
PROFESSIONAL TRAINING OF TOURISM PERSONNEL IN BULGARIA DESTINATION

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ABSTRACT

Tourism, as a dynamic field of human activity, is a leading industry in the modern economy and globalizing world. The successful functioning of tourist activities depends on numerous factors, such as: natural environment, cultural prerequisites and last but not least – training and qualification of tourist personnel. The constantly increasing requirements towards the level of training of future specialists in this field require by the Bulgarian managers to impose updating of the content, methods and technologies of professional training in tourism.

The present scientific report is aiming at presenting and analyzing the significance of tourism as a crucial factor for the development of labour market as well as the necessity of implementing of modern training and qualification requirements towards the personnel. A special emphasis is laid on the vocational training and its rules and regulations. Attention is focused on the role of the Bulgarian National Agency of Vocational Education and Training in ensuring quality of professional training in tourism. A series of indicators set out in the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training are highlighted. In this context, the need of an active support by the institutions

providing training and implementing of the European expertise and strategies is underlined. Current outstanding issues and challenges faced by the vocational education and training system in tourism in Bulgaria destination are discussed.

Keywords: Tourism, Professional Training, Personnel in Tourism, Quality of Vocational Training.

TOURISM: A KEY FACTOR FOR LABOUR MARKET DEVELOPMENT

The priorities of 'Europe 2020' strategy for smart and inclusive growth are the fundamentals of the perspectives for the progress of Bulgaria as a Member State of the European Union. Their accomplishment at national level is highly conditioned by the development policies of Bulgarian education. The **high quality of professional training** is a prerequisite for refining the obtained skills and acquiring new ones. This is the basis for achieving compliance with the requirements of the labor market, improving employment and increasing the economic growth.

Tourism, as the fastest growing industry in the world, is in **dire need of qualified managers** to meet the global demand. The successful operation of tourism activities relies on numerous factors: natural conditions, cultural prerequisites, and last but not least - training and qualification of tourism personnel (Hayes & Ninemeier, 2008).

One of the priorities of the National Strategy for Sustainable Tourism Development in Bulgaria for 2008-2013 is stimulating the role of **tourism as a crucial factor** for the labor market progress and implementation of modern requirements towards training and qualification through:

- development of various tourist services based on up-to-date knowledge technologies;
- wider use of modern communication technologies and devices in tourism;
- improvement of quality of training and professional qualification of tourism personnel at all levels - service, marketing, management, etc.;

- monitoring of the human resources training and qualification system and designing mechanisms for sustainable partnerships between training institutions and business;
- emphasis on alternative methods of training, such as distance, multimedia and interactive form (National Strategy for Sustainable Development of Tourism in Bulgaria 2008–2013).

In comparison with other industries of the economy, the **human factor in tourism** is determinant in terms of the main characteristics of tourism product. Observations and results out of some studies suggest, on one hand, a shortage of qualified personnel, and on the other - a shortage of professional and personable qualities of the specialists and managers. Due to that the lagging behind in training of future specialists and managers shall affect negatively not only the quality of the tourism product, but also its competitive power (Tadarakov, 2013).

The **competitiveness of tourism activities** is highly dependent on the different professionals, their knowledge and skills, working habits and behaviour. Entrepreneurs and managers strive to improve the technologies of the tourism product and to increase their profits mainly through qualification and professionalism of their personnel. The human factor in particular is that, which combines physical, financial and information resources in the tourism product. They not only manufacture the product but also plan, organize and control the processes running simultaneously (World Tourism Organization, 2010).

Issues of human factor have been studied and analyzed in recent years. The World Tourism Organization (WTO), regional and national tourism organizations and units ground, recommend and implement requirements and rules aiming at improving and refining the training of tourism personnel. The **focus of the institutions** listed above is mostly professional. There are some deviations from the problems of comprehensive educational preparation of students, their general knowledge and personal responsibilities. Namely these educational issues are the foundation on which those working in the tourism system upgrade their professional skills and experience, develop and strengthen their individual and group qualities.

It is a common fact that at the core of tourism management lies the **human resource management**. It is characterized by distribution of roles,

leadership behaviour and management by the manager both in the cultural-entertaining activities and in the tourism activities themselves. This requires a constantly refreshing paradigm orientated towards formation of leadership and executive skills in those working in tourism industry, their renewal and optimization.

