

HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT AS RESOURCE FOR ECONOMIC SUSTAINABILITY AND COMPETITIVENESS OF HOTELS

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Abstract

Purpose – Nowadays human resources have become a key asset in the economy, which also significantly affects the competitiveness of countries. The migration of labour from Hungary is still a continuous process, and it is most intense in the tourism sector with high demand for labour, and so the problem now raises economic sustainability issues beyond the frameworks of competitiveness. Tourism service providers have a significant role in the development level and further progress of a destination, and so it is important how they manage labour force related challenges. The focus of our research was to identify the most typical problems that tourism service providers face in this issue, and to explore what solutions could be effectively used.

Methodology – The article is methodologically based on secondary research in addition to primary research. We made structured deep interviews with the managers of several Hungarian hotels with 3 and 4 star qualification.

Findings – Service providers have different methods to keep their workforce. On the one hand, their efforts are made for creating optimum working conditions, on the other hand, recognising that they face a new, differently socialised generation of employees, their goal is to increase their individual satisfaction. The latter also means in many cases that the employer has an active role in employee conflict management, even with regard to their social interactions. The competitiveness of tourism service providers is influenced by the supply of permanent and high quality services, which is increasingly difficult to provide due to the fluctuation of qualified human resource.

Keywords tourism, responsibility, service providers, human resources, competitiveness

INTRODUCTION

Nowadays human resources have become a key asset in the economy, which also significantly affects the competitiveness of countries. The migration of labour from Hungary is still a continuous process, and it is most intense in the tourism sector with high demand for labour, and so the problem now raises economic sustainability issues beyond the frameworks of competitiveness. The article is methodologically based on secondary research (desk research of available literature) in addition to primary research. We made structured deep interviews with the managers of several Hungarian hotels with 3 and 4 star qualification from the South-Transdanubian Region.

Though the South Transdanubian tourism region is not among the most popular destinations, we considered it important to request the service providers, firstly the hotels, in order to explore the aspects of their corporate social responsibility regarding

their employees, as today responsible attitude is an expectation from the enterprises. In order to explore the aspects of corporate social responsibility we have sent a structured questionnaire to the three and four star hotels within the South Transdanubian region of the Hungarian Hotel and Restaurant Association. The questionnaire investigates the corporate social and environmental responsibility. The present study introduces a part of this questionnaire and the results of the questions regarding labour force, its retaining and problems of labour force. The questionnaire was available online and in paper format as well, however the percentage of respondents was very low (10/30). To complete the primer research and make it more successful we participated in the regional meeting of the Hungarian Hotel and Restaurant Association, organised annually. Here the service providers of the region reported about the negative and positive achievements of hotels, thus we got a general idea about the ordinary problems and it turned out that most hotels struggle with the absence of human resources, both in quantity and quality.

1. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

During the past decade tourism has changed a lot. The trends of demand got new directions so the supply should adapt to these changes. In the case of the latter one the changes in human resources are of great importance. Human resource management (HRM) has a key role in the tourism as well. HRM is part of the management process, which is primarily concerned with human constituents of an organisation. Usually a HR manager is responsible for hiring new employees, supervising employee evaluations, mediation between employees and bosses as necessary, and general overseeing of the personnel department. It is obvious that human resource management is influenced by external and internal factors as well. The external factors include the geographical location, the legal regulations, the trade unions and the labour market. In the Cape Town Declaration of Responsible Tourism (2002) the role of local residents in the tourism of a given host area was highlighted together with the local multiplier effects like employment, economic development, the active co-operation of locals and their right in decision-making. This clearly indicates that the actors of tourism sector should have much more responsibility in the regard of society. These principles were reinforced in the studies of Barcelona Responsible Tourism Charter 2010 and The Catalunya 2020 Vision for Responsible Tourism: The Barcelona Declaration 2013. In the case of the actors of economy the concept of CSR (corporate social responsibility) is known and applied, which is shifting towards a so-called value controlled business management, which points beyond the original CSR. According to the world trends many big hotel chains, like Accor Hotels, RadissonBlu, apply a so called Charta, which is an integral part of their business politics. The responsibility taken on by the management affects the employees (education), the local society (economy) and it is also important to inform the guests as well. This attitude is already needed in the global market. It can improve the competitiveness and requires a complex approach. The situation is less idealistic if it only serves as a marketing strategy with dummy activities and if only aims to increase the satisfaction of the guests. As a result of such cases CSR activities became ethically controversial and questionable in business life. According to the National Tourism Development Strategy 2030 (NTS 2030) tourism is “the key sector of economic development”. Its strategic aims include resource allocation, subsidy and the promotion of taking responsibility. The 6th point of the Visions of Tourism Development Strategy

