TOURISM SERVICE PROVIDERS SKILLS & COMPETENCES: NEEDS ANALYSIS

A REPORT ON THE LEVEL OF KNOWLEDGE REGARDING PRINCIPLES, PRACTICES AND WORKFLOW OF PRIVATE TOURISM ACCOMMODATION SERVICES PROVIDERS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY IN EN
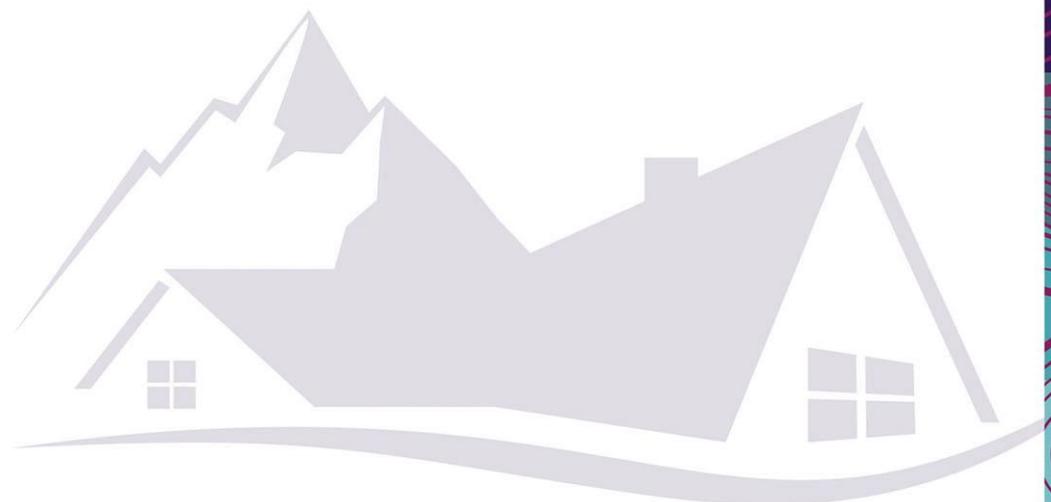
Europe is the world's no. 1 tourist destination, with the highest density and diversity of tourist attractions. The tourist industry has become a key sector of the European economy, generating over 10% of EU GDP (directly or indirectly) and employing 9.7m citizens in 1.8m businesses. The EU tourism panorama and structure has been rapidly changing in the last years. The ROOMS2VET project is an EU funded project (through Erasmus+ KA2) that aims to develop learning material and a free, online training platform to help the providers of private tourism accommodation services make the most of their tourism activities or businesses and grasp the profit from the emerging sustainable and alternative tourism trends.

This report, IO3, has been focused in field research aimed at complementing the desk research from IO1 and the IO2 best practices. The targeted stakeholders have been Tourism-related local, regional, national and European Associations and Organisations. They were requested to provide information about the core training needs. 68 survey questionnaires, 32 in-depth interviews and 5 focus groups with 51 participants from Croatia, Cyprus, Greece, Slovenia and Spain have been designed and implemented.

An initial analysis of the results of the training needs of the Private Accommodation (PA from now on) owners, managers and stakeholders has been carried out having as main results:

Looking at the problems and contingencies faced in their profession, from most important (5) to least important (1), the highest rating correspond to problems related to hospitality and service culture (4,3) closely followed by problems related to planning your business (4,1). running your business day to day received the lowest rating (3,6).

As to awareness regarding upskilling, when asked about their existing experience regarding professional training, by number of respondents we can see that most respondents pointed out to be in the group of "*Occasional follow up of training courses (e.g. 1 day a year)*". But they reported to be aware about the importance of training to better perform their job. These results reinforce what found in the desk research regarding the style of learning; more particularly the recommendation regarding using a variety of teaching and learning methods as an important ingredient to motivate learners, which report to follow learning courses only occasionally.

