

MODELING THE TOURISM SPECIALIST COMPETENCIES. NEW SKILLS AGENDA FOR EUROPE. CASE STUDY OF LITHUANIAN TOURISM SECTOR

Alina Katunian
Lina Zirnele

Abstract

Tourism belongs to the service industry, where the main value is created by the human resources of the company, where the key factor is the skills and competencies of the employees. In the fast-changing tourism market the demand for the skills and competencies is changing together with the market, what as well affects the structure of the occupation and the professions in the market. The Higher Education Institutions, providing the tourism related study programmes, shall be aware of the mentioned changes and react to the changes in the proper way. In 2016 the European Commission adopted The New Skills Agenda which was used to bridge the gap between the skills people are taught and those needed in the service sector. Communication, alongside with other competences, is considered to be one of the most important competence for an employee in the Tourism sector. The problem investigated in the paper is the mismatch between the skills people are taught and the skills needed in the tourism sector.

Aim – To investigate the assumptions of skills and competencies in the tourism sector.

Methodology – Interviewing the 52 representatives of the Lithuanian TO, TA, TIC, analyzing the demand changes regarding the skills in the Lithuanian tourism market and the occupation. Analysis of the statistical data, legal acts and scientific literature.

Keywords Skills, Competencies, Tourism Market, HEI

INTRODUCTION

While Economy is transforming, concept of an employee as the most important asset of an organisation is growing. The new role of human resources is to adopt and predict the changes. The modern economy calls for a very wide range of skills. New and emerging industry sectors may require skills that are not even taught yet (European Commission).

This article analyses the assumptions of competencies and skills in the tourism sector, New Skills Agenda for Europe in the context of tourism, HEI providing the degree in tourism, the Lithuanian case.

1. COMPETENCIES AND SKILLS IN THE TOURISM SECTOR

Tourism can be defined as a fast-growing and a fast-changing sector. International tourist arrivals grew by a remarkable 7% in 2017 to reach a total of 1,322 million, according to the preliminary full-year results reported in the UNWTO World Tourism Barometer. Together with the growth of the tourism sector, the demand of the competent and high-

skilled workforce is growing. According to McClelland, competencies possessed by employees consist of knowledge, skills, abilities and personal characteristics required for adequate job performance (Ferris, Rowland, & Buckley, 1990). Such authors as Dubois, Rothwell, Sajkiewicz, Nickson discuss the meaning and the structure of the competency. Competencies can be defined as the tools used by employees in a variety of ways to perform particular tasks or jobs. Competencies consist of: knowledge (used in job) and skills, as well as more abstract types of competencies – patience, persistence, flexibility, self-confidence (Dubois & Rothwell, 2008, p. 38). Such authors as Sienkiewicz, Jawor-Joniewicz, Sajkiewicz, Trawińska-Konador, Podwójcic suggest the two main approaches to define competencies:

- employee-oriented approach,
- job-oriented approach.

The term competency in the human resources management context was first analysed in the publication of Richard Boyatzis study, “The Competent Manager” (1982). Boyatzis described competency as “an underlying characteristic of a person in that it may be a motive, trait, or skill, an aspect of one’s self-image or a social role or body of knowledge that one uses which results in effective and/or superior performance in a job”. (O’Reilly, 2015). The approach adopted in the UK in the early 1990’s was more work-orientated, where competence relates to the ability to carry out a specific task via a predetermined sequence of steps (O’Reilly, 2015). Analyzing competency approaches from the tourism sector perspective it is obvious that both approaches are important. First of all, tourism and hospitality belong to the service industry, which is completely opposite to that of product manufacturing in terms of service delivery. Secondly, services have four distinguishing characteristic features; intangibility, inseparability, variability and perishability (Kotler et. al. 2012). According to Nickson (2007) various problems characteristic to the tourism sector can be mentioned in the context of competencies and skills: poor status of professionalism, problems in recruiting skills, employees without area related to education or without education at all, low motivation, poor understanding of the sector, lack of intercultural competence, lack of knowledge of foreign languages etc. Problems related to the competencies in the multidimensional tourism sector can be linked to the multidimensional nature of the tourism sector. The diversity of jobs in travel, tourism and hospitality can be illustrated in the range of people involved. A person buying a package holiday is interacting with: a travel agency, an insurance company, ground transport, airport services, airlines, local ground transportations, accommodation, tour services at the destination, service providers etc. (Baum, 1997). Tourism as a sector consists of different sub-sectors, providing different services, obviously with a different range of requirements regarding skills of the employees. However, required skills depend not only on the specifications of the sub-sector, but also on the tendencies in the tourism market, which can be influenced by the changes in the tourists’ profile (language, intercultural differences), technological solutions meeting the needs of the tourists, new types of the tourism packages, etc. Reacting to the mentioned tendencies, the European Commission is initiating the process reducing the mismatch between the skills people are taught and the skills needed by the service sector.

