

# WP2: National Report

## Croatia

Report compiled by

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## 1.0 Introduction

Faculty of Economics, Business and Tourism (FEBT) at University of Split undertook a review of national policies in Croatia in relation to soft skills in the workplace. Moreover, FEBT content analyzed the curricula of tourism & hospitality (T&H) higher education institutions (HEI) in Croatia.

Furthermore, FEBT held face-to-face interviews and a focus group discussion during August and September of 2018, respectively. FEBT also administered two survey questionnaires, one during July and October of 2018 to former T&H students, and the other also during July and October of 2018 to current undergraduate students in T&H. For the purposes of this report, current students are defined as those who are at the end of their final year in an undergraduate program of study in T&H or who in the past three months have completed their undergraduate program of study in T&H. Conversely, former students are those who have completed their undergraduate program of study in T&H one year ago or earlier.

The face-to-face interviews (Appendix 1) involved representatives of two T&H stakeholder groups in Croatia – employers (e.g., a representative of a national/regional/local tourism and hospitality employers' association or business owners/representatives) and HEI T&H instructors.

The focus group (Appendix 2) involved representatives of two T&H stakeholder groups in Croatia – employers (e.g., the leader of a national/regional/local tourism and hospitality employers' association or business owners/representatives) and HEI educators (e.g., dean of a tourism HEI or the head of a HEI's tourism department).

Finally, FEBT surveyed former and current T&H undergraduate students via two e-surveys (Appendix 3). Through in-depth (i.e., face-to-face) interviews, focus group, and two survey questionnaires, the FEBT gathered information to help T&H faculty, administrators, consultants, and industry practitioners in Croatia capture and understand the soft skills gap between the requirements of the T&H Industry and Tourism Curricula adopted by HEI's. The in-depth interviews, focus group, and survey questionnaires were conducted as part of the FEBT's involvement in the INCOME Tourism project.

## 2.0 Findings

### 2.1 Overview of National Policies on Soft Skills

A search of relevant national policies and plans was conducted in an attempt to unveil whether soft skills are formally a part of Croatia's strategy on higher education. The research revealed that, although such policies and plans exist, none of them specifically address the



soft skills. In terms of higher education, however, some relevant documents do address soft skills, although they do not use the term itself.

The legal framework pertaining to evaluation and accreditation of study programs in Croatia is a two-type system. On one hand, the obligatory part is adherence to the Law on quality assurance in science and higher education of Republic of Croatia (NN 45/09), the respective Rule book on the permit content and the terms of permit for performing activities of higher education, study program delivery and the reaccreditation of higher education institutions (NN 24/10). These were the basis upon which the rule books for study program’s evaluation in universities were developed. The review of these documents has revealed that the study program outcomes are not discussed in any detail, thus, no specific mention of soft skills is, directly or indirectly, is found.

On the other hand, the application of Law on Croatian Qualification framework (CQF) (NN 22/13, 41/16, 64/18) and the following Rule Book on CQF (NN 62/2014) is still not obligatory but optional for higher education institutions. The CQF is harmonized with the European Qualification Framework (EQF) and the Qualifications Framework for the European Higher Education Area (QF-EHEA). A qualification is a term used to describe the integrated groups of learning outcomes of different level, volume, profile, type and quality. It is demonstrated by a certificate, diploma or other public document issued by an authorized legal entity.

The learning outcomes in CQF are described/demonstrated through cognitive skills, psychomotor skills, social skills and responding autonomy and responsibility. In CQF, the qualifications are sorted by levels and type. Eight education levels are defined and the first university level, which is in focus of INCOME project, is the 6<sup>th</sup> CQF (i.e. EQF) level. The overview of learning outcomes (Table 1) clearly demonstrate that soft skills are fully integrated in the expected study programs’ outcomes. Namely, conceptual soft skills can be related to NQF cognitive skills, interpersonal soft skills to NQF social skills, while the leadership soft skills can be recognized in the NQF autonomy and responsibility domains. Thus, soft skills roughly cover four of the listed five domains, whilst the remaining one, psychomotor skills, can be said to correspond to hard skills.

Table 1. Descriptors of learning outcomes for the 6<sup>th</sup> NQF level

Knowledge	Skills			Autonomy	Responsibility
	Cognitive skills	Psychomotor skills	Social skills		
Evaluation of specialized facts, terms, activities, principles and theories in the work and/or learning area, including their	Collection, interpretation, evaluation, selection and creative use of different relevant facts, terms and activities in	Complex tasks performance and implementation of complex methods, instruments, tools and materials in unpredictable	Management of complex communication, interaction with others and cooperation process in different social groups in	Management of professional (expert) projects in unpredictable conditions	Taking over the ethical and social responsibility for management and evaluation of professional development



critical understanding	creation of solutions and solving complex assignments or problems in the specialized work area in unpredictable conditions, and transfer of knowledge into other areas and problems	conditions and the creation of instruments, tools and materials and adaptation of complex methods	unpredictable social situations		of individuals and groups in unpredictable conditions
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Source: Law on NQF, p.21.

As said, the implementation of CQF is not obligatory but as the students' demand for acknowledged/authorized standards of qualifications/occupations is on rise, the goal is that the institutions decide to implement the CQF on their own. As an incentive, the designated EU funds can be used for this purpose. However, if they do opt for it, harmonization with the obligatory Law on quality assurance is not easy<sup>1</sup>. Regarding tourism qualifications, the consortium of public higher education institutions has submitted the project for the development of tourism qualification standards for the bachelor and master level in June 2018. The project proposal is still under evaluation.

As per strategic documents of Ministry of tourism, soft skills are mentioned as the critical element of staff competencies in tourism and hospitality. However, as most tourism and hospitality-related jobs are of lower qualification level (vocational secondary school level), the Ministry's activities are aimed at them (not higher education) through the development of EU funded regional competency centers<sup>2</sup>.

## 2.2 Content Analysis of HEIs' Tourism Curricula

A content analysis of tourism curricula offered by Croatia's six HEIs was undertaken to explore whether their students in the final year of their undergraduate T&H-related degree actually learn any soft skills. Only T&H-related classes were content analyzed, while other non-tourism related courses were beyond the scope of this research.

HEI1 provides two tourism and hospitality undergraduate university study programs. Considering both programs, some learning outcomes are not explicitly mentioned in the curricula, but are conceptually related and thus correspond with (as proposed by the Project

<sup>1</sup>National Council for the Human Potential Development (2016), Guidelines for harmonization for study programmes with qualifications ' standards and the creation of new programmes harmonized with Croatian Qualification Framework, p. 7, available at <http://www.kvalifikacije.hr/sites/default/files/documents-publications/2017-07/Smjernice%20za%20uskladivanje%20studijskih%20programa%20sa%20SK.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Official web page of <Ministry of Tourism of Croatia, available at <https://mint.gov.hr/istaknute-teme/eu-programi-za-turizam/eu-programi-ministarstva-turizma/strukovno-obrazovanje/9818>



research team) the following soft skills<sup>3</sup>: (i) maintain the "big picture" while working on a specific property-management, layout, and design component (conceptual soft skill) and (ii) communicate efficiently (orally and in writing) with other employees, clients, and customers (interpersonal soft skill). Regarding leadership soft skills, HEI1 just noted the relevance of organizational and managerial soft skills, but with no any details enclosed. Within the final year, the five specific tourism courses unfortunately do not list as learning outcomes any soft skills that correspond with the soft skills proposed in this project. On the other side, some courses outcome do discuss soft skills, either by the arguing the importance of soft skills generally or by highlighting the importance of perceiving the "big picture" within the understanding of the organization's interaction with the larger external environment. Furthermore, the outcomes of three tourism management courses highlight the importance of both (i) effective communication and (ii) team approach to solve problems when appropriate. The learning outcome of only one tourism course pointed out the conceptual soft skill namely manifest critical thinking.

