

TRAINING THE TRAINERS – INTERCULTURAL AND INTER-EDUCATIONAL BENEFITS OF US COMMUNITY COLLEGES TO HOSPITALTY INDUSTRY

Scientific paper

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Abstract

Purpose – Viewing tourism as an intercultural activity, constructed within and through languages has become an interesting vantage in tourism research. The paper focuses on the objectives and benefits of a long lasting mutual cooperation between a group of American community colleges (CCID) and the University “St. Kliment Ohridski”, (UKLO) Macedonia.

Design –The paper is designed into several sections including introduction, body of the paper and conclusion.

Methodology – This paper deploys empirical material gained from an ethnographic research of the relationship between languages, intercultural communication and tourism carried out diachronically by the authors in the Ohrid tourist region, on the one hand, and intercultural initiatives of UKLO with community colleges, on the other hand. For the purpose of the paper and analytical method have been implemented in the research. A cross-cultural contrastive analyses has been also incorporated in the research of the paper.

Approach – Diachronic approach has been implemented in order to stress the importance of nourishing initial cooperation, development and sustainability of CCID – UKLO contacts. Viewing tourism as a performative cultural *communitas* between human agents, a contrastive analyses of communicative speech acts has been implemented in order to stress the importance for successful intercultural communication.

Findings – The findings highlight the crucial role of the benefits from successful intercultural and inter-educational cooperation. Training faculty staff (professors and teaching assistants) to get further outreach of intercultural communication with a special accent on American culture in tourism and hospitality industry, is an additional benefit for contribution towards internationalising the curricula in tourism studies.

Originality of the research – Originality is viewed in the author’s long lasting research in this field.

Keywords intercultural cooperation, staff training, intercultural communication.

INTRODUCTION

In accordance with the European and global trends towards which University “St. Kliment Ohridski” (UKLO) aspires, for the present management of the University internationalization is one of the most significant processes incorporated in all areas of university functioning as well as a priority in the strategic determination for university approaching towards the European and world family of developed universities. Following this, the Faculty of Tourism and Hospitality in Ohrid (FTH) boasts with rich history of well-planned and integrated international activities throughout its 40 years of existence.

Tourism studies hold the crucial position in the teaching curricula of the FTH – Ohrid Tourism, itself, is an extremely important and powerful agent of signification, key to the construction of both self and others. It is both an agent and channel of globalization, but also a literal embodiment of travelling theory. At one and the same time it effects change and transition, whilst also echoing the coming trends of globalization. Tourism is frequently cited as the world's fastest growing industry or the world's largest business.

Globalization is currently transforming the fundamental parameters of the post-modern world, challenging directly the primacy of the nation-state and national identity in their present form. Powerful forces of integration in all spheres of life are reconstituting the world into a single social space, creating possibilities of global identifications and shared identities - such as 'customers for the same goods or services', 'addressees of the same messages', or 'users of the same lingua franca' – amongst people far removed from one another in time and space.

The processes of integration are counterbalanced by equally powerful trends of weakening and dislocating national cultures. Many scholars argue that late modern societies no longer represent unified, well-bounded wholes, with a well-defined centre, developing according to a single organizing principle. They are fractured and de-centred, crosscut by different internal antagonisms and re-composed around new political or socio-cultural pivots conducive to the emergence of new discourses and the forging of a plurality of identities.

When Macedonia was one of the six constituent republics of Yugoslavia, Ohrid was one of the country's most popular tourist destinations. Tourists visited Ohrid from all over Europe and beyond, often on charter flights and on package tours. Famous politicians and celebrities even kept summer homes in Ohrid, on a hillside overlooking beautiful Lake Ohrid. Today, years after Macedonia peacefully seceded from Yugoslavia, Ohrid remains the primary destination for pleasure travellers within Macedonia. However, the past period of the growing pains of nationhood experienced by Macedonia including dramatic political and institutional changes, economic hardships, and various external pressures, have prevented Ohrid from assuming its rightful place among Europe's leading tourism destinations.

1. INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE – ELEMENT FOR SUSTAINABLE INTERCULTURAL PARTNERSHIP

Mobility of people, student mobility, immigration patterns, rapid international transport, new technologies of communication, and opportunities for project participation in international teams and networks are contributing significantly to the importance of intercultural communication in the developed world, and especially on the Balkan. Europe is obviously developing its own 'international culture in some areas, even though in general, cultures retain distinctiveness. People still queue, order, argue or complain, and make friends quite differently.