formulates a stable subsistence, attracting career and promotion if working in the tourism sector, to which it is positive and computable (MTÜ 2017).

1.1. Literature review

Baum (2015) and Baum et al. (2016, p.2) also raise attention to the fact that most of the researches focuses on the employees of accommodation services and the survey of human resources in the broader context of tourism sector is quite neglected. The general characteristic of hotel employment (Table 1), which can have a negative impact on the regional labor market.

Table 1: **General characteristic of hotel employment**

Seasonality in employment (large proportions of seasonal and casual workers).
Tourism industries employ a large proportion of part-time workers, provides jobs for women and young people.
Workplaces in accommodation sector is characterised by having small and large numbers of employees as well.
Dominance of elementary occupations in tourism and relatively low proportion of professional occupations.

Source: ONS 2013, Eurostat 2015

A study focusing on the OECD countries deals with the replacement of the missing labour force in tourism and the free movement of labour force, emphasising that this movement, besides strengthening the seasonal fluctuation, negatively affects the opportunities of local employees because of the cheap but well-trained foreign labour force (Joppe 2012, p. 670). Devine et al. (2007) pointed out that the handling of multiculturalism at a management level is indispensable to mitigate confrontation and stress. Their research was done among the ethnically diverse employees of the accommodations of Northern-Ireland. They add that the main motivations of foreign employees are to gain experiences and to strengthen their language knowledge, though the employers are obliged to help their integration. Another study analysed the motivations of those Polish foreign workers who work in tourism in the United Kingdom. The results showed that a positive motivation is the liveable environment while the negative ones included discrimination, low wages, the behaviour of management and the physically hard work (Janta & Ladkin, 2009, Janta et al., 2011). It is quite obvious that keeping the rate of wages low have adverse effects on the opportunities of local people in the labour market. A for-profit tourism service provider would definitely employ the cheaper foreign labour force especially if their qualifications are high. A Norwegian study focused on the conditions of employees thus revealing those deficiencies which prove the nihilist behaviour of employers. During the focus group interviews it turned out that the remarks of employees did not reach the adequate person. The communication between the management and the employees did not work at all at the studied accommodation service providers, moreover the situation was not clear regarding the employment contracts (Onsøyen et al. 2009). There are no data on the number of illegal workers or workers in grey economy regarding tourism and the international organisations only have estimations. Most Hungarian literature focuses on the employees

of catering, but we should also mention the books, notes written by tourism teachers in which the employees are present as tourism resources (Dávid 2007, 120). The labour market of Hungarian tourism struggle with human resource deficiency for years now, which is leading news in the media at the beginning of the summer season, and especially in the destinations linked to Lake Balaton. The aim of dual education, namely the practice oriented education, was to improve professional competencies and to encourage students towards shortage jobs like cook or waiter. However, the results have not yet been conspicuous and the tourism sector is quite sceptic about it.

1.2. Statistical data

According to the WTTC the number of direct employees in tourism sector is around 100 million and this number will increase in the next decade (WTTC 2018). The International Labour Organization (ILO 2015) estimated the global number of foreign workers at 150.3 million in 2013 from which 106.8 million (71.1%) was working within the service industry. In the case of middle income countries, it estimates a moderate increase in the number of employees within the accommodation and catering sectors (ILO 2018, 32) but at the same time it records a new problem which results in the increase of average age of employees. The highly qualified and young/younger human resources are much more mobile, thus the migration of human resource towards developed countries will characterise this cohort. Nowadays the internationalisation of a given sector is not surprising at all. Just think of those who leave their home country with the purpose of study or training.

