Revista Românească pentru Educație Multidimensională
ISSN: 2066-7329 | e-ISSN: 2067-9270
Covered in: Web of Science (WOS); EBSCO; ERIH+; Google Scholar; Index Copernicus; Ideas RePeC; Econpapers; Socionet; CEEOL; Ulrich ProQuest; Cabell, Journalseek; Scipio; Philpapers; SHERPA/RoMEO repositories; KVK; WorldCat; CrossRef; CrossCheck

2023, Volume 15, Issue 4, pages: 207-218 | https://doi.org/10.18662/rrem/15.4/789
Submitted: June 16th, 2023 | *Accepted for publication:* October 10th, 2023

Staged Professional Training of Tourism Specialists in the Higher Education System in the Context of Social and Economic Crises

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Abstract: *In the context of social and economic crises, the tourism industry represents the economic branch that is affected in various aspects, which implies the search for new solutions for development. Thus, the professional training of staff in the higher education system, including those in the field of tourism, in recent years was influenced by a series of factors that required rapid adaptation, the identification of the methods and means necessary to train the skills of future specialists. In this sense, the ever-changing requirements for employees in the tourism field, especially the trends of recent years, should focus on the content of the staged training of future employees in the tourism field, with an emphasis on the training of flexible, innovative and with deep digital skills to be able to deal with unpredictable situations that can affect the tourism sector. This fact implies that future graduates who will work in the tourism sector will need to possess skills that will allow them to quickly adapt to multiple tasks, in a redesigned industry that has been attempted by the pandemic. All this determines the need to make changes in the professional training of staff at each training stage, which will aim to ensure the sustainability of the sector, with an emphasis on strengthening the relations between academia and the industry itself in order to find viable solutions for development.*

Keywords: *Professional activity; tourism industry; innovative education system.*

How to cite: Lungu, E., Onoi, M., Nastas, N., Constantinescu, O. V. (2023). Staged professional training of tourism specialists in the higher education system in the context of social and economic crises. *Revista Românească pentru Educație Multidimensională, 15*(4), 207-218. https://doi.org/10.18662/rrem/15.4/789

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Introduction

The latest growths in the tourism sector due to economic, political, social factors, etc., have significantly changed the strategic directions of the professional training of tourism specialists, which implies the search for solutions suitable to the requirements that would lead to the improvement of the educational process (Mindrigan & Sava, 2019).

According to Sabanina (2013), in recent years the concerns of specialists in the field have focused on a series of problems that are in contradiction with each other: insufficient training of staff in the context of the increase in the flow of tourists; sufficient theoretical knowledge of graduates, poor practical skills, etc. All this created premises to identify how the staged professional training of tourism specialists should be organized in the higher education system in the context of social and economic crises.

The mentioned led us to establish and systematize the components of the professional training of future specialists in the field of tourism, by establishing the training stages.

The purpose of the research consists in the theoretical substantiation of the need to change the staged professional training of tourism specialists in the context of social and economic crises.

Research objectives constitute:

- the theoretical foundation of the professional training process of tourism specialists in the context of the current educational system;
- substantiation of the factors, conditions and premises of the training of specialists in the field of tourism;
- identifying the content of the innovative training of future specialists in the field of tourism in higher education;
- the development of criteria and indicators, which reflect the effectiveness of the innovative training of tourism specialists.

Research methods. Starting from the research objectives, the following research methods were applied in the present study: retrospective analysis of the experience in the field of professional training of tourism specialists, generalization of the national and international experience regarding the training of specialists in the educational field; surveying and diagnostic methods (survey, observation, interview, students' survey).

Results and discussions

The transformations of the tourism industry at the local, regional and international level have caused major changes at the branch level,

including the professional staff training. The changes made at each stage of training with an emphasis on digital skills and management of operational activities during social and economic crises will have a significant impact on future specialists in the field of tourism. Thus, the components of the professional training of the future specialist in the field of tourism, such as the systematization of the partnership between the university and the economic environment, the training of future specialists regarding the perspectives of the development of the tourism industry, have an increased importance for the professional activity by forming a concept about the particularities of the future professional activity.

Training the skills to adapt to the innovative changes and social and economic crises that in recent years are increasingly common in professional activity, updating the content of the professional activity of tourism specialists, forming a positive attitude towards the chosen profession, make the higher education system be part of tourism development strategies both at national and international level.

In this sense, we have identified a number of factors of the professional training process of future specialists in the field of tourism (Figure 1):

- an education system in some places overtaken by the rapid transformations in the tourist market;
- planning the professional training of the staff in the field of tourism arising from the need for specialists on the national tourist market;
- the development of quality standards for the professional training of personnel in the field of tourism;
- ensuring the correlation between information technologies and the necessary skills to be applied in situations of economic and social crisis;
- stimulating the creativity of tourism graduates to face the challenges that affect or may affect the tourism industry.

