

## **LOCAL TOURISM COMPETENCE CENTRES – THE ALTERNATIVE FOR THE IMPROVEMENT OF TOURISM PERSONNEL IN ROMANIA**

*Carmen Chasovschi, Heike Baehre, Carmen Nastase\**

### **Abstract**

*Since years, Romania is trying to find its way in achieving the development of tourism. Since years, the quality of human resources working in tourism was stressed as a major weakness. The present paper is the result of a common effort of researchers and professionals in tourism from Romania and Germany, who tried to imagine and to plan a local training and competence tourism centre in Suceava – as a pilot structure that could assure an increase the quality of tourism, through courses and hands-on programs delivered to the new or existing employees.*

*The conclusions presented hereby are only the beginning of a common effort keen to identify additional causes and solutions.*

**Keywords:** local tourism, vocational tourism, human resources, training in tourism.

**JEL Classification:** M12, L83, L84

### **1. General context and methodology**

First input in the identification of the need for such project was given by studies realized by GTZ<sup>1</sup> project in Romania: “Romania among the Eyes of German Tourism Operators”<sup>2</sup> and additional, by other sources.<sup>3</sup> In this research of GTZ, done yearly between 2004 – 2008, while the behavior of local people has been highly appreciated (hospitality, openness, ready to help a.o.), the quality of people working in tourism services (hotels, F&B a.o) was qualified as “weak” and “asking for improvement” / “need for improvement”.

This need was argued by all programmatic documents that were developed by different structures. The Masterplan for Tourism in Romania, developed in 2007 by W.T.O. – World Tourism Organization by the request of ANT – National Tourism

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\* Carmen Chasovschi is Assistant Professor, Faculty of Economic Sciences, “Stefan cel Mare” University of Suceava.

Heike Baehre is Professor at the Baltic College, Integron Institut Berlin.

Carmen Nastase is Assistant Professor, Faculty of Economic Sciences, “Stefan cel Mare” University of Suceava.

<sup>1</sup> GTZ – German Technical Cooperation Agency [www.gtz.ro](http://www.gtz.ro), is a program of German Government in Romania, financed by German Ministry for Cooperation, that had since 1997 through different activities, offered financial and technical support to tourism in Romania

<sup>2</sup> The extended version can be found on [www.forum-turism.com](http://www.forum-turism.com), presentation held by Carmen Chasovschi

<sup>3</sup> “Romania – Education policy note”, The World Bank 2007, <http://siteresources.worldbank.org>

Organization (actual tourism ministry). For this purpose, we try to /*We try for this reason* to analyze the quality of training in tourism field and to identify some alternatives in order to improve the existing situation.

The sequence of steps that we followed in developing a concept for improvement of vocational training in tourism was: identification of a tourism destination, relevant for Romania; in depth/thorough analysis of existing offer in tourism training – formal and informal; identification of strengths and weaknesses; formulation of action proposals; development of a theoretical framework for a tourism competence center – as infrastructure for tourism vocational training. We will briefly present in the following pages the result of this work. In the analysis, we had a comparative approach of the situation in Germany with respect to occupations and skills in tourism, and the list of core qualification in tourism and curricula recognized at EU level.<sup>4</sup>

## 2. Current situation of the formal and vocational tourism training in Suceava County

As basis for the analyze of current situation of formal and vocational tourism education in tourism we used two approaches: one – based on the documents referring to the national situation (especially Chapter 8, Masterplan for Tourism in Romania) and the second, the analysis of the locally situation / situation al local level, /in Suceava County.