The biggest problems of employees working in the tourism sector are present in the Asian and African areas, which include exploitation, forced sexual services or child labour. In Europe such problems are not so considerable but should not be neglected. Armstrong (2016) raised the attention to modern time slavery appearing in the tourism sector of the United Kingdom. According to the publication of the Hungarian Tourism Agency (MTÜ, 2017) the number of direct employees in the tourism sector was 350,000 in 2016, 9.1% of workplaces were generated by tourism. Summing all the direct and indirect effects it gave 12% of national employment rate. In December 2017 the number of hotel rooms was 55,591 nationally.

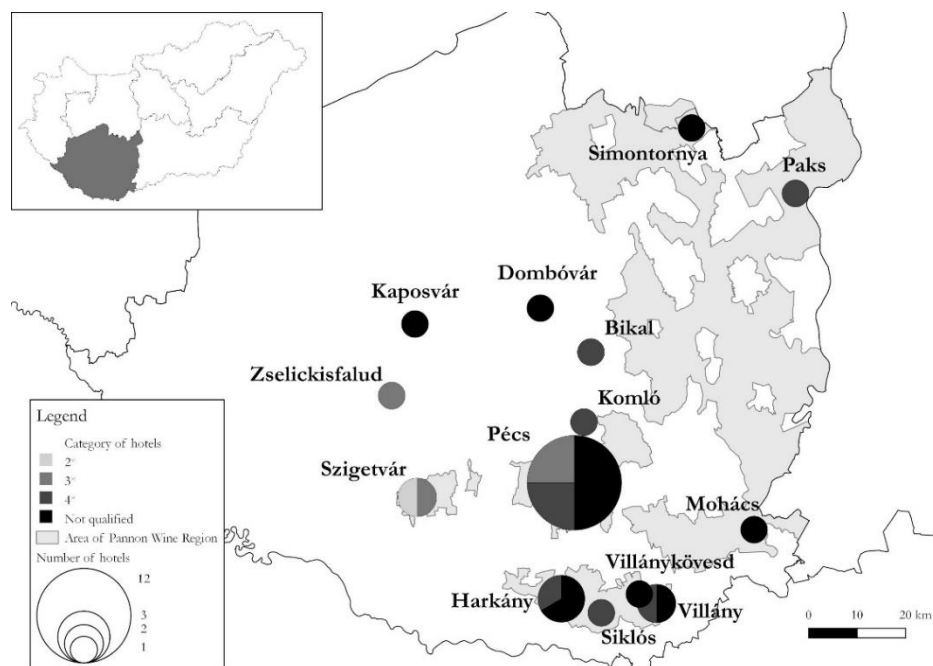
1.3. Methodology

The article is methodologically based on secondary research in addition to primary research. We made structured deep interviews with the managers of several Hungarian hotels with 3 and 4 star qualification. In order to explore the aspects of corporate social responsibility we have sent a structured questionnaire to the three and four star hotels within the South Transdanubian region of the Hungarian Hotel and Restaurant Association. The questionnaire was available online and in paper format as well, however the percentage of respondents was very low (10/30). We elaborated the results of our survey in six subsections.

2. TAKING RESPONSIBILITY IN THE HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT OF THE SOUTH-TRANSDANUBIAN REGION OF MSZÉSZ (HUNGARIAN HOTEL AND RESTAURANT ASSOCIATION)

The Hungarian Hotel and Restaurant Association, henceforth MSZÉSZ, is a determining professional organisation of Hungarian tourism and catering. The number of its membership exceeds 500, including more than 400 hotels, 36,000 hotel rooms (60% of the Hungarian hotel capacity), 7 chain hotels, 30 individual restaurants and other joint members. In the South-Transdanubian region 30 hotels belong to the Regional MSZÉSZ (Figure 1.).