HEI2 provides one tourism management undergraduate program. As related overall study learning outcome are quoted few soft skills conceptually close with the following: (i) maintain the "big picture" while working on a specific property-management, (ii) communicate efficiently (orally and in writing) with other employees, clients, and customers and (iii) build networks with people inside and outside the firm. Even practice work course does not cover the majority of soft skills as elaborated in the Report, only support developing new ideas as learning outcome. In the final year are offered two tourism courses whose learning outcomes are just focused on the hard skill development, without attention on soft skill ones. However, one hospitality course learning outcomes is quite similar with conceptual soft skill namely, the demonstration of an understanding of the organizational interaction, while one tourism course learning outcome has been paid attention on developing new ideas, interpersonal skills and team work approach.

In terms of HEI3, two obstacles were detected. Firstly, the institution staff does not enable the public access to all curricula, just some of them. Secondly, few accessed curricula are quite partially fulfilled and accordingly do not facilitate the proper insight in the curricula as the whole. The stated institution provides one tourism management undergraduate program which signify only one soft skill, i.e. the employment a team approach to solve problems when appropriate. The two final year tourism courses presented learning outcome are conceptually close with the project proposed soft skills as follows: (i) maintaining the "big picture" while working on a specific property-management, layout, and design component and (ii) demonstration of understanding of the organization's interaction with the larger external environment.

HEI4 provides two tourism and hospitality undergraduate university study programs and one undergraduate professional study program. Although non study program in general put more

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<sup>3</sup> The stated approach is applied for each HEI's learning outcome analyses



emphasize into soft skills, generic learning outcomes analysis indicates that some learning outcomes are related with the following soft skills: (i) manifest critical thinking (ii) demonstrate an understanding of the organization's interaction with the larger external environment (iii) develop new ideas (iv) manifest development and adaptation of innovation or improvements (*conceptual/creative soft skills*); (i) employ a team approach to solve problems when appropriate (*leadership soft skill*); (i) communicate efficiently (orally and in writing) with other employees, clients, and customers (*interpersonal soft skill*)

Within the final year program studies most tourism courses highlight the importance of *critical thinking, problem solving, communication skills and understanding of the organization's interaction with the larger external environment*. On the other hand, a few specific tourism courses unfortunately do not list, as learning outcomes, soft skills which correspond with any as proposed by Project team.

Furthermore, from the syllabus analysis it is obvious that teaching methodology has been changed towards more student centered learning and includes educational activities such as work teams, case studies, project works, visits, and presentations from the students, which means that soft skills teaching could be integrated into hard skills teaching.

HEI5 provides two tourism and hospitality undergraduate study programs. All the information related to generic study program learning outcomes is not available on the web sites of HEI.

Within the final year undergraduate university study program, five specific tourism courses unfortunately do not list, as learning outcomes, soft skills. The teaching methodology analysis indicates that the attention has been paid on *critical thinking, problem solving and interdisciplinary approach in teaching*.

Within the final year undergraduate professional study program, only three hospitality courses highlight the importance of soft skills conceptually close with the following: (i) consider customer needs when making decisions (*conceptual/creative soft skill*); (i) manage guest requests with understanding and sensitivity, (ii) communicate efficiently (orally and in writing) with other employees, clients, and customers, (iii) demonstrate empathy in dealing with customers and staff (*interpersonal soft skills*).

HEI6 provides one tourism undergraduate university study program. All the information related to generic study program learning outcomes is not available on the web sites of HEI.

Courses learning outcomes analysis indicates that that some learning outcomes are related with the following soft skills: (i) manifest critical thinking, (ii) consider customer needs when making decisions, (iii) bring together different perspectives and approaches and combine them in creative ways (*conceptual/creative soft skill*); (ii) communicate efficiently (orally and in writing) with other employees, clients, and customers, (iii) demonstrate empathy in dealing with customers and staff (*interpersonal soft skills*). A few specific tourism courses unfortunately do not list, as learning outcomes, soft skills which correspond with any as proposed by Project team.



Generally, the majority of the above analyzed study programs include learning outcomes that are related to hard skills. Soft skills are neither explicitly stated nor implied.

### **2.3 In-Depth Interviews**

The face-to-face interviews were designed to gather information from T&H employers and HEI instructors in regards to a battery of discussion questions regarding soft skills in the workplace and HEIs. In order to prepare the interviewees for the actual interview and to optimize the interview process, a few days prior to the interview each interviewee was emailed a one-page list comprising 30 soft skills organized under three soft skill dimensions, i.e. 10 conceptual/creative, 10 leadership, and 10 interpersonal skills. The interviewees had to rank order the 10 skills in each of the three dimensions and hand it in at the beginning of their scheduled interview.

Ultimately, two separate research protocols were devised, one for T&H employers and the other for HEI instructors. While both research protocols had some questions in common, each protocol also contained questions that were tailored to its unique audience. The list below distinguishes among common discussion questions (C), questions for T&H employers (E), and those for HEI instructors (H).

1. To understand how important are soft skills in the modern T&H workplace? C
2. To rank the 10 most relevant conceptual/creative skills in the contemporary T&H workplace in order of their perceived importance. C
3. To rank the 10 most relevant leadership skills in the contemporary T&H workplace in order of their perceived importance. C
4. To rank the 10 most relevant interpersonal skills in the contemporary T&H workplace in order of their perceived importance. C
5. To divulge how satisfied are T&H employers with the soft skills that, in their experience, graduate employees have? Which are best & which worse developed? E
6. To uncover what emphasis is given to learning these skills in the T&H curricula today? Is it satisfactory and why (not)? H
7. To unveil how are soft skills now learned and evaluated in the HEI system (methods, frequency, importance/weight, in which courses)? H
8. To propose how should soft skills be learned and evaluated in the HEI system (methods, frequency, importance/weight, in which courses)? C
9. To rank the 10 most relevant methods of learning soft skills by T&H undergraduate students in order of their perceived effectiveness. C
10. To understand what are the main assumptions/obstacles/challenges in achieving these learning methods and how can these be assured/resolved? C
11. To propose how can T&H employers facilitate the process of learning soft skills by undergraduate students? E

#### **2.3.1 Participant demographics**

Two T&H employer representatives and two T&H HEI instructors took part in the face-to-face interviews. Of the four interviewees, there were three men and one woman. One interviewee



(I1) manages a small (30-room), independent, boutique 4-star hotel located in the center of Split, Croatia's second largest city that saw over 730,000 overnight visitors in 2017. Another interviewee (I2) is the head of the HR department in a large international chain-affiliated 5-star hotel with 380 rooms located 10km from Split's city center. I3 is the student affairs coordinator at a private college offering T&H undergraduate degrees based in Split. I4 is both an adjunct faculty in T&H at a public university in southern Croatia and owner of a private consulting firm specializing in marine/nautical tourism.

All four interviewees have more than 10 years of professional experience in T&H. Moreover, one interviewee has a degree in T&H, another has a degree in non-tourism area, the third one has a master's degree in T&H, and the fourth has a doctoral degree in tourism.

### **2.3.2 Results / participant perspectives**

*Interview Question (IQ) 1: What are soft skills and how important are they in the modern T&H workplace? C*

I1 highlighted that to work in tourism, which is one of the most competitive industries globally, one must possess a wide range of both soft and hard skills. Since working with people is at the core of tourism, contemporary tourism firms, such as hotels, cannot function without soft skills such as communicating and motivating both guests and staff.

