



Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union



WP 9: 2nd Thematic Discussion Summary Report (Croatia)

Report Compiled by
Faculty of Economics, Business and Tourism
at University of Split



Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union



1.0 Introduction

The 2nd Thematic Discussion was held on Friday, February 8th, 2019, at the Faculty of Economics, Business and Tourism at University of Split, in Split, Croatia.

The aim of the event was to bring together key tourism industry stakeholders, coming from academia, private businesses, tourism boards, and student representatives to discuss what kind of cooperative learning model do we need to implement in order to strengthen the collaboration between higher education institutions (HEI) and companies.

During the introductory part of the discussion, the moderator highlighted the main goals of the project and presented the following discussion points:

- Current state and challenges in learning soft skills at HEIs from students' perspectives
- Current state and challenges in learning soft skills at HEIs from employers' perspectives
- What steps should HEIs take to advance the development and adoption of soft skills among tourism and hospitality (T&H) students?
- What steps should employers take to advance the development and adoption of soft skills among tourism and hospitality (T&H) students?
- How can HEIs and employers further improve the current level of cooperation?

2.0 Main Outcomes of the Round-table Discussion

A participant who is currently both a graduate student and hotel employee argued that, when HEIs and/or Ministry of Science and Education make decisions about student enrollment quotas, employers should be involved in this decision-making process. Such an approach would help ensure that the profile of university graduates is better aligned with the needs of the tourism industry. Moreover, in order for both employers and students to fully benefit from an HEI internship program, employers could provide the list of baseline skills (prerequisites, e.g. communication skills) that a student must possess before being allowed to register for an internship.

An owner of a small hotel accentuated that students would greatly benefit if HEIs were to bring in business practitioners as guest speakers on a specific topic (i.e., handling customer complaints), who can then share their real-world insights, challenges, and ways of handling them. This tactic would help narrow what he perceives as a wide gap between the real-world and what is currently learned in the classroom environment.

A representative of a local tourism board, who is also a recent tourism graduate, commented that, looking back at his student days, he noticed that, although some class instructors hosted guest speakers, most of his fellow student colleagues lacked the necessary seriousness or maturity to get the most out of the guest speaker experiences. Nevertheless, he firmly believes that having industry experts in the classroom is not only an activity that he strongly approves of, but also something that needs to occur more often during undergraduate



Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union



education. He also stressed that the guest speakers he witnessed relied excessively on one-way communication, and what they should have done instead was to employ practical simulations enabling students to engage in real life situations. He defined in-class practical simulations as case studies developed by T&H practitioners, based on real events, or a plausible construction of events, that tell a story involving issues or conflicts that require students' action (e.g., resolution). In his opinion, if students first make a dent in building their soft skills via in-class practical simulations created and presented by guest speakers (i.e., T&H professionals), then when they reach the internship stage of their degree program, they will be better prepared to hit the ground running.

To this last point, two current students, who presently also work in T&H, commented that while they fully support the notion of in-class simulations, such approach is not without limitations. Specifically, the stress and the intensity of emotions experienced during a real-world situation are hard to replicate, at least to the full extent, in a classroom environment. A representative of a sailboat charter company noted that an internship, as opposed to an in-class experience, is the closest a student can come to encounter realism. However, he immediately added that, at first, an intern should not be thrown directly into a stressful situation, because such approach may backfire, causing the intern to avoid any future situation that he or she perceives as difficult. Instead, he suggested that, at first, the intern should shadow a company's employee and get to observe first-hand a stressful situation and the employee's reaction to it. Such method will allow the intern to gradually transition into the real-world, as opposed to being thrown to the wolves right away. Obviously, this strategy requires one-on-one training/observation spread throughout the semester (to allow a separate observation session for each student) and in the off-season (to allow the trainer to devote enough time to each student).

A representative of a large international chain-affiliated hotel remarked that business practitioners, when invited as guest speakers to a university campus, dislike giving lengthy speeches. Instead, they prefer using hands-on exercises, and since they already utilize the same approach during in-house training for their employees, replicating such exercises in front of a student audience requires little, if any, additional effort. She added that HEIs can help by pinpointing the specific subject (e.g., material planning and supplier selection for bedding, linens, and uniforms in the hotel housekeeping department) that a guest speaker should cover. When it comes to internships, she griped that students often show up clueless as to what goals they should accomplish during their internship. She then proposed that if HEIs could ensure that interns come to work with a pre-specified list of tasks and goals, this would greatly help employers streamline the entire internship experience.

