## 2.0 QUALITY TOURISM IN CROATIA

TOMAS<sup>1</sup> '97 findings point towards quality as a pressing problem of Croatian tourism:

- natural beauties of the country are rated very high (in fact, this seems to be Croatia's greatest tourist attraction), whereas ecological condition has been graded as very low;
- respondents manifest general satisfaction with accommodation and general dissatisfaction with destination;
- the grade of satisfaction with cultural events, shopping, entertainment, signage of sights, beach and sports facilities, quality of information has been assessed as low and very low;
- the sublime of guests' satisfaction, *value for money*, is generally assessed as low.

Only through a new, improved understanding of the concept of *quality tourism* can this problem be resolved.

While the rhetoric of quality is explicit or implied in all national tourism development documents (e. g. *quality enhancement/upgrading, promotion of identity and reputation of Croatian tourism, creation of recognisable and attractive tourist environment ...*) and public statements by leading figures (e. g. *... to make the position of Croatian hospitality industry even better... and ... Croatia is only partly ready for elite tourism ...*), the situation on the field persists. In comparison with TOMAS '94, the results of TOMAS '97 do not show any significant change in the degree of guest satisfaction with key elements of the Croatian tourist offer (Stavovi ... 1997:36-40). As emphasised in the concluding commentary to the pool result interpretation (Ibid. pp. 183-192), Croatia has definitely returned to the international tourist scene, but if a leading role is preferred to a supporting one, which clearly is the case, there is only one way to attain it: a new, improved understanding of the concept of *quality tourism* producing a very creative development strategy.

Applying the life cycle concept to Croatian tourism reveals that presently it is in a poststagnation/rejuvenation stage. To restart stable growth, the product has to be altered and the destinations repositioned in terms of selective demand strategies. At this stage destinations usually face pressures to reduce prices, which calls for cost reduction (da Conceicao Gonçalves and Águas 1997:16; cf. also Agarwal 1992), and may well have a further negative impact on quality.

Entering a phase of rejuvenation, Croatian tourism is confronted with great many obstacles, the most pressing being perhaps human resources. Contemporary research into hospitality education and training shows that Croatia seriously lacks professionally educated and skilled manpower which could 'in open competition gain the confidence of capital and thus contribute to the revival of the hotel industry' (Dragičević 1995:203; cf. also Kivela 1997).

Practising hospitality industry managers seem to be quite unfamiliar with contemporary research, such as TOMAS, and unwilling to use the research data appropriately (Tourists ... 1998:23-25; cf. also Weber et al 1994, 1996; Fox 1997, Fox & Fox 1998a, 1998b). In other words, some hospitality and tourism industry executives out there still prefer speculating rather than using facts and figures.

### 3.0 A NEW EDUCATION FOR CROATIA'S HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY

Reflecting on Croatian hospitality management education in the past, Kivela (1997:115) points out key differences between Croatia and developed countries:

- a relatively small number of management students;
- a general preference (partly due to perceived higher social status) of technical sciences to business studies;
- late evolvement of education for management;
- a lack of experienced hotel and tourism management educators;
- a general perception of hospitality management as a non-academic discipline.

Furthermore, the generally low quality of management education has not equipped managers with appropriate skills, indispensable for the transition period (Ibid. 117; also Čižmar 1996). Contemporary research into tourism and hospitality education in Croatia reveals the need for close cooperation of educational institutions

and hospitality industry, which yearns for strategic political and culturological measures (Dragičević 1995:203), and necessitates a reshaping of hospitality, in particular management, education programmes in Croatia (cf. Kivela 1997).

In spite of a great diversity in attitude demonstrated in education circles and academic literature (Goodman and Sprague 1991, Becker 1993; Powers & Riegel 1993; Goeldner 1997), one fact is indisputable: education for hospitality industry in Southeastern Europe, in Croatia too, will have to be appropriately reorganised. To produce professionally skilled staff and 'help eliminate amateurism at all levels' (cf. WTO 1992), a system of professional standards will have to be implemented and personnel training programmes improved.

Some of the needed changes are:

- redefinition of educational/training programs at all levels through feedback from hospitality industry;
- improvement of management education/training;
- implementing international professional standards.

Transitional difficulties should not affect the quality of educational programmes. There will be 'conceptual and contextual differences' between Croatia and the developed countries, but there should be no difference in the quality of the end product (Kivela 1997:117-118).