I2 commented that providing services to tourists draws on the ability to recognize and anticipate their needs, reaction, and gestures. Although international lodging chains incorporate many soft skills in their standards and procedures, employees must be able to think outside the box and recognize subtle clues to a guest's needs. He went on to cite that most people's decisions are driven by their emotions, and therefore those working in tourism are in the business of skillfully managing guest emotions. Consequently, his hotel continuously provides many staff workshops on developing and strengthening emotional intelligence, cultural sensitivity, and empowerment. Overall, he views soft skills as the icing on the cake, with the cake being the hotel's standard operating procedures.

I3 expressed that soft skills are fundamental, personal, and unmeasurable skills that define our personality, our leadership, negotiation, communication, teamwork, motivation, creative thinking, networking, decision-making, time management, and critical thinking potentials. Today, people need soft skills in order to succeed at their job. Moreover, most employers could care less about what HEI did you graduate from, and instead are interested in what soft skills, such as managing crisis situations, do you bring to the table.

I4 noted that in this day and age, if a tourism firm wants to separate itself from the competition, then having employees with strong soft skills is a must. He went on to say that the world's leading marinas owe their superior market position, in part, to their staff's originality and how their employees approach the customers. Those who approach their customers in an old-fashioned way cannot leverage soft skills to the firm's advantage. Soft



skills are particularly important in the nautical segment of tourism, because nautical tourists spend several times more on average per day than other types of tourists.

Overall, everyone found soft skills pivotal in the modern T&H workplace.

*IQ 2-4: Rank the 10 most relevant conceptual/creative skills, the 10 most relevant leadership skills, and the 10 most relevant interpersonal skills in the contemporary T&H workplace in order of their perceived importance. C*

The results of the rank ordering task are located in the appendix.

I1 commented that all 30 skills are important and that it was a non-trivial challenge to rank them in a meaningful way. This interviewee also stressed that although skills ranked 1 and 10 are on the opposite poles of the rank order scale, the difference in their importance is actually significantly smaller than what the numerical ratings suggest.

I2 highlighted that his ranking applies only to an entry-level management trainee position at a hospitality firm. He would have rank ordered the skills differently for positions at other levels and departments inside the hotel. Overall, he places the greatest importance on emotional intelligence and critical thinking skills.

I3 suggested that she would have combined some of the itemized skills into a single soft skill. When asked to describe the difference between the first and the tenth ranked item, she argued that most of the listed soft skills are almost equally important and that it was hard to decide which skill should be ranked more important over the others.

I4 noted that having to rank order the three sets of 10 soft skills each put him in a position where he had to go against his feeling that all of the soft skills listed are very important. He then went on to comment that Croatia's operators in marine / nautical tourism are not paying enough attention to the notion of soft skills. Meanwhile, Croatia's counterparts in Turkey and Greece have been going to the U.S. to learn soft skills from the best.

Overall, everyone believed that nearly all 30 soft skills are almost equally important, and that it would therefore be hard, and thus impractical, to rank order all of them.

*IQ 5: How satisfied are T&H employers with the soft skills that, in their experience, graduate employees have? Which are best & which worse developed? E*

I1 witnessed over the years a drop in the level of soft skills that university graduates possess. While graduates appear strong in statistics and numbers in general, they fall short on emotional intelligence. He went on to suggest that graduates are increasingly relying on virtual / digital interaction with other humans, all the while their face-to-face human interaction is decaying. There is a lack of empathy and consideration as to how it is for others to work in their respective positions. Many graduates expect to hold a managerial position after graduation and simply do not care what a waiter or a cleaner actually do at their jobs.



They fail to understand that without the front-line staff who actually deliver services to guests, managers cannot achieve their organizational objectives. Failure to greet someone, make eye contact, shake hands are additional examples of poor manners that need to be tackled. In this respect, if children are taught proper manners and family values during upbringing, they will be relatively well equipped for a position requiring soft skills following their university graduation.

I2 found that graduates thrive in a team environment and work well with others. However, they underperform in situations that lie outside their comfort zone and require them to take responsibility for service outcomes. He provided an example when a guest complained about the Internet not working, the employee withdrew himself from the issue and immediately sought out a coworker whom to hand over the guest, instead of taking it upon himself to deal with the guest.

In sum, both interviewees expressed their dissatisfaction with most of the soft skills that graduates working in T&H possess.

*IQ 6: What emphasis is given to learning soft skills in the T&H curricula today? Is it satisfactory and why (not)? H*

I3 highlighted that soft skills are represented very poorly in the T&H curricula, and some HEIs do not have any soft skills as part of their study program's learning outcomes. During her university education, which took place about a decade prior to this interview, internship was not a part of her program of study. Consequently, her formal education built her hard skills and left her completely unprepared for the soft skills demands in the hotel. Although her alma mater has since incorporated the internship into its curriculum, this internship is too short and not well structured. Her current employer maintains very close relationship with the tourism industry and is very attentive to the industry's needs. Part of the problem lies on the employers' side. Namely, only recently did the employers realize the importance of hiring quality workers (i.e., those equipped with soft skills) for their business's performance.

I4 noted a steady increase in the number of soft skills being learned in the HEI curricula over the years. He then highlighted that a university in one of Croatia's neighboring countries fosters soft skills adoption by placing its undergraduate students in paid mandatory internships abroad.

In sum, both interviewees consider that today's HEI T&H curricula are deficient in soft skills, however the situation is improving.

*IQ 7: How are soft skills now learned and evaluated in the HEI system (methods, frequency, importance/weight, in which courses)? H*

I3 highlights that students at her HEI acquire soft skills through extracurricular yet mandatory workshops and guest lectures. Each student's internship final grade is determined, in part, by that student's participation in guest lectures and 40 or so workshops. Some examples of



workshops include how to write a resume, how to write a formal email, how to introduce yourself to a potential employer, what questions (not) to ask, what is (in)appropriate dress for work, how to act in an intercultural environment, how to create a restaurant menu, and how to communicate and present effectively. She cited an example where most students at first did not take the workshops seriously, but after having actually interned at a tourism firm early on in their program of study, they quickly realized that the content of their workshops mirrors what is expected from them in the real world.

I4 noted a great variance among Croatia's HEIs in terms of whether students have the opportunity to learn soft skills. While some HEIs have built some soft skills into their curricula, others appear ignorant to the fact that soft skills are pivotal in contemporary tourism.

In sum, both interviewees stated that some HEIs turn a blind eye to the importance of soft skills, while others use a growing array of methods to incorporate soft skills into their curriculum.

*IQ 8: How should soft skills be learned and evaluated in the HEI system (methods, frequency, importance/weight, in which courses)? C*

I1 suggested that students should learn soft skills through group assignments, e.g. by forming in-class student teams that will compete against other teams on a particular task or exercise, and on other occasions a team will work side-by-side with another team. Moreover, the teams will sometimes work on related tasks, other times on altogether unrelated assignments. He went on to suggest an in-class exercise whereby student teams must set hotel room prices against each other in a set time frame. In other words, undergraduate students need to move beyond the understanding of what key performance indicators in lodging, such as the average daily rate (ADR) and revenue per available room, mean for the hotel's bottom line. Through a pricing exercise, students will learn to develop a sense of making important decisions under time pressure. In addition to group assignments, I1 suggested using case studies and inviting industry practitioners into the classroom to go through practical examples involving soft skills.

I2 highlighted that on-the-job training is the best avenue for learning soft skills because it forces a student to learn the job at an actual work site in a real life situation. Another way for developing soft skills in general and emotional intelligence in particular is through targeted workshops held at university premises. He also cited group projects, which he already knows that HEIs make use of. I2 then called for a much greater use of role-playing, which is a tool to facilitate learning soft skills that Americans have used very successfully, while Croatians have mostly neglected. When asked about the applicability of case studies to learning soft skills, he argued that case studies help develop logical thinking for problem solving, however they lack the situational details that are key ingredients in learning soft skills.