The initiation of international collaboration with US community colleges is to shed light on the impact of global processes on communication. The topic can be approached from different perspectives: meaning construction through new discourses, characteristics of discursive practices; ways of identification and conceptualization of human action: language policies; language manipulation; global English and foreign language teaching/learning; dynamics of globalization discourses in terms of universalization, particularization, differentiation, integration, fragmentation, etc.

We all belong to and are exposed by a series of interlocking cultures, which influence the way we view the world, make decisions and interact with others. National cultures have a huge influence on people's values, attitudes and behaviors. Nowadays, people coming from different cultures have to negotiate, interact with, understand and respect the behavior and reactions of people from quite different cultures. Thus, it is very important that there is an awareness of cultural differences since multicultural groupings are becoming more common in professional settings and elsewhere around the globe.

The field of intercultural communication is a rapidly developing field which has been supplied with its theoretical and methodological insights by contrastive pragmatics, discourse analysis and areas of sociolinguistics, such as ethnography of communication. One has to learn how to deal with unexpectedness, directness and indirectness, cordiality or individualism, empathy and otherness as well as the frequent culture misunderstandings or culture shock. The knowledge, skills and attitudes that are necessary for successful intercultural communication have to be practiced, to be observed and discussed. What matters the most is that the students should learn to be aware of cultural differences and be prepared to deal with them in a non-judgmental way. The rapidly increasing use of English as a language of intercultural communication between non-native speakers means that the training the trainers for intercultural communication through this course will be of interest not only to university staff trainees, but also to those involved in different branches of tourism ,etc.

2. THE INICIATIVE UKLO -CCID Colleges(<http://www.ccidinc.org>)

Being rich with cultural, historical and natural heritage, the Republic of Macedonia becomes an attractive spot for trans-oceanic educational exchange experience through partnerships with community colleges in the USA. First of this kind being a project between the Faculty of Tourism and Hospitality and St. Louis Community Colleges. It has proved a successful one, apart from certain external factors that slowed down its progress.

The cooperative relationship between UKLO and CCID started in 1999 by signing an agreement of cooperation, with the hope to find similar goals for international cooperation between UKLO and CCID Colleges. American ambassador, Mr. Einik's letter of support stated:

“ I am pleased to learn of the cooperation of your university with several of our colleges in the Midwest in developing educational programs to serve the needs of and enhance the tourism industry in the Lake Ohrid region. As my wife and I have seen for ourselves last month, the beauty of Lake Ohrid is world-renown, and any efforts to accommodate more visitors while protecting its natural beauty are welcome indeed.....I take it as a great compliment that you think so highly of our educational system and see it in aspects that could be beneficial in improving your own efforts to train young people for careers in the tourism industry. Tourism is an important sector in development of the region. The Embassy is certainly supportive of programs to develop tourism in Macedonia, and we would be interested in learning more of your plans in this regard.”

In 2000, UKLO and SLCC in partnership with CCID won a grant in the amount of \$250,000 by the State Department for the two-year project named "On the Path to Sustainable Economic Development" sponsored by the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs. This linkage project was successfully completed and built new avenues for international activity for the partners. The following project activities were achieved:

- Configure the St. Louis-Ohrid advisory council and conduct pre-funding planning
- Initial post-grant notification planning and needs assessment visits to/from Ohrid
- Hospitality -Management/Tourism DACUM in UKLO
- Preparing for the St. Louis based train-the-trainers Module
- Distance learning implementation
- Dietetics/Nutrition/Foods science team to UKLO
- English language and business English workshop and training in UKLO
- ESL for Macedonian students attending SLCC
- UKLO students in the US
- Professional enrichment and international education
- Perpetuating linkage
- Project sustainability - monitoring and evaluating

Since 2003 new relationships and exchanges have been bridged between UKLO and CCID members: Kirkwood Community College, Iowa, Saint Louis Community College, Missouri, Florissant Community College, Missouri, Davidson County Community College, Scottsdale Community College, Phoenix, Arizona, University in Pensacola, Florida m Howard Community College, Maryland, Mercer Community College, New Jersey. The following project activities were achieved in the course of a fifteen-year –across-ocean cooperation:

3. PROJECT – ASPAT

Within the international cooperation and the tendency of strengthening the relationship between the US and Macedonian higher education the US Embassy in Macedonia funded the realization of the project American Cultural Studies at Tourism (ASPAT). The main objective of the ASPAT project is to train faculty staff (professors and teaching assistants) to get further outreach of American culture in general and with a

special accent on American culture in tourism and hospitality industry, thus contributing towards internationalising of the curricula.

