

Challenges of tourism education: Conformity of tourism curriculum to business needs

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Abstract

This study was conducted in the fourth largest tertiary education institution in Latvia, which also provides higher education in the field of tourism. The purpose of the research is to study stakeholder needs and to evaluate the knowledge of tourism students, as well as the level of skills and abilities necessary for work in tourism business and to determine opportunities for curriculum development. The study is comprised of three stages: context analysis; a survey of 262 tourism students and 192 employers applying a similar Likert Scale questionnaire; comparing findings with the findings obtained in similar studies in other countries and elaborating conclusions and suggestions regarding curriculum improvement. A quantitative approach conducting primary data analysis (descriptive statistics) and secondary data analysis (Levene's Test for Equality of Variances, Anova test) is applied to study stakeholder opinion. Findings of the study reveal the knowledge, skills and abilities necessary to succeed in tourism business. It indicates that the present curriculum corresponds to the requirements of the industry and student needs. Students highly value the knowledge acquired and the skills and abilities developed during their studies. The employers' high evaluation of student knowledge, skills, and abilities verifies this fact. The curriculum might be improved by creating modules of related courses, applying a cross-disciplinary approach to studies, using corresponding teaching-learning methods and creating a supportive learning environment, initiating autonomous learning for the students and motivating them for studies.

Key words: tourism curriculum, knowledge, skills, abilities

1 Introduction

Over the last decades, discussion regarding the quality of education and its correspondence to the needs of industry has been on the agenda worldwide. Under the influence of globalization and the world-wide economic downturn, it is especially important to create or update curricula so that they would correspond to rapidly changing market needs and would help educate employees who will be working in situations that are currently difficult to predict.

The strategic EU document *Europe 2020* points to three priorities in order to overcome the problems and face the future: smart growth, sustainable growth and inclusive growth. This means the development of 'economy based on knowledge and innovation', promoting a green, efficient and competitive economy and 'fostering a high-employment economy' (Europe 2020, 2010, 3). In order to attain this goal it is necessary to create new curricula and adapt the existing ones so that they would ensure social cohesion and be innovative and develop creative personalities.

To do this, higher education institutions try to establish close contacts with the industry to follow all changes and development. The UN World Tourism Organisation TedQual programme, whose objective is to improve the quality of tourism education, training and research programmes, has defined evaluation criteria for tourism curricula. Among other components the degree of incorporation of stakeholder needs, both the needs of the tourism industry and its students, into the programmes are evaluated.

In this respect, Tourism Education Futures Initiative (TEFI) (2009) has formulated a set of five values-based principles that tourism students should embody upon graduation in order to become responsible leaders and stewards in their field: ethics, stewardship, knowledge, professionalism, and mutuality. According to the principle of ethics, students should be able to identify sources of power, provide ethical leadership and initiate changes for the better. Knowledge includes creativity, critical thinking and networking through complex of reasoning, learning, communication, as-

sociation and application. Describing stewardship, TEFI emphasizes that students should be encouraged to question everything, including what their professors say. Professionalism is defined as a complex of leadership skills, practicality, reflexivity, team working and partnership building skills, and pro-activity. It means not only the skills, competences or standards, but also attitude and behaviour. Mutuality is characterized as self-respect and respect for others, which could be developed through open interactions, constructive communication and discussions, conflict avoidance and management, empathy and acceptance. To conform to the requirements of the five aforementioned principles, improvements are needed in the spheres of the learning and teaching environments, curricula revision and development. Tourism curricula have to be 'updated, reflecting a more realistic view of the industry' (Lee, Lee & Kim, 2009, 62).

The studies regarding curricula improvement have been conducted in different regions of the world. Recently, several such studies have been conducted in Australia, Korea and China (Wang et al., 2010; Lee, Lee & Kim, 2009; Lu & Adler, 2009) in which the focus was laid on the analysis of the courses to be included in the curriculum. Phelan et al. (2009) compare the top 25 ranked hospitality management undergraduate programmes of the USA, placing emphasis on objectives, assessment and teaching methods. In Europe studies dealing with curricula evaluation and assessment of student and graduate learning outcomes are popular. Some examples providing an analysis of tourism curricula are as follows: the studies conducted in Spain (Munar & Montaña, 2009; Cervera-Taulet & Ruiz-Molina, 2008; Boni & Lozano, 2007), Lithuania (Pukelis & Pileickiene, 2009), and the United Kingdom (Nield, 2011) that focus on the assessment of student and graduate learning outcomes. Several studies have been conducted to analyze certain curricula aspects. The study conducted in Cyprus (Orphanidou & Nachimas, 2011) analyzes the curriculum objectives and their compliance with industry needs and the studies conducted in Estonia (Tooman, Müristaja & Holleran, 2007) and Austria (Ring, Dickinger & Wöber 2009) focus on the courses to be included in the curriculum.