The **peculiarities of training** a specialist in the field of tourism determine specific demands to the organization of the teaching process. Any future professional with high potential of managerial and executive actions shall implement their competence in the management system in different fields of the hospitality industry as a manager, consultant, analyst, researcher, executor, designer, and functionary (Cannon et al., 2013). He/she shall need to be able to orientate in socio-economic, organizational and technical situations, possess entrepreneurship, analytical skills, initiative and social activeness as well as knowledge of human psychology. In this regard, there is a need for development of **methodological and content tailored training programs** to support resolving of professional and creative tasks. Such targeted programs increase **effectiveness of professional training** of managers in tourism in the course of which the tutors use adequately:

- ✓ dialogue in debatable situations that run on the basis of specific acquired knowledge for individual and group solutions to problems arising in unusual conditions;
- ✓ training sessions that help students to transform learning into skills to solve real life situations;
- ✓ didactic games and exercises to reassert the material and strengthen the motivation for learning;
- ✓ design of projects related to new strategies for vocational training of managers in tourism, which takes into account the characteristics of their social and intellectual development.

According to Palchuk (2007) the main **qualification characteristics** of the professional manager in tourism are:

- systemic acquisition and upgrading of modern economic knowledge;

- level of professionalism (ability to plan upcoming activities, to report on the fulfillment of the tasks assigned, to control the quality of performance, to possess managerial and organizational skills, to analyze the processes of the economic activities and the results thereof);
- development of economically important personal qualities (enterprise, organizational skills, businesslike manners, creative attitude to work, responsibility);
- level of socio-psychological readiness (presence of inner conviction, value orientations, striving for continuous professional growth).

The nature and functions of professional training in tourism are objectively determined by socially important values and the existing needs of the society. Therefore, specialization in tourism is considered as a publicly necessary and socially regulated system.

Based on the fundamental necessities and development of the labour market and professions, and according to the paradigm developed in the research of Novikova (1999), vocational education includes the following **qualitative indicators**, which characterize the modern vocational training:

- ability to transform the acquired theoretical knowledge and apply it in practice;
- ability to communicate in various tourist activities;
- ability to adapt to the professional activities, subject to the ability of problem solving and performing creative tasks, active participation in discussions;
- ability to self-assess the targets set with a view to their future professional career;
- ability to work effectively in a team;
- ability to influence (a manifestation of leadership).

PARTICIPANTS IN THE PROFESSIONAL TRAINING IN BULGARIA

Key players in providing high quality vocational training in Bulgaria are the main institutions and units that legally or as a social duty have clear responsibilities, rights and obligations in respect of professional training. Their

functions are implemented through individual actions and/or interactions with other institutions involved in this process.

The institutions in relation to professional training in Bulgaria could be studied in two directions:

➤ ***Institutions at systemic level:***

Ministry of Education, Youth and Science. Its main functions related to ensuring the quality of training are:

- ✓ performing the overall management of the system that provides high-quality vocational training and is responsible for its condition;
- ✓ executing conceptual, legal and planning activities to improve the quality of vocational training;
- ✓ analyzing resources and usage of financial funds for vocational training. It develops and proposes for approval suggestions for their improvement;
- ✓ providing the necessary administrative structure and procedures for effective operation of the system for achieving high-quality professional education and training;
- ✓ preparing analyses and proposing measures for improvement of the overall performance aiming at providing high-quality vocational training;
- ✓ discussing with the social partners opportunities for development of the material and technical facilities for vocational training and possibilities for its modernization, especially for practical training;
- ✓ confirming state standards for acquiring professional qualification, monitoring their application and initiating their actualization and developing new ones;
- ✓ studying international experience in order to adopt good practices, ensuring compliance with the requirements and recommendations of the EU on improving quality of vocational training;
- ✓ interacting with the social and institutional partners to solve important organizational and resource issues - conducting

examinations, providing the required quality and quantity equipment for practical training, developing standards, curricula, etc.

National Agency for Vocational Education and Training (NAVET) is the state body responsible for the licensing of the activities in the professional education and training system, as well as for the coordination between the institutions related to vocational guidance, training and education. NAVET designs projects of the state educational institutions for acquiring professional qualification for the system of vocational education and training, creates and updates the List of Professions for Vocational Education and Training, regulates the vocational training carried out in licensed centers for vocational training and in various kinds of professional schools.