The rapid changes in the tourism market are determined by digitization, demographic changes, globalization and climate changes, which requires the adaptation of the education system to the existing transformations, especially the professional training of the specialist in the field who can cope with these changes. Therefore, Çinar (2020) mentions that the digital revolution has become a prominent engine of society and the pandemic has revolutionized the professional training system of teachers and contributed to the online transformation process of higher education institutions, including those that train professionals in the field of tourism.

The planning of the professional training of the staff in the field of tourism arising from the need for specialists on the national tourism market is another essential factor which according to the author Brel & Kayzer (2019) is

due to some essential shortcomings of the education system which mostly do not cope with the fact that permanent new types and tourism directions and enterprises appear, which in turn leads to new requirements in the staff training.

Another essential factor that contributes to the professional training process of future specialists in the field of tourism are the quality standards, which are mostly dispersed, a fact for which Platon (2014), mentions that the current trends of the market economy have an important significance in the field of tourist services, which implies new concepts in the training of the field staff, including the development of educational programs that are correlated to international standards.

Currently, information technologies play a significant role in most industries, including that of tourism as a priority after the Covid-19 pandemic, during which, in accordance with the strict requirements imposed, virtual technologies were used to present tourist attractions in real time , but also of the museums potential through the creation of virtual tours, etc., which created a competition between tourism companies, but also those in the field of tourist services, a fact that proves that according to the authors Gorobievschi & Colun (2020) the integration with the IT field is a pressing necessity and the use of modern evolutions in IT plays as important role as many others, for which teachers must be prepared for any challenges. All this is also a factor in stimulating the creativity of tourism graduates to face the challenges of economic and social crises.

In this vein of ideas, Volcu (2020) mentions that one of the objectives of the educational process in various fields consists in the formation of a creative personality, which implies the development of capacities at the level of maximum potential. The creative potential of future graduates in the field of tourism should be manifested in their attitude towards what they profess and the daily situations they face at work, whether they are in a closed space or in the field with tourists on hiking, excursions, etc.

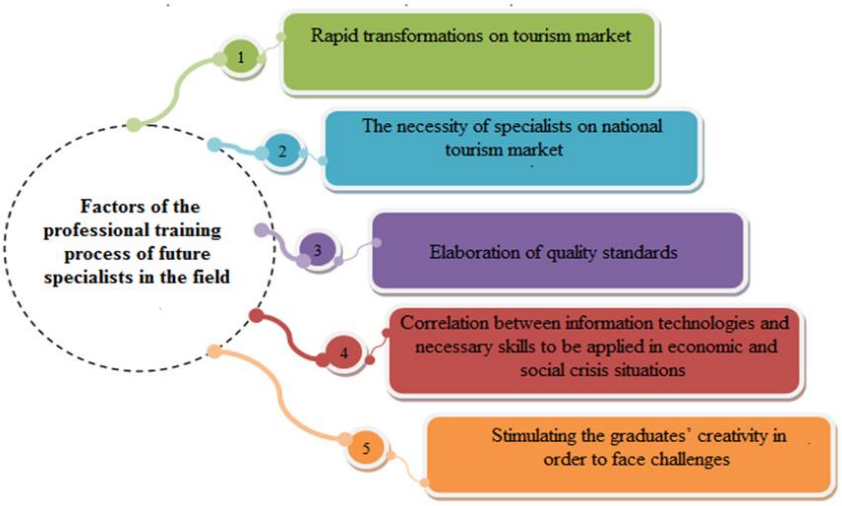


Fig. 1. Factors leading to changes in the professional training process of future tourism specialists

In order to effectively train future specialists in the field of tourism in situations of social and economic crises, it is necessary to ensure a series of specific pedagogical conditions, capable of forming a specialist who can easily adapt to changes in the tourism market, to the conditions of the working place, the need to self-develop and self-realize despite the influence of factors affecting the tourism field, which implies the creation of a training environment based on current information to be brought to the knowledge of the future specialist using various teaching-learning methods, including online ones ; to create a favourable environment between the higher education institution and the real sector of the economy capable of ensuring the internship of students, the identification of a possible job, but also the solution of tasks in crisis conditions to achieve the company's objectives (Figure 2).

