

Secondary school education for the needs of tourism and hospitality in Croatia – analysis of present state and proposals for improvement

Introduction

Developing and driving competitiveness in tourism depends not only upon the existence of scenery and landscapes or upon augmenting the quality of the tourism, hospitality and hotel offering, but also upon properly and adequately educated production and service personnel and managers, who have the opportunity and obligation of pursuing continuous learning. Comprising sociological, psychological and developmental elements, education is a complex, ongoing and long-term process with regard to both the timeframe in which it evolves or the objectives it seeks to achieve. The concept of education should not be confused with the concepts of learning, training and personnel development. Namely, the education of personnel refers to all the expertise, knowledge, skills and abilities, in the broadest sense, of an individual who is training for a profession in life, in which he/she will be subject to the process of independent decision-making and action in complex, unfamiliar or unpredictable situations. As such, education represents the *condicio sine qua non* of future development.

Given the definitions of tourism and hospitality, these are obviously complex and fragmented economic service and labour-intensive branches with specific demands that entail the existence of appropriately educated managerial and production-and-service personnel capable of performing successfully in an exceptionally customer-driven industry. Communication and interpersonal action are at the heart of tourism and hospitality, with the human factor being a key to business excellence. It is, therefore, right to maintain that having well-trained personnel is one of the fundamental competitive advantages of tourism and hospitality, and it is at the core of satisfying guests and tourists. Also, the quality of tourism workers and hospitality staff defines the quality of the tourism and hospitality product and services.

Considering the above, the educational process for tourism and hospitality needs to be adequately designed to ensure that pupils and students acquire the knowledge, skills and competences required. This is a field of formal education

focused on preparing pupils and students to carry out managerial and professional jobs in the domain of tourism and hospitality.

This paper aims to analyse the issue of schooling and educating production-and-service and managerial personal for tourism and hospitality in the Republic of Croatia. The paper is based on the assumption that the share of tourism traffic realised, the share of planned number of enrolled pupils and the share of secondary vocational schools for hospitality and tourism professions are interdependent. Namely, it is reasonable to assume that the Croatian counties accounting for the highest share in overall tourism traffic will have the largest number of secondary vocational schools for professions in hospitality and tourism. On the other hand, considering their share in overall tourism traffic, these leading counties should also exhibit a high rate of employment in the group „H – Hotels and Restaurants”. This fact should be a motivating factor for pupils to train for jobs in these fastest-growing service branches in Croatia.

1. State of secondary education for the needs of tourism and hospitality in Croatia

The data of the Croatian Employment Office, the Central Bureau of Statistics and the Croatian Tourism Board show that six Adriatic counties account for the majority of tourism traffic in Croatia. Data also show that only about 50 percent of secondary vocational schools for jobs in tourism and hospitality are registered in these six counties. This indicates a disproportion between the share of tourism traffic realised and the share of secondary vocational schools for hospitality and tourism in the counties of Croatia.

Considering the total tourism traffic realised in the three-year period 2007–2009, it is interesting to examine the extent to which the fastest growing counties in terms of tourism participate in generating hospitality and tourism workers.

Hospitality and tourism schools and hotel business schools are vocational schools dedicated to training and educating pupils for jobs required for the further development of Croatian tourism and hospitality. Croatia has a total of 93 vocational secondary schools for jobs in hospitality and tourism. Some schools provide a four-year education (technical programmes) for hotel and tourism technicians, and tourism and hotel sales officers, while others provide three-year education (crafts and industrial programme) for waiters, chefs and pastry-chefs. The schools also provide special programmes or programmes for gaining secondary school qualifications or semi-skilled qualifications for pupils with developmental difficulties, as well as two-year programmes for semi-skilled qualifications. Of the total number of schools, 89 are public and four are private schools, two of which are located in Zagreb, one in Višnjan (Istarska County) and one in Splitsko-Dalmatinska County (www.skole.hr).

