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Dr. oec., prof.**INNOVATION IN TOURISM EDUCATION DEVELOPMENT**

*Although much of the discussion on the permanent process of innovation focuses on new products and technologies, all innovation is based on challenging existing assumptions and ways of thinking, in particular, it is argued, as a result of education and training. This paper argues that one option for developing the new ways of thinking in the management of innovation in tourism is the use of complicated and miscellaneous tourism educational program models. The analyses of tourism educational developmental history show that being contemporary it is a new educational sphere. A special place is allocated to analyses of multi-disciplinary and inter-disciplinary studies in higher education, development educational program models. At the end a suggestion is made to discuss the conceptual issues regarding coordination of the interests of students, employers and teaching staff in enhancing the quality of higher education in tourism. Material for the paper has been gathered through contacting experts in the field and conducting extensive literary reviews.*

**Key words:** *development of tourism education, tourism educational program models, educational system, multi-disciplinary and inter-disciplinary studies.*

**Introduction.** Tourism is a continuously expanding industry with huge economic potential. The research of World Tourism Organization shows, that from 1995 to 2005 tourism globally grew by 4,5 %, an increase of over 36 million tourists<sup>1</sup>. The tourism product is a composite one with its production, distribution and marketing being configured along a value chain involving many activities which are vertically, horizontally and diagonally related and integrated in varying degrees. In Europe, EU enlargement and diversifying regional economies have opened up new tourist destinations to add to this ever increasing market.

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Rapid development of tourism industry has involved large amounts of human resources. The number of people occupied in the HORECA sector grows faster than the total labour force. The tourism industry represents about 8.6 mln people employed with 24 mln. in the broad definition corresponding to around 4 and 12 % respectively of the total EU labour force. In the period 2000 to 2004 in the 27 Member States of the enlarged Community the growth rate in the number of people occupied in the HORECA sector was on average significantly higher than the growth rate of total employment<sup>2</sup>.

Latvian tourism is a micro and SME – dominated sector, with over 99% of firms employing fewer than 250 individuals<sup>3</sup>.

High standards for education and professional qualification are vitally important element. This element is necessary in order to satisfy completely the high demands, wishes and needs of today's tourists. Only in such a way further rapid development of separate enterprises, as well as of the entire sphere is possible. Alongside with the changes in the tourism sphere greater changes are needed in the field of tourism education.

The analysis of the qualitative personnel, employed in tourism and other spheres related to it, shows that in many cases the employees are from other spheres – without education or qualification in the sphere of tourism. The leading criterion for the choice of such personnel is the low price, on the one hand, but on the other hand, the quality of such service is a problem. Today it is the most essential factor for the competitiveness of companies.

So far, many questions arise for those who train the specialists for a tourism and chains involving many activities. Therefore, within the dynamic approach to innovation in tourism industry, great changes in the tourism educational end training are expected.

The problem of the day – clearly anticipate the “real needs” of specialists in the modern tourism industry; which kind of scientific courses and practice we should teach and train; which initiatives and winning strategies need to be emphasized and any additional questions – how to create a studying-field of the tourism industry.

The integrated studying-field approach to tourism educating and training is now required to encourage innovative practices and it is hoped that the development of a studying-field will upgrade the

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skills and competence of the tourism industry and ultimately boost competitiveness.

The tourism industry's studying-field, from the author's point of view, may be defined as theoretical and practical tools for a qualification of high level tourism professionals, explains all the issues concerning tourism industry studying-field and describes how to set them up.

**The contents of education in tourism.** Tourism is considered as a very recent field of education. Therefore there are many discussions about its content and models of education.

Gradually more and more scientists and practitioners recognize that tourism is not an educational programme in the traditional notion of higher education, but a separate sphere, which includes systematically linked infrastructure. It is a part of many other fields and even of separate spheres. Thus, it is very complicated to elaborate a model of study courses for tourism professionals – educational programmes, which would ensure the preparation of such high rank specialists of tourism management, firstly managers, which provide these specialists with the necessary knowledge, skills, abilities and competences. It has to be added, that previously the Latvian tourism associations and other organizations of employers have not prepared the standard for the profession of tourism business managers, which educational institutions would follow when preparing the corresponding study programmes. That is why they are elaborated, licensed and accredited in accordance with the general standard of company and institution manager profession, which is not related to the factors that influence the tourism education.