Through coordinating the activities of the development of strategies for advance and improvement of the vocational education and training, the Agency:

- ✓ contributes to the improvement of the quality of vocational training;
- ✓ participates in the development of conceptual, statutory, regulatory and planning documents in the field of quality assurance of vocational training;
- ✓ ensures the development of high-quality public educational requirements for acquiring vocational qualification by professions and majors;
- ✓ provides monitoring and control over the vocational training centers and makes recommendations for improving the quality of their work;
- ✓ supports an information system for adult vocational training, which traces changes in their quality;
- ✓ makes recommendations to the centers for vocational training for improvement of the quality of education, fulfillment of the state standards, improvement of curricula and syllabuses, and monitors their implementation.

In this regard, it is particularly important the role of NAVET for quality assurance of the vocational training, and for the active support for the institutions

offering training as well as for the implementation of European experience and strategies. Considering this purpose, the Agency monitors a series of indicators underlying in the European Quality Assurance Reference framework concerning the quality of the professional training, such as:

- ✓ training for trainers;
- ✓ successful completion of training programs;
- ✓ level of unemployment among graduates of training courses;
- ✓ adaptation of the training to the changing challenges of the labor market;
- ✓ access to the available vocational training.

The institutions, which offer vocational training in Bulgaria, are subject to licensing and continuous internal and external control. This aims at constant improvement of training and elimination of identified deficiencies. The systematic documentation and analysis of qualifying measures play a basic role. By December 2012, NAVET has issued 977 licenses and 650 of them are for vocational training in tourism.

National Employment Agency: its main commitments related to vocational training are to:

- ✓ organize and control conducting of vocational training for adults - both unemployed and employed in accordance with the Law on vocational education and training;
- ✓ organize the implementation and ensure provision of the required quality of vocational training for adults under the programmes financed by the EU Structural Funds;
- ✓ perform check-ups on the overall quality of vocational training for adults;
- ✓ assist methodologically the operation of the quality assurance system for vocational training of employed and unemployed;
- ✓ provide systematized information on the quality of completed vocational training for adults;

- ✓ give assessments, prepare analyses and make suggestions to the higher authorities in the process, including on the quality of the available vocational training;
- ✓ make suggestions for improvement of the organization of vocational training, curricula, syllabuses and content;
- ✓ carry out vocational guidance and career counseling.

Other institutions at systemic level, which support the higher quality of vocational training, are:

- ✓ Independent body for assessment of the quality of vocational training to the Council of Ministers
- ✓ Regional Education Inspectorates
- ✓ Regional Employment Service
- ✓ Labour Office Directorates
- ✓ Industrial Ministries

➤ ***Nationally represented organizations of the social partners:*** these include employers' organizations, on one hand, and the employees' organizations on the other. The former invest in the improvement of existing equipment and ensure financial support for the development of vocational training and the latter distribute the necessary information about the application of quality standards for training and assist in providing real job positions.

➤ ***Institutions providing vocational training:*** personnel training and up-skilling and their retraining are mainly provided by several bodies: vocational schools, vocational training centers, colleges, universities, which:

- ✓ implement the state policy on the quality of vocational training;
- ✓ create and provide conditions for the functioning of the internal quality control system of the offered vocational training;
- ✓ prepare self-assessment of the completed vocational training, analysis and a plan to improve its quality;
- ✓ include all stakeholders in the activities related to establishment and improvement of the quality of vocational training;

- ✓ create real conditions and take measures for settling and maintaining a high culture of quality assurance of vocational training.
- **Teaching staff:** Although teachers are a part of the institutions providing vocational training, given their particular importance and in relation to highlighting the shared responsibility in the process of quality assurance of vocational training, they are separated as another group of key players. They participate in the learning process with all their psychological, professional and moral potential. Their qualification is a crucial element of the quality of vocational education and training.
- **Trainees:** they have a specific place in the provision of high quality vocational training. As direct and primary consumers of the activities of vocational training they have a significant impact on its quality and act as a corrective.

PROBLEMS AND CHALLENGES TO PROFESSIONAL TRAINING IN BULGARIA

The dynamic development of Bulgarian tourism in the last few years, the rapid growth of accommodation facilities, and of the employment in this sector highlighted the problem concerning preparation of highly qualified specialists. In recent years we have seen a rapid expansion and modernization of tourist infrastructure as well as an increase in its capacity. Under these conditions, mobility of Bulgarian tourism is determined by the professionalism of the employees in the sector. The rapidly developing Bulgarian tourism experiences acute deficit of contemporary vocational training staff. The solution of this pivotal problem in these market conditions suggests achieving an optimal match between supply and demand. This match should be implemented in two ways: first – as demand and supply of education and training services and second – as labor demand and supply. The peak efficiency could be reached, when the chain is closed and the needs of education and training are implemented in an adequate labour demand with relevant quality professional characteristics.

