E-manager – A New Professional Profile in Tourism Landscape

Andrei Dumitrescu¹, Tom Savu¹

(1) POLITEHNICA University of Bucharest,
Department of Production Engineering,
313 Splaiul Independentei, RO-060042, Bucharest, Romania
E-mail: dumitrescu.andrei@yahoo.co.uk

Abstract
This paper presents the work performed up to this date by an European partnership in order to develop a new professional profile in the tourism sector and to design the associated curriculum. The new professional profile is the e-manager - the professional who uses and manages ICT tools in order to monitor and control activities in a tourism organisation in a more effective way. It was decided from the very beginning that the method of learning will be online learning and it will be done using a new specialised portal. The work started with the establishment of the methodology for defining the profile and for designing the curriculum. Afterwards, an initial study was carried-out in each partner country. The study was focused on the state of the art of tourism and tourism learning (especially the online learning in tourism). The profile was finally defined. There were established national networks with stakeholders in tourism and learning in order to ensure that their interests are best served. The subsequent work was done involving the stakeholders. Finally, the curriculum for e-manager was designed.

Keywords: online learning, professional profile, tourism learning

1 Introduction
Professionals from tourism and education discovered that ICT has a great impact on the tourism business. Electronic commerce and revenue management are heavily influenced by ICT.

In this new environment, tourism professionals need skills to identify opportunities in the new tourism market. ICT enables direct communication with clients and improves efficiency and effectiveness of customer service, trading and product design related processes. At the same time, ICT makes competition harder and demands continuous investments. ICT provides new tools and enables new distribution channels. It supports tourism innovations and vice versa. ICT development has created a new business environment, e-tourism. These continuous developments require new skills.

Tourism professionals need skills for successful navigation in tourism value net. Many of these skills develop with work experience, but tourism educational institutions should provide sufficient knowledge and practice to meet emerging skill requirements in the tourism labour market. ICT should be studied in the context of its application.

In this context, professionals from different countries decided to join their forces and competencies in order to develop innovative digital contents for ICT skills in the tourism firms, especially SMEs, as a result of the common work of a multi-stakeholder network.

The framework is the Leonardo da Vinci programme and the project received the name e-Talents. The European partnership includes:

- BDF - Balear Development and Training (Spain);
- RKW - Rationalization & Innovation Centres (Germany);
- UETP Action Link/Action Synergy (Greece);
- FETE-UGT - Federation Teaching Workers – General Trade Union (Spain);
- Ármuli Comprehensive Secondary School (Iceland);
The objectives of the project were decided to be:

- Ensure that the tourism sector workforce acquire the necessary skills and knowledge for their job and personal development, which has a direct influence on European competitiveness and economic growth, and thus helps to create more and better jobs.
- Contribute to the development of digital contents which is a fundamental element of the knowledge society.
- Offer an integral virtual platform for learning, evaluation and accreditation of professional competencies in the tourism sector.
- Involve the final users and other stakeholders into the process of e-learning contents development and delivery in order to reach transparent and portable ICT skills certification and employment.

The partnership aimed to address the following target groups:

- Employees and managers in SMEs in the tourism sector;
- The unemployed with experience in the tourism sector;
- Tourism companies and SMEs;
- Tourism associations.

2 Establishment of methodology for definition of the new professional profile and for design of the associated curriculum

The partnership analysed carefully the context of tourism in Europe and also the trends in online learning. It was decided that it will be used the following methodology for definition of the new professional profile and for design of associated curriculum:

1. Initial study;
2. Definition of professional profile;
3. Establishment of a network of stakeholders;
4. Establishment of the associated curriculum;
5. Development of online learning tools;
6. Piloting;
7. Evaluation and Quality Control (as a continuous activity).

3 Initial Study

The initial study was carried-out mainly by three methods:

- Desk research;
- Focus groups;
- Questionnaires.

All the partners applied the above methods for the tourism field in their country. The Romanian partner (POLITEHNICA University of Bucharest) was responsible with the synthesis of all information gathered using the three methods. The report made by the Romanian partner was rather extensive. In this paper, only the tourism learning and especially the tourism online learning will be presented.

3.1 Desk Research

The desk research revealed that in all partner countries, the tourism knowledge and skills can be acquired in high schools, vocational training institutions and universities.

The most common tourism courses taught in high schools and similar vocational institutions are: tourism worker; tourist agency specialist; tourism and restaurants; culinary art; hotel/restaurant techniques; hotel technician; hotel maid; tourist guide; mountain guide.

The most common tourism courses taught in universities are: tourism studies (diploma in tourism); tourism and services; geography of tourism; management of tourism companies; planning, management
and policies in tourism; business administration - tourism management; business administration - travel and tourism; rural tourism.

There are some differences in education and training systems between the countries of the e-Talents partnership. Differences regard types of education and training institutions, affiliation to different ministries and certification. Usually, the Ministry of Education and Ministry of Labour are in charge with tourism learning.

Distance learning courses in tourism exists, but few of them are genuine e-learning courses. In all partner countries, tourism e-learning is in an embryonic stage.

Often, e-learning courses are just an adaptation of face-to-face courses for online use. The e-books are the same with textbooks, curriculum is the same and examination methods are the same.

Some elements of e-learning exist in the following types of education and training: distance learning with downloads and blended learning. These elements are:

- E-mail communication between learner and tutor;
- Virtual libraries with e-books;
- Virtual classrooms.

A common problem in e-learning nowadays is that learners have more and more knowledge and skills in ICT. The result is that the courses should be updated more often than before.