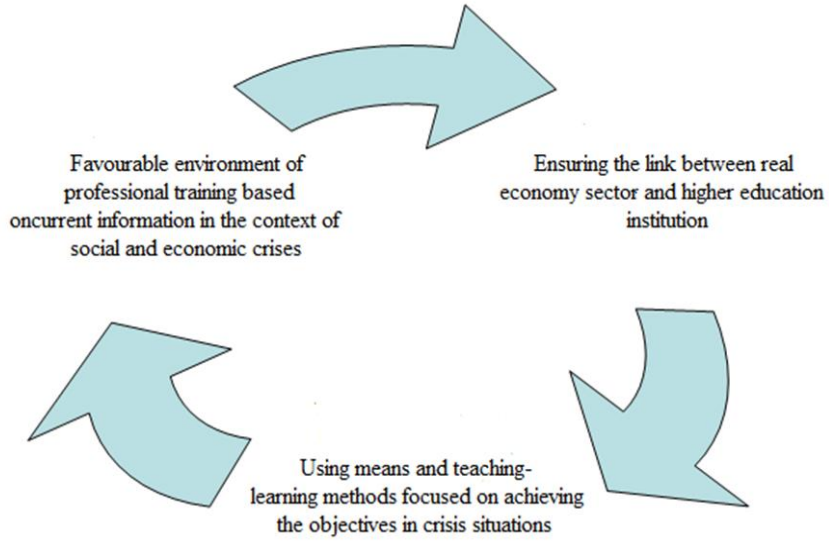


Fig. 2. Pedagogical conditions necessary in the training of future tourism specialists in the higher education system in the context of social and economic crises

Creating a suitable environment for professional training based on current information in the context of social and economic crises, requires that future specialists be provided with current information in the field of tourism (e.g.: the role of the Covid-19 pandemic on the tourism sector, trends and forecasts of the national tourism sector and international one, the energy crisis and the influence on the tourist market). All this ensures the student's knowledge of the "up-to-date" situation of what is happening in the tourism sector, being able to propose solutions for certain real situations that can be prevented or anticipated. This process must be ensured both during the classroom hours in specially equipped rooms where the teaching staff with the help of informational means ensure the preparation process, as well as during field tourist activities (excursions, hikes, etc.), as well as in the process of scientific research of a problem focused on the influence of social and economic crises on the tourism industry.

Ensuring the permanent link with the real sector of the economy is not to be neglected, which involves both ensuring the internship of students and adapting the study programs for the effective training in accordance with the trends of the tourist market of tourism specialists. All this would be possible on a level that would involve the joint organization of activities that

would strengthen this connection and would largely reduce the need for the student to adapt to the workplace after graduation. Thus, this fact would imply:

1. The organization of classes to be provided by specialists from the real sector of the economy (directors of tourism enterprises for subjects related to the management of tourist enterprises, specialists from tourism federations and sports orientation for the disciplines of sports tourism, etc.);

2. Inviting to thematic events (e.g. World Tourism Day) people who manage certain associations, agencies (e.g.: Tourism Development Association, National Association of Travel Agencies, etc.) to share up-to-date information about the situation in real domain.

3. Carrying out joint studies to answer certain questions related to the development of the tourism sector.

4. Addressing topics of interest for the real sector of year, bachelor's, master's and doctorate theses, which as a result of the research carried out should be capitalized and applied in practice.

5. Realization of internships for future graduates in tourism enterprises, etc.

Another aspect of the professional training of future tourism specialists should not be neglected, especially in the case of social and economic crises, namely the self-development and self-improvement of students to face challenges by identifying solutions, developing crisis strategies, adopting decisions in non-standard situations.

The aforementioned created premises for a staged approach to the professional training of tourism specialists in the higher education system in the context of social and economic crises, which would entail (Table 1).

Table 1. Staged approach to the professional training of tourism specialists in the higher education system in the context of social and economic crises

The year of studies	Types of activities	The environment of achievement	Benefits
I Initiation in the specialty	● carrying out a work with a tourist theme by identifying the necessary information on the subject "History of the native land"; ● familiarization with tourist attractions; ● meetings with personalities from the real sector of the economy to learn the charm of the profession.	● in the premises of the higher education institution. ● in the field around the tourist attractions by making excursions, hikes, etc. ● within the higher education institution or at the headquarters of the agency, the professional association.	The development of cognitive skills, the knowledge of the history of the native land, the tourist attractions, initiation into research, but also the identification of the profession subtleties.
II Acquiring skills	● the realization of projects, the thesis of the year on certain subjects of national interest or those proposed by specialists in the real sector of the economy; ● development of tourist routes, but also of tourist products intended for short-term vacations; ● completing the initial internship to get familiar with the future work environment;	● in the premises of the higher education institution, but also in the vicinity of the touristic attractions or the enterprise that is subject to the study, etc. ● on the route, using various means of transport, but also the portfolio with the necessary documents. ● within the profile enterprises.	Initiation in scientific research and the formation of communication skills using professional terminology; drawing up the technological map of the trip and the necessary documentation; familiarization with the possible workplace; the easier