The Macedonian trainees attended a workshop enriched with combined lectures delivered by two American community colleges experts in the field of American culture and international cuisine. Practical culinary classes were undertaken in the kitchen premises under supervision of American chef of kitchen. The participants were granted signed and sealed certificates of attendance.

4. TRAINING FOR ESP TOURISM PROFESSIONALS

Many hospitality training programs available nowadays to advanced students in ESP courses focus on culture and cross-cultural communication skills. The context of culture is an important frame within we interpret the reality and organize our experience. Katan emphasizes that culture maybe viewed as a commonly shared mental model or *map of the world* (1999:17), consisting of beliefs, values and cognitive environments which affect the behavior and identify individual persons¹. Cross-cultural understanding is of considerably great importance when ESP courses are taught. It has been widely recognized that moving across cultures actually means communicating not only with foreign visitors but also dealing with foreign social and cultural systems. Functioning successfully in academic, business or other professional settings always understands adjustment to cultural variations in social relationships.

In the hospitality industry, human resources represent an agent of the uttermost importance. Education for the hospitality industry, further upgrading, professionalism, together with a change of the mentality in the service encounter i.e. communication culture, assume an exceptional significance within quality standards improving strategies. Future hospitality industry employees, represent the base for a further development in tourism - a complex phenomenon requiring an interdisciplinary approach towards professional training. Future tourism professional being professionally trained, should gradually become aware of strong relationship that exists between linguistic communication and culture and realize that social behavior depends on socially prescribed norms which differ from one country to another.

According to Prichard, the ultimate goal of ESP tourism professionals is to ensure pragmatic success in communication. In developing awareness of the needs and concerns of ESP tourism professionals, teachers, should consider teaching matters beyond teaching the language². The author is definite that the answer is clearly affirmative because most tourism and hospitality English courses, especially those designed for advanced learners, often focus on such areas as polite requests, apologies, expressing regrets, etc. In these areas behavioral strategies and techniques play important role.

¹ Katan, D.(1999). *Translating Cultures, An Introduction for Translators, Interpreters and Mediators*. Manchester St. Jerome Publication.

² Pritchard, K. (2000). "Cross-Cultural Approach to the teaching of ESP". In *Tourism & Hospitality Industry 2000: New Trends in Tourism and Hospitality Management*. Opatija: 239-246.

Tourism professionals should be made aware of socio-cultural contexts in which communication occurs, culturally-influenced behavior, the impact of different cultures on their languages. Therefore, cultural awareness raising and cultural instruction should play an important role in advanced ESP courses. No one involved in teaching ESP is likely to argue for cross-cultural understanding and multicultural diversity, but some may question the relative emphasis to be given to cross-cultural as opposed to target or local culture components in course design. The main teaching/learning aim should be mastering spoken communication, as tourism is actually a human exchange in which it is extremely important to communicate respecting and understanding the tourists' different cultural values in order to create reliability and trust. According to Yu, One of the most important task in the ESP teaching process is the students' cross-cultural awareness. Foreign language teachers should bear in mind that they are actually teaching operators in direct contact with customers a very complex art of how to manage, interact, negotiate and compromise with people of different culture backgrounds and at different levels of communication.³

The hospitality industry with its specific services is an arena of cultural clichés and cultural misunderstandings. It is of great importance to know the cultural norms and the language used by the tourism professionals within international cooperation encounters. However, if the attitudes in the speech acts of the native speakers of English reflect what is 'normal', 'natural', are widely accepted, a successful intercultural communication among the speakers of different cultures cannot be realized. If a speaker of Macedonian tries to use simple imperative constructions in the English language will be marked as impolite and rough communicator. The same speaker may be defined as uncooperative and insufficiently intelligent when not being able to offer a reply to a well elaborated indirect addressing by the speakers of English. On the other hand, too loud expression of emotions for instance, when a customer is complaining or the use of direct forms of address, for the speakers of English can be considered as insulting and irritating.