The most important factors that influence the tourism education are the following:

- Defining tourism in broader sense, which would grasp all the issues and problems related to the field of tourism;
- The multidisciplinary character of tourism – related to issues from different spheres, which then influence the content, fields of investigation, other academic and professional activities of the programmes.

Different authors have attempted to create universal definitions of a tourist and tourism, which the state institutions and the very tourism industry would accept, but no one has made it yet. Due to

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the lack of a unanimous definition of the tourist<sup>4</sup>, tourism sector and industry<sup>5</sup>, however several basic elements repeat in those definitions. Majority of the definitions include the following elements:

- A journey from home to the destination and the way back;
- Corresponding activities during the journey and at the destination;
- Infrastructures created specially for the travellers and the use of services;
- Economic influence of buying goods and services of travellers<sup>6</sup>.

Various sciences reveal the essence of these elements. For example, several important spheres are touched in relation with the process of travelling, such as, transport, politics and communication science, geography, engineering, etc. The second element – the activities of travellers include such fields as geography, psychology, sociology, history, archaeology, marketing, etc. Infrastructure and the use of services enclose such fields as politics, business management, hotel and restaurant administration, accountancy, marketing, ecology, nature protection, landscape architecture, architecture, engineering, etc. In relation to economic influence such spheres as finances, economics, management, business, politics, etc. have to be mentioned.

It is a very short enumeration of spheres related to these four elements, and it does not create a complete picture of the sophisticated structure of the tourism industry. There are a lot of different models, in which it is attempted to enclose all the spheres connected with tourism, which should be included in the study programmes.

One of the most important models is that of Jafar Jafari (1981)<sup>7</sup> which includes 16 different branches. The author has improved his own model, and other authors have used it in their works for more than 20 years. In one of his latest works (1990) Jafari has grouped the studies according to the stages of evolutionary development:

- The stage of defence;
- The stage of precaution;
- The stage of adaptation;
- The stage based on knowledge<sup>8</sup>.

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These stages reflect different viewpoints and comprehension about the tourism studies which arouse from them. Modern tourism studies in the universities of tourism education are situated in the last stage – based on knowledge.

The multidisciplinary comprehension of tourism is the base for creating and evaluating the higher educational programmes in this field. In Jafari and Ritchie's (1981) work several problems are emphasized<sup>9</sup>, which have to be faced during this process:

- Necessity to have a multidisciplinary institution for the realization of tourism studies;
- Difficulties to integrate the units of multidisciplinary tourism studies in the existing institutional structure;
- The lack of such individuals, who are able to study and teach tourism professionally from the multidisciplinary point of view;
- The lack of financial resources for the maintenance of an „ideal” institution of multidisciplinary tourism studies;
- The passivity of the existing institutions, which promote the inability and/or indisposition to restructure the resources from the existing (already elaborated) programmes, although they are out of date/

The tourism studies model of The British Tourism Society<sup>10</sup> is also one of a few, where it is attempted to depict the content of the studies and during the process of its elaboration the representatives from tourism industry and lecturers were also involved. However, this model was created in late 70ies of XX century and published in 1981, thus several imperfections might be found, for example, the influence of tourism on the environment is touched upon very little, which nowadays plays a very important role in the context of sustainable tourism; a very insignificant role is given to the foreign language studies, the knowledge of legislation, etc.