I3 commented that as many soft skills as possible should be woven into the individual HEI courses / classes. Obviously, some soft skills are a better fit for one particular course, whereas other soft skills could be learned as part of a different course.



I4 noted that soft skills should be learned and evaluated through one or more internships, followed by course projects and assignments rooted in real-life situations. He went on to describe how his students learn soft skills through a simulated construction of a mooring buoys site. Therein, they face opposing interest groups and thus have to figure how to communicate with those who resist the construction. For instance, an olive oil producer in a small island town who does not want to see a nearby cove polluted in any way, needs to understand that if mooring buoys are properly managed, this will not only ensure the cove's protection, but also bring more customers who will tour his olive grove and/or buy his olive oil and other produce.

In sum, everyone expressed that internship, group projects, guest speakers, role playing, in-class exercises, workshops, and case studies should be employed to learn soft skills in HEI curricula.

*IQ 9: Rank the 10 most relevant methods of learning soft skills by T&H undergraduate students in order of their perceived effectiveness. C*

I1 commented that various methods of learning soft skills (e.g, group assignments, case studies, guest speakers, etc.) are all equally important and using all of them will help paint the full picture. Singling out and using any one of these methods alone would prevent students from learning a wide array of soft skills that are sought after in today's work environment.

I2 placed the highest value on role-playing, followed by on-the-job training, workshops at work, group projects, and in-class workshops.

I3 noted that a variety of learning methods should be employed simultaneously to learn soft skills. Specifically, soft skills should be incorporated into the existing courses / classes, workshops, field instruction, guest lectures, internships.

I4 highlighted that soft skills should be learned from capable course instructors, that is, teachers who are knowledgeable about the T&H area that is covered by their course. These instructors do not necessarily need to have worked in the field, however they must maintain close relationships with industry practitioners in order to remain up to date with the most current issues in their area of professional interest. When students view you as a competent and credible teacher, they are more likely to learn any soft skills you lay in front of them.

In sum, everyone believed that a combination of different methods is the most effective way of learning soft skills.

*IQ 10: What are the main assumptions/obstacles/challenges in achieving these learning methods and how can these be assured/resolved? C*



I1 highlighted the importance of course instructors in exposing students to soft skills. The instructor must invite industry practitioners into the classroom, and more importantly, point them in the right direction. For instance, instead of talking about the ADR and how it is calculated, the guest speaker should discuss forecasting, how forecasting affects the ADR, and what to do once you calculate the ADR. Namely, ADR by itself, that is, without a comparison against the ADR for another time period or the industry average, for example, is meaningless. Ultimately, the biggest challenge for any teacher is to adapt any learning method to the realities of how today's students understand and behave in the world around them. Owing in large part to the IT advances, nowadays many young people are relatively estranged and even antisocial, thus increasingly lacking soft skills. In addition to course instructors, the educational system as a whole also plays an important role in fostering soft skills. In that respect, soft skills should be incorporated into the learning outcomes across all levels of education, i.e. from kindergarten to university. He went on to cite how a university in England, during its summer program, blocks all Internet access after 10pm on school nights in order to free up time for social encounters. He further brought up another example of how students in some Japanese elementary schools develop soft skills, such as a sense of interdependence and their role at school, through working together to clean their entire school, serve meals in the dining hall, clean plates and food trays, and rinse off soiled dishes and place them in the dishwasher.

I2 commented that the current HEI curricula are packed with too much theory, thus not leaving enough time to learn soft skills. He called for a more balanced approach between theory and practice in T&H education. He went on to suggest that, once we move beyond the entry-level positions, different positions necessitate different soft skills. In such instances, tailored role-plays and workshops are a must. Another challenge to learning soft skills among students is their evident lack of motivation. Specifically, they seek instant gratification at work, aiming to bypass a professional growth path involving the development of soft skills, and wanting to begin their career paths at more advanced levels in the organization. In short, if they cannot have their desired position here and now, their level of motivation dwindles rapidly.

I3 remarked that both HEIs and students need to increase their motivation and awareness in the context of what the tourism industry is looking for in a graduate. When asked whether employers are in any way in the way of learning soft skills, she praised the employers for being very responsive to her efforts to promote learning soft skills in the classroom. In fact, they continuously welcome the opportunity to step inside the classroom and share their experiences with students.

I4 highlighted that the problem lies at the top and that Croatia's tourism officials (i.e., those occupying the leading positions in the nation's Ministry of Tourism and the National Tourism Board) do not understand the impact of soft skills on Croatia's competitiveness as a tourism destination. He put forward that these officials should hire an advisory board comprised of international T&H experts with a proven track-record, whose advice would lead to changes in



what students learn at HEIs. In this sense, HEIs can help by lobbying for the formation of such advisory board.

In sum, everyone expressed that, for the most part, HEIs in general and HEI instructors in particular are both the problem and the solution in regards to soft skills learning. HEIs and HEI instructors need to work closer with the T&H practitioners in order to keep up with the T&H industry's latest challenges, opportunities, and trends.

*IQ 11: How can T&H employers facilitate the process of learning soft skills by undergraduate students? E*

I1 suggests that employers can appear as guest speakers in front of university students, host students during their visit to an actual tourism firm, provide both students and instructors with case studies and other real-life examples of running a business, and provide mentored internship opportunities for students.

I2 highlighted that employers are not running away from their share of responsibility in helping students develop their soft skills. By offering student internships and summer jobs, employers like I2 are more than happy to take the soft skills that students have learned through HEI curricula and help them take this set of soft skills to the next level.

In sum, both interviewees understand the important role of T&H business in reaching out to HEIs and creating opportunities for students to learn soft skills.

## **2.4 Focus Groups**

The discussion was designed to gather information from T&H employers and HEI educators in regard to the following discussion questions:

1. To understand how important are soft skills in the modern T&H workplace?
2. To generate a list of up to 10 most relevant conceptual/creative skills in the contemporary T&H workplace and to rank them in order of their perceived importance.
3. To generate a list of up to 10 most relevant leadership skills in the contemporary T&H workplace and to rank them in order of their perceived importance.
4. To generate a list of up to 10 most relevant interpersonal skills in the contemporary T&H workplace and to rank them in order of their perceived importance.
5. To propose how should soft skills be learned and evaluated in the HEI system (methods, frequency, importance/weight, in which courses)?
6. To generate a list of up to 10 methods of learning soft skills by T&H undergraduate students and rank them in order of their perceived effectiveness.
7. To understand what are the main assumptions/obstacles/challenges in achieving these learning methods?
8. To propose how can these be assured/resolved?

### **2.4.1 Participant demographics**



Excluding the three focus group administrators, eight participants took part in the focus group, of which three were women and five men. Moreover, five T&H employer representatives and three T&H HEI representatives took part in the focus group.

One focus group participant (F1) helps manage the HR department of a large (200+ room) international chain-affiliated 4-star hotel in Split. F2 helps manage a yacht charter company based in Split. F3 is the F&B manager at a medium (76 rooms) independent 4-star hotel in Split. F4 is a senior T&H lecturer and researcher at a public HEI in Split. F5 has over 20 years of international experience and is the owner, manager, and chief cook at a small independent family-owned 3-star hotel in the coastal city of Omiš in southern Croatia. F6 is a seasoned former restaurant and hotel F&B manger, currently a full-time hospitality instructor at a private HEI in Split. F7 is the president of the managing board of a private HEI offering T&H degrees in Split and Zagreb (the latter being Croatia's capital). F8 helps manage a 4-star campground with capacity for 1,200 guests in Split.

