

EERA: Enhancing Employability Skills for Tourism and Hospitality Industry Employees in Europe

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### **11 SES 11 A, Adults? Training and Promotion of Values for Integrated Societies**

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Chair: Ineta Luka

## Contribution

### **Enhancing Employability Skills for Tourism and Hospitality Industry Employees in Europe**

The twenty-first century has brought many challenges for people in all spheres. Addressing human and social consequences of an international financial crisis, meeting development goals, encouraging green growth, responding to climate change, ageing societies, the knowledge economy (*OECD*, 2012) are the key issues at the centre of international debate. This is also evident in the EU strategic priorities till 2020, where stress is laid on smart sustainable and inclusive growth (Europe 2020, 2010) and which are further elaborated in corresponding documents and reports on education Europe-wide, e.g., *ET 2020* (2009), *Quality and Relevance in HE* (2014), and in Latvia and various comprehensive studies worldwide, e.g., OECD study *Skills beyond School* (2014). All of them emphasize employability, high level employable transferable skills and the role of lifelong learning in enhancing their development.

Year 2015 has even been declared the European Year for Development. The motto of EYD2015, officially opened in Riga, on 16.01.2015., is "Our world, our dignity, our future" (EYD, 2015). This brings us to the issue of the significance of lifelong learning at all stages of life, including transition from formal learning into professional life.

Business environments are changing and to adapt to the new context employees have to engage in learning.

For employees this means a move from guaranteed lifelong employment to self-managed lifelong employability (Thijssen, et.al., 2008) which implies possessing knowledge and the skills to apply that knowledge in a multidisciplinary, team-oriented, dynamic environment and engaging in LLL (Berdrow, Evers, 2011).

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Various studies on employability skills reveal similar trends ? employers highly value skills related with employees? attitudes, communication, basic knowledge (Baxter, Young, 1982; Casner-Lotto, et.al., 2006; Ju, et.al., 2012). In ECER 2014, the author of the current paper collaborating with T.Pigozne analyzed the terms ?employability? and ?employment?, different concepts of employability skills, presented the results of research on employability skills of young people (Pigozne, Luka, 2014). The current study focuses on the specific needs of tourism and hospitality industry and development of employability skills for their employees.

The topicality of the study is underlined by the fact that tourism has turned into a key driver of socio-economic progress being one of the largest and fastest-growing economic sectors in the world. 1 in 11 jobs worldwide is connected with tourism (*WTO Highlights*, 2014).

The quality of tourism product/service lies in intangible elements, including interaction between employees and customers during the service encounter (Bailly, L  n  , 2014). Other relevant skills are occupation-specific skills, communication, team-working, self-management, creativity (*Learning while Working*, 2011).

Studies on employability skills for tourism specialists (Bagshaw, 1996; Emenheiser, et.al., 1998; Tesone, Ricci, 2006; Kwok, et.al., 2012) emphasize significance of communication, management, organizational, intercultural skills. To summarize, employees in tourism must be qualified with regard to professional, methodological, social and leadership competencies; in order to develop them, integrated approaches encompassing learning in natural environment should be applied (Zehrer, et.al., 2014). This points to the special role of languages in tourism where they are a primary tool for operating successfully. Language learning is not an isolated activity. Languages are learnt in professional setting and for interaction purposes. Language learning is not the aim but the means to become professional in the field. Hence, stakeholders? needs are significant.

The purpose of the current study is to analyze the industry needs and language teachers? perceptions on teaching languages for hospitality industry Europewide in order to create a course that would foster the development of tourism specialists? employability skills applying integrated language learning approach.

Such a course would enable hospitality industry employees to ease transitions to working life more effectively and have access to opportunities to develop their employability skills.

