

THE PECULIARITIES OF HUMAN RESOURCES IN THE TOURISM INDUSTRY

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Abstract

The competitiveness of a tourist destination is mainly based on its ability to offer unforgettable, unique and unparalleled experiences to customers. Due to the intangible component of the tourist product, it is the result of the facts, actions and performance of people engaged in tourism for the satisfaction of travelers. The cost of available human resources is a major factor determining the competitiveness of a destination, considering the fact that the tourism industry is a large labor force. The importance of human resources in the tourism industry lies in the skills, knowledge and skills that make the human resource a valuable asset of tourism. The knowledge that tourism employees must have is an important factor determining the competitiveness of a tourist destination. The present article identifies the human resources issues affecting the tourism sector, namely low wages, high demand for staff flexibility, high levels of labor instability or skills shortages. For most tourism companies, predicting skills that will be needed in the future in the tourism industry, under current vulnerability and instability, is a real challenge.

Keywords: Tourism employment, Employee fluctuation, Tourism industry

1. INTRODUCTION

Tourism refers to people's experience as guests, and the provision of tourist products and services is appreciated by people's wishes and expectations. At the same time, tourism products and services are provided by people, with tourism sector employees being an integral part of the product that visitors request and pay. (Presbury, 2010).

The development of tourism in a country or region depends on many factors, such as: the existence and the degree of capitalization of the natural and anthropic tourism resources, the development of the general and the specific tourism infrastructure, the existence of high quality tourist staff, the establishment of a legislative framework favorable to the efficient development of tourism activity. For an area to be declared of tourist interest, its tourism potential must meet two requirements: to have natural resources and other elements of attraction for tourists: to have access, transport, accommodation, food and commercial units, installations, other adjacent facilities, in a word, the basic

material and the infrastructure necessary to facilitate tourist activities. Once these conditions are met, it is obligatory the existence of the quality human factor that ensures the functionality of all the other components of the tourist offer.

The tourism industry has become increasingly competitive over the years, facing a growing need for customer focus, in the face of high international competition, fragile markets, insecure markets and consumer demands in a constant change. Lately, tourism companies have transformed their structure and pattern to meet the challenges of the international tourism market. In an unstable economic environment, will succeed only those organizations that will change in order to cope with the threats of competition and take advantage of existing opportunities for adapting to new markets, characterized by flexibility, creativity, determination, innovation and professionalism in action taken. In setting and implementing their development strategy, tourism firms need to realize that they can increase their attractiveness only by recruiting and retaining quality staff (McIver Consulting, 2002).

2. THE IMPORTANCE OF HUMAN RESOURCES IN TOURISM

The role of human resources in all economic sectors, including the tourism industry, is widely recognized, people being the key resource, a vital resource for all organizations. Tourist attractions and material endowments have a potential existence until they become tourist products through the human factor. Human resources are the most valuable assets of the tourism industry because they provide quality products and services. The main concerns of tourism being efficiency and quality, people are certainly the most important element in efficient operation and further development of the industry. Customer experience is closely linked to the quality of human resources. In order to offer a tourist product, it is not enough to have a pleasant natural environment; it is necessary to enliven this product, which implies the addition of interpersonal skills, communication skills, the pleasure of an irreproachable service, the ability to meet the needs of the clients, the teamwork skills and the understanding of the tourists' expectations (Laliberte, 2006).

The human resources needed to meet the needs of tourists, both in the emitting areas of tourists and in the tourist destinations, are very diverse. However, the importance of human resources in tourism development is usually overlooked or underestimated, similar to the whole tertiary sector. This attitude is due to the general misconception that employment in the service industry, especially in tourism, requires few skills and that the provision of adequate human resources is not a critical issue for the development of the industry. However, there are several reasons that support the basic idea of the

major importance of supply and quality of human resources in the tourism industry (Ritchie & Crouch, 2003).