2. NEW SKILLS AGENDA FOR EUROPE

European Commission declares, “Skills are a pathway to employability and prosperity. (...) In a fast-changing global economy, skills will to a great extent determine competitiveness and the capacity to drive innovation.” (<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52016DC0381>). Seeking to reduce the mismatch between the skills people are taught and the skills needed by the service sector and manufacturing industry, on 10 June 2016 the European Commission adopted the New Skills Agenda for Europe. One of the main strands of the Agenda is to make skills and qualifications more visible and comparable. In the case of tourism as a global fast changing sector, it is crucial to analyse the main tendencies in the required skills in the education of the tourism specialists and if they fit the reality of the market.

Tourism can be described as one of the key forces of the global and the EU economy, approx. 2.3 million enterprises belong to the sector, and 9.7 million jobs are created. (Eurostat.org) Tourism is a multidimensional sector, which consists of different subsectors, where different and similar skills and competencies are required.

Requirements regarding the skills of the employees in the mentioned context are changing, therefore the educational institutions providing the degree in tourism are changing / should change as well.

3. CASE STUDY OF LITHUNIAN TOURISM MARKET IN THE CONTEXT OF OCCUPATION

Typically, tourism sector in Lithuania consists of: tour operators (TO) and travel agencies (TA), tourist information centers (TIC), transportation service providers, hospitality services providers, culture, sports and leisure services providers. According to Lithuanian Statistics Department there were 349 tourism companies and 57 tourism information centers in Lithuania in 2016. 52 respondents were investigated in this research: representatives (mainly CEO and Heads of the HR departments) of 27 tour operators, 22 travel agencies and 3 tourism information centers. In 2015, 46.2 thousand people were employed in the Lithuanian tourism market, and the number was growing. 3.3 thousand people were employed in TO, TA and TIC in 2015. The main reason for this growth can be the growing tourist flows in Lithuania: 2.062 million tourists visited Lithuania in 2014, 2.071 million in 2015, and 2.295 million in 2016 (Lithuanian Tourism Department).

3.1. Skills required and changes in the occupation and professions

Competencies are the knowledge used at work, experience, abilities and aptitudes to work in a team, specific skills required at work, working etiquette and impeccable manners. (Sajkiewicz, 2002, p. 30) Occupational classification is another commonly used method of skills measurement. (Felstead et. al., 2007) The Classification of Occupations in Lithuania is a tool for grouping data on occupations, which helps to overview and analyze the Lithuanian labor market and compare the data received internationally. The Classification has an internationally recognized profession, in which

the profession is related to the work done by one person. The Lithuanian Classification of Occupations is the national version of the International Standard Classification of Occupations ISCO. The Lithuanian Classification of Occupations is created according to the International Standard Classification of Occupations 2008 (ISCO-08) (Lithuanian Classification of Occupations).

Table 1: Comparison of Occupations in Tourism (TA, TO, TIC)

Occupations regarding the ESCO:	Occupations regarding the Lithuanian Classification of Occupation and Classification of Economic Activities:
Tourism policy director Tourism product manager Travel and tourism vocational teacher Tourism contract negotiator Destination manager Travel agency manager Tour organiser Tour operator's manager Travel consultant Travel consultants and clerks	Travel agent Tourism instructor Travel consultant Trip organizer Travel Tickets Officer Travel agency officer Tour leader Guide Representative of the Travel Agency Travel, Tourism and Leisure Services Teacher Tourism Information Consultant

Source (prepared by authors)

Taking into consideration that professions represented in the Lithuanian Classification of Occupations and Classification of Economic Activities were updated in 2008, the mismatch between the current professions in the market and the declared ones in the mentioned classifications, is more than possible. The data, presented in ESCO – the multilingual classification of European Skills, Competences, Qualifications and occupations is more relevant to the changes in the market.