It is obvious that future challenges in hospitality education are calling for re-examining the methodology of teaching intercultural communication. According to Hymes, the ability to understand the speakers who come from different national cultures does not rely only on communicative competence but on the consciousness that the cultural meanings and values incorporated in the foreign language are specific for each national culture.⁴

The assumption that what is needed for a successful intercultural communication is to learn the other's language, is not sufficient. Language represents the deepest manifestation of a culture and people's value systems. Considering the role of cultural values in discourse, the various major function of language are stressed: language as a means of identification, where we indicate group membership and make group boundaries, whether at the national, regional, local, ethnic, political or religious level. It is the most important medium of human communication, since through language we

³ Yu, L. (1999). *The International Hospitality Business*. New York, London. Oxford. The Haworth Hospitality.

⁴ Hymes, D. (1964). *Language in Culture and Society*. New York: Harper & Row.

express information, ideas, emotions, attitudes, etc. Language as a means of cognitive conceptual development, facilitates the creation of new concepts. The language is an instrument of action, as certain important acts are performed purely linguistically. It is because language performs all these functions in humans and human societies, that is so crucial.

Future tourism professionals and trainers should become aware of learning how to understand the cultural differences and cultural relativity. Intercultural cooperation begins with a change towards applying the *intercultural communicative competence*. The cultural mirrors of the source culture and culture – target which are incorporated in the speech acts can offer great contribution not only in the methodology of foreign language learning but in the international cooperation settings.

5. PROJECT – TRAINING THE TRAINERS

The UKLO- CCID/ Scottsdale Community College/Howard Community College focuses on the objectives of a mutual cooperative activities in the field of teaching intensive English language courses and tourism and hospitality management. The program offers US language and tourism/hospitality instructors coming to Ohrid tourist area to give courses to students and hotel personnel for upgrading their language and professional hospitality skills in a global international context. The main objective is focused on acknowledging the needs of the Macedonian hospitality industry of English language curricula and hospitality training upgrading, pointing to the necessity of implementing a methodologically relevant model for effective learning in Macedonian hospitality education. In the light of the evidence we found our language policy and staff training should be re-examined and innovated in order to adapt to requirements for greater language and professional competence in a global international context.

Topics of interest achieved through UKLO – CCID cooperation:

- Expanding curricula in hospitality management, dietetics, tourism, and business administration
- Conducting short-term seminars in strategic business planning, management, the biotechnology industry
- Equipping, training, and testing in distance learning technology
- English language training for faculty
- Developing English-Macedonian course materials
- Conducting a semester- long student exchange program for full credit and at minimal cost to students
- Developing mini-labs for the culinary arts
- Establishing in Ohrid tourist region internship programs with local business
- Training in contextual learning
- Increasing the holdings of the library

CONCLUSION

Speakers of a given culture very often and much more are exposed to the influence of a foreign culture and ever since before, as a result of the demand of their profession or as a result of the socio-economic makes which contribute towards the ethnic profile of a country being quite picturesque. In that colourful field of different cultures, traditions, languages and dialects, insufficiently informed person can very often experience a cultural shock, thus confronting diverse influences on a daily basis. Therefore, the systematic study of the cultural phenomenon in general and specially studying the specific a nation's cultural conventions the guests encounter becomes an integral part of the modern educational system. The information offered through this approach offers better penetration in one's own culture. The importance of multiculturalism is seen in overcoming the ethnocentrism which is a needed precondition for living in a multinational and multicultural society.

In the area of cross-cultural encounters misinterpretation of politeness strategies may occur if cultural variables are not respected. EFL learners, especially those pursuing advanced courses should be taught to develop 'sensitivity' when using English as a means of communication. In the light of these cross-cultural considerations, there is a pressure on the ESP teachers to include cultural information in their courses so that students can have proper functioning in professional settings.

Communication practices and processes are of fundamental concern to humanities and social science disciplines. Although language and communication are central aspects of tourism studies, this is a relatively unexplored area of study. The knowledge of foreign languages is the most important assumption for communication in the tourism and hospitality industry where human resources represent an agent of the utmost importance. Education for the tourism and hospitality industry, professionalism, further specialization together with a change of the mentality in the service encounter, i.e. communication culture, assume an exceptional significance within quality standards improving strategies.

An important benefit of the intercultural cooperation with the CCID Colleges in the tourism and hospitality industry are the specific communicative interactions. Communication does not occur only in a language surrounding but in a cultural context as well, where the speakers are accommodated towards behavioral norms. An attempt to divide them is impossible nor desired, especially for the fact that their inner relations are culturally strengthened. Not possessing any knowledge of a successful communicational competence or an excellence in foreign languages as well as sound knowledge of foreign cultures would lead to a failed communication.

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