For the beginning of the school year 2009/2010, for all 93 secondary vocational schools for professions in tourism and hospitality, in Croatia was planned the enrolment of 5,162 pupils, distributed across 211.58 divisions.

A detailed analysis of professions provided by secondary vocational schools reveals that the majority of pupils are to train for hotel and tourism technicians, chefs (29 percent) and waiters (21 percent). The least number (a mere 3 percent of enrolments) are planned to train for assistant chef and pastry-chef, assistant chef and assistant waiter.

The question arises as to the motivations and reasons behind the underperformance of the plan of enrolments for specific tourism and hospitality professions, and the distribution of enrolments by county with regard to a county's share in total tourism traffic.

The order of the six counties accounting for the largest share of tourism traffic in the observed three-year period is as follows: Istarska County, Primorsko-Goranska County, Splitsko-Dalmatinska County, Zadarska, Dubrovačko-Neretvanska County and Šibensko-Kninska County (table 1).

Table 1

Overview of the most developed Croatian counties, in terms of tourism, and their share in the overall number of vocational secondary schools for professions in tourism and hospitality and in the number of pupils enrolled

County	Share in overnights	Share in tourist arrivals	Share in no.of schools	Share in no.of pupils
Istarska	31.70	24.60	8.43	4.45
Primorsko-goranska	19.79	19.99	6.02	6.05
Splitsko-dalmatinska	16.27	15.39	14.46	12.52
Zadarska	10.84	9.66	3.61	4.86
Dubrovačko-neretvanska	7.79	8.76	4.82	6.32
Šibensko-kninska	6.90	7.16	2.41	2.72
Total share	93.29	85.56	39.75	36.92

Table 1 demonstrates a disproportion between the six counties realising the majority of tourism traffic and the number of vocational secondary schools and number of pupils training for hospitality and tourism professions in each of these counties (Figure 1).

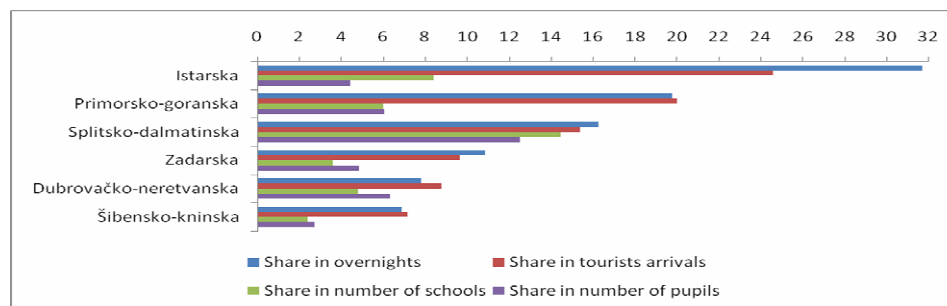


Figure 1. Ratio of share of enrolled pupils, number of vocational secondary schools, overnights and number of tourist arrivals in six counties with the highest tourism traffic

Source: Table 1.

Namely, while accounting for 93.29 percent of overnights and 85.56 percent of tourist arrivals, the counties listed account for only 39.75 percent of vocational secondary schools and only 36.92 percent of pupils. The remaining 15 counties with a relatively small share of overnights (6.7 percent) and tourist arrivals (14.44 percent) account for as high as 60.20 percent of vocational secondary schools and 63.08 percent of enrolled pupils (Table 2).

Table 2
Share of individual counties in the number of vocational secondary schools and number of pupils enrolled

County	No. of schools	Share of schools	No. of pupils	Share of pupils
I. Zagrebačka	4	4.82	187	4.23
II. Krapinsko-zagorska	3	3.61	158	3.58
III. Sisačko-moslavačka	4	4.82	129	2.92
IV. Karlovačka	3	3.61	124	2.81
V. Varaždinska	1	1.20	84	1.90
VI. Koprivničko-križevačka	4	4.82	186	4.21
VII. Bjelovarsko-bilogorska	5	6.02	308	6.97
VIII. Primorsko-goranska	5	6.02	269	6.09
IX. Ličko-senjska	3	3.61	81	1.83
X. Virovitičko-podravska	5	6.02	128	2.90
XI. Požeško-slavonska	2	2.41	91	2.06