#### **2.4.2 Results / participant perspectives**

*Focus group question (FQ) 1: How important are soft skills in the modern T&H workplace?*

F5 commented that they are extremely important, however they should be learned from kindergarten onwards. Today, young people transition from high school to university without any soft skills whatsoever. That makes it very hard and highly unlikely that they will somehow learn and develop their soft skills after not having worked on them since their early childhood. While employers expect from HEI graduates to hit the ground running, a typical HEI graduate nowadays is useless. Therefore, the entire system of education in Croatia should be razed and rebuilt from scratch.

F6 added that, in addition to graduates, many restaurant and small hotel owners in Croatia are seriously deficient in soft skills. They lack empathy towards young people and fail to take into consideration that their staff are not just numbers, but rather human beings with their individual feelings and needs. Soft skills are the focal point of any T&H business, however the lack of soft skills among T&H owners and managers restrains graduates from learning and developing their soft skills.

F4 noted that tourism industry is the livelihood of Croatia's economy, thus it attracts hordes of poorly educated and low-skilled individuals. If a great number of individuals without any formal education in T&H can work in tourism, then both high schools and HEIs specializing in tourism appear unnecessary. The notion of soft skills is especially important in the vacation rental segment of Croatia's tourism, because over 50 percent of the nation's beds are in family owned and operated vacation rentals. She agreed that many employers are partly to blame because in her many attempts over the years to get the employers' suggestions on how to improve HEI's curriculum, only one employer answered her prayers.

F5 remarked that HEIs must pressure policy-makers to change the current educational paradigm. Specifically, employers pay exuberant taxes that the government then funnels into



HEIs who churn out students whom employers do not find particularly useful. Furthermore, employers face increasing expectations to devote their time to mentoring young people and helping them learn by doing. In essence, employers pay twice for the same product. First, they pay taxes that are used to finance HEIs. Second, they invest their personal time and equipment, none of which are free, to help prepare students for the real world. Strictly in economic terms, when you do not get what you paid for, you should get your money back. Since employers are not getting a part of their taxes refunded, the current state of the art in education needs to change.

F7 reflected that there are many success stories of how those with formal degrees in areas unrelated to tourism returned to school, earned a T&H degree or certificate, and are now prosperous in their newly found career. He finds that continuing education programs and HEIs are great avenues for those who wish to make a career shift to T&H.

F3 noted that Croatia's tourism is marked by low profit margins and that the nation's high tax burden leaves employers with little wiggle room for investing additional resources into staff education and training. Instead, employers expect graduates who can almost immediately after graduation positively impact firm performance.

F6 commented that a few hundred thousand people left Croatia over the past several years for both full-time and better paying jobs elsewhere in the EU. Hence the Croatian paradox where it is still hard to find a full-time (i.e., year-round) job, yet there is a massive shortage of seasonal (i.e., summertime) labor. Consequently, when the tourism season begins, there are countless seasonal job opportunities, and in turn, few employers will question whether a job applicant possesses soft skills.

In sum, everyone agreed that soft skills are at the core of the contemporary T&H industry, however there are other economic and social forces that hamper the students' ability to learn soft skills at HEIs.

*FQ 2: Generate a list of up to 10 most relevant conceptual/creative skills in the contemporary T&H workplace and to rank them in order of their perceived importance.*

Focus group participants decided that creativity, responsibility, motivation, independence in problem solving, basic knowledge, empathy, the art of not causing problems, distinguishing important things from the unimportant ones, and the art of listening as the most important conceptual/creative skills. There was strong consensus among the participants that all of the soft skills produced in this step are equally important and that it would thus be inapt to order them.

*FQ 3: Generate a list of up to 10 most relevant leadership skills in the contemporary T&H workplace and to rank them in order of their perceived importance.*

The participants decided that understanding work processes, inclination to teamwork, empathy, objectivity, organizational ability, clearly defined goal(s), defining actions that must



be undertaken to accomplish a goal are the most important leadership skills. Same as in the previous step, all participants agreed that it would be inappropriate to order these soft skills.

*FQ 4: Generate a list of up to 10 most relevant interpersonal skills in the contemporary T&H workplace and to rank them in order of their perceived importance.*

The participants determined that talkativeness (i.e., sociability, outgoingness, gregariousness, extroversion), politeness, urbaneness, objectivity, empathy, speaking ability, intelligibility, literacy, listening to others, ability to verbalize something and to be able to repeat it, ability to memorize things, and patience are the most relevant interpersonal skills. Again, the group agreed that it would be unsuitable to have to prioritize one soft skill over another.

*FQ 5: How should soft skills be learned and evaluated in the HEI system (methods, frequency, importance/weight, in which courses)?*

HEI course instructors should lead by example, e.g. show empathy towards students, find ways to inspire and motivate them, exhibit effective communication. Success breeds success, i.e. when people witness someone's success, they tend to emulate the actions and behaviors of those who are successful. In doing so, they increase the likelihood of being successful themselves. Another way for students to learn soft skills is by reading and analyzing actual employee manuals that can be supplied by partner T&H firms. Role playing and simulation of various service encounters that are likely in the real-world. Bringing industry practitioners into the classroom.

*FQ 6: Generate a list of up to 10 methods of learning soft skills by T&H undergraduate students and rank them in order of their perceived effectiveness.*

The participants rated practical instruction (i.e., workshops) at HEIs as the most effective method of learning soft skills, followed by internships, field instruction, role playing, problem solving assignments, case studies, working on projects, and inviting guest speakers.

*FQ 7: What are the main assumptions/obstacles/challenges in achieving these learning methods? How can these be assured/resolved?*

Sometimes, there is pressure from HEI officials to maintain high grades in the classroom. Overall, there are no system-wide efforts to ensure soft skills learning in all courses and mediocrity among both students and instructors is often the norm. However, course instructors have the opportunity to incorporate many, if not all, of the methods generated through the focus group.

## **2.5 Survey Questionnaires**

### **2.5.1 Survey of former students (n = 112)**

#### **2.5.1.1 Respondent demographics**

A former student in this sample can be described as a female (76%) averaging 5.2 years of total work experience and 3.2 years of work experience in T&H, respectively (Table 1).

Majority (53%) of respondents currently work in the travel, tourism and hospitality at the level of operations management (41%). Among those whose current field of employment is other (44%), majority (70%) work in non-tourism related occupations, 10% are unemployed, while the remainder (20%) work in T&H, mostly managing their own vacation rentals. Similarly, among those whose current job position is other (29%), majority occupy a non-tourism related position (51%), followed by entry-level T&H jobs (21%), unemployed (15%), and front-desk managers at a lodging establishment (12%).

Table 1. Respondent Demographics

Variable	%
<i>Gender</i>	
Female	75.9
Male	24.1
<i>Combined length of any work experience (in years)</i>	
Highest	29
Lowest	1
Mean	5.21
Mode	2
Standard Deviation	4.66
<i>Length of work experience in T&amp;H (in years)</i>	
Highest	20
Lowest	0
Mean	3.19
Mode	0
Standard Deviation	3.58
<i>Current field of employment</i>	
DMO / tourism board (national, regional or local)	3.6
Hotel / restaurant (including catering)	23.2
Cruising / nautical (including charter)	2.7
Travel agency / tour operator	17.9
Transportation (air, sea, rent a car, etc.)	3.6
Event / congress organization	1.8
Marketing / PR	2.7
Consulting agency	0.9
Other	43.8
<i>Current position</i>	
Entry level	29.5
Assistant manager	21.4
Department manager / supervisor	19.6
Other	29.5



### 2.5.1.2 Results

Overall, among the former students, 28 of 30 soft skills were rated important to critically important at their current job (Table 2). Conversely, only two of 30 soft skills were rated between three (neither important or unimportant) and four (somewhat important) on a 5-point Likert-type scale. In terms of the former students' satisfaction with the soft skills actually learned/acquired during their undergraduate study in T&H, all 30 skills were rated between three (neither satisfied or dissatisfied) and four (somewhat satisfied) on a 5-point Likert-type scale.