First of all, the competitiveness of a tourist destination is based, above all, on its ability to offer unforgettable, unique and uncomplicated experiences to customers. The competitiveness of the tourism industry depends to a large extent on the quality of the human resources involved, their abilities, skills, attitudes and behavior (Kusluvan, 2003). The tourist products offered to customers include tangible goods and, to a large extent, services which, in their entirety, constitute the tourist's experience within the chosen destination. Due to the intangible component of the tourist product, it is obvious that it is the result of the facts, actions and performances of the people engaged in tourism to achieve the satisfaction of travelers. Providing employees with impeccable service to tourists is both key to the success of the employing organization and one of the greatest challenges. The challenge stems from the problem of finding employees who have the right attitude to their work, to serve customers, taking into account the time, the quality of their performance. To provide tourists with authentic, diverse experiences and for increasing the competitiveness of a tourist destination, the quality of services is very important, which in turn depends on the quality of human resources, the skills, skills and behavior of the employees that determine the uniqueness of tourism products.

Secondly, the cost of available human resources is a major factor determining the competitiveness of a destination, given that the tourism industry is a large labor force. Human resources costs are based on the general level of income in host regions, depending on labor productivity, regular labor conditions, employee benefits, etc.

Thirdly, attitude towards tourism jobs is very important for tourism development. This differs significantly from one area to another; crafts as chefs, waiters or small entrepreneurs are better seen in some countries than in others. The tourism industry must take into account the fact that, in order to be successful, it must attract and retain within it the best and most talented employees for which they are in constant competition with other industries and professions.

Fourthly, the skills and knowledge transform the human resource into a valuable productive asset of tourism. The knowledge that tourism employees must have is an important factor determining the competitiveness of a tourist destination. In order to obtain and enrich these knowledge and skills, educational and research institutions play a leading role, and so numerous training organizations have been set up for this purpose.

3. THE SPECIFICITIES OF EMPLOYMENT IN TOURISM

Human resources are the key element through which continued renewal, improvement, change and organizational culture can provide a sustainable competitive edge for tourism companies. The success of tourism companies lies in the quality of the services offered and in the close relationship between employees and customers, human capital being the primary factor in the promotion and effectiveness of the tourism product. The literature has identified several features of employment in the tourism industry (Baum, 2015; Santero-Sanchez et al., 2015), presented in Figure 1.

