



Improving Tourism Development Through Planned Employee Training

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Abstract: *The paper represents a problem statement and an invitation to start a research project presented as a draft and is focused on ways to increase the effectiveness of the educational process for training human resources in tourism. Stimulating tourism is now key to achieving effective economic development internationally, nationally, and locally. The authors propose an invitation to research focused on developing human resources in tourist host areas. Well-trained staff are key to maximizing tourist program efficiency. The research project will develop a training program intended for undergraduate and graduate levels, as initial training, and for continuing adults' training. The graduates of the proposed training programs should show the covering of the needs of an effective tourism activity in each of the areas involved, being trained according to the local specificity. They have to show achieving those main competencies which help to work on a wider touristic area, after only short continuing training sessions.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Tourism is one of the fastest and largest growing industries in the world, with Europe being the world's leading tourist destination. Before the pandemic, the sector accounted for 10% of both global GDP (USD 9.2 billion – EUR 7.87 billion) and EU GDP, while employing approximately 10% of the global workforce (European Commission, 2021).

Tourism's rapid growth makes it a key driver of employment and a major contributor to the global economy. On a global scale, tourism stands out as a dynamic and influential industry, making significant contributions to the economic, cultural, and social landscapes of organizations worldwide.

Moreover, the tourism industry boasts many advantages, like job creation, regional growth, and the preservation of cultural heritage. By fostering economic growth and promoting cultural exchange, tourism allows people to discover new places and enjoy leisure.

Tourism is an almost universal phenomenon, except in areas devastated by war or political instability, tourism in a certain form and, to a certain extent, occurs everywhere. Even war zones attract visitors such as journalists, writers, or those who want to experience thrills (Robinson et al., 2020).

Tourism currently offers a wide range of choices for travellers. Cultural tourism, business travel, ecotourism, adventure tourism, and medical tourism are just a few examples of different types of tourism.

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Economic, demographic, social, and political forces have driven the global growth of international tourism. Technological advancements in transportation, making travel easier and faster, along with the desire to experience other cultures, are key reasons for the importance of international tourism in this context.

According to [Matosevic \(2021, p. 177\)](#), tourism is clearly an experience-driven sector because tourism products and services are specifically designed to enhance the tourist's experience.

"Tourism" and "tourist" are widely recognised international terms, describing travel and travellers for leisure in most modern languages. A tourist, as defined by [Yu et al. \(2012\)](#), is someone who travels away from home for under a year, primarily for reasons other than paid work in the destination.

Leisure, business, education, culture, and entertainment are just some of the ways tourism impacts our lives. With travel becoming a favourite pastime globally, the tourism sector is experiencing rapid growth in the world economy ([Veşca, 2018](#)).

Economic, demographic, political, and social factors increasingly influenced global tourism, such as the desire to travel, cultural curiosity, and technological advancements in infrastructure ([Yu et al., 2012](#)).

Increased tourist activity in a location often results in more job prospects within the tourism industry. [Paicu et al. \(2013, p. 1\)](#) highlight that tourism activity generates significant economic benefits, including registered income, employment opportunities, and foreign investments.

2. DISCUSSION

As a multifaceted field, tourism acts as a bridge, combining goods and services from multiple departments. Tourism relies on licensing agencies to link suppliers and tourists by offering the services they require. Today, tourism stands out as a unique activity that plays a significant role in people's interests. As a key sector of the world economy, tourism significantly contributes to job growth and sustainable development.

Since tourism has a vast impact on the world's economy, environment, and society, it relies on sustainable development as a guiding principle, and its growth depends on the dimensions of sustainability. Sustainable development directly involves the tourism industry, which relies on natural resources and cultural heritage. Sustainable tourism development is essential for both economic and environmental reasons ([European Commission, 2021](#)).

This phenomenon boosts the economy by creating jobs, such as hotel staff, waiters, restaurant cooks, and tour guides. According to [Livandovschi et al. \(2018, p. 235\)](#), tourism development positively impacts diverse economic actors, such as accommodation businesses, restaurants, transportation providers, travel agencies, tour operators, taxi drivers, and other transportation services, in addition to tourist guides.

Similar to other income sources, tourist spending directly benefits local businesses by providing revenue for food, transportation, and other services, thus contributing to the local economy.

An infrastructure that draws investment can be a big advantage. Local trade's growth and scale are linked to the number of explorers involved; visitors can dine at local restaurants, promoting

local culture's authenticity, which attracts tourists seeking unique experiences and encourages spending on local goods and services.