XII. Brodsko-posavska	3	3.61	179	4.05
XIII. Zadarska	3	3.61	216	4.89
XIV. Osječko-baranjska	5	6.02	351	7.94
XV. Šibensko-kninska	2	2.41	121	2.74
XVI. Vukovarsko-srijemska	3	3.61	261	5.91
XVII. Splitsko-dalmatinska	12	14.46	557	12.60
XVIII. Istarska	7	8.43	198	4.48
XIX. Dubrovačko-neretvanska	4	4.82	281	6.36
XX. Međimurska	2	2.41	103	2.33
XXI. City of Zagreb	3	3.61	436	9.87
Total in Croatia	83	100.00	4419	100.00

Source: Association of Hospitality and Tourism Schools of Croatia.

Some counties that account for a relatively small share of total tourism traffic participate ambitiously in secondary schooling. For example, Osječko-Baranska County accounts for a small share of overnights (0.33 percent) and tourist arrivals (0.76 percent) but has five vocational schools with 351 enrolled pupils.

Ranked penultimate by overnights and tourist arrivals, Bjelovarska-Bilogorska County has as many as five vocational schools (6 percent) and 308 enrolled pupils, making up about 6 percent of the total Croatian secondary-school population for professions in hospitality and tourism.

On the other hand, in the Adriatic counties that account for the major part of Croatia's tourism traffic, the number of pupils enrolled in vocational secondary schools is below expectations. This trend is indicative of the fact that pupils in these tourism-oriented regions show little interest in jobs in hospitality and tourism. The reasons behind the low interest in these jobs can be found in low wages, poor working conditions, seasonal employment and uncertainty in finding employment on a permanent basis. In the future, this fact will only intensify the existing trend of the migration of professionals from inland Croatia to Adriatic regions during the tourist season.

The question is raised as to the reason for this disproportion. Namely, the interdependence of the mentioned indicators would be expected. It would be reasonable to assume that the greatest interest in tourism and hospitality professions is exhibited in the counties with the fastest-growing tourist trade, and that these counties have the greatest number of vocational secondary schools and the greatest number of pupils interested in enrolling in them.

2. Proposals and guidelines for improving Croatia's vocational secondary schooling system

The need for education, which implies the continuous training of personnel, is permanent in nature; to meet the changing needs of tourists, learning must become a daily activity of personnel. The following reasons fuel the need for training and for continuous improvement:

- Change in the motivations, habits and needs of guests;
- Change emerging from the environment – encouraged by competition;
- Change brought about by the development of science and technology;
- Change brought about by the application of new technologies in absorbing, selecting and transmitting information using contemporary means of communication (the Internet);
- Change driven by suppliers and new systems.

Where hospitality personnel and tourism workers are concerned, two major issues are present. The first refers to structural unemployment, which is a global problem of the Croatian economy, including the hospitality and tourism industries. This issue is about:

- the mobility of the work force,
- qualifications, and
- lifelong education.

The second issue refers to the large number of unemployed persons (some 40,000) who have graduated from hospitality and tourism schools and are registered with the Employment Office. On the other hand, a shortage of workers occurs in peak seasons for jobs that are considered less attractive, that is, traditional jobs in hospitality and tourism are becoming less and less interesting. This trend has been observed in other, developed tourism countries as well, causing a shortage of personnel at an international level.

For these reasons, this paper puts forward proposals of concrete solutions for reorganizing the Croatian secondary schooling system for the needs of tourism and hospitality, together with guidelines for creating such a schooling system that would be capable of meeting the needs of modern hospitality and tourism practice.