Other problems detected regarding e-learning are:

- Some courses are in foreign languages (English, Spanish).
- There are courses with no proper accreditation.
- The content of some courses is obsolete.

In some countries, there are specific barriers to e-learning:

- Computer illiteracy;
- Low usage of Internet at home.

3.2 Focus groups

All the partners organised one or more focus groups in order to determine the need for ICT knowledge and skills in the tourism sector. The participants at focus groups were stakeholders in the e-Talents project. The type of organisations that were represented at workshops is displayed in Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of organisation</th>
<th>No. participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hotel</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School / University</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel Agency</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training Centre/Agency</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enterprises Associations</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tourism Related Services</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tourism Information Organisation</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VET Organisation</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tourism Marketing Organisation</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Institute</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The participants at workshops discussed about the introduction of ICT in the tourism sector and about professional knowledge and skills required by this new mean of work.

ICT was introduced in tourism rather late, because ICT specialists adapted with difficulty to the needs of tourism industry. The application of ICT in the hotel industry has been fairly recent. Smaller hotels tend to be further behind, especially those that neither plan nor have a clear vision of future needs. ICT was considered not just a new tool, but another technique.

There is a considerable difference between large and small hotels regarding the introduction of ICT:

- Large hotels implemented ICT quick and in all departments.
- Small hotels were reluctant to introduce ICT and when they did it, they used it only for reception and bookings.

Owners of small hotels were reluctant to introduce ICT because they were not convinced of its benefits. Also, they were afraid of high costs for investment and maintenance. ICT was introduced in tourism agencies on a larger scale than in hotels.

Personnel with high qualification (not particularly in ICT) and young personnel welcome the introduction of ICT. Older personnel and personnel with low qualification opposed training in ICT, even when they faced unemployment.

### 3.3 Questionnaires

The Romanian partner designed a questionnaire aimed to identify and rank the organisations’ need for skills in ICT. The questionnaire was conceived following the general rules from the specialised literature (Aaker et al., 1995; Dillon et al., 1987). Later, the questionnaire was analysed by the partnership and some improvements were made.

The questionnaire was composed by the following sections:

- General information about the respondent’s organisation;
- Personal data of the respondent;
- General ICT competencies needed in a tourism company;
- Department comparison from the point of view of ICT skills;
- Specific ICT skills needed in specific departments.

The “general ICT competencies” section consisted from a list of competencies (ability to use computer, ability to process elementary text and graphics etc.). Each competence from the list was evaluated by the respondent in terms of importance and availability on the labour market. Actually, the respondent had to assess the importance of competence by assigning a mark from 1 (not important) to 5 (very important). Also, the respondent was asked if he/she is able to find a person with the considered competence in the labour market (option A) or prefers to train the employee within the company (option B).

There were evaluated using the questionnaire no less than 34 ICT competencies. The respondents were actually the participants at focus groups. The questionnaires from all partner countries were processed. Because of space constraint, the results are presented in a synthesised manner in Table 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Competence</th>
<th>Importance [1 - 5]</th>
<th>Option A [%]</th>
<th>Option B [%]</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Using a computerised system</td>
<td>3.66</td>
<td>79.52</td>
<td>20.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using computer files</td>
<td>3.91</td>
<td>74.07</td>
<td>25.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Processing text and graphics</td>
<td>3.94</td>
<td>80.39</td>
<td>19.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using a spreadsheet editor</td>
<td>4.14</td>
<td>83.33</td>
<td>16.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using databases</td>
<td>3.66</td>
<td>53.42</td>
<td>46.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicating through internal networks</td>
<td>3.58</td>
<td>58.62</td>
<td>41.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using Internet</td>
<td>3.89</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Designing web pages</td>
<td>3.71</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using software tools for project management</td>
<td>3.55</td>
<td>56.25</td>
<td>43.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presenting the information</td>
<td>4.02</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4 Definition of e-manager
From the results of the initial study emerged the need for a new professional profile. The new professional profile should have management and ICT competences. This new professional profile was foreseen in a certain degree from the start of the project. At that stage, it had received its name – e-manager.

In a transnational meeting of project’s partnership held in Bucharest, the results of the initial study were analysed in-depth. After several discussions, the partnership agreed on the following definition of e-manager.

The e-manager is the professional who uses and manages ICT tools in order to monitor and control activities in a tourism organisation in a more effective way.

The competences of the e-manager are strongly related to the knowledge and skills associated to computer programmes used in different departments of the tourism company. Afterwards, national stakeholder networks were established and continuously consulted in order to ensure that the stakeholders interests are taken into consideration when the online course is designed.

5 Establishment of curriculum for e-manager
From the very beginning, it was decided that the modules for e-manager will be delivered only online and they will available on a learning portal. The e-learning contents will be uploaded at http://www.etalents.eu/.

The e-learning contents will have 3 modules:

Module 1. E-Administration
- Customer Relationship Management
- Booking
- Customer movement
- Human Resource Management
- e-marketing
- e-business

Module 2. E-Quality
- ISO 9001
- Environmental ISO 14001
- Stock control
- Maintenance
- Food and Beverage
- House Keeping

Module 3. E-Accounting
- e-Finance
- e-Banking

6 Conclusions
The partnership of an European project is in the process of designing an online course for a new professional profile in the tourism sector: the e-manager. The process followed the recommended path: identification of need on the market; study of market, definition of profile, design of curriculum and design of contents.

7 References
[2] Dillon, W. et. al. (1987), Marketing Research in a Marketing Environment, St. Louis;