Figure 1: Members of Hungarian Hotel and Restaurant Association in the South-Transdanubian region



Source: hah.hu & own data collection

2.1. Human resource management in the MSZÉSZ tenders

MSZÉSZ annually announces a competition for the title of “Hotel of the Year”. One of its criteria includes the activities related to taking responsibility. The Association collects the best practices in several topics from the submitted materials of the hotels, and they release them on their website. From the documents uploaded we can observe the changes in best practices regarding human resources from 2013 (Table 2.). In 2015 and 2016 besides the “Hotel of the Year” award, some hotels were recognised in the category of “Best staff politics”.

Table 2: **Human resource management best practise from the collection of MSZÉSZ**

Year	Human resource management
2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • makeup and dressing counselling • Spanish, Mandarin language course • own football team • employing disabled person • regular employee contentment survey
2014	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • employee of the year can spend 2-3 days in a domestic or foreign health/wellness hotel • in case of fulfilling the object purposed monthly by sectors (FO, Housekeeping) collective premium is given • team building • colleagues can use the wellness and health facilities once a week • Employee Olympics • OPPOSITE DAY: annually a day when the employees do the employers job and vice versa • annual opinion poll among employees • “Employee Assistance Programs” – legal, life style, financial, family affairs, stress handling consultations, which can be resorted by the employees in the 24 hours of a day. • all employees are offered to occupy two fields of work from which one is dealing with the guests • education (3 levels: qualified, expert, leader, in case of a successful exam they mean + 5%, + 10%, + 7% raise in salary) • after entering every new employee spends a night in the hotel, writes a written opinion and consults with the director of the hotel
2015 “good working environment”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • free meals for the staff and free coffee during the day • opportunity to take part in language and other trainings • the employee of the month can spend a weekend in the partner hotel of the firm
2016 “How to keep the employees?”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • all employees have the opportunity to spend one night in the hotel with their partner • all the increment from the value added tax of catering will be spent on wage increase • employees can apply a 20-90% subsidy for self-education • <i>they assess the stress level and organise wellbeing programmes</i> • <i>employees are allowed to work flexibly and in the cases of some occupation the distance work</i> • <i>internal training of employees</i>

Source: <http://www.hah.hu/sikertortenetek/best-practice>

It is quite meaningful that in 2016 the question of human resource management got the title of “How to keep the employees?” in these documents. Unfortunately, the application in 2017 was not successful. The Association reported that the number of applicants was so low that they were unable to award the title. Searching for the reasons for this disinterest it turned out that besides having qualifications regarding the prestige of the title, submitting the application brings so much extra administration for the hotels that they do not want to burden their staff with it.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION OF SURVEY AND INTERVIEW RESEARCH

18 questions of our structured questionnaire were related to the topics of human resource management. With open questions (8) we tried to get such information in which the difference of hotels can have a role. Such as, what kind of problems does it face during its operation, what are the challenges it should solve regarding the human resource or if it has got problems with keeping the employees and how it tries to solve them. We got 10 answers online and one personally.

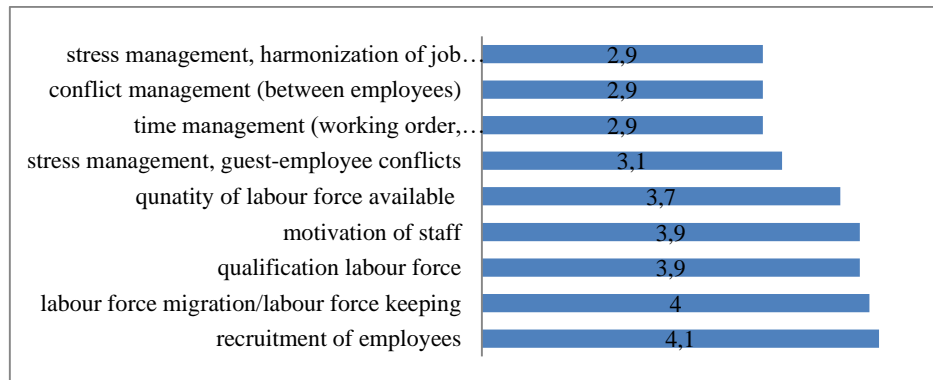
3.1. General characteristics of hotel employment in South-Transdanubia