There have also been discussions as to whether higher education tourism curricula should contain basic business courses with a tourism speciality or specific tourism curricula need to be designed (Wang, Huyton, Gao & Ayres, 2010). Various countries and universities have selected different approaches. The School of Business Administration Turiba (BAT) follows the second line and has designed a specific tourism curriculum, the core of which is formed by tourism and business courses. The study programme observes the balance between the acquisition of theoretical knowledge and development of practical skills. The scope of the Bachelor's programme is 240 ECTS and the content is comprised of general education courses (30 ECTS), field theoretical basic courses and information technology courses (54 ECTS), field professional specialization courses (90 ECTS), electives (9 ECTS), internship in the industry (39 ECTS) and State examination (18 ECTS). In developing the *Tourism and Hospitality Management* curriculum, the following influence and interests were taken into account: 1) the needs of the industry (external actor), 2) the interests of students (internal actor), and 3) the guidelines of the World Tourism Organisation. To collect data and analyze information and the opinions of external actors the following approach has been applied:

- 1) The opinion of the industry is expressed regularly in the highest collegial body – the Council of the Faculty. The Council is responsible for the quality assurance of studies, research and methodological work. BAT regulations state that 50% of the Council's members are representatives of the industry, which ensures permanent feedback from the industry regarding the curriculum, and 20% are students representing the respective study programme.
- 2) The staff of the Faculty includes both academic lecturers and industry representative lecturers. Industry representative lecturers represent tourism and hospitality companies, state and municipal institutions, different professional associations. Besides lecturing, academic staff members are also involved in consulting the industry and are elected to the boards of professional associations. It allows for the academic staff to be involved in the daily

issues of tourism business and to acquire firsthand experience thus initiating changes in curricula following the developments in the industry.

- 3) Using the results of special surveys carried out regularly by the Faculty. Findings of the studies are analyzed and incorporated into the curriculum providing there is such a need.

However, it is essential to reconsider both the content of the studies and the methodologies used in order to develop a curriculum that would correspond to the 'new paradigm for values-based tourism education' (Sheldon, Fesenmaier, Woeber, Cooper & Antonioli, 2008, 62) and comply with stakeholder needs.

Widdowson (1986) points to two different approaches to the term *student needs*. The first approach is result-oriented. In this respect student needs are connected with their long-term goals. For example, a long-term goal might be to have work or study opportunities. The second approach to the aforementioned term is process-oriented. It is connected with the whole study process and it is comprised of definite tasks (e.g., attending lectures, working on home assignments, participating in seminars, passing tests and examinations, undergoing internship training, collaborating with peers and professors, etc.) students have to fulfil in order to become professionals in the field.

However, it has to be marked that in practice there is often observed a contradiction between the aims of students and those of professors as the professor's aim is often result-oriented, but the students' aim is process-oriented. As students and professors work for the same aim – to develop professional competence, both these aims are closely linked and significant.

The role of stakeholders in curriculum design and implementation can be seen in two aspects: to influence the creation of the curriculum and to evaluate it, thus contributing to its development. Stakeholders indicate the core areas, courses/modules that should be included in the curriculum (Lewis, 2005).

As tourism graduates work in multicultural organisations and are in contact with international tourists of various nationalities and ethnic groups, they must

acquire knowledge and develop skills that will enhance their ability to adapt to different unpredictable situations (Sangpikul, 2009).

Special attention in the studies has to be paid to enhancing students' team work skills, innovation capabilities, strategic approach to entrepreneurship (Kallioinen, 2010), creativity, ability to think logically and strategically, as well as professional language competence and intercultural communication skills. 'Students must be prepared to work *in* tourism and *for* tourism' (Lewis, 2005, 12).

The updated curriculum should ensure the development of student knowledge, skills and abilities, as well as special attention has to be paid to enhancing of attitude. Attitude is developing in all study courses, including internship training. It can be developed by the enhancing of student responsibility, capabilities of analyzing and synthesizing information, mutuality, collaboration skills, team work, tolerance and empathy.

This paper addresses the issue of evaluating the tourism curriculum and making improvements in order to create a curriculum that would enable the development of knowledgeable, innovative, creative personalities who are able to efficiently manage their own and other employees' work and can operate in a modern multicultural environment.

2 Methods and methodologies

2.1 Purpose of the research

This study was conducted from May to September of 2009 in the fourth largest tertiary education institution in Latvia, which among other programmes provides well-acknowledged internationally accredited higher education in tourism.

The purpose of the research is to study stakeholder needs and to evaluate tourism students' knowledge, skills and abilities necessary for work in tourism business and determine opportunities for curriculum development.

2.2 Research questions

- 1) What knowledge, skills, abilities and attitude are important to work in the tourism business?
- 2) How do employers and students evaluate student knowledge in tourism courses and how are skills and abilities developed?
- 3) How can tourism curriculum be improved in order to enable students to acquire an up-to-date tourism education?

2.3 Research design

The authors have chosen a quantitative approach to the study as it is connected with cause and provides greater objectivity, data reliability and validity, and representation of reality (Turner, 2007; Denzin & Ryan, 2007). Another reason for applying the quantitative approach to the study was the possibility to better reveal the number of differences (Hunter & Brewer, 2003; Kardoff, 2004). The study was comprised of 3 stages: 1) context analysis, 2) empirical study (tourism students and tourism employers survey), and 3) comparing findings with the findings obtained in similar studies in other European countries and elaborating suggestions and conclusions.

2.4 Survey

A survey was conducted by questioning 192 tourism employers and 262 tourism students applying a similar Likert scale questionnaire (where 1 was *not at all significant/very bad* and 6 – *extremely significant/very good*) consisting of 5 parts:

- 1) the knowledge necessary to operate in tourism industry;
- 2) evaluation of student knowledge in this field;
- 3) the skills, abilities and attitude necessary to operate in tourism industry;
- 4) evaluation of these skills and abilities;
- 5) general information (the type of the enterprise, represented tourism sectors, the post, the number of employees in the enterprise, etc).

The questionnaire revealed employers' and students' opinions following the students' internship in the in-

dustry. The questionnaires were developed comprising all compulsory tourism courses included in the curriculum reflected in the questionnaire as knowledge. Questions regarding skills and abilities were selected taking into account generic and subject specific competences for business oriented curricula (González & Wagenaar, 2003; 2009). The developed questionnaires were discussed and approved at the Faculty Council comprising tourism educators, industry representatives and students. Next, the questionnaires were tested with two groups – 12 students and 9 employers. After having made the necessary amendments, the survey of the selected sample of students and employers was conducted.