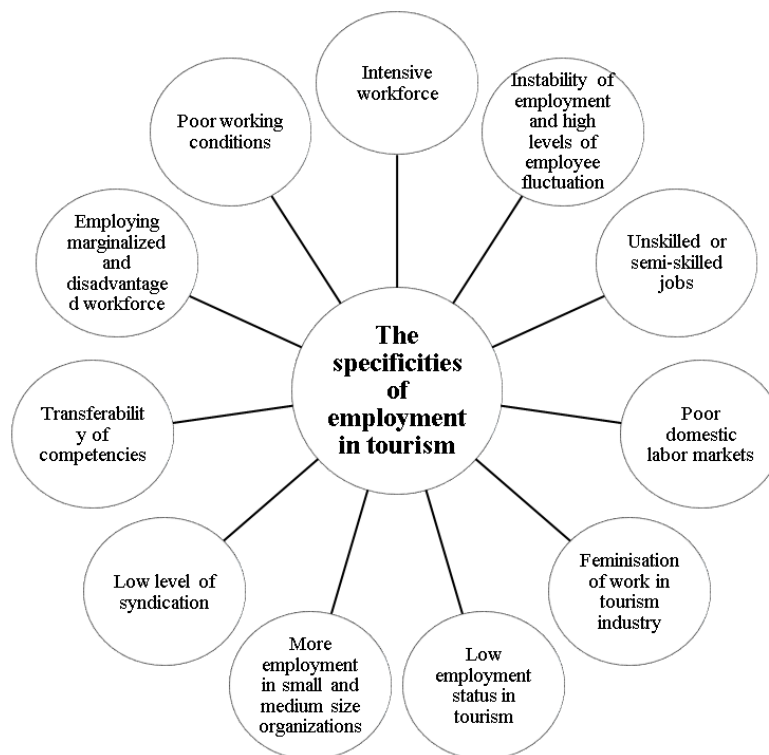


FIGURE 1. FEATURES OF EMPLOYMENT IN THE TOURISM INDUSTRY

Source: Developed by author on literature review

3.1. Intensive workforce

Tourism is an intensive workforce industry because it uses a large number of people to carry out its specific activities. The development of tourism has led to the creation of many skilled or unskilled jobs in both developed and developing countries. Increasing employment is one of the most important indicators of the social impact of tourism, as creating new jobs determines the improvement of living standards and conditions for the socio-economic progress of host communities. Tourism creates

multiple employment opportunities in both the formal and informal sectors of the economy (Sharma K. K., 2004).

The fact that tourism is an intensive labor force industry implies that this sector creates more jobs than other economic sectors with the same capital invested. This is due to the importance and role of human resources in tourism, the impossibility of man replacing the apparatus in the service delivery process and the late adoption of technology in this industry. The intensity of the workforce has determined the description of the tourism industry as the people's industry that requires employees to have human skills.

3.2. Instability of employment and high levels of employee fluctuation

Job instability and the high level of departure of tourism workers are due to a multitude of factors such as seasonality of tourism demand, precarious working conditions, employment opportunities in other sectors, poor image of industry, small-scale employers offers limited opportunities for promotion, etc. Boella (2000) states that there are also some employees who change their jobs from an employer who can not offer opportunities for promotion to another, but still remain in the tourism industry. In this case, it is no longer considered the departure of the employees, the movement, their mobility, the staff not leaving the tourist industry.

For many young graduates, the tourism industry is the employer who offers the opportunity to get a first job and the beginning of his career (Boella, 2000). Regarding the consequences of increased employee mobility, some specialists consider that this feature is beneficial because it offers flexible, favorable employment opportunities, especially for students who want to earn income during the holiday or learn a foreign language, to temporary workers who want to work, to women with household duties, workers looking for part-time jobs, etc. (Boella, 2000). For other authors, this feature has negative consequences, because seasonal and part-time work attracts marginalized workers and the skilled ones lead them to leave; also other negative effects are stress, low morale, high workload due to lack of staff and skills, low quality of products and services, low productivity, unfair workers, etc. (Kusluvan, 2003).

Another negative consequence of labor instability is that it causes direct and indirect costs in the tourism industry. Direct costs include time and money spending for finding, hiring, and continuing training for new workers who need to replace those who have gone, and indirect costs include a reduction in productivity and services due to inadequate staffing during the search for other employees, and lack of experience new workers (Lynn, 2002).

3.3. Unskilled or semi-skilled jobs

It is widely believed that tourism jobs are semi-skilled or unqualified, which means that the skills and knowledge required can be quickly and easily assimilated by in-service training without the need for education formal. The low level of qualification required by tourism jobs explains the inferior status, low pay and poor working conditions in this industry. Accordingly, tourism firms also appreciate the training and practical and operational skills that can be easily acquired at the workplace without requiring formal qualifications for beginners. A large part of the employees in tourism is made up of workers who have basic formal education other than in tourism, short-time students and accident workers (Kusluvan, 2003). This view of the need for unskilled or semi-skilled workers in tourism is, however, disputed by some authors who believe that employees in this sector must have considerable cultural and communication skills and knowledge to provide services to international standards.

Taking into account the growing customer expectations of direct relations with tourism staff, new skills have emerged for workers, namely those related to personal and communication behavior. More complex jobs have led to changes in training concerns from operational or vocational skills to personal and social skills. Although operational skills are still required, more and more emphasis is placed on technological innovation.

