FORMATION OF MANAGEMENT KNOWLEDGE IN TOURISM: THE ROMANIAN CASE

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Abstract

The present work analyses the creation of management knowledge in the Romanian tourism, focusing on the contribution of the academic environment due to the accomplishment of specialized syllabuses. The choice of topic is motivated by the state of the Romanian tourism, characterized by a poor economic performance and by negative quotidian manifestations.

The present situation of the management knowledge is reflected in the educational standard of the tourism executives, owners and managers, and also within the university educational framework related to this field. The university segment dealing with the management knowledge formation is analyzed from the point of view related to its affiliation to a specialized educational system. The influence of the significant elements belonging to all the educational links is referred to the performance expected.

An overview of general characteristics of the present managers and owners in this industry in Romania explain the different and divergent positions of the academics and the entrepreneurs and the difficulty of a real knowledge exchange.

The implicit hypothesis is the existence of a consistent gap between the necessities and competences desired in the tourism management and the results of academic education. The expected result of the work is the identification of some specific causes of Romanian poor economic performance in tourism, despite the so-called potential of national resources. The fact could be used in generating new ideas for adopting some changes in academics programs or for refining the national strategic plan for management training in tourism.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The discussion about the management knowledge related to the Romanian tourism has two main sources of inspiration: the theoretical source and the pragmatic one.

The theoretical source consists of the numerous works which focused on identifying the management skills which generate the success of the organizations. The list of these
works is impressive, and so the list of “unusual” management authors, who pointed out certain interesting elements related to the topic. Livingston or Mintzberg can be mentioned among the ones who added unusual points of view to the discussion, referred to the nowadays standards. They have emphasized, in one way or another, the idea that there is a difference between what is useful to the organization (the elements of knowledge related to the managers) and what they teach within the framework of certain institutions specialized in the transfer of knowledge, especially in the academic organizations [1] [2].

On the other hand, there is the reality of the Romanian tourism management which generates a significant number of themes of reflection. A well represented theoretical basis has been already defined in the specialized literature, focused both on the general management and on tourism. In the case of Romania, the main reflection topic should be focused on the difference between the expected performance -having in mind the national resources, including the geographic position- and the achieved performance. As an absolute and also relative value in GDP, the Romanian tourism achieved performances which place it in the lower half of the classifications related to Europe. That’s why an analysis of the management quality, as any other study related to this topic, seems to be a logical attempt to improving the performances, especially the economic ones.

To the macroeconomic reality which belongs to tourism, a collection of minor facts is added, with full agreement, in order to emphasize the image of non-performance. The questions generated by these situations are related to the management, so to speak to the process and to the people involved.

Having both the macroeconomic aspects and the everyday manifestations in mind, which are related to a non–performing management, a study on the manner the management knowledge in this field comes to being becomes compulsory. The management being the topic of discussion, and not the knowledge related to the operational or functional aspects, the focus on the universities will be natural.

2. MAPPING THE TERRITORY

The radiography of the present situation related to the state of the management knowledge in the Romanian tourism implies on the one hand a concise analysis based on case studies, dealing with the situation of formal education belonging to the Romanian employers who operate on the national territory, and on the other hand a deductive analysis of the manner in which certain skills related to this domain are formed, within the framework of the universities.

The study of classifications dealing with the richest people in Romania, carried out every year by the Capital magazine [3], shows that a significant part of the people occupying the first 300 positions state they are interested in tourism. Their interests materialize in the ownership of certain hotels, restaurants or tourism agencies. A quick look at the biographies of these owners, involved in management both directly and indirectly, but always decisively, shows that the accumulation of systematic knowledge related to the tourism management is a relatively unusual fact. The proportion of people who own other specialization than the one related on business administration or economics is obviously in the majority. The engineers seem to be the most numerous, but the group of owners who have football as their basic profession, or sports in general, is significant. The age of owners–managers, associated to the fact that until the nineties the management knowledge related to tourism was available in an institutionalized framework only for the economists, offers a
relatively clear image of their relation with the main official source of knowledge. (The adequacy of this kind of instruction won’t be discussed at this point!)

Following a basic economic reasoning, one may infer that the penetration of these people in the tourism business happened because of the perspective of an attractive discrepancy between the efforts and the results, the management being included. To put it differently, the entries barriers on business have been lowered, due to the lack of regulations and to the fact that, in general, an economic validation related to the market wasn’t available, for a short interval of time. The lack in the owners’ knowledge of tourism management induced a certain behavior to the top managers, to not speak about the fact that they were selected to implicitly correspond to the employer’s cultural profile. One may observe that even if one of the most important employers in the Romanian tourism, Financial Investment Company “Transilvania”, has numerous managers with economic degrees involved in management, they don’t own real management knowledge related to tourism.

Any supplementary study, associated to the biographies belonging to the people who form the group of interest, is likely to offer an image which is worse than the one resulting from the “statistic data”, by which one may usually operate.

The analysis of the university specializations which offer a management instruction related to tourism implies the review of the various syllabuses for the bachelor’s or master’s degrees on the one hand and of the infrastructure elements associated to the process of education on the other hand. The specializations of interest must be classified between the syllabuses for the high school level and the ones necessary for the accreditation and the authorization of occupying certain jobs in the field of tourism.