The second one, more concrete, offered a much closer perspective, and was mainly based on interviews with representatives of County Council, municipality Suceava, Chamber of Commerce and Industry Suceava, Economic High-Schools in Suceava and Tourism Specialisation of Faculty of Economics and Public Administration from Suceava. We are presenting bellow the structured results of the accomplished research:

### **Graduates,**

of Secondary Schools (age 14/15)

1. get professional training at a 2-years-professional school (S.A.M.)
2. after 1 additional year at a High School they can enter the Diploma (A-level) classes for further 2 years
3. or 14/15-aged pupils go to High Schools (“Liceu”):
  - a) Economic High Schools
  - b) Tourism Classes
  - c) Other kinds of High Schools (“Licee”)
  - low or little/barrel real workingexperience
  - theoretical knowledge

<sup>4</sup> www.eu-eqt.de

**„Fresh“ University and Business College Graduates:**

- often speak fluently foreign languages
- international experience
- theoretical marketing and management knowledge
- high mobility to leave their (public) employers, DMOs ... or Romania
- low or little working experience

**People working in the field of tourism, but without a formal degree in tourism can visit:**

1. CNFPA adult education courses at a High School or a private training company (e.g. a 6-month-course for cooking, 720 h)
  2. seminars offered by private seminar providers/academies
  3. seminars financed by EU(EFS), but offered by providers without tourism experience
  4. seminars offered by tourism branch associations (like the Romanian Hotel and Restaurant Association, ANAT or others)
- Speak no, 1 or more foreign language(s)
  - No / with international experience
  - No/poor mobility

**People with a formal diploma or degree in tourism, but with working experience:**

- need of special tourism knowledge and service abilities

**People without a formal diploma or degree in tourism and without working experience in the fields of tourism / should be enabled to work in tourism (Re-Trainees)**

*Figure 1: Educational and professional training system in Romania*

**The current situation in education and further education in tourism can be described as follows:**

- High density and variety of tourism faculties in Romania: at least 27 listed tourism faculties;

- Good performance graduates use internships and work & travel programs abroad to leave Romania and go working abroad;
- Only (or mainly) theoretically based first professional education;
- Lack of practical experience orientation in first professional education (High Schools, College, Professional schools/SAM and University);
  - Teachers, professors and trainers do not have (enough) practical and up-to-date experience and knowledge;
  - Content and curricula don't fit requirements of the tourism labour market;
  - Mediated tourism knowledge is not up-to-date;
  - A lot of training facilities at professional schools were developed and modernized in the last 5 years, but even today there are not enough places/is not enough space in learning stations and practical training facilities;
  - Lack of intercultural behaviour and green-thinking (environment protection);
  - Lack of multi-language tourist guides and knowledge about Romania and the region.

**Problems of jobholders and small businesses in tourism, concerning the personnel:**

- Lack of service orientation of employees and managers;
- Lack of business and management skills of the middle and top management;
- Family businesses do not have (enough) tourism knowledge, customer orientation, management and marketing skills;
  - Lack of active selling and internet marketing skills;
  - House-keeping and room-services should be improved;
  - Accommodation design, furnishing and interior equipment are not up-to-date and not convenient;
  - Problem of part-time labour / seasonality / high rate of labour migration to Western Europe.

3. Tourism Competence Centre – is an alternative for a better “on going” education of the staff working in tourism?

Starting from the identified points mentioned in the previous part, we assume that at local level, where the offer of the private training structures in vocational training in tourism is almost inexistent, an alternative can be to create a **Tourism Competence Centre**. The Vision of such structure should be **focused firstly on education and training (lifelong learning)**, then – step by step – after a while, it should also become **responsible for audits and the development of service quality and quality management systems in the branch sectors of Romanian tourism**.

As objectives we can also mention:

- Evaluation of first and further education programs in Romania, fitting European standards [*European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) for these*

*qualifications and professions (modularization of educational and training offers from first education up to graduation by an university [according to EQAR (European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education)]])*

- Development of lifelong-learning-concepts
- Development and realization of intensive training programs for starters in tourism.

Target groups (participants in education programs) are specialists, skilled employees, managers, job starters in tourism, re-trainees in tourism administrative officers and clerks, starting their career in tourism administration.