By engaging with local residents, visitors can learn about their traditions, customs, and way of life. Tourists can gain a deeper understanding of a culture and community identity by engaging in traditional activities. Promoting local trade can boost local income, especially in areas with limited tourism, while simultaneously increasing the visibility of local businesses.

Natural beauty and rich history are the cornerstones of Romanian tourism. Besides the landscapes, the villages with people preserving traditions for centuries are also a unique feature of the country. Romania's tourist potential is highlighted by its medieval towns and castles.

Romania's tourism industry thrives on its varied landscapes, unique traditions, and rich historical heritage, significantly contributing to the country's economic well-being (Paicu et al., 2013, p. 1).

The current strategy aims to promote not only Romania's landscapes and places but also its regional gastronomy. The exploration of local cuisines reveals both the ancient, traditional culinary practices unique to each region and the modern reinterpretations of these gastronomic traditions. The present culinary landscape is marked by a drive to promote fresh creations and bring old favourites back to life (Tabunșic, 2023, p. 207).

Culinary experiences are now essential for tourism, attracting global travellers seeking new dishes and flavours, contributing to economic growth. In Tabunșic (2023, p. 204) view, gastronomy is a key component in enhancing tourist offerings and driving economic growth at various scales. This approach prioritizes sustainability, emphasizing territory, landscape, local products, and authenticity, which are all consistent with contemporary cultural consumption trends.

Chiriac and Grunzu (2021, p. 213) argue that cultural tourism plays a crucial role in boosting tourism and the national economy. Positively presented historical sites become more valued and significant, leading to increased efforts for their protection and preservation.

As Comendant (2019, p. 166) notes, all tourism development strategies must contribute to the preservation and enhancement of the community's sociocultural identity.

Tourism is an activity in continuous expansion, and it is becoming more and more important, with indirect causes of increased labour productivity and leisure periods, so tourism has increased the number of companies providing tourist services (Mironescu, 2012).

Tourism has become remarkably diverse and interesting in the contemporary world. From leisure to business, medical, or religious, tourism offers opportunities to discover the traditional treasures of diverse areas, such as rural, gastronomic, or cultural landscapes.

Though they are found in various parts of the world, each region, including Romania, has its own special national or local elements. Tourism has become the fourth industry in terms of contribution to GDP worldwide (after retail trade, financial services and construction) and also the fourth industry in terms of contribution to employment (after retail trade, agriculture and construction) (Cristian, 2020).

Since tourism is a key driver of the global economy, governments must prioritise its growth. This is especially true for businesses, considering the positive impact tourism has on jobs and the economy at various levels.

Universities need to focus on methods that enhance the effectiveness of training tourism human resources. As we previously discussed, fostering tourism is key to achieving sustainable economic development internationally, nationally, and locally. There is potential to create strategies for developing human resources in tourist host areas. The goal is to ensure the highest possible efficiency of tourist programs through good training of human resources. This should determine the balancing effects of the regional economy even in conditions of economic syncope determined by the dynamics of evolution within the traditional areas of activity.

The focus is on improving the efficiency of tourism, particularly in Europe and other regions witnessing interesting contemporary trends. Some tourism areas have developed in a promising way. Though these trends are global, they are shaped by unique national or local characteristics in different parts of the world.

Such initiatives are taking place all over the world, but each place shows its specific mark coming from its own culture and history. The awareness of the unity in diversity of this training efficiently represented an essential factor in training human resources in tourism.

Thus, one can find a common competence profile all over the world of each occupational status in the tourism area, completed by elements of specificity for each local/ national area.

3. RESEARCH PROJECT – TRAINING PROGRAM

Educational institutions at the European and international levels can positively affect the efficiency of national and international tourism by providing quality training for tourism professionals. Human resources training can be delivered through specialized tracks in undergraduate and master's programs.

This training program can be designed for both undergraduate and graduate students, as well as adults who are seeking initial or continuing education. Niculescu (2010, p. 198) argues that teachers and scholars should be change agents, not just passive contributors. It's essential to recognise the significance of teachers when creating a curriculum that prioritises student needs and skills strongly connected to the needs of the jobs market.

Developing competences for undergraduate and graduate as well as continuing adults' training requires a mix of formal, non-formal, and informal education. Thus, what is trained in formal contexts (schools or training non-formal institutions) should be connected to what the general background of the work and the life, the aim of training being to prove competence within the professional context, not to get a certificate.

According to Niculescu (2010, pp. 93-94), formal education is not the sole factor influencing learners' competency, as informal and non-formal learning within their communities plays a significant role, as well. Assigning competences depends on their specific qualities and their proof to satisfy particular demands in the concrete work area, whether it's to individuals, social groups, or institutions (Niculescu, 2010, p. 95).