An HEI representative commented that her home institution does provide an itemized list of internship goals and tasks, and that their internship program prescribes that each intern must have an inside (i.e., HEI) and an outside (i.e., company) mentor. Despite the fact that an intern receives a pre-specified list of internship tasks prior to his or her internship, this does not



Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union



guarantee that either an intern or his/her company mentor have actually read and familiarized themselves with these tasks. Thus, two pre-internship meetings, one with the intern and the other with the company mentor, are strongly encouraged to ensure that everyone involved in the internship understands each internship task. After the internship, the intern should revisit his or her HEI mentor and reflect in detail, both orally and in writing, on each of the pre-specified tasks.

The idea of student needing a pre-specified list of internship tasks immediately gave rise to a remark by several participants, who stressed that the list of internship tasks must be regularly (i.e., annually) scrutinized and updated to keep abreast of the latest industry needs. One current student added that interns should not be bothered with mundane tasks like waiting on guests. To that, another student, along with several other business practitioners representing various tourism industries (i.e., lodging, nautical, camping), retorted that each skill and task in the process of professional development builds on a previous skill/task, thus interns cannot fast-track their way past the seemingly less intellectually challenging activities. They all pointed out that even the presumably dull task of peeling potatoes entails not only mastering some hard skills (e.g., culinary aspects of handling a potato, such as peeling, slicing, and dicing), but also nurturing some typically overlooked yet important soft skills (e.g., human dynamics lurking in the supervisor-employee, customer-provider, and peer-to-peer relationships).

All participants agreed that HEIs should make it mandatory (as opposed to optional) to learn at least one foreign language in addition to English. Namely, in contemporary tourism, the ability to communicate effectively and efficiently in both Croatian (i.e., the native language) and English is not enough. A growing number of T&H businesses seek job candidates who are competent in at least two foreign languages (i.e., English and another foreign language).

3.0 Conclusion

All of the participants commended the host for organizing this thematic discussion. They agreed that the discussion's central theme was on point. That is, both current and former students, as well as tourism professionals, agree that HEIs need to upgrade their curricula by creating opportunities for students to learn soft skills through practical experiences. In this respect, HEIs should pave the way for this change by helping T&H practitioners develop practical simulations and case studies based on real events, and then invite them as guest speakers to conduct in-class workshops on a specific topic/subject.

Moreover, HEIs and T&H businesses should re-design the existing internship programs in a way that ensures that the learning trio (i.e., the intern, the company mentor, and the HEI mentor) is on the same page in terms of what soft skills are going to be learned and how are they going to be learned. As part of this endeavor, the list of internship tasks should be regularly (i.e., annually) scrutinized and updated through HEI-practitioner collaboration in order to keep abreast of the latest industry needs. Finally, the degree of intern's exposure to



Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union



conditions present in the real-world should be incremental to avoid intern burnout. Thus, during internship, the intern should first observe an employee live in action before taking on the task himself.



Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union



Appendix 1: Event Program

2. tematska rasprava: Združeno učenje mekih vještina u turizmu i ugostiteljstvu

2nd Thematic Discussion: Cooperative Learning of Soft Skills in the Tourism Industry

Petak, 8. veljače 2019.

u 10h

Ekonomski fakultet
Sveučilišta u Splitu
Vijećnica 3
Aneks, 2. kat

10:00h	Uvodno obraćanje i predstavljanje turističkog EU projekta INCOME – <i>Ljudevit Pranić, EFST</i>
10:10h	Rasprava za okruglim stolom: Meke vještine – Kakav model združenog učenja trebamo primijeniti da bi osnažili suradnju privatnih poslodavaca i visokoobrazovnih ustanova? Voditelj: <i>Ljudevit Pranić, EFST</i>
11:00h	Završno obraćanje



Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union



**INCOME
Tourism**

Appendix 2: Participants List

**2. tematska rasprava
Popis sudionika**

Br.	Ime i prezime	Titulka/ustanova/organizacija	Poslovna adresa	E-adresa	Potpis
1	Iva Pavić	Studentica, EFST	-	iva.pavich@gmail.com	
2	TIHANA KLARIĆ	Hotel Split d.d. Radisson Blu Split	tihana.klaric@radissonblu.com		
3	SHIGJANA PINDIČIĆ	Ekonomski fakultet Split	snipi@eff.hr		
4	DANIJELA GABRIJ PRANIČEVIĆ	Ekonomski fakultet Split	daniela.prfst.hr		
5	ELATAN JELOVAČ	HOTEL VILICA ADRIATICA SUPERIA	INFO@VILIKAPULJITAC.BG		
6	MARCO STOLICA	HOTEL ANTIQUE SPLIT	antique.split@gmail.com		
7	DUJE VUČIĆ	TURISTIČKA AGENCIJA GRADA ŠPUTA	duje@visitplit.com		
8	JOSIP PETRIČEVIĆ	NAJLINA CENTAR NAVA d.o.o.	josip.petricevic@najlinabds.com		



Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union



Appendix 3: Photographs of the Meeting