Analyses show that the paramount problems have to do with the schooling of waiters and pastry-chefs, as recent years have seen a downward trend in enrolments for these occupations. A possible explanation could be the poor image in the eyes of the public, which can be summarised as follows:

- The hospitality industry no longer enjoys the integrity it once had.
- Jobs in hospitality are poorly paid and overly strenuous.
- In comparison with other occupations, a major issue is the explicit seasonality of the business, especially when it comes to chefs.
- Many feel that hospitality has lost its image of a prized profession in society.

The state of secondary vocational schools that are the research subject of this paper is problematic for a number of reasons, the following being the most significant:

- Secondary school centres are poorly adapted to and unequipped for this task.
- There is a disparity among teaching staff, resulting in varied quality in teaching pupils for certain trades, although pupils receive the same diploma.
- Secondary school centres do not possess the equipment and facilities needed for conducting practical classes.
- A discrepancy has been diagnosed between the curricula, on the one hand, and the needs of the tourism market, on the other. Neither the profession's specific features nor the need to harmonise secondary school programmes with university programmes are taken adequately into account.
- The school network is inadequate, unsuitable, inflexible and inefficient due to the fragmentation and dispersion of school centres.
- A vital issue pertains to inadequate legal regulations and the poor funding of school programmes.

Aimed at encouraging change in the existing, unsatisfactory state of secondary school education for professional trades, the proposal for measures presented in this paper is based on the real assumption that all stakeholders, identified as the carriers of specific activities, will partake in resolving personnel-related issues of Croatia's tourism and hospitality industries with equal enthusiasm and willingness. This implies continuous efforts across all proposed levels (Figure 2) in creating the preconditions to improving the hospitality/tourism and hotelier professions as a whole.

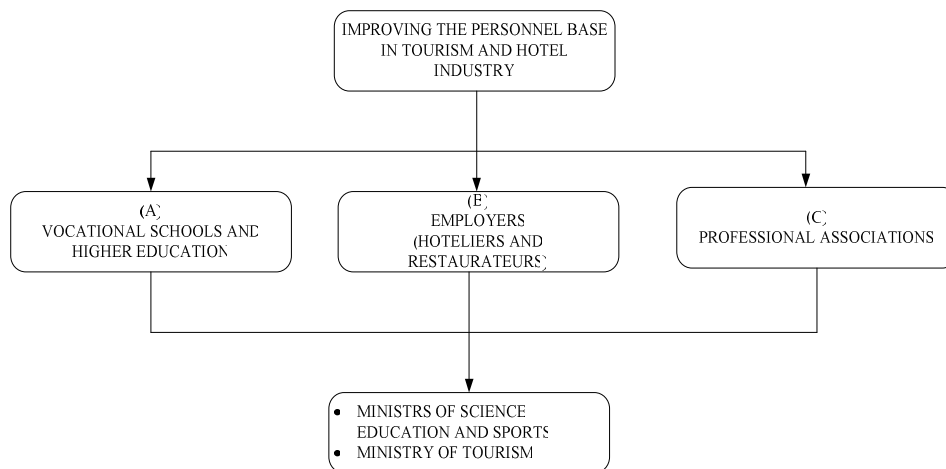


Figure 2. Partakers in the process of improving the personnel base in tourism and the hotel industry

Source: Authors.

The following section presents the concrete tasks which each of the above-mentioned stakeholders should be expected to carry out.

(A) Vocational schools and schools of higher education (providers of formal education) should:

1. Reconsider school curricula and bring them in line with the wants and interests of hotel and tourism companies.
2. Harmonise secondary school programmes with those of universities.
3. Innovate teaching programmes for developing knowledge for special tasks within the profession.
4. Rationalise the network of secondary vocational schools in Croatia (reduce the number of schools to some 15).
5. Improve the material conditions in which practical classes are conducted (equip demonstration rooms to match, in terms of quality, the facilities that employers have).
6. Improve the working conditions of personnel (define the criteria and standards for employing professionals).
7. Intensify cooperation with the hotel and tourism industry through contractual relationships.
8. Actively engage with hospitality and tourism businesses in designing plans for practical classes and professional practical training (organisational, contextual and methodological redefining).
9. Set a higher grading threshold for candidates enrolling in secondary vocational schools.
10. Undertake campaigns in the senior classes of elementary and secondary schools to enhance the interest and encourage the enrolment of pupils in further education.

