

# Transformation of Hungarian Tourism Education

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## Tourism in Hungary

In Hungary, tourism is one of the most important industries of the economy. In 1997, Hungary was ranked 8th in the world concerning the number of international visitors (the country had approximately 40 millions visitors, of which approximately 20 millions tourists). The country's official income from international tourism exceeded 1,8 billion USD. According to estimations, tourism currently provides employment for 250,000 – 300,000 people.

Negative characteristics of Hungarian tourism are the relatively short average length of stay, the low average expenditure in international tourism, the significant share of the black economy and seasonality. Tourism in the popular tourism destinations, like Lake Balaton or Budapest, has a mass tourism nature, while other, less well-known areas of the country have difficulties in attracting visitors.

Despite these negative characteristics, tourism is also one of the most rapidly growing industries in Hungary. The country's natural and man-made resources provide a basis for further tourism development, especially in the currently underdeveloped areas. International tourism trends – growing interest for rural tourism, growing market for special interest holidays, short breaks, etc. – are favourable for a country with no large seaside resorts, but with a varied landscape, good geographical location, attractive cultural heritage, friendly people. So, combined with the crisis of traditional economic activities, tourism seems to be the only development alternative for many regions, resulting in a growing demand for educated labour force in this field.



## Tourism education in Hungary

Though hospitality education has traditions in Hungary, tourism education is a relatively new phenomenon in Hungary. University-level tourism education started with the establishment of the Tourism Research Centre of the Budapest University of Economic Sciences in 1992, followed by the establishment of the [Kodolányi János College](#) and by the introduction of tourism studies at the College of Commerce and Catering (now College of Commerce, Catering and Tourism). In the last five years tourism has been a booming academic field, so at the moment around fifteen institutions offer tourism studies in the framework of the higher educational system. These studies vary from complete degree programmes to a few elective courses and the backgrounds of the students are also very different. The latest development in this field is the introduction of rural tourism studies into the programmes of teacher training colleges all over the country.

Though tourism education has also started to develop on secondary level, at the moment university- and college-level education seems to be over-represented and vocational training under-represented, especially compared to Western European systems. Vocational training is provided by the Institute of Further Training in Commerce and Tourism (KIT), their programme including courses for guides, for retail travel agencies, special language courses, etc. Several secondary schools also offer tourism studies on various levels (including the special course developed by American Express for secondary education).



### **Curriculum in tourism education**

There is no established core curriculum in higher tourism education and there has not been any attempt to develop one. Though there are similar courses in all the important tourism programmes (like geography of tourism, tourism marketing, economics of tourism, tour operations), every programme places emphasis on different aspects of tourism.

Traditionally colleges are supposed to provide much more practical education than universities, so it is not surprising that college programmes, especially at the beginning, have included courses like ticketing or conventions management, instead of tourism policy or impacts of tourism. University-level education has always been more theoretical (sometimes, also especially at the beginning, even too theoretical), so planning or policy issues have always been considered as essential in these programmes. Consequently, university-level programmes are suitable for general tourism studies, while college-level programmes are more specialised (in, e.g., hotel management, tour operation/travel retail, animation, etc.)

The major reason for the lack of consensus over a core curriculum is probably the fact that most of the newly established institutions have been looking for partners abroad, and co-operation in most of the cases has also included help in curriculum development. The main objective of these attempts has been to fill the gaps in the existing curricula (usually concerned with management, strategic planning, customer care or marketing issues) and to harmonise the Hungarian education with the Western European system. The range of co-operation varies from the adaptation of whole tourism programmes (with external validation and evaluation) to common development of certain courses or to help in staff development by exchange visits, shadow lecturing, etc.

The establishment of these academic links can also partly solve another problem in higher tourism education: the lack of sufficient financial resources. This problem characterises the whole Hungarian educational system, so tourism education is not an exception. Though, of course, foreign partners are not supposed to finance Hungarian education, their contribution in the form of teaching material (textbooks, journals, etc.) is very important.

By the way, the development of a core curriculum is also inhibited by the relative lack of tourism texts in Hungarian. Though more and more books are being published, these are often translations, and in several cases, the main textbooks used in a programme are in a foreign language, mainly in English. (Even though students are not supposed to read these books - due to unavailability and lack of financial resources for photocopying -, they serve as basic material for lecturers.) Consequently, there is a need to identify new areas in which Hungarian texts should be provided.

One promising initiative is the publication of a journal in tourism research (Turizmus Bulletin) by the Hungarian Tourism Service. The existence of publication opportunities can

also encourage research in tourism, which is traditionally done by universities, so the development of research activities could hopefully also improve education.



### **Transformation of higher education in tourism**

As on academic level tourism education has been one of the most rapidly growing fields, in the not-so-far future the danger of over-provision of tourism graduates can emerge. To avoid this problem, education has several alternatives: to establish closer links with the industry in order to forecast - to a certain degree - the demand for specialised labour force, and to develop special programmes based on these forecasts; to modify the structure of education by increasing the role of vocational education; or to provide students with high quality education which is relatively general, but complex enough, so the result is a flexible labour force with strong intellectual abilities and a wide outlook on the whole of the tourism industry.