The comparison of the importance of soft skills at the current job and satisfaction with the soft skills actually learned/acquired during undergraduate study in T&H, as perceived by the former students, reveals that their satisfaction ratings are lower than their importance ratings for all 30 soft skills. Specifically, satisfaction with four skills falls in the 1.20-1.46 point range below importance, 12 skills in the 0.90-1.19 point range, 12 in the 0.60-0.89 point range, and two in the 0.38-0.59 point range.

When analyzing each of the three soft skills dimensions, the following is evident. The two most important conceptual/creative soft skills at the former students' current job are developing adaptation responses to unexpected changes and considering customer needs when making decisions. Conversely, "understanding the agendas and perspectives of owners, staff members, managers, and other parties" and "manifesting development and adaptation of innovation or improvements" are perceived to be the two least important, albeit still rather important, conceptual/creative skills. In terms of the former students' satisfaction with the soft skills they actually learned/acquired during their undergraduate study in T&H, the two most satisfactory, albeit not very satisfactory, conceptual/creative soft skills are considering customer needs when making decisions and manifesting critical thinking. Conversely, "understanding the agendas and perspectives of owners, staff members, managers, and other parties" and "developing adaptation responses to unexpected changes" are perceived to be the two least satisfactory, albeit still somewhat satisfactory, conceptual/creative skills.

The two most important leadership soft skills at their current job are operating effectively and calmly under pressure or in crisis situations and confronting problems early before they become unmanageable. "Working to understand why others resist change instead of forcing others to accept change" and "employing a team approach to solve problems when appropriate" are perceived to be the two least important, albeit still somewhat important, leadership skills. In terms of satisfaction, the two most satisfactory, albeit not very satisfactory, leadership soft skills are promoting respect and appreciation for diversity and individual differences, and listening carefully to input and concerns expressed by others. Conversely, "working to understand why others resist change instead of forcing others to accept change" and "confronting problems early before they become unmanageable" are perceived to be neither satisfactory nor dissatisfactory leadership skills.

The two most important interpersonal soft skills at their current job are providing effective feedback and acting courteously and respectfully. “Manifesting intercultural sensitivity” and “demonstrating awareness of others’ feelings” are perceived to be the two least important, albeit still rather important, interpersonal skills. In terms of satisfaction, the two most satisfactory, albeit not very satisfactory, interpersonal soft skills are communicating efficiently (orally and in writing) with other employees, clients, and customers, and acting courteously and respectfully. Conversely, “effectively handling staff grievances and complaints” and “exhibiting negotiating skills” are perceived to be the two least satisfactory, albeit still slightly satisfactory, interpersonal skills.

Table 2. Importance of Soft Skills at the Current Job vs. Satisfaction With the Soft Skills Actually Learned/Acquired During Undergraduate Study in T&H

Variable	$\bar{x}^*$	$\bar{x}^{**}$
	<i>Importance</i>	<i>Satisfaction</i>
<i>Conceptual/Creative Soft Skills</i>		
Maintain the "big picture" while working on a specific property-management, layout, and design component	4.50	3.41
Manifest critical thinking	4.41	3.51
Demonstrate an understanding of the organization's interaction with the larger external environment	4.41	3.47
Develop new ideas	4.36	3.43
Develop adaptation responses to unexpected changes	4.61	3.15
Exhibit knowledge of related job roles - peers, subordinates, others	4.39	3.35
Manifest development and adaptation of innovation or improvements	4.27	3.29
Understand the agendas and perspectives of owners, staff members, managers, and other parties	4.25	3.14
Consider customer needs when making decisions	4.56	3.70
Bring together different perspectives and approaches and combine them in creative ways	4.33	3.48
<i>Leadership Soft Skills</i>		
Steer conflicts away from personalities and toward issues	4.13	3.25
Present ideas in a convincing manner	4.27	3.44
Expresses disagreement in a tactful and sensitive manner	4.11	3.28
Works to understand why others resist change instead of forcing others to accept change	3.74	3.08
Operate effectively and calmly under pressure or in crisis situations	4.68	3.28
Build networks with people inside and outside the firm	4.32	3.54

Confront problems early before they become unmanageable	4.51	3.21
Employ a team approach to solve problems when appropriate	3.96	3.58
Listen carefully to input and concerns expressed by others	4.29	3.61
Promote respect and appreciation for diversity and individual differences	4.30	3.71
<i>Interpersonal Soft Skills</i>		
Manage guest requests with understanding and sensitivity	4.37	3.59
Communicate efficiently (orally and in writing) with other employees, clients, and customers	4.63	3.86
Exhibit emotional intelligence, such as emotional control and passion	4.45	3.29
Effectively handle staff grievances and complaints	4.51	3.24
Act courteously and respectfully	4.71	3.80
Demonstrate awareness of others' feelings	4.25	3.52
Exhibit negotiating skills	4.37	3.27
Provide effective feedback	4.72	3.61
Demonstrate empathy in dealing with customers and staff	4.38	3.43
Manifest intercultural sensitivity	4.23	3.57

\* Importance of soft skills at the current job on a 5-point scale ranging from 1=*not very important* to 5=*critically important*.

\*\* Satisfaction with the soft skills actually learned/acquired during undergraduate study in T&H on a 5-point scale ranging from 1=*very dissatisfied* to 5=*very satisfied*.

## 2.5.2 Survey of current students (n = 74)

### 2.5.2.1 Respondent demographics

A current student in this sample can be described as a female (84%), majoring in T&H management (84%), and averaging 3.3 years of total work experience and 2 years of work experience in T&H, respectively (Table 3). Thus far, majority (64%) of respondents have worked in hotels and restaurants as waiters/waitresses (45%), front desk attendants/receptionists (34%), and guest relations officers/specialists (33%).

Table 3. Respondent Demographics

Variable	%
<i>Gender</i>	



Female	83.8
Male	16.2
<i>Current major field of study</i>	
Tourism and/or hospitality management	83.8
Hotel / lodging management	4.1
Restaurant management	0.0
Destination management	4.1
Other	8.1
<i>Combined length of any work experience (in years)</i>	
Highest	21
Lowest	0
Mean	3.31
Mode	3
Standard Deviation	3.30
<i>Length of work experience in T&amp;H (in years)</i>	
Highest	10
Lowest	0
Mean	2.04
Mode	0
Standard Deviation	2.57
<i>In which T&amp;H field(s) have you worked so far (multiple answers are possible)</i>	
DMO / tourism board (national, regional or local)	7.9
Hotel / restaurant (including catering)	64.5
Cruising / nautical (including charter)	2.6
Travel agency / tour operator	13.2
Transportation (air, sea, rent a car, etc.)	5.3
Event / congress organization	5.3
Marketing / PR	5.3
Consulting agency	0.0
Other	25.0
<i>Job assignments (multiple answers are possible)</i>	
Waiter / waitress	44.7
Kitchen worker	14.5
Bar worker	18.4
Host / hostess	19.7
Social media	6.6
Front desk / reception	34.2
Housekeeping	18.4
Travel agent	5.3
Event planner	6.6
HR	6.6
Sales & marketing	18.4



Guest relations	32.9
Tour guide	3.9
Other	13.2

### 2.5.2.2 Results

Overall, among the current students, all 30 soft skills were rated important to critically important in contemporary T&H (Table 4). In terms of the current students' satisfaction with the soft skills actually learned/acquired during their undergraduate study in T&H, 18 skills were rated between three (neither satisfied or dissatisfied) and four (somewhat satisfied) on a 5-point Likert-type scale. Interestingly, 12 skills were rated somewhat satisfactory to satisfactory (i.e., between points four and five on a 5-point Likert-type scale).