The questionnaire was filled out by 30% (10 hotels) of the South-Transdanubian members of MSZÉSZ. The respondents included five 3 starred, four 4 starred and one not ranked hotels. The average number of rooms in the hotels concerned is 38, the biggest hotel has got 81, while the smallest has got 12 rooms. The average number of beds is 81, there are 159 beds in the hotel with the biggest capacity and 27 in the smallest hotel. The respondent hotels employ 22 persons on the average, in the biggest the number of employees is 40 and in the smallest 5, while the average number of casual employees is 4. The positions concerned in this casual employment include: housekeeping (90%), front desk (30%), waiter and bartender (50%) and kitchen support staff (50%). According to the results of the questionnaire we can state that open-ended employment is more typical as most of the employees have this type of contract. Only 30% of the hotels employ workers with fixed-term contract, which means that only 1-2 persons are concerned. The hotels questioned mostly employ workers from the active age population between the ages of 26-45. There were no persons of retiring age (65 and over) employed. 50% of the MSZÉSZ members of South-Transdanubian hotels have no employees responsible for marketing communication and economic manager, 60% of them have no HR manager, while 80-80% does not own sommelier and bellboy. Those belonging to the young age group, under the age of 25 are usually employed in front desk (50%). 30% of the hotels questioned employ physically disabled and persons with other disabilities. 25% stated they do not refuse to employ such persons in the future. They are mostly willing to employ persons with other disabilities and least willing to employ persons with visual or hearing impairment. The employees of the hotels arrive from a 30 km distance in average and all of them come from the county from a maximum distance of 30-40 kilometres. 70% of the hotels concerned do not provide accommodation for their employees, 20% of the hotels provide and 10% support their employees in a different way. The employees can resort to catering in 40% of the hotels and lodging is available only in 30% of the hotels.

3.2. Challenges of hotel management

In two questions we also asked the hotel management to describe the challenges and problems the hotels face. One was an open-ended question in which the management summarised their daily challenges they meet during their work. According to the answers and the regional meeting of the MSZÉSZ, held on the 27th of February, most of the South-Transdanubian hotels struggle with the shortage of labour force. In a closed-ended question we asked the hotel management to evaluate the strength of the mentioned problems on a scale from 1 to 5, where 5 is the strongest and 1 is the least strong. The answers of the two questions are consistent in several parts. Most hotel management reported the shortage of labour force as the biggest problem, and not only in the sense of quantity but also in quality, thus the level of their qualification. 50% of the hotels questioned are highly affected (5 on scale) by the migration of labour force, on average they rated this problem with 4 on the scale. They rated the magnitude of problems regarding the quantity of labour force by 3.7 points, while the problems arising from the lack of proper qualification level by 3.9 points. In the South-Transdanubian sector these problems now become the everyday struggle of hotel managements. This shortage of labour force also creates internal tensions which are now moderately strong, but in the long run their multiplier effect will result in further problems such as the overburden of employees, overtimes, holidays, problems of organising shifts, anxious and deconcentrated colleagues, wage pressures. Another problem is the fluctuation of labour force which affects mainly those positions which were mentioned above, thus housekeeping (40%); front desk (60%), chef, cook, kitchen boy (50%), waiter and bartender (70%) and kitchen support staff (40%). The hardship to motivate the colleagues got 3.9 points, while the problems of recruiting labour force got much more, 4.1 points. Thus we can see that to fill the available positions is as hard as to keep and motivate the existing labour force. 40 % of the hotels emphasised that not only the quantity of labour force means a problem, but also to find the qualified, skilful and experienced workers. The possible solutions could be, at least according to the answers, the decrease of wage tensions or the dual education, though many of the hotels doubt it. Some hotels highlighted that this Y generation have completely different motivation than the earlier, "loyal" employees, therefore it is hard to keep them. They change their job more quickly, they are continuously searching for new challenges and they are not so loyal to their employers. Besides these, many continue their career abroad, which is not only important regarding the migration of labour force, but also because it raises the question of training the labour force. Is it worth to train the employee to one of the positions if the employee leaves within 2-3 months and invests it elsewhere? This costs the employer money and time and a burden on the hotel, not to talk about the returning problems of recruiting new employees. The question of time management, conflict management between employees, the management of stress resulting from the conflicts of job and private life, guests and workers were rated as moderate (3 points) problems (Figure 2).