Table 2: Present Occupations in the Lithuanian Tourism Market (TA, TO, TIC)

Occupations regarding the Lithuanian Classification of Occupation and Classification of Economic Activities:	Acceptable	Non-acceptable
Travel agent	91%	
Tourism instructor		100%
Travel consultant	25%	
Trip organizer	31%	
Travel Tickets Officer		100%
Travel agency officer		100%
Tour leader	47%	
Guide	72%	
Representative of the Travel Agency	15%	
Travel, Tourism and Leisure Services Teacher		100%
Tourism Information Consultant	73%	

Source (prepared by authors)

Majority of the respondents declared that such occupations as Tourism Instructor, Travel Ticket Officer, Travel Agency Officer and Travel, Tourism and Leisure Services Teacher are not any more applicable in the activities of the organization. Some of the functions of these positions were transferred to different positions. Mostly supported occupations were: Travel agent, Travel consultant, Trip organizer, Tour Leader, Guide. It was explained by the respondents, that the decrease in the number of occupations is related to the extension of the position of Travel Agent. Respondents also stated, that there is a growing tendency of creating the positions of tourism projects managers and destination managers who are responsible for the specific tourism product and destination.

Occupations stated by the Lithuanian Classification of Occupation and Classification of Economic Activities should be developed, which is under the action in 2018 up to the New Skills Agenda for Europe.

An employee should possess specific skills in order to implement the tasks related to the occupation. In the context of changes in tourism, the sector related skills can be highlighted.

Table 3: Skills required in the tourism sector

Skills Required in the Tourism Sector	
Communication	Ability not only to collect information about the tourism destination and tourism services and products, but also the ability to represent the gathered information in the interesting way.
Additional competences	The more additional competencies a tourist specialist has, the more valuable employee he is, who can be assigned for additional tasks. For example, Travel Manager can provide tour guiding services, if necessary.
Knowledge of tourism reservation systems	More and more tour operators sell their services online, respectively, tour operators and travel agents work with reservation systems such as Amadeus, GoGlobal, etc., every day.
Knowledge of foreign languages	The need for the specific foreign language depends on the target market the company is working with. The most demanded foreign languages in the Lithuanian Tourism market are: Russian, English, Polish, German, Spanish, Scandinavian languages, Asian languages. The more languages an employee knows - the better.
Basics of e-marketing	As the number of internet users is growing rapidly all over the world, there is a growing demand for advertising and sales of tourism services in this area. An online marketer-skilled tourism specialist can help a tourism company achieve better results.

Source (prepared by authors)

Communication in the broader context - the ability to represent the gathered information, the ability to communicate in foreign languages respecting the cultural differences, is treated as one the most important competence. A lot of attention is also paid for the technological advancement, basically working with the reservations systems and the usage of social media tools.

3.2. HEI

The bridging function between the sector and the employee often belongs to the higher education institutions. For the HEI preparing tourism specialists it is important not only to keep track of changes in the tourism sector but also to respond to these changes.

Table 4: **Tourism Related Study Programmes in Lithuania**
 (*not all HEI are represented)

University	Study Programme	University of Applied Sciences UAS	Study Programme
Klaipėda University	Recreations and tourism	Vilniaus kolegija/ University of Applied Sciences	Tourism Management and Hospitality Management
Mykolas Romeris University	Tourism Management and the Heritage	Kauno kolegija / University of Applied Sciences	Tourism and Hotel Management
European Humanities University	Cultural Heritage and Tourism	Klaipėda State University of Applied Sciences	Tourism Administration
Lithuanian Sports University	Sport recreation and tourism	Utenos kolegija / University of Applied Sciences	Tourism and Hotel Administration
Vytautas Magnus University	Cultural Heritage and Tourism	International School of Law and Business	Tourism and Hotel Business

Source (prepared by authors)

Tourism related study programmes often are divided into two main groups: tourism and hospitality. The Tourism management study programme by the nature is broader, focused on managerial skills for creating and selling the tourism products. Analyzing the Lithuanian HEI through the prism of tourism, the following tendencies are noticeable: academic universities, compared to the universities of applied sciences are less focused on the tourism business and more focused on the recreation, culture and heritage, sports; Universities of Applied Sciences offering the wider character study programmes are more focused on the tourism business.

CONCLUSIONS

The tourism sector is constantly growing and changing, therefore, there is a great need for high-skilled and competent work force. Employee-oriented and job-oriented approaches are used to define competences and they are both relevant for the Tourism sector.

In 2016 the European Commission adopted The New Skills Agenda which was used to bridge the gap between the skills people are taught and those needed in the service sector. The required skills are changing, therefore, the HEI preparing tourism specialists should respond to these changes.

The number of employees in the Lithuanian service sector is constantly growing along with the growing tourist flows. The respondents of the research presented in this paper representing Lithuanian tour operators, travel agencies and tourism information centers stated that there is a tendency of creating the positions of tourism projects managers and destination managers.