3.4. Poor domestic labor markets

Internal labor markets are those labor markets within organizations, the tourism industry, which have a set of regulations that regulate people's rotation and reward. These rules refer to "promotion criteria, training opportunities, differential payments, job assessments and opening up to external markets" (Kusluvan, 2003). Although the views on the characteristics of the domestic labor market in tourism (weak or strong) are divided, the existence of a weak market can explain features of employment as low remuneration, high instability, unfavorable image of industry.

3.5. Feminisation of work in tourism industry

Jobs in the tourist industry are more occupied by women in many countries, this trend of feminisation of tourism work being increasing. This tendency for female recruitment is explained either by the fact that it is about professional functions considered closer to women's skills or because a part of women accept "more flexible" statutes with lower salaries. Tasks such as breakfast, kitchen and bedding, performed in the household, and similar services in the hotel are traditionally regarded as female occupations. (Sharma K. K., 2005) As in other sectors, the tourism industry shows significant gender segregation of the labor market, both horizontally and vertically. As far as vertical separation is concerned, lower levels

of occupations with little career development are dominated by females, and leadership positions are dominated by males. Occupational separation is considered to be driven by the likelihood that women will have dual careers combining paid jobs with household responsibilities. Also, this motivation may exclude women from leading positions.

3.6. Low employment status in tourism

According to various authors, employment in tourism is seen as characterized by the low level of job status, low wages and poor working conditions. (Samson, Wanderi, & Ondigi, 2011) Generally, in society, most tourism jobs are not given a high status or respect, which contributes to the poor image of the industry. Maintaining low employment status in tourism is due to several factors, such as: More jobs in the sector are seasonal, low-skilled, low-paid, low-paid; also, working conditions are precarious; over time, tourism has been associated with servilism, being considered the work of women, namely cooking, serving, cleaning.

This low status of tourism occupations is often transferred to workers in the sector, who are perceived as "uneducated, unmotivated, unqualified and unproductive." (Kusluvan, 2003) Some researchers consider that tourism occupations have a relatively high status in Europe and in some developing countries where tourism is the main sector of activity, identifying among the positive aspects of jobs in this industry the following: to travel, knowing people with different nationalities and cultures, speaking a foreign language, visiting some attractive and exotic places, the fame of working in foreign companies, etc.

3.7. More employment in small and medium size organizations

Even though global multinational companies, large tour operators, hotel chains and catering establishments, airlines, etc. in the tourism industry still dominate small and medium-sized organizations, both in developed countries, both in developing and developing countries. This situation has negative effects on human resources in the tourism industry, such as lack of professionalism and skills, poor financial capital and poor organizational performance (Kusluvan, 2003).

3.8. Low level of syndication

Trade union unions are concerned about the representation of its members in order to obtain reasonable working conditions. Over time, membership in trade unions in tourism has been lowered for various reasons identified by specialists in the field. The large number of small institutions does not provide enough space to hold meetings with potential members. The dispersion of the labor force determines the lack of cohesion of the groups of workers with common interests. There are a large

number of part-time workers who are not interested in belonging to a union, lacking the tradition of union membership. Changing work shifts also makes it difficult to contact and organize all workers (Boella, 2000).

3.9. Transferability of competencies

This feature relates to the fact that the tourism industry workers with different skills in this field can use these skills in several sectors, both within and outside the industry, in other fields of activity.

3.10. Employing marginalized and disadvantaged workforce

The marginal labor force groups that the tourism industry employs mainly in low-skilled working places are young people, migrant workers, ethnic minority groups, children under 18, elderly people, etc.

3.11. Poor working conditions

Many jobs in tourism, especially those at lower levels, are recognized as having poor working conditions and are characterized by: long, irregular work hours, low wages, lack of overtime payments, heavy workload, routine work, low security, low promotion opportunities, unprofessional management of employees. These working conditions determine the instability of the workforce (Kusluvan, 2003). Lucas and Mansfield (2008) identify six properties directly affecting employment in tourism: "an unpredictable demand for services; a high level of direct contact with customers; low levels of labor productivity; low wages on a wide range of jobs; high rates of labor instability; difficulty filling vacant posts." Jobs in the hospitality industry have often been disapproved of the nature, status and conditions offered. Walmsley lists several features of tourism employment repeatedly cited: "low pay, low skills, negative image, short and seasonal schedule, lack of management and a well-established career plan." (Walmsley, 2004). Baum (2006) adds to these characteristics that workplaces in tourism are indecent, physical work, monotonous and boring, prolonged and anti-social.