Quantitative data analysis software SPSS Statistics 17.0 was applied for data processing. Data analysis was done based on the approach of Raščevska and Kristapsone (2000) and it included primary data analysis (frequencies, means) to obtain descriptive statistics and secondary data analysis (Levene's Test for Equality of Variances, Anova test) to reveal the differences and similarities. Data validity and reliability was verified by applying Cronbach's Alpha test.

2.5 Sample

The sample of the study was composed based on the approach of Geske and Grinfelds (2006) and Trochim and Donelly (2007).

A simple random sample of 262 tourism students of the Faculty of International Tourism (FIT) of the School of Business Administration Turiba (BAT) was made: 93 were first year students (35.50%), 80 second year students (30.53%), 56 third year students (21.37%), 13 foreign students, 5 students belonged to other groups and 15 students did not indicate to which group they belonged. Three tourism sectors were targeted: the lodging sector – 168 students (64.12%), the catering sector – 69 students (26.34%), and the state and municipality sector, including travel agencies and tourism information centres (TIC) – 25 students (9.54%).

An intentional sample of 192 tourism employers of the enterprises, in which the participating students had

done an internship, was made: 84 (43.75%) represented top-level management, 57 (29.69%) – mid-level, 42 (21.88%) had marked the choice *other* and 9 respondents (4.69%) did not indicate their post. One hundred twenty three employers represented the lodging sector, 65 employers – the catering sector. 32 respondents (16.66%) represented small tourism establishments, 48 (25%) – medium sized tourism establishments, 49 (25.52%) – large tourism establishments and 51 (26.56%) – very large tourism establishments. An intentional sample was formed to compare findings of both surveys to introduce curriculum improvements considering all stakeholder needs.

3 Findings of the research

The research consisted of two empirical parts – a student survey and a tourism industry employer survey, which allowed for comparing the results and therefore gives a comprehensive view regarding correspondence of the curriculum to the employers' needs, and thereof the respective needs and wishes of the industry. First, students and employers had to evaluate knowledge and skills necessary for work in the tourism industry. Second, the students performed their self-evaluation in these aspects, and the employers evaluated competence of the students undergoing internship in their enterprises. Items under evaluation corresponded to the study courses included in the curriculum. Thus the results enabled finding information on the knowledge, skills, abilities and attitude necessary to succeed in the tourism business, as well as reflected in student opinions of the curriculum and the competence acquired during studies at BAT.

Data regarding student knowledge indicating the options *significant*, *very significant* and *extremely significant* as well as evaluation *very good*, *good* and *nearly good* are summarized in *Table 1* and *Table 2* (refer to *Table 1* and *Table 2*). Both, the students and the employers found the knowledge in *Communication Psychology* (means 5.29 and 5.49 respectively), *Personnel Management* (means 5.17 and 4.97 respectively) and *Commercial Activity in Tourism* (means 4.96 and 4.80 respectively) as the most significant issues for success-

Table 1: Students' opinion on the knowledge necessary to succeed in the tourism business and its evaluation (n=262)

Knowledge	Evaluation of the significance of knowledge			Students' self-evaluation of knowledge		
	No	%	Rank	No	%	Rank
Communication Psychology	251	95.80	1	252	96.18	1
Personnel Management	247	94.27	2	230	87.79	3
Commercial Activity in Tourism	243	92.75	3	212	80.92	4
Hotel Operations and Management	226	86.26	4	194	74.05	6
Hotel Reservation Systems	224	85.50	5-6	171	65.27	9
Marketing	224	85.50	5-6	197	75.19	5
Latvia and World Tourism Geography	222	84.73	7	232	88.55	2
Management of Catering Establishments	217	82.82	8	182	69.47	8
Travel Organization and Management	214	81.68	9	189	72.14	7
Financial Management and Accounting	208	79.39	10	156	59.54	10
Economics	199	75.95	11	146	55.73	11

ful work in the tourism industry. The employers evaluated knowledge in *Marketing* (mean 4.92) as especially important as well.

Additionally, students emphasized the importance of specific subjects related to work in hotels: *Hotel Reservation Systems* (mean 4.71) and *Hotel Operations and Management* (4.73). They gave a lower ranking to subjects related with branches of economics and finances: *Economics* (mean 4.32) and *Financial Management and Accounting* (mean 4.53).

In analyzing the skills, abilities and attitude required for successful work in the tourism industry, the opi-

nions of students and employers are similar – both gave high priority to skills of official language (Latvian) (means 5.73 and 5.79 respectively), communication skills with clients (means 5.75 and 5.76 respectively) and colleagues (means 5.66 and 5.73 respectively), English language skills (means 5.69 and 5.62 respectively), a positive attitude to work (means 5.66 and 5.74 respectively) indicating these as the most important (refer to *Table 3* and *Table 4*).