If we look at educational strategies and formats we can find that blended learning is the preferred learning format, (that is, combining face to face and online learning) is the most voted learning format. Regarding ICT and learning related experience, the results show a tight tie: when we look at the results by country we can clearly see that in Spain the respondents had more

experience than the Greek while Croatia and Cyprus show a balanced tie. This is complemented by the fact that 98% of the respondents declared to use computers or mobile devices every day and when asked about their access to internet and devises the results are a more frequent use of smartphones with Android system. Only 39% of the respondents reported to access specialised online fora.

As to the rating of specific features of learning and e-learning courses, the preferred ones are easy to use, quality of learning contents and text easy to read. The item considered least important was usefulness of certification but it was among the most important ones from Spanish and Croatian respondents.

The final conclusions of the report have been structured according to methodological and educational implications, recommendations for the online platform and for the piloting.

Regarding the structure and content of learning and training material, some examples and recommendations have been identified from the field research that may be used as guiding ideas or inspirations of the training to be designed.

Regarding the structure and content of learning and training material, from the field research we have identified examples and recommendations that may be used as guiding ideas or inspirations of the training to be designed:

1. HOSPITALITY AND SERVICE CULTURE - a general introductory course dealing with the importance of hospitality or customer care in general taking into account changing trends (i.e. greater diversity of guests, intercultural aspects and similar):

· Place emphasis on social and emotional intelligence related skills such as: problem solving and training in critical incident resolution (i.e.: especially as guests are not complaining directly, but write the feedback on portals); balance regarding social skills– not being too distant, not overburdening guests with attention…etc.
· Hospitality learning from an innovative and customer-oriented perspective, including Tailor-made services provision: putting themselves in their customers' shoes, understanding their real needs and providing them with customised services taking into account the country of origin, age, cultural characteristics, religion etc….

2. PLANNING FOR SUCCESS - *generally covering business plan (setting goals and targets), monitoring and controlling, examining and*

adapting to legal frameworks, formalising and getting certified for standards (safety, quality, sustainability, etc.):

- Practical ways of managing your business: from where to buy your supplies, how to clean the rooms, provision of the right services to the customer, defining the customer's needs
- Knowledge of how to start a business, administrative procedures, licenses, and insurance policies, etc.; are considered as key units of this module.
- Market research, how to follow market trends and destination marketing: mapping the specific characteristic, habits, preferences etc. of the specific target market, taking into account their age and origin
- Basic accounting to build up and manage a budget according to income/expenses that allow planning and thinking forward.
- Human resources planning
- Communication diary: the need for customer communications and their role in maintaining customer focus, establishing successful customers relationship and creating loyalty and customer retention

3. RUNNING YOUR BUSINESS DAY TO DAY - *focusing on operations and services (reception, housekeeping, food/beverage, accounting)*:

- Basic administrative issues: Tax obligations, such as managing VAT, how to manage cash-flow, how to calculate the feasibility of introducing new services (i.e. breakfast; bicycle rental)
- How to manage reservations – namely, it used to be that guests were booking for a 7-day (from Sunday to Sunday) and it was easy for them to keep records; now length of stay varies greatly (increasingly one or two days) and it is more complex when there are several accommodation units and booking made through few different channels
- How to manage human resources: proper business staffing
- Constant monitoring: the premises of the accommodation; the reservations; customers' satisfaction etc.
- Cleaning and food serving areas management;
- Customised communication with customers: emergency phone available on a 24/7 basis and all-day communication with customers.

4. FACE-LIFTING YOUR BUSINESS - dealing with interior decoration/design issue to reflect market demand and authenticity of the local place:

- Include information on how you could find funding sources to renovate and decorate your accommodation,
- Introduce examples/best practices from other countries; educational exchange trips; in order for them to see other successful examples that

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could be transferred as knowledge through an educational trip. It is not easy for these products and services to be applied.
- Eco-friendly equipment and renewable energy sources
- Accessible infrastructure
- Health and safety (for example emergency exits, etc.)
- Introduce video tutorials with examples on how to renovate your business (e.g IKEA)
- Tips on how to observe the new markets and evolve and how to place your business into today's digital world

5. CREATIVE AND INNOVATIVE PRODUCTS AND SERVICES - essentially dealing with product development, including diversification of activities and services, by, among others, cooperating with other tourism product providers in a destination

- The importance to link innovation with your context: innovation must come through experiences and thematic activities and products. That's what differentiates the business in competition
- Creation of an attractive product for the consumer. Whether it concerns the accommodation or the food etc. How to keep your business in an excellent condition and if you produce your own products to make their image beautiful so to be able to promote them
- What destination offers from a "different point of view", how they can benefit from it. Learn how to be differentiated from the rest.
- Tips on how to provide traditional products to the tourist and to involve him/her to the local community and to the local activities
- Importance of networking and creativity for innovation.