Bar-On and Cooper (1998) characterize tourism employment as "seasonal, low-time, casual, self-employed, part of the informal economy." In addition, the authors consider that considering also six other features of tourism work:

1. *Employment in tourism is seen as a whole.* The typical characteristics of the workforce directly engaged in the tourism industry should not be extended to the indirect and induced occupation of tourism workers; the features of workers in the accommodation sector, for example, are also not valid for those in equipment supply companies.

2. *Employment is characterized by freelancers.* The tourism industry is dominated by small and medium-sized enterprises, which carry out independent activities in its various sectors: accommodation, distribution, food, etc.
3. *Hiring women is important.* This derives not only from the increase in the number of women looking for a job, but also from the nature of tourism occupations more suited to them.
4. *Low-budget employment is a feature of tourism.* It offers tourism businesses the opportunity to adapt their staff according to their tourist activity.
5. *Seasonal employment is a characteristic feature of tourism.* Tourism engagements are dependent on the demand for tourist products that is higher at certain times of the year, depending on the leisure time of tourists, preferably for certain seasons, etc.
6. *The spatial distribution of tourism generates jobs in dispersed areas.* This feature relates to the fact that employment in tourism is more important at local or regional level.

The multitude of occupations in tourism requires a combination of high skills and low skills. Tourism companies often encounter difficulties in recruiting staff due to the negative features of tourism work that make it unattractive for potential candidates, so it is becoming a necessity to radically change the poor image of the tourism industry among people looking for a job. One of the negative traits of tourism engagement to be changed is the generally valid view that jobs in this sector require little or no skills. On the contrary, in order to be able to successfully cope with all the tasks imposed by the different functions in this industry, the hired personnel must have solid knowledge, have specific competences, obtained by graduating from specialized education institutions and by attending appropriate training courses. While skill needs differ from one occupation to another, research shows that there is a set of key competences required for most of the tourism industry qualifications. At present, the skills needed by the tourism industry include the following key competences: communication in the mother tongue and in foreign languages; teamwork skills; problem solving ability; entrepreneurial skills; planning and organizational skills; working autonomy; learning skills; digital knowledge and others (European Commission, 2016).

4. CONCLUSIONS

There are multiple human resources problems affecting the tourism sector, such as low wages, high demand for staff flexibility, high levels of labor instability, skills shortages, etc. Many skilled workers leave the tourism sector, and many graduates of tourism training institutions opt for jobs in other areas due to the negative features of employment in the industry, resulting in a significant loss of human resources and skills. For most tourism companies, predicting skills that will be needed in the future in the tourism industry, under current vulnerability and instability, is a real challenge.

Continuing investment in human resources by participating in training and developing skills and capacity to add value to the organization is an intrinsic quality of recognized tourism success organizations around the world. Improving the skills and knowledge of the workforce can increase the competitiveness of tourist destinations and contribute to the establishment and maintenance of a viable industry.

The need to assimilate new knowledge, the formation of new skills is becoming more and more pressing nowadays, as diversified and multiplying tourism offers and services require the existence of suitably qualified staff. Thus, the formation and development of human resources plays an important role in the development of professionalism in the tourism industry. Those workers who will always have new knowledge and skills will excel at the workplace, achieving performance.

One of the most important concerns of any employer in tourism is the ability to respond and adapt to change, especially at the management level. The existence of managerial skills and the retention of highly qualified employees becomes an imperative in a high-tech sector where knowledge and managerial skills are vital.

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