## Method

This study is conducted within Erasmus+ project ?Key Skills for European Union Hotel Staff? (Project No.2014-1-HR01-KA2014-007224; project period 2014-2016). Six countries (Latvia, Croatia, UK, Italy, Slovenia, Romania) are collaborating on the project addressing the specific objectives of Erasmus+ programme in the field of education and training: 1) to improve the level of key competences and skills (namely, employability skills and language competences), with particular regard to their relevance for the labour market (tourism and hospitality industry) and their contribution to a cohesive society (providing better cultural awareness and increased language competence); 2) improve language teaching/learning and promote EU's broad linguistic diversity. The project is targeted at developing professional language competence in six EU countries in 12 languages (EN, IT, HR, LV, SI, RO, HU, DE, FR, RU, ES, GR) and raise hospitality industry employees? intercultural awareness. This paper deals with the first project outcome ? comparative needs analysis report and designed curriculum for developing tourism and hospitality industry employees? employability skills, including language competence and raising employees? intercultural awareness. Exploratory research (pragmatism paradigm), applying mixed-method approach, quantitative and qualitative data analysis was conducted (Saunders, et.al., 2009; Collis, Hussey, 2009). The study comprises 2 handpicked

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samples created for research purposes: 1) the sample of all 85 language teachers of 5 partner institutions (18 from LV, 22 from HR, 15 from IT, 15 from RO, 15 from SI) and 2) 131 top level managers of hospitality enterprises from the 5 project countries (30 from LV, 34 from HR, 30 from IT, 7 from RO, 30 from SI) recognized as experts in their field, in whose enterprises students are having training. The needs analysis consists of: 1) individual country needs analysis in 5 project countries, 2) comparative needs analysis, based on which the curriculum is designed. The needs analysis comprised collecting and analysing the official country statistics on tourism (incoming, domestic), accommodation and catering sector (offer, employees), institutions providing tourism education, needs of the partners? institutions, a survey of language teachers (respondent completed) and a survey of hotel/restaurant managers (interviewee completed). The language teachers? survey included 14 5-point Likert scale, choice and open questions containing 4 parts: information about teachers, students, teaching approach and the course. The hotel/restaurant managers? survey included 21 similar questions about institution, employees, clients and respondent. Quantitative data were analysed applying SPSS software (descriptive and inferential statistics), qualitative data ? applying content analysis (Saunders, et.al., 2009).

### Expected Outcomes

Findings showed general trends and specific needs of each country. Language teachers admitted significance of all skills and competences indicated: reading (mean 4.3647), writing (4.3467), listening (4.5647), dialogical speaking (4.6353), monological speaking (3.6353), communication (4.7059) and presentation skills (4.3059), intercultural competences (4.1529), collaboration skills (4.1529), teamworking (4.2235), leadership (3.5059). Kruskal Wallis test confirmed significant differences among countries regarding monological speaking skills ( $p=0.007$ ) and leadership ( $p=0.026$ ), no differences regarding the language taught ( $p=0.054-0.946$ ) and teachers? work experience ( $p=0.065-0.918$ ). The countries have similar needs regarding English language competence, but different for other foreign languages. For example, teachers of Spanish show predominance of writing (100%) and reading skills (80%); French and Spanish teachers more recognize leadership necessity; French and English teachers argue their students need monological speaking skills less than other language skills. In qualitative part, teachers emphasised students? active involvement in different learning activities, students? independent studies, projects, dialogues, discussions, case studies. They mentioned that students? motivation to learn languages increases after training in the industry, especially if they have practised abroad. Thus, teachers often incorporate tasks of intercultural relevance in their lectures to create a more natural learning environment. Employers of accommodation/catering sector find all topics given significant for A2/B1 language course (means=2.6870-3.4656; modes=4.00/5.00); for B2/C1 English course modules ?Financial Management? (mean=1,9847) and ?Housekeeping? (mean=2,1756) have low significance. Considering all analysis, ?Housekeeping? is not included in curriculum. Concerning countries, significant differences were discovered: 18 variables out of 25  $p<0.05$ . Regarding C1 course, no difference was only for the module ?Hotel Front Office? ( $p=167$ ). Enterprise location (11 variables  $p<0.05$ ) and type (17 variables  $p<0.05$ ) partly influenced employers? opinion. International tourists (21 variables  $p<0.05$ ) significantly influenced employers? opinion. Communication frequency with foreigners not ( $p=0.077-0.818$ ). Based on the findings of the needs analysis a language learning course is created.

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