6. PROMOTING AND SELLING EFFECTIVELY - dealing with market communication, overview of tourism distribution system with a special attention to on-line promotion and sales:

- Place special attention to web 2.0 tools adapted to PAs, as even though it has not been selected as key issue in the proposal, it is considered an extremely relevant issue in the frame of private accommodations nowadays. (i.e.: show how to create also special events and invite the media. To get visible through specialized/thematic magazines and websites)
- SEO & SEM basics: online reputation management, digital marketing and social networks: metrics, statistics, management
- Low cost promotion: through social media.
- How to "sell" your exclusive product: pre-sales and after-sales services

- Examples on how staging for photo-session and professional photography (good/bad examples), describing the premise (short but effective), Improving visibility on booking portals…etc.
- Price-setting/dynamic pricing (understanding how different intermediaries charge different commission rate; how to adjust the price daily to improve sales)
- Newsletter marketing

Thematically from the field research, we may also deal with issues such as corporate social responsibility issues (environment, social issues, etc.), how to create a company, eco-friendly issues, accessible infrastructure, health and safety issues and networking. Transversally, we may also add the idea of including a glossary, a basic dictionary on the key issues when running a private accommodation service (think of using a wiki) including basic concepts such as the "home atmosphere" which is regarded as one of the most important elements of the attractiveness of this form of accommodation.

Moreover, it is advised to consider some ingredients that might increase the motivation of our target group, such as:

- Present the content in modular "learning bites" that will be able to provide just in time learning
- Use of inquiry-based and problem-based learning approaches and inclusion of stories and case studies as simple examples on stories and practices in which people can feel identified, promoting *Peer to Peer* support and communication between learners.
- Accommodate multiple learning styles and contextualise learning to meet the needs of private accommodation owners in the different national and regional contexts involved;
- Promote self-reflection through the provision of tutor support and guidance, as well as keeping online journals
- Provide learning activities to be carried out either synchronously or asynchronously
- Think of the possibility of including a "Resources" section including links to cases, multimedia materials, books or "further readings", information about existing funding in your country, …etc. that would help the learners to feel more engaged.
- Think of the possibility of making up (or selecting already available) video tutorials and making up a user-friendly Learners' handbook combining both information about the structure of the modular "learning bites" and the technology to be used and their implications for the trainees. The idea is to make up a simple and trainee oriented information guide, a support tool to facilitate understanding;

- FAQ which will solve questions divided into sections (contents, technical requirements...etc.).

Regarding the piloting, both based on the preferences of the surveyed respondents who preferred blended learning and from previous experience in pilots implemented in the frame of EU projects, we recommend to consider the possibility to hold 2 or 3 face to face sessions (recommended: at the beginning, in the middle and at the end of the piloting) and using ad hoc online evaluation grids to be filled in by the participants, before and after the training. In the first face to face session we would also recommend to make a simple initial exercise with the pilot participants to check what motivates them the most and also to check their level of familiarity with the technology they will have to use and try to adapt and customise as much as possible the course to the results of this exercise.

In this frame, we also believe that the role of the responsible of the validation and reporting of the piloting and its direct coordination with in each piloting country is crucial as this requires a transformation process to that of *learning facilitator*.

The following recommendations also go in this direction:
- Prepare and encourage the tutors in each country (to also guide the participant teachers on the use of technologies (platform and mobile devices);
- Ask all the learners who have participated in the learning courses in all the sessions to report orally on previous experiences and try to build on "*good practices examples*" while trying to cope with the problems they may have.
- Fill in *ad hoc* assessment forms and base each session on the results of the previous evaluation results
- Not all the learners will have the same profile and experience: the learning needs to be customised as much as possible.