The comparison of the importance of soft skills in contemporary T&H and satisfaction with the soft skills actually learned/acquired during undergraduate study in T&H, as perceived by the current students, reveals that their satisfaction ratings are lower than their importance ratings for all 30 soft skills. Specifically, satisfaction with three skills falls in the 0.90-1.19 point range below importance, eight in the 0.60-0.89 point range, 19 in the 0.18-0.59 point range, and none in the 1.20-1.46 point range.

When analyzing each of the three soft skills dimensions, the following is evident. The two most important conceptual/creative soft skills in today's T&H, as perceived by the current students, are developing adaptation responses to unexpected changes and considering customer needs when making decisions. Conversely, manifesting critical thinking and understanding the agendas and perspectives of owners, staff members, managers, and other parties are perceived to be the two least important, albeit still rather important, conceptual/creative skills. In terms of the current students' satisfaction with the soft skills they actually learned/acquired during their undergraduate study in T&H, the two most satisfactory conceptual/creative soft skills are considering customer needs when making decisions and exhibiting knowledge of related job roles - peers, subordinates, and others. Conversely, developing new ideas and maintaining the "big picture" while working on a specific property-management, layout, and design component are perceived to be the two least satisfactory, albeit still somewhat satisfactory, conceptual/creative skills.

The two most important leadership soft skills are operating effectively and calmly under pressure or in crisis situations and confronting problems early before they become unmanageable. "Working to understand why others resist change instead of forcing others to accept change" and "expressing disagreement in a tactful and sensitive manner" are perceived to be the two least important, albeit still somewhat important, leadership skills. In terms of satisfaction, the two most satisfactory, albeit not very satisfactory, leadership soft skills are listening carefully to input and concerns expressed by others, and promoting respect and appreciation for diversity and individual differences. Conversely, "working to understand why others resist change instead of forcing others to accept change" and "building networks

with people inside and outside the firm” are perceived to be the two least satisfactory, albeit still somewhat satisfactory, leadership skills.

The two most important interpersonal soft skills are communicating efficiently (orally and in writing) with other employees, clients, and customers, and acting courteously and respectfully. Demonstrating awareness of others’ feelings and manifesting intercultural sensitivity are perceived to be the two least important, albeit still rather important, interpersonal skills. In terms of satisfaction, the two most satisfactory, albeit not very satisfactory, interpersonal soft skills are managing guest requests with understanding and sensitivity, and communicating efficiently (orally and in writing) with other employees, clients, and customers. Conversely, exhibiting negotiating skills and emotional intelligence, such as emotional control and passion, are perceived to be neither satisfactory nor dissatisfactory interpersonal skills.

Table 4. Importance of Soft Skills in T&H vs. Satisfaction With the Soft Skills Actually Learned/Acquired During Undergraduate Study in T&H

Variable	$\bar{x}^*$	$\bar{x}^{**}$
	<i>Importance</i>	<i>Satisfaction</i>
<i>Conceptual/Creative Soft Skills</i>		
Maintain the "big picture" while working on a specific property-management, layout, and design component	4.50	3.67
Manifest critical thinking	4.38	3.86
Demonstrate an understanding of the organization's interaction with the larger external environment	4.42	3.74
Develop new ideas	4.68	3.63
Develop adaptation responses to unexpected changes	4.74	3.74
Exhibit knowledge of related job roles - peers, subordinates, others	4.44	4.05
Manifest development and adaptation of innovation or improvements	4.61	3.83
Understand the agendas and perspectives of owners, staff members, managers, and other parties	4.41	3.86
Consider customer needs when making decisions	4.73	4.30
Bring together different perspectives and approaches and combine them in creative ways	4.42	3.94
<i>Leadership Soft Skills</i>		
Steer conflicts away from personalities and toward issues	4.38	3.90
Present ideas in a convincing manner	4.44	3.88
Expresses disagreement in a tactful and sensitive manner	4.11	3.93
Works to understand why others resist change instead of forcing others to accept change	4.03	3.71

Operate effectively and calmly under pressure or in crisis situations	4.78	3.86
Build networks with people inside and outside the firm	4.45	3.74
Confront problems early before they become unmanageable	4.68	3.86
Employ a team approach to solve problems when appropriate	4.41	3.80
Listen carefully to input and concerns expressed by others	4.46	4.11
Promote respect and appreciation for diversity and individual differences	4.58	4.25

#### *Interpersonal Soft Skills*

Manage guest requests with understanding and sensitivity	4.63	4.28
Communicate efficiently (orally and in writing) with other employees, clients, and customers	4.68	4.21
Exhibit emotional intelligence, such as emotional control and passion	4.58	3.97
Effectively handle staff grievances and complaints	4.54	4.00
Act courteously and respectfully	4.66	4.18
Demonstrate awareness of others' feelings	4.31	4.12
Exhibit negotiating skills	4.54	3.92
Provide effective feedback	4.64	4.06
Demonstrate empathy in dealing with customers and staff	4.55	4.15
Manifest intercultural sensitivity	4.43	4.17

\* Importance of soft skills in T&H on a 5-point scale ranging from 1=*not very important* to 5=*critically important*.

\*\* Satisfaction with the soft skills actually learned/acquired during undergraduate study in T&H on a 5-point scale ranging from 1=*very dissatisfied* to 5= *very satisfied*.

### **2.5.3. Summary of student surveys**

Both current and former students perceive that all 30 soft skills are vital to their success in today's T&H workplace. Unfortunately, both groups also find that the soft skills actually learned during their undergraduate study in T&H are below the industry's soft skill demands. Interestingly, at face value, when compared to former students, current students consistently rate soft skills as slightly more important. Similarly, current students also consistently express slightly higher level of satisfaction with the soft skills they actually learned during their undergraduate study, as compared to former students.

### **3.0 Conclusions and Recommendations**

The goal of this report was to help T&H faculty, administrators, consultants, and industry practitioners in Croatia capture and understand the soft skills gap between the requirements of the T&H industry and tourism curricula adopted by HEI's. To accomplish this goal, FEBT reviewed national policies in Croatia in relation to soft skills in the workplace, content



analyzed the curricula of T&H HEIs in Croatia, conducted face-to-face interviews and a focus group with T&H practitioners and HEI instructors, and surveyed current and former T&H students.

Overall, all three stakeholders, that is, T&H industry practitioners, HEI instructors, and current and former students, share a common view that soft skills are essential for success in a contemporary T&H workplace. Despite the growing prevalence of soft-skill-intensive jobs in T&H, Croatia's T&H managers, academics, employees, and soon-to-be graduates regard the soft skills as underdeveloped in higher education. That said, T&H businesses have been creating opportunities for students to explore interests and develop soft skills outside of the classroom. Inside the classroom, the results from the survey of current and former T&H students suggest that HEIs need to step up and put soft skills at the forefront of their curriculum.

## Appendix 1: Face-to-Face Interview Supporting Documentation

Results from the interviewee questionnaire completed in preparation for the face-to-face interview

Importance of **conceptual/creative** skills

Please imagine that you are part of an interview panel/team involved in recruiting a university graduate to fill an entry-level management trainee position at a tourism and hospitality (T&H) firm.

Please rank each of the following 10 conceptual/creative skills in order of their importance, with 1 being the most important skill to 10 being the least important skill in a new recruit.