Levene's Test for Equality of Variances pointed to several significant differences between the student and the employer opinions regarding the significance of the knowledge and skills necessary for

Table 2: Employers' opinion on the knowledge necessary to succeed in the tourism business and its evaluation (n=192)

Knowledge	Evaluation of the significance of knowledge			Evaluation of students' knowledge		
	No	%	Rank	No	%	Rank
Communication Psychology	188	97.92	1	184	95.83	1
Personnel Management	176	91.67	2	166	86.46	3
Commercial Activity in Tourism	173	90.10	3-4	162	84.34	4-5
Hotel Operations and Management	147	76.56	11	144	75	8
Hotel Reservation Systems	150	78.13	10	143	74.48	9
Marketing	173	90.10	3-4	162	84.38	4-5
Latvia and World Tourism Geography	164	85.42	5	170	88.54	2
Management of Catering Establishments	154	80.21	7-9	152	79.17	6
Travel Organization and Management	154	80.21	7-9	151	78.65	7
Financial Management and Accounting	156	81.25	6	134	69.79	10
Economics	154	80.21	7-9	133	69.27	11

Table 3: Students' opinion on the skills and abilities necessary to succeed in the tourism business and their evaluation (n=262)

Skills and abilities	Evaluation of the significance of skills, abilities, attitude			Students' self-evaluation of skills, abilities, attitude		
	No	%	Rank	No	%	Rank
Abilities to communicate with clients	262	100	1-2	255	97.33	4-5
Abilities to communicate with colleagues	262	100	1-2	260	99.24	1
English language skills	261	99.62	3	255	97.33	4-5
Ability to work in a multicultural team	260	99.24	4-5	252	96.18	8
Positive attitude to work	260	99.24	4-5	256	97.71	3
Organizational skills	259	98.85	6-7	245	93.51	10
Ability to apply theoretical knowledge into practice	259	98.85	6-7	254	96.95	6-7
Official language skills	258	98.47	8	258	98.47	2
IT skills	256	97.71	9	254	96.95	6-7
Initiative	255	97.33	10	251	95.80	9
Russian language skills	253	96.56	11	222	84.73	13
Strategic approach to entrepreneurship	252	96.18	12	227	86.64	12
Creativity	249	95.04	13	236	90.07	11
Skills to work with different computerised reservation systems	243	92.74	14	191	72.90	14
German/French language skills	224	85.50	15	146	55.73	15

Table 4: Employers' opinion on the skills and abilities necessary to succeed in the tourism business and their evaluation (n=192)

Skills and abilities	Evaluation of the significance of skills, abilities, attitude			Evaluation of students' skills, abilities, attitude		
	No	%	Rank	No	%	Rank
Abilities to communicate with clients	190	98.96	3-5	186	96.88	4-5
Abilities to communicate with colleagues	191	99.48	1-2	190	98.96	1-2
English language skills	190	98.96	3-5	184	95.83	7
Ability to work in a multicultural team	191	99.48	1-2	188	97.92	3
Positive attitude to work	190	98.96	3-5	186	96.88	4-5
Organizational skills	187	97.40	11	183	95.31	8-10
Ability to apply theoretical knowledge into practice	189	98.44	6-9	183	95.31	8-10
Official language skills	189	98.44	6-9	190	98.96	1-2
IT skills	186	96.88	12	183	95.31	8-10
Initiative	188	97.92	10	185	96.35	6
Russian language skills	189	98.44	6-9	171	89.06	12
Strategic approach to entrepreneurship	184	95.83	13	168	87.5	13
Creativity	189	98.44	6-9	177	92.19	11
Skills to work with different computerised reservation systems	169	88.02	15	145	75.52	14
German/French language skills	171	89.06	14	121	63.0	15

successful operation in the tourism business: understanding the work of tourism business (F=5.193, p-value=0.023), *Commercial Activity in Tourism* (F=5.751, p-value=0.017), *Hotel Reservation Systems* (F=7.201,

p-value=0.006), *Hotel Operations and Management* (F=14.691, p-value=0.000), Russian language skills (F=4.893, p-value=0.027), information technology skills (F=6.156, p-value=0.013), skills to work with

different computerised reservation systems ($F=4.736$, $p\text{-value}=0.030$), and the ability to work in a team ($F=4.031$, $p\text{-value}=0.045$). Students evaluated them higher than the employers, except the Russian language skills and an ability to work in a multicultural team.

Cronbach's Alpha test verifies a high data reliability and validity ($\alpha=0.849$ for significance of knowledge; $\alpha=0.834$ for significance of skills and abilities).

Both students and employers highly evaluated student knowledge, skills and abilities developed during their studies at BAT. In the student survey the means ranged from 5.69 (official language skills) to 3.57 (knowledge in economics) and in the employer survey – from 5.78 (official language skills) to 3.92 (knowledge in *Financial Management and Accounting*). As demonstrated, the highest evaluation is similar in both surveys. Levene's Test for Equality of Variances revealed significant differences in the following issues: evaluation of student knowledge of *Commercial Activity in Tourism* ($F=11.874$, $p\text{-value}=0.001$), knowledge in *Hotel Operations and Management* ($F=17.975$, $p\text{-value}=0.000$), knowledge in *Management of Catering Establishments* ($F=9.527$, $p\text{-value}=0.002$), knowledge in *Latvia and World Tourism Geography* ($F=5.908$, $p\text{-value}=0.015$), knowledge in *Travel Organization and Management* ($F=7.256$, $p\text{-value}=0.007$), official language skills ($F=5.037$, $p\text{-value}=0.025$), English language skills ($F=7.387$, $p\text{-value}=0.007$), third language (German/French) skills ($F=10.673$, $p\text{-value}=0.001$), information technology skills ($F=4.449$, $p\text{-value}=0.035$), skills to work with different computerised reservation systems ($F=6.069$, $p\text{-value}=0.014$), initiative ($F=3.948$, $p\text{-value}=0.048$), and a strategic approach to entrepreneurship ($F=4.470$, $p\text{-value}=0.035$). In all cases, except the English language and IT skills, the students' self-evaluation is lower than the evaluation performed by the employers.

Cronbach's Alpha test verifies a high data reliability and validity ($\alpha=0.865$ for evaluation of student knowledge; $\alpha=0.822$ for evaluation of student skills and abilities).