Communication, alongside with other competences, is considered to be one of the most important competence for an employee in the Tourism sector. The Higher Education Institutions perform the bridging function between the sector and the employee, therefore HEI should respond to the changes in the sector. Both academic universities and universities of applied sciences offer tourism related study programmes, whereas the latter offer the wider character of study programmes which are more focused on the tourism business.

REFERENCES

- Baum, T. (1997), "Making or breaking the tourist experience: the role of human resource management", in C. Ryan (ed.) *The Tourist Experience: A New Introduction* in Nickson, D. (2007) "Human Resource Management for the Hospitality and Tourism Industries", Elsevier.
- Classification of Economic Activities, viewed on 2 February 2018: <https://osp.stat.gov.lt/600>
- Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee of the Regions a New Skills Agenda for Europe, viewed 5 January 2018: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52016DC0381>
- Dubois, D. D., & Rothwell, W. J. (2000), *The competency toolkit, 1*. Amherst, MA: HRD Press Inc.
- Dubois, D. D., & Rothwell, W. J. (2008), *Zarządzanie zasobami ludzkimi oparte na kompetencjach*. Gliwice: Wydawnictwo Helion.
- European Commission, "New Skills Agenda: A Blueprint for Sectoral Cooperation on Skills" viewed 23 February 2018: http://ec.europa.eu/growth/content/new-skills-agenda-blueprint-sectoral-cooperation-skills-1_en
- Felstead, A., Gallie, D., Green, F., Zhou, Y., (2007), "Skills at work, 1986 to 2006" ESRC, viewed 15 February 2018: <http://orca.cf.ac.uk/68042/1/Skills%20at%20Work,%201986%20to%202006.pdf>
- Ferris G. R., Rowland K. M., & Buckley R. M. (Ed.) (1990), "Human Resources Management: Perspectives and Issue", in Ł. Sienkiewicz, A. Jawor-Joniewicz, B. Sajkiewicz, K. Trawińska-Konador, K. Podwójcic, "Competence Based Model". (2014).
- Lithuanian State Tourism Department review, viewed on 15 February 2018: <http://www.tourism.lt/lt/turizmo-turizmo-bukles-trumpos-apzvalgos>
- Lithuanian Classification of Occupation, viewed 10 February 2018: <http://www.profesijuklasifikatorius.lt/?q=lt/node/13441>
- Makowski, K. (Ed.). (2014), *Zarządzanie pracownikami. Instrumenty polityki personalnej*. Warszawa: Poltext. 2002 in Ł. Sienkiewicz, A. Jawor-Joniewicz, B. Sajkiewicz, K. Trawińska-Konador, K. Podwójcic "Competence Based Model".
- Nickson, D., (2007), *Human Resource Management for the Hospitality and Tourism Industries*, Elsevier.
- Sajkiewicz, A. (2008), *Kompetencje menedżerów w organizacji uczącej się*. Warszawa: Difin. in Ł. Sienkiewicz, A. Jawor-Joniewicz, B. Sajkiewicz, K. Trawińska-Konador, K. Podwójcic "Competence Based Model" (2014).
- Sienkiewicz, Ł., Jawor-Joniewicz, A., Sajkiewicz B., Trawińska-Konador, K., Podwójcic, K. (2014), "Competence Based Model".
- Tourism statistics 2016 provided by Eurostat, viewed 1 March 2018: <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-catalogues/-/KS-02-15-874>

Tourism & Hospitality Industry 2018, Congress Proceedings, pp. 180-187
A. Katunian, L. Zirnele: MODELING THE TOURISM SPECIALIST COMPETENCIES. NEW SKILLS ...

UNWTO Barometer, viewed 18 February 2018:

http://cf.cdn.unwto.org/sites/all/files/pdf/unwto_barom18_01_january_excerpt_hr.pdf

WTTC Travel and Tourism Economic Impact 2017, viewed 2 March 2018:

https://www.slovenia.info/uploads/dokumenti/raziskave/europolcu2017_1.pdf

Alina Katunian, M.A., Head of the Tourism Department
Vilniaus kolegija / University of Applied Sciences
Faculty of Business Management
Tourism Department
Didlaukio str. 49, Vilnius, Lithuania
Phone: +37067597153
E-mail: a.katunian@vvf.viko.lt

Lina Zirnele, M.A., Lecturer
Vilniaus kolegija / University of Applied Sciences
Faculty of Business Management
Advertising and Communication Department
Didlaukio str. 49, Vilnius, Lithuania
Phone: +37067915555
E-mail: l.zirnele@vvf.viko.lt