In recent years in Bulgaria a steady trend has appeared of increasing interest in vocational training of tourism specialties and in the professions of tourism. Increasing numbers of young or unemployed people are turning to vocational training and career in the field of tourism, mainly encouraged by the new jobs and new opportunities for starting a business. But unfortunately it is not

yet established in this country and there is no such a **system for career guidance**, which to inform, consult and advise students, unemployed and other people in their choice of profession and career development according to their personal characteristics and needs of the labour market. This is evidenced by the fact that so far in Bulgaria there is no licensed information and guidance center due to the **lack of entrepreneurial initiative**.

The **professional nosedive** is one of the main reasons for **loss of huge staff potential** in tourism as regards to young recruits with foreign language proficiency, good communication and motivation. At the same time the supply of vocational training in the tourism sector is expanding. There are numerous vocational schools, which are turning to current and prospective jobs in tourism. The largest is the offering of qualification courses in tourism vocations and majors by licensed training centers. In the prevalent part, however, these are companies that do not have their own equipment, training experience and potential. Some of these centers are licensed for vocational training in a very wide range of diverse vocations and majors, which raises reasonable doubts about the level of professionalism in the learning process.

A key problem of vocational education and training in the field of tourism is its **poor relation to the needs and requirements of actual tourist business and expectations and claims of employers**. In most cases educational plans and programs just end in themselves and are detached from the practical needs. Graduates of vocational education and training acquire primarily theoretical, but very insufficient practical skills to successfully deal with their professional duties and responsibilities at the workplace. The main reason for this is the lack of conditions for efficient implementation of students' practical training in a real production environment, which should occupy more than a half of the length of the process. Vocational schools and centers do not have their own facilities for practical training, and in the place where they exist, they are primitive. Tourism management refrains from providing a work placement and work experience in its enterprises because it prevents the normal production rate and extremely committed qualified staff to deal with the trainees.

The **insufficient quality of vocational training** also is due to multiple other reasons, such as:

- ✓ most of the teachers are good professionals, but they lack the required pedagogical skills and experience in adult education, they are not familiar with the innovations in tourism, modern methods and forms of tourist services;
- ✓ the lecture form is still widespread, which is less effective. Extremely insufficiently are applied interactive forms of learning – presentations using visualization tools, tests, discussions, case studies, business games, training, individual work in small groups, solving practical problems and others;
- ✓ there are no suitable textbooks and didactic materials for practically applicable training in tourism professions and majors. Especially needed are written technologies, procedures and standards for specific activities and operations related to the performance of the basic and additional services;
- ✓ up till now only state educational requirements have been developed and approved for acquiring a qualification in certain tourist professions. For the other professions in tourism in fact there are no regulations on the level of compulsory vocational training, knowledge, skills and professional competencies that must be acquired in the training process. In the development and evaluation of these documents trained personnel is not involved, and their expectations and real needs are not considered;
- ✓ the management in tourism business neither invests in company training nor supports partnerships and contacts with vocational schools or training centers. Instead of participating in the necessary professionals preparation, often employers prefer to attract executives from other travel companies unfairly;
- ✓ the motivation of specialists for professional development in the Bulgarian tourist business is unsatisfactory. A significant part of the specialists trained in our country seeks opportunities abroad. This situation is very unfavorable. It is caused primarily by the pay systems and staff assessment, the seasonal nature of employment and by the absence of prospects for career development in the Bulgarian tourism companies (Infotourism, 2012).

All these circumstances are profound reflection questions, which create **initiatives for change**. The decision of a big part of these problems could be

sought by establishment of National Centre for Vocational Education, Training and Implementation of Tourism Staff. According to the social status, its founders might be interested industrial organizations. This center can help for:

- ✓ more active involvement of tourism management in the process of training and education;
- ✓ better vocational education quality by improving teacher training, preparation of training materials, monitoring of teaching in vocational training centers, conducting strategic forums and public discussions, accelerating the development and improving the quality of public educational requirements for acquiring professional qualification in tourism professions, certifying educational plans and programs, etc.;
- ✓ establishment and development of partnerships of competent public authorities, tourism management, trade unions, NGOs and tourism training institutions to raise the level of vocational education and training in tourism in line with European standards;
- ✓ promotion and support intercompany action to enhance the staff skills in tourism businesses;
- ✓ actualization of the list of professions and vocational education and training majors in tourism, according to the needs of the tourism industry;
- ✓ creation of an information data system, containing graduates from vocational education and training, to assist employers in their recruitment;
- ✓ provision of professional assurance and advices of successfully completed vocational education and training for acquired knowledge, skills and competencies that will give them an advantage in the candidates selection process for employment in tourism enterprises;
- ✓ conduction of pilot training courses for new and prospective professions and specialties and dissemination of such educational and training products.