	● participation in various tourism meetings and measures (thematic seminars on social and economic crisis aspects affecting the tourism field; workshops with speakers from the real sector who can share from their own experience, etc.).	● in the premises of accommodation structures, the headquarters of tourism enterprises, in certain tourist areas, around the tourist attractions that represent the subject of the discussion, etc.	resolution of crisis situations in the field based on the experience of specialists in the field.
III Transferring skills to the real environment of the economy and solving crisis situations	● participation in volunteer activities in the tourism field (e.g.: organization of events dedicated to tourism day). ● carrying out the technological internship; ● participation in research projects (e.g.: socializing teenagers by practicing forms of active tourism, etc.). ● conducting a tourist activity in the field with a group of tourists. ● the elaboration of the bachelor's thesis on a theme proposed by managers of some tourism enterprises or dictated by the situation created in the field (e.g.: the Covid-19 pandemic and its role on tourism, etc.).	● in the field (areas with a tourist connotation, representative tourist attractions, etc.), conference rooms, etc. ● within tourism enterprises. ● in the premises of educational institutions or practical field activities. ● in the field on the route designed by the students and made with the group mates. ● in the field around the researched subject and within the educational institution where the research takes place.	Personal development, obtaining organizational and communication skills in the professional field; adaptation to the workplace; solving a problem in the field of tourism by carrying out projects; obtaining practical skills in the field; the scientific argumentation of a crisis situation that has affected the professional field.

The staged preparation of the professional training of tourism specialists in the higher education system in the context of social and economic crises is currently a topical subject that should be focused on (Figure 3):

- ensuring a quality educational process, in an environment conducive to achieving the study objectives transposed in curriculum, adapted to current situations in the tourism industry;
- adapting to social and economic crisis situations based on the experience gained through involvement in research projects to solve urgent problems arising in the field, etc.;

training of organizational culture and activity coordination within specializ

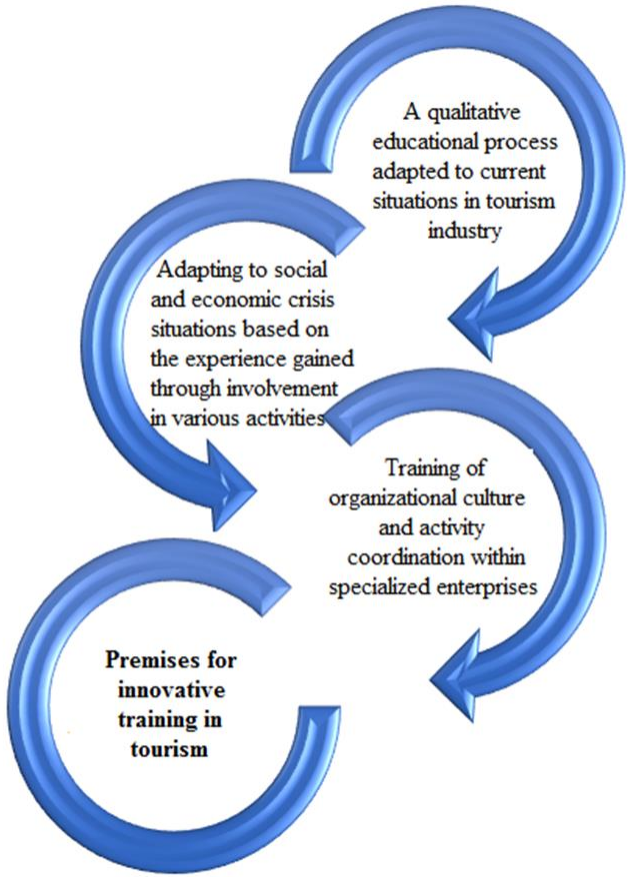


Fig. 3. Premises for innovative training in tourism

The evaluation and appreciation of the innovative professional training of future specialists in the field of tourism is focused on the

evaluation of the skills obtained by students based on the premises identified in the research process.

The analysis of the factors of the professional training process of future specialists in the field of tourism and the premises of innovative training in tourism led us to establish that:

- it is necessary to train the staged student taking into account the crisis situations that may arise in the professional field;
- placing students in practical activities that capitalize on their creative potential, for self-development and self-determination in professional activity;
- students' use of innovative technologies specific to the field, which will allow them to adapt more quickly to crisis situations.

Conclusions

Innovative training of tourism specialists in the higher education system in the context of social and economic crises, involves the staging of the training process, which emphasizes the activities and contents necessary to be assimilated by the student in the professional training process. This fact implies the identification of the factors and the innovative premises of the professional training process, which once established can have the effect of training a qualified specialist required by the tourist market. Due to the continuous crises that significantly influence the tourism activity globally, it makes every stage in the training of tourism specialists in the higher education system to be focused on modern technologies, practical involvement of the student at every stage, working with the real sector of the economy, etc.

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