(B) Employers (the hospitality and tourism trade) should:

1. Make an in-depth and comprehensive analysis of the existing nomenclature of occupations and put forward recommendations to vocational educational institutions (secondary vocational schools, two-year post secondary schools and faculties) regarding new programme contents together with the names of jobs.
2. Specify qualifications required for each job based on the programmes proposed.
3. Prior to the beginning of the tourist season and in accordance with the financial possibilities of each company, organise and finance the training of unemployed persons (seasonal workers) registered with the Employment Office.
4. Actively take part in all continuous education programmes organised by the providers of formal (secondary vocational schools, two-year post secondary schools and faculties) and informal (professional associations) education to help develop additional knowledge and skills in employees.

5. Provide additional education and motivation to mentors within the organisation to help them meet the criteria in organising and conducting professional practical training and practical classes for pupils and students who will later be employed by the organisation.
6. Set up with the providers of formal education contractual relationships relating to the practical classes of pupils and students.
7. Increase the competitiveness of the salaries of their employees (full-time or seasonal workers) in accordance with business conditions.
8. Institutionalise, on a permanent basis, the granting of scholarships to pupils and students for professional trades.

(C) Professional trade associations should:

1. Seek to design and carry out lifelong learning programmes for professional trades (in collaboration with the Ministry of Tourism).
2. Ensure, together with the Croatian Chamber of Crafts and Trade (Hospitality and Tourism Workers Guild), a greater number of licensed workshops in which pupils can participate in practical classes.
3. Devise a *Strategy for the Organisation and Execution of Professional Practical Training and Practical Classes for Pupils and Students Training for Hospitality/Tourism and Hotel Profession*. The Strategy should be proposed to employers and schools as a framework for establishing contractual relationships in the field of professional practical training and practical classes.
4. Draw up a *Proposal of the Nomenclature of Professions in the Croatian Hotel Industry* to ensure the standardisation of existing professions and to innovate future curricula based on the needs expressed regarding new jobs.

(D) Responsible ministries (Ministry of Science, Education and Sport; Ministry of Tourism) should:

1. Formulate a strategy to rationalise the network of secondary vocational schools in Croatia, in collaboration with the Association of Hospitality and Tourism Schools.
2. With the aim of increasing the number of highly qualified workers, create the preconditions needed for deploying systematic solutions in education and long-term measures to encourage employment through co-financing on the part of the Ministry of Tourism carried out in three segments: a) secondary schooling, b) higher education, and c) lifelong learning.
3. Compile a list of occupations for which there is the greatest need for education, based on collaboration with professional trade organisations and employers.
4. Evaluate appropriately the material costs involved in carrying out practical exercises in vocational secondary schools.
5. Create the legal preconditions to working in the profession (thus preventing the employment of persons without the appropriate professional qualifications).

Although contradictory statements are often heard with regard to the number and quality of personnel, rarely do hotel enterprises or private hospitality establishments see personnel as being on an equal footing with other organisational elements. This makes it all the more important to encourage, and take the lead from, the few hospitality-tourism enterprises and hotel enterprises that seek to ensure their future, in terms of personnel, by granting scholarships to pupils.

Conclusion

In the coming five-year period, the number of hotel beds in the total number of accommodation units in Croatia is planned to grow by one hundred thousand. Consequently, the need for employing new personnel will also grow (by about 10–15 thousand new workers).