Also, transitional difficulties should not be used as a pretext for weak educational standards (reduced criteria with respect to either teaching staff or students): in the context of increased global competition this will just not do.

#### **4.0 HOTEL & TOURISM MANAGEMENT EDUCATION DEVELOPMENT PROJECT**

In May 1997 the realisation of a joint three year project *Hotel & Tourism Management Education Development* of Manchester Metropolitan University, Hollings Faculty, Department of Hotel Catering and Tourism Management (MMU) and Faculty of Hotel Management Opatija was started. The project is financed and supported by the British Council and Croatian Ministry of Science and Technology.

The aim of the project is: **development of curricula in both UK and Croatia through joint research into management development, and particularly in Croatia towards Western European standards of international accreditation.**

##### **4.1 Broad objectives of the project**

- joint scientific research into the personality profiles of Croatian management and students in order to identify management training needs and gaps in the current curriculum;
- joint publication of the results of the research;
- joint development of curricula structure through research of contemporary tendencies of management development in the hotel industry and tourism;
- highlighting modifications necessary in curricula structure, content, delivery and assessment to successfully submit for EFAH (European Foundation for Accreditation of Hotel School Programmes) accreditation.

## 4.2 Benefits of the project

Faculty of Hotel Management Opatija should benefit from the project in following ways:

- Tailoring hospitality management education and training to Croatia's specific needs. The Department of Hotel Catering and Tourism Management, Hollings Faculty has a successful record of European research and development with projects concerned with hospitality and tourism curriculum and management development numerous East European countries (e.g. Hungary, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Slovakia and Poland).
- The expertise of the Manchester Metropolitan University in respect of development of a new curriculum in order to qualify for EFAH accreditation (the Manchester Metropolitan University was the first institution in Europe to be accredited by EFAH. and successfully supported the process of accreditation of Budapest College of Commerce Catering & Tourism and University of Banska Bystrica in Slovakia).
- The output of joint research into management personality will be useful in the development of management training programmes of Croatian hospitality industry.

It is understood that the stated research will enable Faculty of Hotel Management in Opatija to adapt its courses to internationally accepted standards, whilst retaining the best tradition of Croatian educational system and cultural identity.

## 4.3 International accreditation

High quality standards of educational system are an imperative: not just in terms of attaining and offering quality programmes and quality products, but also in terms of publicly demonstrating, advertising and proving one's quality.

The international accreditation, one of the expected outcomes of the Project, is a concept comparatively new to Croatia, and we believe that its brief elaboration will be useful.

'Accreditation is a straightforward process used to recognise and endorse programmes of study that meet or exceed certain quality standards or criteria' (EFAH 1996:5). One of the aims is to encourage quality of schools, programmes and processes. It is awarded through an external expert body, neutral and objective. If and when attained, it represents a *stamp of quality* in the true sense. All parties to the process of hospitality benefit from it: the industry, the schools and the students (future managers).

### 4.3.1 Process of accreditation

Broadly speaking, the process of accreditation includes self analysis of the programme/programmes to be submitted for accreditation, initial evaluation by the Accreditation Manager (after which the process may either proceed or additional advice may be required). The accreditation panel visit follows. Subsequently, the accreditation report and recommendations are referred to EFAH Board of Governors meeting for discussion and finalisation. The process is demanding and can be long lasting. It is also rewarding, as it enhances the competitiveness of schools and school programmes.

#### 4.3.2 Accreditation criteria

EFAH's accreditation criteria are based on standards agreed by representatives from education institutions and hospitality employers. They include

- educational input and output
- staff resources
- physical resources
- students
- administrative and education process (selection, recruitment etc.)
- links with other institutions and organisations - other schools and industry
- self monitoring and development
- school management

#### 4.3.3 Accreditation levels

- craft (jobs at operational level)
- supervisor (operational level + basic staff management and business control)
- management (managerial and academic skills, opportunity for industry related research)

#### The broad objectives of a management programme

- Develop the ability to think critically, using management techniques in solving problems, making decisions, determining strategies, measuring performance and implementing remedial procedures.
- Develop the ability to collect, interpret and present financial information which supports effective planning and control of operations.
- Acquire interpersonal skills in both staff and customer interface.
- Develop the ability to implement the marketing and other functions to achieve corporate objectives.
- Establish a framework for decision making related to planning organising, coordinating, directing and controlling food, beverage and hotel operations.