Findings of the students' and the employers' surveys were analyzed as a whole, by sectors and the posts

occupied. In research 3 different sectors were singled out during the study: the lodging sector (hotels, guest houses, farmhouses, campsites, youth hostels, other), the catering sector (restaurants, cafes, bistros, other) and state and municipality sectors (TIC, state agencies, municipality offices, other).

When analyzing the importance of knowledge, differences between the sectors appear when evaluating knowledge/study courses related to one particular sector; for example, hotel management systems, work of hotel departments etc. At the same time there are no differences regarding the necessity of knowledge in management of catering enterprises. The aforementioned knowledge is evaluated significantly lower by employers working at TIC (for example, management of catering enterprises mean=2.40 cf. the corresponding total mean=4.45). The student survey showed a similar pattern – students, who were working in companies of other sector than lodging, evaluated lower the necessity of such knowledge as hotel management systems and work of hotel departments.

The Anova test revealed differences within the sector. Most of these differences were observed in the catering sector. When evaluating the knowledge, significant differences were discovered in the following issues: importance of the knowledge of *Hotel Reservation Systems* ($F=4.123$, $p\text{-value}=0.003$), *Hotel Operations and Management* ($F=2.445$, $p\text{-value}=0.047$), *Management of Catering Establishments* ($F=4.824$, $p\text{-value}=0.001$), *Latvia and World Tourism Geography* ($F=3.311$, $p\text{-value}=0.011$), *Travel Organization and Management* ($F=5.213$, $p\text{-value}=0.000$). On average higher means were demonstrated by the students having done internship in restaurants. For example, the total mean for evaluation of the knowledge of *Latvia and World Tourism Geography* is 4.65. The students working in the restaurants had a mean of 4.13, but those working in bistros – 3.86.

When applying the Anova test to analyzing students' self-evaluation of their knowledge by the post students had occupied during internship, significant differences were observed in all courses (refer to *Table 5*). The work specifics also influenced student knowledge. For

Table 5: Results of Anova test on students' self-evaluation of knowledge by their post during the internship

Knowledge	Means (max=6.0000)											ANOVA results	
	Waiter/ waitress (N=44)	Bartender (N=8)	Receptionist (N=86)	Maid (N=17)	Housekeeper (N=8)	Travel consultant (N=34)	Director (N=13)	Cook (N=1)	Manager (N=8)	Marketing specialist (N=10)	Bellboy/ busser (N=5)	F	Sig.
Commercial Activity in Tourism	3.9091	4.5000	4.4767	4.0000	3.7500	4.1765	4.3846	3.0000	4.3750	4.4000	4.6000	2.037	.026
Financial Management and Accounting	3.6591	3.5000	3.7907	2.6471	3.3750	3.6765	3.5385	4.0000	4.1250	4.2000	4.2000	2.259	.012
Economics	3.4545	3.8750	3.8140	2.7647	3.2500	3.4412	3.6154	4.0000	3.8750	4.0000	4.6000	2.172	.016
Communication Psychology	4.9091	4.5000	5.2326	5.2353	4.2500	5.3235	5.0769	4.0000	5.5000	5.2000	5.6000	1.953	.034
Personnel Management	4.1818	4.3750	4.7674	3.4706	4.0000	4.5588	4.8462	5.0000	4.5000	4.8000	4.4000	2.319	.010
Hotel Reservation Systems	2.9545	3.5000	4.6977	3.4118	3.3750	3.7353	3.2308	3.000	3.3750	4.6000	3.0000	4.847	.000
Hotel Operations and Management	3.5227	3.6250	4.6395	4.2941	4.2500	3.5000	3.3077	3.0000	4.1250	4.2000	4.2000	3.152	.001
Management of Catering Establishments	4.4773	5.2500	3.9535	4.1176	3.5000	3.4412	4.0000	6.0000	3.8750	3.9000	4.4000	2.141	.018
Latvia and World Tourism Geography	4.3409	4.0000	4.5233	4.9412	4.3750	4.7059	4.4615	1.0000	4.7500	5.0000	5.0000	2.093	.021
Travel Organization and Management	3.5000	3.5000	4.0233	3.8824	3.8750	4.7059	4.1538	1.0000	4.5000	4.7000	2.8000	3.153	.001
Marketing	3.7727	4.2500	4.3837	2.8235	3.6250	3.9118	4.7692	1.0000	4.0000	5.3000	4.6000	3.829	.000

example, the highest self-evaluation of the knowledge was given to the course of *Communication Psychology* (mean=5.60 by bellboys/table-bussers, mean=5.50 by managers, mean=5.20 by marketing specialists, mean=5.32 by travel consultants). The lowest means were given to knowledge in *Financial Management and Accounting* (mean=2.65 by maids), knowledge in *Economics* (mean=2.76 by maids), knowledge in *Travel Organization and Management* (mean=2.80 by bellboys/table-bussers). Performing the duties of these posts did not require the aforementioned knowledge, which might explain their comparatively low evaluation. The limitation in analyzing the data as to the posts lies in the fact that only one student has performed

the job of a cook, therefore the means for a cook were not analyzed.

The Anova test did not reveal significant differences regarding evaluation of the students' knowledge done by employers in accordance with their post (top-level managers, mid-level managers, others).

Evaluating the students' abilities to act strategically – the highest evaluation was given by those students who had work experience or internship in the lodging sector. However, overall, the students did not evaluate their skills of a strategic approach to entrepreneurship as high as employers – the total means: 4.43 and 4.52 (F=4.470, p-value=0.035).