Developing a common competencies profile for tourism workers is necessary in this context, with core competencies necessary for occupants of the same status/job no matter where in the world. These core competence profiles should be completed and nuanced for each local/ national area according to the cultural, social, religious, etc. specificity.

They become targets to be achieved for specific training programs for each type of occupation within the tourism domain. One of them needs an undergraduate training program, others a graduate training and, no doubt, each of them needs a continuing training track aiming to update the competencies according to evolving the work context needs.

The competences profile is a matrix outlining many competencies organized on "must, should and would" levels (essential, necessary, and desirable) developed and permanently adapted for a profession/ occupation. They are described and detailed for all the domains of activity implied by a specified profession/ occupation.

At this point is important to highlight an essential observation in enough thorny issues: the concept of competence/ competency and the competence structure. The literature usually uses the term skills, which implies a focus on what is easy to see: what a professional shows to do in the work context (what the worker can do, the performance as an act). But, competence is much more than this. Any performance as an action is determined by the base and the functionality of knowledge in the area, and hugely by the values and the character features of the worker, which gives efficiency and quality to the performance. Thus, competency represents the synergic effect of three verbs: to know, to know how, and to be. It contains knowledge, capacities or abilities (implying skills) and attitudes based on values.

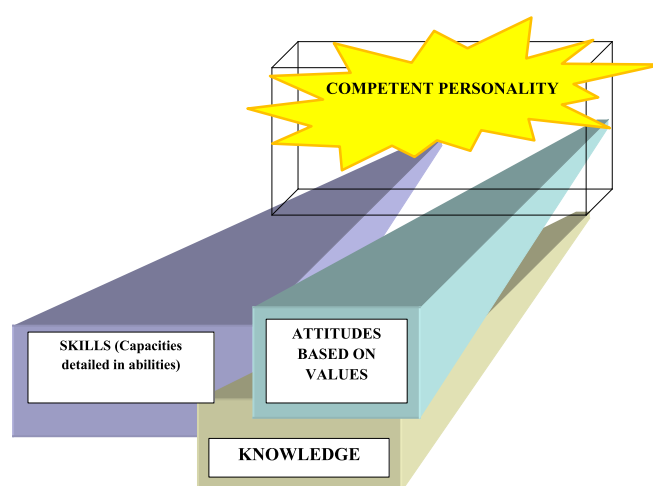


Figure 1. Competency structure

Source: Niculescu (2010)

The starting point of a curriculum design for a training program must be the competencies profile of the occupation/ profession the program is designed for. Achieving the competencies' profile structure on at least acceptable levels of performance (the must/ essential described competencies) represents the *aim* of the curriculum implementation. The items of the specifically described matrix represent the *goals* of the training program, detailed during the designing process by *objectives* connected to each sequence of learning situations. This developed *learning situations* during the curriculum design offer *learning experiences* for students/ learners along the curriculum implementation. They give the learners content aiming to provide them information for their future role as professionals, and by the way, this information and the way to interaction teacher-learner are aimed to achieve and develop components of know-how (capacities) and to be (attitudes and values). The teachers should demonstrate a real teaching art to develop all these on a high level for students/ learners.

A competence profile for a specific occupation/profession serves as a useful tool for both selection and ongoing evaluation. The selection process must focus on the "must" (essential) competencies of each domain of activity which are compulsory. The competition is on the level of should and would competencies (necessary and desirable).

During the selection process, the mandatory *must* level competencies must be verified, with consideration given to the presence, absence, and quantity of *should* and *would* level competencies.

The employers have a profile of each employee (what the selected candidate already has in their own profile and what lack) after the selection process if it is done using this matrix. They will know what they need to guide the employee towards further training, beyond those new skills that may appear as necessary in the specific field of activity.

The focus of further development will be on mastering the competencies not covered in the selection process.

Creating a well-structured curriculum must take into consideration, as well, a correctly understood structure of a learning situation/ experience as the core concept of the curriculum concept. A curriculum consists of a suite of learning situations that generate learning experiences for learners.

The learning situations are designed by the curriculum designers and are implemented for and with the students/learners. The students/learners live learning experiences which have as outcomes elements of competencies (knowledge, capacities and attitudes) combined, with specific focuses on one or more of these.

Each learning situation as design and learning experience, from the perspective of the learners (twins' elements of curriculum concept), can be defined through *five elements*. A possible model of curriculum can be disposed as a pentagon or as a pyramid for a more complex and dynamic understanding (Niculescu, 2010).