**NOTE:** You cannot choose the same ranking for multiple skills (for example, you cannot choose two skills to be ranked 1).

<i>Soft skill</i>	<i>I1</i>	<i>I2</i>	<i>I3</i>	<i>I4</i>
Maintains the "big picture" while working for a specific firm/organization	9	9	10	3
Manifests critical thinking	4	4	5	10
Demonstrates an understanding of the organization's interaction with the larger external environment	10	10	7	4
Develops new ideas	7	8	3	9
Develops adaptation responses to unexpected changes	6	3	2	5
Exhibits knowledge of related job roles of peers, subordinates, others	1	5	9	7
Manifests development and adaptation of innovation or improvements	5	2	8	6
Understands the agendas and perspectives of owners, staff members, managers, and other parties	3	7	6	2
Considers customer needs when making decisions	2	1	4	1
Brings together different perspectives and approaches and combine them in creative ways	8	6	1	8

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 Results from the interviewee questionnaire completed in preparation for the face-to-face interview
 

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 Importance of **leadership** skills

Same as in the previous task, now please rank each of the following 10 leadership skills in order of their importance in a new recruit.

<i>Soft skill</i>	<i>I1</i>	<i>I2</i>	<i>I3</i>	<i>I4</i>
Steers conflicts away from personalities and toward issues	8	9	7	2
Presents ideas in a convincing manner	7	8	5	10
Expresses disagreement in a tactful and sensitive manner	6	10	6	9
Works to understand why others resist change instead of forcing others to accept change	4	7	8	8
Operates effectively and calmly under pressure or in crisis situations	1	3	1	7
Builds networks with people inside and outside the firm	2	6	3	6
Confronts problems early before they become unmanageable	3	4	2	1
Employs a team approach to solve problems when appropriate	9	5	10	3
Listens carefully to input and concerns expressed by others	5	1	4	4
Promotes respect and appreciation for diversity and individual differences	10	2	9	5

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 Results from the interviewee questionnaire completed in preparation for the face-to-face interview
 

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 Importance of **interpersonal** skills

Same as in the previous task, now please rank each of the following 10 interpersonal skills in order of their importance in a new recruit.

<i>Soft skill</i>	<i>I1</i>	<i>I2</i>	<i>I3</i>	<i>I4</i>
Manages guest requests with understanding and sensitivity	7	4	2	2
Communicates efficiently (orally and in writing) with other employees, clients, and customers	1	5	1	1
Exhibits emotional intelligence, such as emotional control and passion	2	1	3	5
Effectively handles staff grievances and complaints	6	7	6	8
Acts courteously and respectfully	3	8	4	6
Demonstrates awareness of others' feelings	9	2	5	7
Exhibits negotiating skills	8	10	10	3
Provides effective feedback	4	9	9	4
Demonstrates empathy in dealing with customers and staff	5	3	8	9
Manifests intercultural sensitivity	10	6	7	10

**Appendix 2: Focus Group Supporting Documentation**


Erasmus+ Programme – Project No. 588476-EPP-1-2017-1-PT-EPPKA2-KA

 Događaj: Fokusna grupa  
Nadnevak održavanja: Četvrtak, 6. rujna 2018.  
Lokacija: Ekonomski fakultet Sveučilišta u Splitu

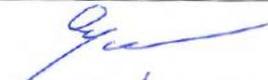
**Fokusna grupa  
Popis sudionika**

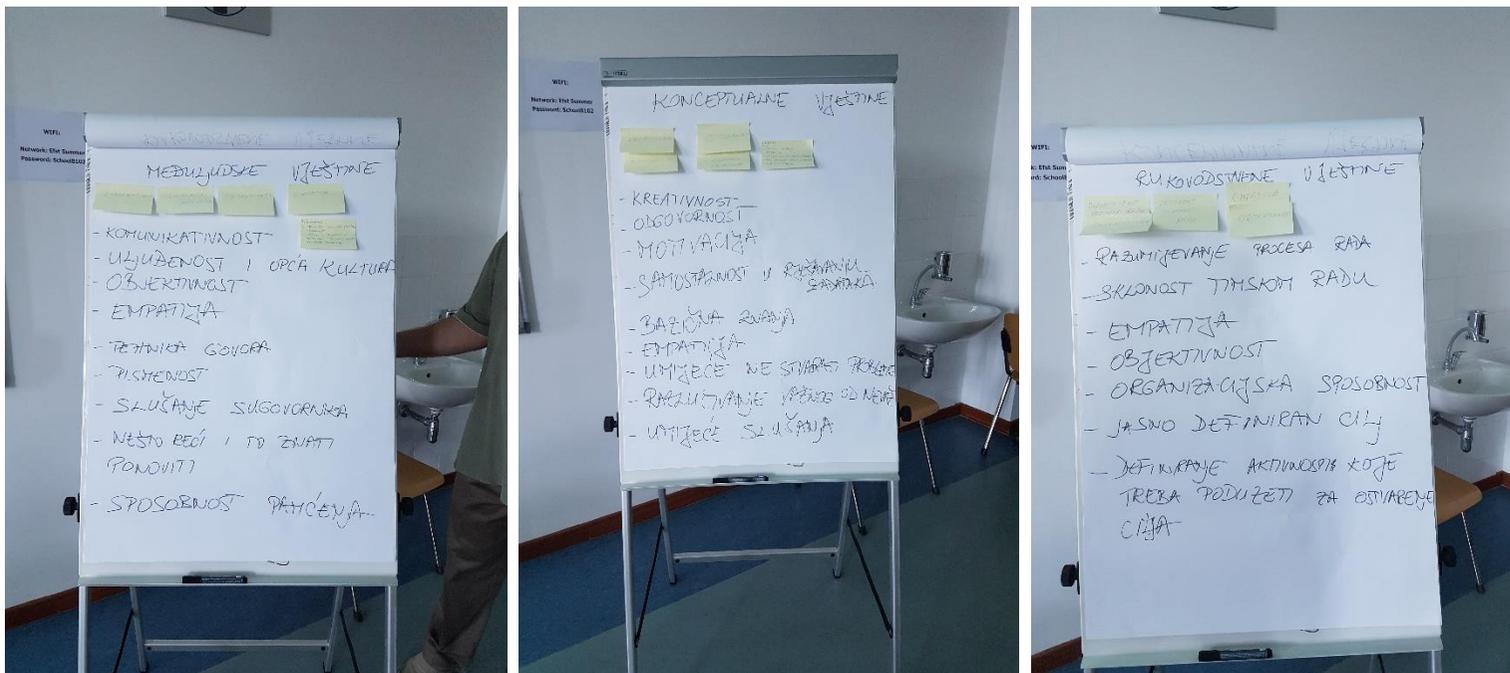
Br.	Ime i prezime	Tvrtka/ustavna/organizacija	Poslovna adresa	E-adresa	Potpis
1	LJUDEVIT FRANIĆ	EFST	CVITKO FIŠKOVIĆA 5 SPLIT	LJUDEVIT.FRANIC @EFST.HR	
2	TIHANA KLARIĆ	RADISSON BLU SPLIT	PUT TRSTENIKA 19	tihana.klanc@radissonblu.com	
3	ANDRIJANA OZRETIĆ	NAUTIKA CENTAR NAVA	<del>DRUŠTVO IVA OZRETIĆEV</del> UVALA BAKUNI 8 SPLIT	charter@navaboats.com	
4	JOSIP BILJAK	HOTEL MARVIE	PERIČIĆEVA 1	josip.biljak@gmail.com	
5	KRISTINA PETRIĆ	EFST	C. FIŠKOVIĆA 5 21 000 SPLIT	kristina @ efst.hr	
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