The students' and the employers' views regarding foreign language skills are similar. Both very highly evaluated ability to communicate in foreign languages: in English (means 5.69 and 5.62 respectively), Russian (means 5.44 and 5.55 respectively) and a third language (German/French) skills (means 4.70 and 4.63 respectively). Interestingly, the need to possess Russian language skills was evaluated higher by students and employers who work at state and municipality institutions – the mean above 5.50 in all cases. Compared to other language skills slightly underestimated was the need for the third language skills – not all groups considered it as an important skill (e.g., mean=3.92 for employers of campsites, mean=4.16 for employers of bistros). This might refer to French since there are not many French speaking tourists in Latvia but German speaking countries are a traditional tourism market for Latvia. Thus more attention has to be paid to popularization of the German language among students as well. The student survey also pointed to their wish to learn Spanish and Russian.

Regarding communication and collaboration skills, both students and employers evaluated collaboration skills slightly more highly. The highest evaluation of these skills was received by the respondents working at bistros (students' mean for teamwork 5.86; employers' mean=5.57) and guest houses (students' mean for teamwork 5.73; employers' mean=5.91).

In general, student skills and abilities received a comparatively high self-evaluation and a high evaluation by employers (refer to *Table 3 and Table 4*). However, a comparatively low evaluation was given to creativity. Interestingly, both employers and students evaluated these skills at lower than 5.00, with the only exceptions – guest house employers (mean=5.45) and students having internship in guest houses (mean=5.27), restaurant employers (mean=5.42) and employers of bistros (mean=5.43).

A similar pattern was observed evaluating organizational skills. Students' organizational skills were evaluated higher by those working in the catering sector: mean=5.10 for students who worked in restaurants and 5.08 – in cafes and mean=5.33 for employers from

restaurants and 5.29 – from bistros. This points to the students' abilities to manage their own work and collaborate with colleagues.

The applied Anova test to the student survey pointed to significant differences in the lodging sector: abilities to work with different computerised reservation systems ($F=2.172$, $p\text{-value}=0.046$) and creativity ($F=3.123$, $p\text{-value}=0.006$), in the catering sector: organizational skills ($F=2.747$, $p\text{-value}=0.029$). The Anova test applied to the employer survey revealed the following differences in the lodging sector: applying information technology skills ($F=2.802$, $p\text{-value}=0.012$), positive attitude to work ($F=2.190$, $p\text{-value}=0.046$), in the catering sector: English language skills ($F=3.369$, $p\text{-value}=0.011$), strategic approach to entrepreneurship ($F=3.341$, $p\text{-value}=0.011$), creativity ($F=3.811$, $p\text{-value}=0.005$), in the state and municipality sector: the third language skills ($F=3.020$, $p=0.019$), creativity ($F=4.360$, $p\text{-value}=0.002$).

Similarly, there were not many significant differences singled out comparing the employers' evaluation of the students' skills and abilities by their post (categories: top-level managers, mid-level managers, other). The differences were exposed in the following skills and abilities: evaluating the students' official language skills ($F=7.141$, $p\text{-value}=0.000$), abilities to communicate with colleagues ($F=2.770$, $p\text{-value}=0.043$), ability to work in a multicultural team ($F=3.641$, $p\text{-value}=0.014$), positive attitude to work ($F=3.414$, $p\text{-value}=0.019$). In most situations mid-level managers have evaluated the students' skills and abilities slightly higher than the other groups which might be explained by their closer cooperation with the students in performing everyday work duties.

4 Discussion

The findings of the conducted study have been compared to other studies conducted in the field of tourism education providing a similar tourism offer and demand, as well as similar education systems and similarities and differences have been distinguished.

The findings of the study regarding the knowledge and skills necessary to succeed in the tourism business

are similar to the latest studies conducted in Europe. Both this study and the study conducted in Croatia (Kužnin, Agušaj, 2011) show that the stakeholders admit the importance of creativity, team working skills, critical and analytical thinking skills, communication skills and the applicable, practical knowledge of the tourism business. The difference is demonstrated in the variable of 'creativity' as Croatian students evaluate their creativity higher than the Latvian students.

Similarities regarding the skills necessary for work in the tourism business have been found with a study conducted in Spain (Bustelo, Fernandez, & Tomás, 2010) which is one of the most comprehensive studies conducted in the field of tourism education analyzing the Spanish tourism curricula, their objectives, and students' abilities to be developed. Both studies recognize the significance of generic skills – an ability to analyze and synthesize information, language competence, IT skills, decision making, working in interdisciplinary and multicultural teams, creativity, leadership, etc. Bustelo, Fernandez, & Tomás (2010) point to three aspects of developing specific skills: 1) learning knowledge, 2) learning to do, and 3) learning to develop attitudes, which links the content of the studies to the methodologies chosen.

Regarding the courses included in the tourism curriculum, both this study and the study conducted in Estonia (Tooman, Müristaja, Holleran, 2007) reveal that both higher education institutions apply a similar approach – including the courses that develop students' generic and subject specific competences (e.g., the Basics of Tourism Industry, Catering, Hotel Administration, Management, Tourism Geography, Accounting, foreign languages, etc.).

The present study and the studies conducted in Croatia (Božinović, Friganović-Sain & Perić, 2011) and Estonia (Tooman, Müristaja, Holleran, 2007) point to the significance of foreign languages. However, the differences have been found as well. The present study shows the significance of the English, German and Russian language competence. Whereas the findings of the study conducted in Croatia apart from the English and German language competence (89.72% and 50.47 %

of the respondents respectively), stress the significance of the Italian language competence (52.34%). In turn, the study conducted in Estonia reveals the significance of the Finnish language, which is included in the tourism curriculum of Pärnu College of the University of Tartu, Estonia. These findings might be explained by the geographical location of the countries. The findings of the present study concerning the foreign language competence are also similar to the results of the study conducted in the neighbouring country – Lithuania (Pukelis & Pileickiene, 2009) which revealed that students possess highly developed foreign language skills, demonstrate good knowledge of other countries and cultures and their idiosyncrasies, which may help them while working in a multicultural environment.