One of the models, created by the World Tourism organization (1995), includes 10 spheres related to the tourism education:

- Psychology – it helps to understand the motivation, wishes and behaviour of tourists, which have to be taken into account when creating a product, in marketing, etc;
- Anthropology – it analyses socioeconomic and cultural aspects, which determine the human need for travelling, influence,

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which these aspects have on the behaviour of travellers, on the local inhabitants and as a result – the social interaction;

- Sociology – it perceives tourism as social phenomenon in continuous development, the emergence of mass tourism, change in the favourite destinations in relation to the tendencies in the sphere, etc. It studies very many changing elements, for example, nationality, education, age, gender, etc., which are very important elements in the segmentation of tourism market;

- Economics – since the economic influence of tourism on the result is more than just the increase of amount of travellers and influence on the payment balance, economics is a very essential part of tourism studies;

- Business administration – planning, organization, decision making, control, etc, which plays an important role in the process of ensuring competitiveness of tourism industry;

- Geography – it provides the analysis of tourism from the space viewpoint, taking into account the situation of regional, national or international tourism markets, places of tourist concentration, etc.;

- Law – the increasing economic globalization and complexity of relations determine the necessity to study the similarities and differences of valid legislation in different countries, as well as the need for stronger right protection of tourism product consumers;

- Ecology – concentration on resource exhaustion, the capacity to renew them, their potential use for the needs of tourism, etc, - in other words observing the principle of sustainability;

- Statistics – it provides a tool to use in the studies and investigation of other courses/subjects, including, economics, psychology, sociology, etc.;

- Education – the significance of this subject depends on its ability to create basic concepts, which should be involved in the process of creating the necessary specialization level for tourism education and adaptation of courses and programmes for the changeable environment<sup>11</sup>.

Thus many educational programmes, created during these years, do not comply with the modern needs and requirements. The analysis of study programmes shows that they are still very fragmented, there is a lack of united standards for the programme accredita-

tion, united system of classification and profession standards, which could provide clarity to the employers about what skills and knowledge the potential employees have obtained, and which could promote the mobility of workforce, etc. The greatest challenge of education specialists is to develop further the education system, avoiding the typical errors – fragmented and narrow trends depending on the academic origin of professors and scientists – and to ensure the basis for providing multidisciplinary knowledge, which could thus provide possibilities to obtain united and versatile higher education in accordance with the demand in the dynamic sphere of tourism.

**The development of tourism education.** The European strategy of employment pays great attention to the improvement of education and professional training. Investments in human capital are considered as the decisive factor for increasing the productive capacity in order to promote the orientation on the economy based on knowledge. These investments have to ensure significant improvements in the ability of the educational system to adapt itself for the changing needs of labour market, to improve the accessibility of education at all levels, to increase the participation and responsibility of regional municipalities and employers for ensuring the accessibility to professional education, to create effective lifelong system of education.

As it is highlighted in the Latvian Tourism Development Policy, it is necessary to „increase the quality of education at all education levels in accordance with the needs of tourism development, to elaborate wide lifelong system of education<sup>12</sup>”.

The rapid growth of tourism creates great amount of new workplaces, therefore there are several negative things that directly or indirectly have influenced the attitude of the sphere and society towards the tourism education. The objective characteristic of tourism industry is the great number of seasonal and occasional employees, where lots of them come from other spheres without previous education and training in tourism. A very typical phenomenon is the uncertainty of working hours – part-time job, longer working day and week.

Although these negative factors vary from country to country, in general it has to be said that sometimes the work in tourism is situated on the verge of violating the laws or the law is violated

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completely, taking into account the worked hours, as well as other issues. All this has influenced negatively the image of the sphere and has promoted the high level of workforce turnover.

The complicated structure of the sphere determines that the study programmes have to comply with the interest and real needs of those who are involved in tourism, in order to avoid too narrow or, on the contrary, too detailed scientific academic education, which is difficult to use in practice.

In order to optimize the study programmes, there is practice to find out and harmonize the needs and interests of those who study – the would-be specialists – employers and professors.