Mentioned facts do not exhaust the problems of vocational education and training in tourism. The strategic importance of these sustainable development

problems of Bulgarian tourism makes even more urgent the **broad public debate** on the demand for better solutions.

GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE TO PROFESSIONAL TRAINING IN 2020

European development, which is **based on the knowledge**, and opening of European labour market is the biggest challenge to the vocational education and training in Europe and to all stakeholders. The same is true about the **need of these systems to adapt continuously to new developments and changing needs of the society**. Enhanced cooperation in vocational education and training will help to ensure a successful enlargement of the EU, and to achieve the objectives set by the European Council in Lisbon. The European Development Centre for Vocational Training and the European Training Foundation are important institutions in supporting this collaboration. The opportunities, which EU gives to its citizens for life, education and work in other countries, contribute to **cross-cultural amity, personal development and full realization** of the Union economic potential (Parusheva, 2013).

Bulgarian public management takes into account European strategies, policies and practices in the field of vocational training. For our country leading in this respect are the Lisbon strategy, the Strategy for Lifelong Learning, the European Employment Strategy and others (Pencheva, 2011). **Education reform** in general and in particular – in vocational education and training in Bulgaria is facing an important task – to ensure such terms for training that allow continuous maintenance of the workforce quality and its employment suitability under the requirements of the labour market and knowledge economy.

By 2020 European vocational training systems should become more attractive, applicable, directed closely to careers, innovative, affordable and flexible than they currently are, and should contribute to excellence and equity in learning lifelong learning, by providing:

- ✓ attractive and inclusive vocational training with highly qualified teachers, innovative learning methods, high quality infrastructure and facilities, a high relevancy on labor market and opportunities for further education and training;

- ✓ high initial vocational training, which shall be an attractive choice, having the same value as general education for students, parents and society as a whole. It should provide students to acquire both key competences and specific skills;
- ✓ easily accessible and career-oriented continuing vocational training for workers, employers, independent contractors and unemployed, which facilitates both competence development and career changes;
- ✓ flexible vocational training systems, approach focused on achieved learning outcomes, which shall support both flexible learning programs and allow passage between the different subsystems of education and training (school education, vocational training, higher education, adult education) and also provide validation of formal and informal learning, including competences acquired through the work experience;
- ✓ European education and training area using the transparent qualifications systems, allow the transfer and accumulation of learning outcomes and qualifications and competences recognition and increase transnational mobility;
- ✓ significantly improved opportunities for professionals transnational mobility in vocational training;
- ✓ easily accessible and high-quality information, guidance and lifelong counseling forming a coherent network that allows citizens to take solid decisions and to manage their learning and professional development beyond the traditional gender lines.

The **strategic objectives** for tourism development to the period 2008-2013 are aiming at establishing a human resources development system and creating tourism integrated information system. Priority is given to the workforce training and retraining for the real needs of the economy to be met, and in this way the available training to comply with the demand.

FINDINGS

- Tourism, as the fastest growing world industry, needs qualified managers to meet the global demand.
- At the core of tourism management lies the human resource management.
- There is an objective necessity of active institutional support providing vocational education and training and the implementation of European experience and strategies.
- The problems and challenges of vocational education and training require broad public debate on demand for better solutions.
- European development, which is based on the knowledge, and opening of the European labor market is the biggest challenge to the vocational education and training.
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CONCLUSION

The challenge that society meets at the beginning of the new century is to achieve full employment and to maintain worldwide economic growth. In terms of developing globalization and continuous improvement of the knowledge society, the education and training are important priorities. The requirement for continuous improvement of the level of knowledge, skill and competence is a precondition for all citizens' personal development and also guarantees their participation in all ongoing important social processes and their active involvement in the labor market. Efforts are targeted to ensure the employment quality and quantity based on the new educational and training strategies.

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