The firstly defined elements inside of the curriculum design and implementation process must be the expected outcomes. These outcomes are: (1) the aims as general outcomes for learning situations considered at a wider level (as time connected to educational cycle, school year, sequences of a school year, or as contents/ defined subjects); (2) goals at an intermediate level as time/ complexity of the suite of learning situations (sequences of content or suite of time units sequences); (3) objectives at the level of a learning situation/ experience considered as a short unit as content and time (lesson or learning unit). They represent three levels of targets to be achieved along the learning situations designed and implemented. Finally, they must be reflected by learners' performances (achieved outcomes) expressed by the learning experience. The content selected for being taught represented the second structural element of a learning situation/ experience. This selection should be done according to the designed outcomes and to the allocated time for implementation (the third structural element).

The content delivered in a defined time aiming to achieve specified outcomes (aims, goals and objectives) is approached with specific didactic methods, which represent the fourth element of the mentioned structure of the learning situation. The teaching methods are selected according to content, the age and other particular features of the learners, and the existing didactic means available. This element must be connected wisely to the assessment method of students' achievements, the level of fulfilment of the designed outcomes. The assessment represents the fifth element. The circle is closed when the action returns to the outcomes as already achieved results as mirror of their design as expected outcomes.

4. CONCLUSION

The tourism domain needs training based on local specifics. That's why three issues should be considered. First, the curriculum design must be concerned with the core competence profile of a tourism worker. This is asked by a more and more accurate necessity determined by the wide transfer of workers worldwide in this area, as well. This core competencies profile must be the fundament for further training in case of geographical movement according to a specific competence profile that answers the needs of each region where the worker intends to practice.

Second, must exist for each occupation/ status within the tourism domain clear specific competencies profile.

Third, the responsible staff for tourism management and educational training for tourism must know the matrix of a competence profile for any status, even well defined as a structure, is a dynamic construction as content, because of the dynamic of the needs of beneficiary for the tourism.

Debating developing strategies to train tourism staff for determining a higher level of effectiveness was followed by the idea of drafting an international project aiming to improve the level of initial and continuing training of this type of professionals. The improvement could turn tourism as an alternative to balance the efficiency of economic development at the international, national and local levels.

This project is a proposal for collaboration that could bring beneficial elements to the efficiency of national and international tourism by influencing training human resources in a genuine professional way. Partners enrolled should establish the level of training necessary for each represented educational institution, according to their necessities (undergraduate, master's degree, adult continuing training). A grouping strategy may be the preparation for the next stage: designing curricula for the chosen levels.

Some goals can be stressed: (1) developing specific curricula for the chosen levels of training; (2) training a core team to implement the developed curricula; (3) developing a cascade system of training the training staff for the future of the project implementation.

These goals may be achieved if well-structured activities are designed and implemented. Workshops can be the best way to organise these activities. They should be focused on:

- a) Establishing the level of training programs for each group of project's members according to their local specific needs - types of curriculums for each group (undergraduate and graduate levels, as initial training, and/or for continuing adults' training).
- b) Establishing the steps of developing an effective curriculum.
- c) Designing the competence profile for the beneficiaries of a specific level/type of training, as a defined outcome of each curriculum. This stage will consider how tourism activities in a specific area fulfill the needs of each region. The staff should be trained under local details.
- d) Defining the core competencies to be developed for all the regions which approach the same type of curriculum, and the specific ones for each region.
- e) Establishing the necessary time for curriculum implementation.
- f) Designing the necessary content for each curriculum (considering the national/ local specificities, as well).
- g) Designing the teaching methods according to the contents, time and the intended outcomes defined by the competence profile (carefully respecting the specificity of the culture and tradition for concrete beneficiaries, especially for the specific competencies).
- h) Designing the assessment and evaluation strategies (also respecting the specificity of the culture and tradition for concrete beneficiaries, especially for the specific competencies).

A high impact could occur on local and even wider levels. Some milestones of this impact are: (1). The graduates of the proposed training programs should show the covering of the needs of effective tourism activity in each of the areas involved, being trained according to the local specificity. At the same time, they have to show achieving those main competencies which help to work on a wider touristic area, after only short continuing training sessions corresponding to each cultural context. (2). Through its very structure and implementation, the project can be a marketing and training tool for effective marketing. The idea is to develop a project with international participation to realise the unity in diversity of human resources, training in tourism as an essential factor of its efficiency. (3) The project will also open the way to prove similarities in the tourism field, underlying the existence of some core needs of effective tourism activity in each of the areas involved.

This project could have multilevel effectiveness for the educational staff as well. A professionalised approach to curriculum design, with a better understanding of its core concept, and an in-depth approach to developing the training in the tourism area is expected.

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