The questionnaires of those who study (education consumers) show that the requirements vary, but the general tendency is united – the students want to reach their aim – to form long-term career. It can be seen in Students' questionnaires and their analysis of study programme „Tourism Business Manager” in Information Systems Management Institute<sup>13</sup>, where students' questionnaires are conducted regularly. Answering questions about the quality of lecturers and professors' work, and as a result of their analysis the activity of institute's academic staff would be improved and optimized. The graduates' questionnaires are conducted annually, in form of an interview, which allows evaluation of objectivity of a respondent, sometimes by starting a discussion upon certain question; it also allows clarification of evaluation motives, quite often getting not planned information.

In the questionnaires of employers in tourism industry – who are the direct consumers of students' obtained knowledge, skills and competences – and in the attitudes of those, who create demand for tourism professionals the main needs necessary for the current qualification of specialists can be observed, but they are oriented too little on the rapid influence of innovative changes in the future. Therefore there have to be people who are critical towards elaboration of standards for the profession and supporting the study programmes, adjusting the study programmes to the needs of the employers.

Information System Management Institute (ISMA) has set employers' and practice place providers' questionnaire setting as a well aimed tradition. Employers' questionnaires were conducted by means of telephone talks, interviews and surveys during recent



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years. According to the goal there has been target audience and questions selected. Employers' questionnaires are organized by conducting student official researches, and their aim is to define, if the programme content corresponds to requirements of the labour market and if the graduates would be in demand on the labour market. Results of questionnaires show that lasting recent years the necessity of highly qualified staff has been increasing, including the profession of a manager who has gained professional higher education. After questioning employees and managers of companies, associations, there was full information about professional study programmes provided, in order to get an opinion and feedback on it. After data analysis and evaluation it can be concluded that the programme organization fulfils the requirements of employers.

The realization of a programme is fulfilled by the academic personnel that need qualifications in a certain study subject and who are engaged in scientific and scientifically methodological work. The work of the academic staff is evaluated every term by students, filling in written questionnaires, where students give their opinion of the theoretical level, practical tasks, necessary for acquisition of the study material, on individual tasks and the attitude of the academic staff towards students.

Professionals of educational institutions – the teaching staff in universities play a decisive role in the elaboration of study programmes and ensuring quality. However, even the very teaching staff has its own interests in the system of education – available resources, aids for work, rights to choose freely the methodology, assessment mechanism, etc. These interests may vary to greater or lesser extent and do differ from the interests of students and employers.

The national legislation and normative acts have a great importance for adjusting the interests of all the parties, as well as for the procedures related to the control of observing the laws, for example, study programme licensing and accreditation.

In long-term the needs, interests and wishes of students and employers will definitely differ: The aim of students is to create long-term career, whereas the employers seek qualified workforce with practical skills which comply with their current needs. The employers stress the need for students with practical skills and competences, whereas professors are oriented on providing versatile and adapted

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education, thus preparing more theoretically not practically educated employees. At the same time the students look for education, which is qualitative in their opinion, that is – education which complies with their needs for long-term career and which could increase the value of time and other resources spent in the study process.

As the general comprehension, that education is the main factor for increasing the competitiveness, grows stronger, there have emerged many separate, unmethodical systems of education, which do not operate within a wider cooperation mechanism with the aim to join the efforts of all the involved parties. The need for cooperation between all the involved parties is even more important in relation with the increasing necessity of international workforce mobility in the conditions of general globalization of tourism market and the necessity to increase the capacity of technology and business sciences.

It is necessary to promote the dialogue and cooperation between the tourism industry and educational institutions, as well as state authorities for the development of competitive tourism industry. It is a hard task, taking into account that the vertical integration – government – industry – education – is not possible without previous horizontal integration between different levels of government, which very often is missing. The possible cooperation model will work effectively only, if all the involved parties will be interested in that and will clearly see what benefit they will gain.

**Conclusions.** In the future, the tourism industry will be seen as dynamic, full of creativity and new ideas, and built on a strong skills and knowledge base.

Study programme has been constantly updated based on tourism labour market research, consultations with employees, graduates, students, institute academic staff and specialists practising in the tourism sphere, with the aim of providing the labour market with educated, competitive and professional specialists with the perspective of founding their own companies and performing the administrative tasks.

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