Contrary to the study conducted in Spain, the Balearic Islands (Munar & Montaña, 2009) where international dimension received a very low evaluation among employers, the present study stresses the importance of the international dimension. Similar to this study, the findings of another study conducted in Spain at the University of Valencia (Cervera-Taulet & Ruiz-Molina, 2008) showed that graduates found English language (7.41 points from 10) and computer skills (7.51 points) the most useful skills for their employment. Other skills that were mentioned as significant were communication skills, team working skills and social skills, which coincide with the findings of this study.

Tasks involving an international or multicultural scope as well as research projects relating to cross-cultural and comparative studies in hospitality and tourism may be applied in order to develop students' intercultural competence (Sangpikul, 2009).

Similarities were found regarding the ability to work in teams and the ability to apply knowledge in practice. This study, the studies conducted in Valencia, Spain, (Boni & Lozano, 2007) and in the Balearic Islands (Munar & Montaña, 2009) showed that the stakeholders recognised their significance ranking them at top positions. However, the employer survey showed that an ability to apply theoretical knowledge into practice could be strengthened.

The capacity for applying knowledge in practice might be developed by choosing various types of exercises; organizing lectures, seminars, field work; working on industrial projects; undergoing internship in the industry, participating in study visits, field excursions; doing research work; performing problem solving tasks; involving practitioners in course delivery (Approaches to teaching, learning and assessment in competence based degree programmes, 2005).

As the findings of the study show, students still lack experience in collaboration and organizational skills. Therefore, it is essential to develop team working skills which also influence the development of the previous two. This can be done by fostering student cooperation in discussing different topics, resolving problem tasks, working on common assignments and projects, making presentations in groups and pairs, introducing peers to their research results, etc. Project work and group work are useful not only for promoting student collaboration skills and team working abilities but also for enhancing their leadership skills. It is important to promote both peer-to-peer collaboration and collaboration between students and the professor. However, it has to be emphasized that the professor has to be an observer and supporter and let students themselves collaborate and attain the goal. The professor encourages student cooperation and independent studies, providing support if needed and the students have to feel the professor's readiness to help them at any time.

The creation of a favourable learning environment stimulates students' autonomous learning as it allows students to perform tasks independently and be aware that they can receive help and advice when/if necessary. Professors have to create a learning environment in which students 'are willing to share information and in which they can easily communicate with others' (Wang, 2008, 412) thus enhancing their communication skills, developing collaboration skills and team working skills.

Other advantages of collaborative learning are the active exchange of ideas, increased motivation, enhancing critical thinking, fostering socialization, developing better understanding of work in a multicultural en-

vironment and developing student attitudes towards learning (Hassanien, 2006).

5 Conclusions

"The world faces many challenges, of which one of the most important is creating the leaders of tomorrow" (TEFI, 2009, 2). In this situation a special role is given to universities as the leading force in educating the younger generation who will be entering the labour market in the near future and will be responsible for developing industry and society. As they will be working in conditions no one can currently predict, it is especially important to promote the professional competence of future manager as well as the generic competences that would enable them to learn fast, adapt to new circumstances and creatively develop their industry. Thus the role of universities is increasing all over the world. However, to strive for a common aim, university professors have to work hand-in-hand with the industry representatives thus contributing to the creation of new curricula and updating the existing ones in accordance with the needs of the industry and considering the requirements of the whole society. This can be done by conducting joint studies, and by exploring the needs and wishes of stakeholders in order to create updated curricula that could be successfully implemented in the next decade as well.

This study showed that both the students and the tourism professionals consider that the most important knowledge, skills and abilities for successful operation in the tourism business are as follows: the knowledge of *Communication Psychology*, *Personnel Management*, *Commercial Activity in Tourism*, abilities to communicate with clients and colleagues, English language skills, the ability to work in a multicultural team, a positive attitude to work, organizational skills, the ability to apply theoretical knowledge in practice, official language skills, IT skills, initiative, Russian language skills, strategic approach to entrepreneurship and creativity. Based on work experience the employers, contrary to the students, find the knowledge of marketing, finances, and accounting very significant.

Fig. 1: Tourism and Hospitality Management Curriculum of BAT

		Professional Study Courses by Choice			
		Hotel and Restaurant Management	Management and Logistics of Travel	Tourism Management in the Intercultural and e-environment	
Basic Study Courses	Trends in world tourism and scientific research work Finance management Tourism planning and management E-commerce Corporate responsibility and sustainability	4th study year	Rural Tourism	International Law	Advertising Language and E-communication Technologies
	Planning of tourism industry, tourism project management. International tourism business Political science Tourism project management Tourism and market research World culture history Marketing of services and tourism Tourism economics and globalization Accounting and taxes Philosophy Personnel management	3rd study year	Business Etiquette and Communication in Hospitality	Business Etiquette and Communication in Hospitality	Language and Intercultural Communication 2
	Organizing and Managing Business Operations Commercial activity in tourism Tourism geography Economics Organization and management of travel Commercial law Management Civil defence Professional Terminology (English) 3/4 Professional Terminology (German, French, Spanish or Russian) 3/4	2nd study year	Management of Catering Enterprises; Systems of Hotel Management	Tourism Logistics Culture of Latvia and Baltic States	Computer Graphics and Design; Language and Intercultural Communication
	Tourism Industry and the Basic Skills that are Necessary Tourism and hospitality Organization and service of catering Information Technologies Psychology of interaction Professional Terminology (English) 1/2 Professional Terminology (German, French, Spanish or Russian) 1/2	1st study year	Hotel Department's Management	Travel Agencies and Information Systems	Internet Technologies

The comparison of the findings with similar studies conducted in Europe (Estonia, Lithuania, Spain, and Croatia) showed that the main required courses are similar. Depending on the national context, each country has its priorities but the core subjects/modules are similar. The largest difference is exposed with regards to foreign languages and ability to work in a multicultural environment.