#### The criteria of a management programme

- The ratio between General<sup>2</sup> & Management<sup>3</sup> and Technical<sup>4</sup> Subjects is approximately 70-80%:20-30% of curriculum.
- Classroom/lectures represent 50% of students' workload.
- Assessment is done through formal examinations, case studies, reports, oral presentations, extended essays, dissertations.
- Teachers (all staff should participate in industry updating).

#### 4.3.4 Benefits through accreditation

- a flexible trans-European system of quality endorsement
- a set of quality standards that are applicable to all hotel school programmes
- a set of standards that ensure that educational programmes meet the needs of the European hospitality and catering industry.

Worldwide research (DeVeau 1989; Umbreit 1990; Powers & Riegel 1993; Kivela 1997 and numerous others) has confirmed that only strict quality standards in hospitality management education enable achieving and maintaining excellence.

## Discussion

Concepts such as quality change their meanings with circumstances. The usual framework of discussion (definition, relation of quality to the area under focus, official standards of quality) is a comfortable one: it allows the analyst to state his case, to wish for quality without too overt a criticism. Needless to say, such an approach is invariably prescriptive, it is invariably optimistic and as a rule does not offer the answer to the key question of quality: the contribution of the individual.

In the past contemplation on issues such as *quality tourism* was quite simplistic. It was generally believed that private initiative would be sufficient to improve the quality of Croatian tourism - a private owner is motivated! We now know that it is not that simple: so far private ownership did not essentially contribute to the quality of tourism in Croatia. Some even claim that the today's owner is as unknowing in questions of quality as yesterday's employee used to be. Fifty years of conformism have taken their toll: an average citizen still hesitates to experiment or innovate. Just how realistic is it to expect such an individual to suddenly become aggressively innovative? However, worldwide developments in tourism leave Croatian tourist industry and the individual engaged in emerging process little choice. Croatian tourism will have to be full revised, in all aspects, from infrastructure to heritage parks, from customers' expectations to hosts' perceptions of these expectations. Otherwise, as Dragičević points out (1995:203), the generally accepted view of tourism as a comparative advantage and a trump-card in the process of European integration of Croatia remains just a popular myth.

Development, education and training of human resources towards acquisition of general managerial, technological and financial knowledge, as well as definite sets of skills for particular jobs has to be given top priority. Education will be the cutting edge to securing quality of Croatia's tourism.

## NOTES

1. TOMAS is a research into attitudes and consumption of tourists in Croatia, periodically undertaken by the Institute for Tourism in Zagreb. Its broad aims are: defining key advantages and weaknesses of Croatian tourism, evaluating the impact of tourism on the economy of the destination and continual monitoring of the trends of tourist demand. The name TOMAS originates from Swiss research *Touristisches Marktforschung System Schweiz*, and is used only as a registered trade mark of the research.
2. General subjects include: languages, basic mathematics, cultural studies, bookkeeping, general studies.
3. Management subjects include: human resource management, supervisory skills, finance, accounting, economics, sales, marketing, operations supervision, operations management.
4. Technical subjects include: kitchen practicals, kitchen theory, hygiene, restaurant practicals, restaurant theory, beverages theory.

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## Sažetak

### PROFESIONALNO OBRAZOVANJE I KVALITETA TURIZMA

*Noviji trendovi razvoja ukazuju na sve zahtjevnije turiste i rastuću potražnju za turističkim uslugama usklađenim sa specifičnim zahtjevima pojedinaca i grupa. Konkurencija je sve intenzivnija, opći trend je podizanje razine kvalitete. Većina zemalja jugoistočne Europe ulazi u brojne projekte razvoja turizma. Ključni element tog procesa je međunarodno kompatibilan sustav profesionalnog obrazovanja. S namjerom razvijanja obrazovnih normi koje će omogućiti prilagodavanje nastavnih programa potrebama europskog turizma i ugostiteljstva, Hotelijerski fakultet Opatija je u okviru zajedničkog projekta s britanskim sveučilištem Manchester Metropolitan University Hotel & Tourism Management Education Development učinio prve korake prema međunarodnoj akreditaciji vlastitih obrazovnih programa.*

*Ključne riječi: kvalitetan turizam, profesionalno obrazovanje, znanja i vještine, ljudski resursi, međunarodna akreditacija EFAH.*