Links between academic institutions and the tourism industry have been growing in the last few years. Though there is still a relative lack of contact, the establishment and extension of these links have been among the main priorities for most institutions. Typical examples of co-operation with the industry are the invitation of guest lecturers from companies, industrial placements of students at a certain stage of their studies, postgraduate programmes and short courses offered to managers from the industry, co-operation in research with student involvement (usually in marketing) and consultancy by academic staff.

As one of the first institutions in this field, the Kodolányi János College is a good example of how Hungarian tourism education is looking for new ways.



### **Tourism education in the Kodolányi János College**

The Kodolányi János College is the first private college in Hungary. It was established in 1992 and during the last 5 years, it has gained a good reputation in Hungarian tourism education. Though the tuition fee, as a consequence of KJC being a private institution, is significantly higher than the average tuition fee in public higher education, the College has been very popular and the number of applications has been approximately 4 times higher than the number of places in the programme.

KJC offers a 4-year undergraduate programme in travel and tourism plus, from the current academic year, a foundation year for those students who do not meet the entry requirements for the undergraduate programme. The foundation year aims to develop study skills and knowledge in economic sciences and business studies.

The curriculum of the 4-year programme in travel and tourism has been developed gradually, with an attempt to take into consideration the needs of the labour market. It is a combination of compulsory and elective courses with compulsory specialisation from the second semester of the second year.

The curriculum of KJC reflects the aim of adapting the programme to international tourism trends, especially with the introduction of the Animation and Ecotourism specialisations, but the heritage of traditional higher education is also obvious. During their compulsory studies, students receive a thorough education in methodological subjects, economic

sciences and history, but various aspects of management and business studies are missing (e.g. operations management, strategic management, human resource management, behavioural studies, communications, marketing).

*The courses of the specialisation modules are the following:*



#### **Product development in tourism:**

- Programme planning,
- Tour and convention/meeting management,
- Cultural and special interest tourism,
- Travel retailing management



#### **Ecotourism:**

- Principles and methodology of ecotourism,
- Protected natural resources of Hungary,
- National Park management



#### **Hotel management:**

- Hotel and catering management,
- Management of small enterprises,
- Financial management



#### **Animation:**

- Principles and methodology of animation,
- Guiding,
- Leisure management.

One of the reasons of the imbalance in the curriculum is the fact that graduated students receive a diploma in economic sciences, so there is obviously a need to provide them with the necessary knowledge. But the majority of students want to work in the tourism industry, so most probably they would benefit more of management and business studies.



#### **The curriculum in a European context**

As it has been mentioned, there is no core curriculum accepted in Hungarian tourism education, even though there is a need for it (as it could be very useful e.g. in international accreditation of Hungarian degrees or it could contribute to the development of a more comparable labour force provision). In the UK, the National Liaison Group for Higher Education in Tourism has identified seven areas of knowledge which should be included in a core curriculum for any tourism degree programme (Holloway, 1996):

1. The meaning and nature of tourism
2. The structure of the tourism industry
3. The dimensions of tourism and issues of measurement
4. The significance and impact of tourism

5. The marketing of tourism
6. Tourism planning and development
7. Policy and management in tourism

The curriculum of KJC does not or not sufficiently covers several of these areas of knowledge. Students gain a knowledge of the meaning and nature and tourism, of the structure and dimensions of the industry and also of issues of measurement, but rather briefly. Impact studies have been introduced to the curriculum from this academic year, as we recognised the need that students should be familiar with the possible positive and negative impacts of tourism development (though this is still an under-represented field in Hungarian tourism research, especially compared with economic and marketing analyses). Tourism marketing is taught in sufficient depth, though it sometimes causes a problem that students do not have general marketing knowledge before they start to study tourism marketing.

Planning and development issues are included in the curriculum, but not in their Western European sense. Students - in the specialisation modules - study about product development in tourism and about programme planning, but they are provided with relatively little knowledge on strategic planning, resort development or development on macro-level. Tourism management in a broad sense is part of the programme, but tourism policy issues are formally missing (provided there is enough time during the tourism system lectures, students can get familiar at least with national-level tourism policy in Hungary).



### **Teaching methods and assessment**

The teaching methods in the college include lectures (unfortunately, due to the high number of students, in relatively large part of the programme, especially in the compulsory tourism courses), seminars, industrial placements, practical training (especially in animation and ecotourism studies), involvement of students in surveys done for the industry. Assessments are typically organised in the forms of oral or written examinations and essays, but in practical courses students are assessed by their performance during the semester.



### **Internships**

The professional training period is an additional and compulsory part of the programme. The placement, which would take place in the fourth year, is organised and developed by the department and employers. It gives students an opportunity to gain experience and a realistic appreciation of the working environment of the industry. Placements are offered in different sectors of the industry, including hotels, tour operators, travel agencies, national parks, tourist attractions, restaurants, etc. The College is aiming to provide placements also abroad. Students graduated with a specialisation in animation have been placed for the training period e.g. in Cyprus.

The scheduling of the industrial placement, as it is organised at the end of the programme, is beneficial for the potential employer, as students have all the knowledge they can acquire during their studies. For the students themselves a sandwich approach could be more suitable (their practical experience could help their orientation in the last year of their studies) and the placement could be better integrated in the courses.



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