Figure 2: **Challenges of hotel management**



3.3. Causes of labour force problems of hotels and the possible solutions

According to the answers of hotel managers there are complex causes behind these problems. The managers admit that they cannot compete with the wages abroad (mainly the German and Austrian wages), but many highlighted that not definitely the high wages would keep the labour force at home. They claim it is a sectoral problem as the opinions on certain positions of the hotels recently have deteriorated. The shortage of qualified workers is also a problem especially in the South-Transdanubian region. So the quantity of qualified labour force is low, moreover, many of the qualified workers make their fortune abroad. Besides these, commuting from more than 40-50 kilometres is not solved, travelling with own car would be too expensive, while in almost all counties, public transportation is not ideal for daily commuting. The internal operation processes, the lack of opportunity to improve and to be appointed are such factors which are not motivating for the Y generation and do not mean commitment for them in the long run. The respondents agree that to solve these problems is very difficult and they feel it is more and more impossible. However most of them mentioned the personal motivation, strengthening the commitment to workplace, securing optimal and flexible working conditions, positive attitude from the employers, shaping a good, intimate atmosphere, running flexible working hours, rising of wages and other allowances as solutions. It is interesting that in 50% of the answers they mention the securing of a positive, friendly environment and management ready for compromises.

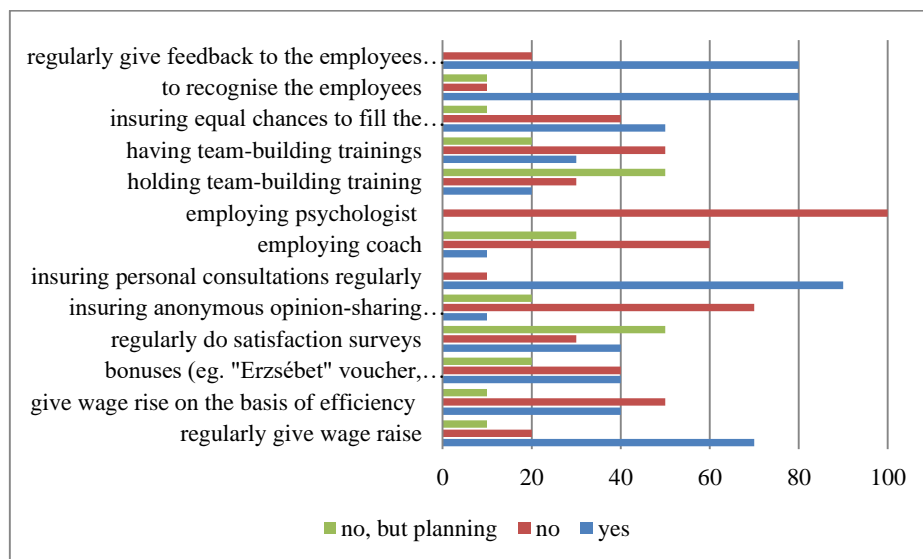
3.4. Strengthening the loyalty of employees

The answers of the above explained question can be associated with the closed-ended question in which we asked the managers to mark those factors from our list which they apply or are planning to apply in the future to strengthen the loyalty of their employees. The answers clearly demonstrate how important the so-called soft factors are, which help to develop a friendly and intimate atmosphere. Such factors include recognitions and regular feedbacks regarding their work. These factors are usually typical in a multinational environment but their importance show up in this sector as well. Besides this it is important to highlight that 90% of the managers questioned insures personal

consultation to the employees, which was not so regular and recognised earlier. But today it is important to put an emphasis on this activity, within the work of hotel managers, in order to keep the confidence of employees. At the same time, however, this puts an extra burden on the managers. To solve this problem 10% of the hotels employ, while 30% are planning to employ coaches, experts focusing on the inner development of employees, thus they ease the burden on the managers. None of the hotels employ psychologist and they do not plan to employ. Only 10% of the hotels ensure opinion-sharing opportunity and 20% of the hotels are planning. More important is that 20% of them regularly do satisfaction surveys and 50% are planning to introduce it to recognise the needs and experiences of employees. During the conversations with the managers it turned out that it is more and more established custom to make termination interview during which they try to find out the reasons behind the leaving of the employee and to recognise other recurrent problems in the operation of the hotels, behind the individual motivations of employees. In this way these problems can be solved either in short or long term.