Croatian tourism is seeing a downward trend in the supply of personnel for certain professions in hospitality and tourism. As this trend is expected to deepen in the future, appropriate measures are needed to generate an enabling atmosphere and enhance the appeal of jobs in tourism and hospitality. Where personnel are concerned, it is necessary to develop the profession across all levels, from the bottom to the top of the pyramid, to prevent the human factor from become a constraining factor of tourism development. All this leads to the conclusion that, very soon, programmes will need to be developed for encouraging employment, focusing on three segments of co-funding: co-financing secondary schooling, higher education and lifelong learning. According to relevant analyses, the present state of personnel in Croatia's hospitality-tourism sector and hotel sector is not at a satisfactory level for a number of basic reasons, the most important being the pronounced seasonality of business with insufficiently low occupancy rates, inadequate pay for responsible and hard work, and the loss of the image and dignity of hospitality and tourism as valued branches of the economy.

The precondition to augmenting the quality of secondary schooling for professional occupations in tourism and hospitality is the launching of an initiative for reforming the educational system in tourism and hospitality (reducing the number of vocational schools, adjusting the educational programme, improving practical classes, and granting scholarships to pupils and students), and continuously aligning it with the needs of the tourism business.

The educational system should aim at generating human resources whose theoretical and practical knowledge and skills will make them capable of competing not only in Croatia but abroad as well. Finally, it can be concluded that a discrepancy exists between the educational system and the needs of the tourism industry. It should be pointed out, however, that this is not only an issue of tourism but also an issue of structural unemployment in Croatia's entire economy.

Given the global crisis and the unsatisfactory performance of tourism and hospitality, the question is raised of how to continue. The authors' opinion is

that, in addition to general antirecession and incentive measures, greater resources need to be invested in educating personnel for tourism and hospitality, optimising the links between the academic and business sectors, and adjusting educational programmes to market needs to ensure more efficient and effective employment.

The potential for Croatia's competitive advancement lies in a number of factors, such as the modernising and adjusting of the educational system to world trends and market needs, augmenting the quality of business and vocational education, making greater investment in educational systems and innovation, and forging stronger links between education and the profession.

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Abstract

The Republic of Croatia has a total of 93 vocational schools for professions in hospitality and tourism: chef, waiter, pastry-chef, hotel and tourism technician, and hotel and tourism sales officer. Evidently, the outcome of such a wide dispersion of educational institutions can only be a decline in the quality of the teaching process. While there is obviously no lack of secondary schools in the

field of hospitality and tourism, the skills of pupils graduating from these schools are dubious in the opinion of many tourism and hospitality professionals. It is assumed that the causes behind the adverse results of the entire secondary schooling system lie in the lack of motivation in young people, who tend to leave the selection of their future occupation to their parents or who are likely to enrol in a vocational school only after they have failed to enrol in the school of their choice. The educational system in Croatia needs to undergo thorough change. Or, rather, it needs to adapt to European educational standards, because after the flow of services and goods with the EU, the flow of labour is to be expected, which will demand standard education for various levels and profiles of personnel, at least with regard to basic core subjects. On the other hand, there is a need to integrate hospitality schools in Croatia to create strong and well-equipped county centres for the schooling of future workers in tourism and hospitality. This paper seeks to put forward concrete solutions for reorganising the Croatian secondary schooling system for the needs of tourism and hospitality and to meet the demands of modern tourism practise.

Key words: secondary school education, education of tourism and hospitality, professional education.

Wykształcenie na poziomie średnim dla potrzeb turystyki i hotelarstwa w Chorwacji – analiza stanu obecnego i propozycje usprawnień

Streszczenie

Na terenie Chorwacji działają łącznie 93 szkoły średnie kształcące w zawodach przydatnych dla hotelarstwa i turystyki, takich jak: kucharz, kelner, cukiernik, technik hotelarstwa oraz zarządzanie turystyką. Oczywiście takie rozproszenie szkół może tylko powodować spadek jakości procesu dydaktycznego. Mimo że nie brakuje szkół średnich kształcących w zakresie turystyki i hotelarstwa, umiejętności uczniów, absolwentów tych szkół są nisko oceniane w opiniach wielu specjalistów z przemysłu turystycznego.

Słowa kluczowe: edukacja zawodowa na poziomie średnim, kształcenie w zawodzie turystyka i hotelarstwo, edukacja zawodowa.