Such institution should be:

- (politically) independent,
- but basically financed by a fix base amount by Suceava County Administration (from tourism taxes) and / or the Romanian government
- financed further by project funds of Bucovina DMO (including EU and government project funds),
  - funds from the tourism branch organizations,
  - and fees of the participants (seminar visitors),
  - donors and sponsors.

We are presenting in the next table the general framework for such a structure, on the concrete example of Suceava Region / Bucovina Destination.

***Idea framework / draft of a tourism competence centre***

Table 1

<b>Partners</b>	<b>Co-operation and function of the other professional education institutions</b>	<b>Graduation Institutions</b>	<b>Codified Rules</b> - <b>System of Permanent Training and Further Education</b>	<b>QIT® as a registered trade mark and the foundation for the further implementation of a Total Quality Management (TQM) System</b>
County Council Suceava And its CIT/TIC Economic High School “Dimitrie Cantemir” University Suceava DMO/APT Bucovina Chamber of trade and commerce <b>Supported by</b> Tourism Ministry of Romania	- Creating a network for a better quality in tourism education - Develop and get news-letters - Send trainers (for money) - Can co-operate in best-practice exchange and train-the-trainer-projects	- get more well-prepared applicants - can send trainers (for money) - can provide seminar facilities - improve their teaching qualifications - improve	• part and first step of a future total quality management system • declared by a special brand (word-picture brand) and • declared by an official	➤ First implemented as a model in Bucovina region it can be transferred to other <i>FAPT</i> Members through a Memorandum that describes the conditions ➤ Other institutions that want to implement or join the concept should pay a franchise fee

Board of member/branch organisations: - ANAT - FAPT / Federation of regional DMOs - FIHR - OPTBR - Romanian Convention Bureau - FPTR (private owners) - ADR Nord-Est	- Can provide training facilities (for rent) - Improve their practice-orientation and their reputation	their learning material - can get first-hand information about labour market and tourist projects (research funds) - students get better internships and jobs - better job-orientation of the graduates	certificate (which can hang in the restaurant and reception area) • vision: if the tourism is well-developed with a strong competition among the providers every employee / hotel owner/director has to visit a <b>QIT@-seminar every 3<sup>rd</sup> year</b> • it has to be assured that basic seminars and higher education seminars fit in a modular <b>ECTS</b> graduation system	➤ See for more information the introduction and implementation of Switzerland TQM by German state DMOs: <a href="http://www.servicequalitaet-deutschland.de">www.servicequalitaet-deutschland.de</a> , but used in the field of professional education. ➤ Later the QIT® can also be the “TQM-service and implementation organization” for the potential “Romanian tourism quality brand”.
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The institution needs furthermore a Charta and a decision about the placement and seat of the headquarters, a sustainable management organization, consisting of a scientific director, a chief of operations, a marketing organization (the 4 Ps of the marketing process): definition of the seminar and congress program, the certificates and courses, curricula, recognition of the courses and seminars according EU-credit point systems (**ECTS** and **EQAR**), placement /distribution, distance learning, pricing, communications.

### **Conclusions. Further tasks for a sustainable conception for the institution.**

According to the developed matrix of the educational content of the 18 most needed and CNFPA-certified qualifications, the Tourism Competence Centre should develop a curricula and a certification system which would make it possible, that someone can start with a first professional training and can later obtain a first or higher academic degree (through visiting/attending of other courses offered by the partners or by the Tourism Competence Centre of itself).

These different options should be further educed, discussed, and evaluated among specialists of the Romanian tourism administration and the Romanian industry.

Such a structure can increase the chances of tourism sector for real tourism professionals, and not only for people working in tourism without having proper qualifications, proper skills or proper behaviour. It is true that these kinds of problems are not specific only for Romania. For example, in Mexico, at the opposite side of the world, tourism educational and training institutions vary in quality too, is “mediocre, if not poor, programs are manned by people who have minimal educational qualification and little, if any, industry experience” (Jones, Tang; 2005).

The improvement of tourism education in Romania is a “must”, and the first step is to admit the existing problems and then to find ways of improvement.

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