The findings of the conducted study enabled an improvement to the curriculum. To ensure that every student can select the study courses that comply with their interests, the outcome of the surveys and suggestions of representatives of the industry were taken into account and as a result a new specialization – *Tourism management in the intercultural and e-environment* was developed providing students an opportunity to develop the skills necessary to compete in a global and modern labour market. The new specialization contains such study courses as *Internet Technologies, Computer Graphics and Design, Language and Intercultural Communication, E-commerce, the Language of Advertising and Promotion*. Thus the students can choose between three different specializations: *Hotel and Restaurant Management, Management and Logistics of Travel, and Tourism Management in the Intercultural and E-environment* (refer to Figure 1).

Both students and employers admitted the significance of language competence in the tourism business therefore languages take a special role in the curriculum. During the first two years, students study English and another foreign language. An important suggestion following from the conducted research was to provide students with an opportunity to study not only German or French as a second foreign language, but also Spanish or Russian. Such a proposal was made by the industry taking into account tourist market segments in Europe and Latvia particularly. This proposal was also accepted and now it is incorporated in the curriculum.

The regulation of BAT envisages that all curricula should be accepted by the Faculty Council. Therefore it can be assumed that the study programme corre-

sponds to the industry's needs and is competitive in the regional and global market.

Although, in general both students and employers highly evaluate student knowledge, skills and abilities, certain fields still need to be improved. The students demonstrated a comparatively low success at the courses connected with economics and finances. One of the improvements could be joining courses in modules consisting of related study courses and increasing the contact hours/the scope of ECTS for the module, e.g., *Economics and Financial Management and Accounting*. Another suggestion that might be applied when developing student skills and abilities might be using cross-disciplinary approach to studies. The conducted study showed that in the majority of cases there are no significant differences between evaluation of student skills and abilities done by different actors, as well as their significance for operating in the tourism business has been admitted by all stakeholders. This means that these skills and abilities can be developed in all study courses. For example, student creativity, a strategic approach to entrepreneurship, and team working skills might be enhanced in general education courses, field theoretical basic courses, specialization courses by applying group work, project work, discussions, case studies, and problem-solving tasks. The skills developed might be further strengthened in the internship training in the industry. The necessary precondition to implement this approach is cooperation between the professors of different study courses. The created supportive learning environment that motivates student learning will help developing skills and abilities and acquiring the knowledge, especially if the studies provide an opportunity for cooperation between peers, and students and professors, as well as motivate students to independent studies thus promoting their autonomous learning.

To summarize, the findings of the study may be used to update the present tourism curriculum and/or design new curricula for other tourism specialities.

“Tourism is not a peripheral activity in the world. It is rather a hallmark activity of the postmodern world. As such it is a significant factor in world-making and

people-making. The same can be said for universities – they are major enterprises and can be sources of innovative thinking and change. The intersection of tourism and universities is therefore a powerful nexus of potential influence” (TEFI, 2009, 4) that can

enhance the development of society and contribute to the fulfillment of the three EU strategic priorities – smart growth, sustainable growth and inclusive growth (Europe 2020, 2010).

Izzivi na področju izobraževanja za turizem: skladnost učnega programa s potrebami v gospodarstvu

Povzetek

Študija je bila izvedena v četrtem največjem zavodu za terciarno izobraževanje v Latviji, ki vključuje tudi visokošolsko izobraževanje na področju turizma. Namen raziskave je bil preučiti potrebe deležnikov, oceniti znanje študentov turizma ter ugotoviti, kakšna raven spretnosti in sposobnosti je potrebna za opravljanje dela na področju poslovnega turizma. Obenem je bil cilj študije tudi ugotoviti, kako bi lahko izboljšali obstoječi učni program. Študija je potekala v treh fazah: analiza konteksta, vprašalnik, ki je zajemal 262 študentov turizma in 192 delodajalcev po Likertovi lestvici, primerjava rezultatov z ugotovitvami podobnih študij iz drugih držav in priprava sklepov in predlogov za izboljšanje učnega programa. Mnenja deležnikov smo preučili s kvantitativnim pristopom, ki je temeljil na analizi primarnih (deskriptivna statistika) in sekundarnih podatkih (Levenejev test enakosti varianc in ANOVA test). Rezultati študije so pokazali, kakšna znanja, spretnosti in sposobnosti so potrebni za uspeh na področju poslovnega turizma. Rezultati kažejo tudi na to, da sedanji učni načrt zadostuje potrebam gospodarstva in študentom. Študenti pripisujejo veliko vrednost znanju in veščinam, ki so jih pridobili v času študija. To potrjujejo tudi delodajalci, ki so znanje, veščine in sposobnosti študentov zelo dobro ocenili. Učni program bi lahko izboljšali z moduli povezanih študijskih predmetov, z uvedbo interdisciplinarnega pristopa do študija in z uporabo ustreznih metod poučevanja in učenja, z uvedbo bolj spodbudnega učnega okolja, s stimulacijo samostojnega učenja ter z motiviranjem študentov.

Ključne besede: učni program pri predmetu turizma, znanja, veščine, sposobnosti

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