50% of the hotels insure equal chances in wages for the employees of the given positions, 10% are planning to reconsider the wages, 70% regularly raise the wages of employees and 40% give wages after efficiency. 40% hotels questioned give and 40% of them do not give bonuses to its employees, while 10% are planning to introduce bonuses. Nowadays the so-called teambuilding trainings are very popular especially in the case of multinational environment. 20% of the respondents organise such trainings within their own circles while 30% keep it outside their borders. It is interesting that in the case of the latter one the managers do not see the potential so it is not likely that this type of teambuilding training will strengthen. At the same time the previous one is likely to be introduced in 50% of the hotels. The reason behind is that this type of training is more time and cost effective. Their popularity is the result of the demands of employees and the manager practice especially in an unstable environment (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Strengthening the loyalty of employees



3.5. Training of employees

Most of the employers support the training of their employees in a given field. The most popular trainings are vocational (70%), problem management (40%) and self-improvement (40%) trainings. This also proves that most of the hotels try to keep their employees with the development of “soft”, humane factors, while the vocational trainings are necessary for the business and individual development. The least supported trainings are those which deal with the fields of marketing and economy. It is likely that in this situation the hotels would already like to work with highly qualified employees and in this case they do not need new trainings but rather vocational trainings. The results in the case of language and computing are mixed, the hotels support both the language (30%) and ICT (40%) trainings. However, in the case of language trainings 40% of the hotels would like to improve.

3.6. Recruitment of employees

The palette of channels used to recruit employees is quite wide according to the answers. We enlisted more known channels in a closed-ended question and also asked the managers to evaluate their efficiency in a scale from 1 to 5 if they had ever used a given channel. The least used channels include:

- LinkedIn, job centre, job fair, online (vocational) press.

Moderately used and moderately useful channels include:

- vocational training institutes, general news pages, press (printed, vocational).

Moderately used and effective channels include:

- own website.

Channels used by most of the hotels (90%) include (in the order of their efficiency):

- elaboration of directly handed CVs (3.6), online job portals (3.5), social media (3.4), recommendation (3.2).

According to this it can be seen that either the personal “presence”, recommendation or the CV are very important parts of tourism and catering, but at the same time the importance of social media and online portals is obvious.

4. CONCLUSIONS

In our literature review we tried to give an overview on the conclusions of different studies which dealt with the employees working in the tourism sector. According to this we can agree that from an employee point of view the corporate social responsibility of the tourism service providers is often doubtful. The reasons behind not only include the unequal treatment of foreign employees but also results of its negative local effects.

Service providers have different methods to keep their workforce. On the one hand, their efforts are made for creating optimum working conditions; on the other hand, recognising that they face a new, differently socialised generation of employees, their goal is to increase their individual satisfaction. The latter also means in many cases that the employer has an active role in employee conflict management, even with regard to their social interactions. Another problem is that, because of the changed motivational culture of the workers, responsible tourist service providers try in vain to hire employees from a local job market if they are not available. Therefore, they are forced to extend the geographical boundaries for recruiting labour. The competitiveness of tourism service providers is influenced by the supply of permanent and high quality services, which is increasingly difficult to provide due to the fluctuation of qualified human resource.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This publication/research has been supported by the European Union and Hungary and co-financed by the European Social Fund through the project EFOP-3.6.2-16-2017-00017, titled "Sustainable, intelligent and inclusive regional and city models". Special thanks to Ferenc Schmidt, chair of the South-Transdanubian Region of the MSZÉSZ, for helping in the communication of the research.

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