At the present moment, there are a great number of specializations which claim to offer managerial knowledge in tourism [4]. Their denominations are conceived in a bombastic manner, in order to attract the students. The specializations belonging to the type of bachelor’s degree carry on within the framework of both the economic and the engineering. In the latter case, we speak about certain specializations that have been engrafted on faculties which have lost their students, meaning that a great amount of the disciplines are kept with a modernized label added, as a great number of teachers who have no relation with this kind of activities. It goes without saying that there is a reduced probability to exist for the skills related to the economic functional aspects and to the managerial knowledge. At the best, within the framework of these specializations certain skills associated to the technical aspects of the tourism operations will be accumulated.

The specializations within the framework of the economic field have the advantage to offer a vision which is profit oriented. However, there is also a structural drawback in conceiving the syllabuses, due to the unbalancing of the instruction, aiming at a functional specialization focused on marketing [5] [6]. In such a manner, the most important segment of the courses is market oriented, to the detriment of operations. The integrating perspective is associated to one or two management courses and the focus on the product or on the innovation is almost non-existent. The most important specialization is the one called “The economics of the commerce, tourism and services”, which continues the specialization existing before 1990, which was called “The economics of the services, public alimentation and tourism”. Right from the denomination, one can infer that the limits related to tourism are ambiguous, which implies certain dissipation of time for courses, with no notable effects in improving the management skills related to tourism. The tourism appears as an appendage of the commerce, and the dominating and integrating vision is that related to marketing.
The analysis of the infrastructure belonging to these specializations, and of the manner the professional practical work is accomplished, show there aren’t enough specific elements to support the development of specific competences and skills. The time allocated to the professional practical work represents elements which prove that the graduate owns very poor operational knowledge. In addition, there are no infrastructure elements which could allow the generating of certain “prototypes” related to the services, or a number of products with an innovative character. However, if the graduate succeeds in finding a technically reasonable place to accomplish his professional practical work, the interval of time allocated, which is too short, doesn’t allow him to get a specialization or an overall view on the organization [7].

Both the links from downstream and from the upstream have a disputable role in improving the managerial skills. The number of secondary schools in the field of tourism has decreased dramatically because their graduates have no advantage either on the job market, or on attending high education. These schools should build a basis of functional-type skills for the operation related to tourism, but the infrastructure available for training and the expensive consumable materials diminish the possibilities of training. To put it differently, a student attending a certain specialization in tourism may have no previous operational-type training and the graduate may avoid the employment in the field of tourism because the rewards may not seem very appealing.

The master’s degrees related to tourism emphasize the drawbacks noticed at the bachelor’s degree level. In Romania, the majority of the students who attend the courses of a certain master’s degree have a full time job, which reduces considerably the time allocated to the educational process. Because the possibility of attending the courses of a master’s degree related to tourism is not conditioned of a previous professional practical work or the experience of a job in the field of tourism, the candidate to the master’s degree not only hasn’t practiced at all in the tourism, but also hasn’t got enough time to study.

The paradox related to the specialization in the domain has to be faced when graduating a high school. According to the Romanian legislation, in order to get a license that offers the possibility of working in tourism, the university degree is not enough. A “school of formation in tourism” should be attended too, whose courses take several months. Actually, these private schools authorized by few ministries (Education, Labor, and Tourism) mimic a number of courses, usually given by academics and offer a summary professional practical work. Obviously, there is no improvement of the managerial knowledge.

3. SOME CONTEXTUAL DETERMINANTS

The management knowledge is also the result of certain behavior patterns developed in time, due to determinants associated to the environment. Some of them can be considered as specific to the relation with the consumer of tourist services, and others are the results of the national context. The patterns have similar basic characteristics for the first line employees and for the managers. Then, the managers operate by virtue of the existence of the named patterns.

In Romania and also in many other countries, for a client content with the service performed to pay directly to the person who performed it, is considered to be a fact at least usual and hard to struggle against, if not simply a normal fact. The payment has the generic denomination of “tips”. The problem has managerial implications when the payment is considered as implied, without a relation to the quality of the service and to the degree of the
client’s satisfaction. If the salary of the employee is settled having this element in mind, then a behavior deformation is likely to appear at each and every level of the hierarchy. For the top manager, the financial planning of the salaries will be built on these premises, achieving a false transfer of knowledge from the economy to psycho-sociology. Instead of building patterns of an economic character, the manager will build scenarios based on presumptions of psychological nature, related to the behavior of his employees. Gradually, the manager will be more concerned to accumulate knowledge related to the procedures he might get the tips, than to the product or to the client.

This specific situation of the labor situations in tourism is recognized and legalized de facto by numerous elements related to the legal environment. It affects the management of human resources, because the uncertainty of the salaries is a real drawback for the employees’ motivation. Having this perspective, less and less attractive when compared with the one belonging to other academic specializations in the economics, the number and the quality of the applicants for a job in tourism tend to decrease. The negative selection will probably affect also the standard of knowledge, as the results show.

However, the tourism reflects a certain behavior towards the guests. There is a general conviction in Romania, encouraged -due to various reasons- by multiple opinions belonging to autochthonous or foreigners, that in Romania the people always prove their hospitality. The conviction is contradicted by comparative studies related to the amiability in different cities of the world, including Bucharest, and by the general appreciation related to the quality of the Romanian services in tourism.

The communist period gradually reduced to minimal dimensions the travel exchange of Romania and deformed the behavior of the Romanian tourist when abroad and also the behavior of the Romanian people related to the foreign tourists visiting Romania. For the individual who was getting out of Romania, the tourism assumed to be a business-oriented travel, until the end of the nineties. This form meant that the tourist was interested in the petty international traffic, focused on common merchandise. The foreign tourist was treated inversely as an immediate and unrepeatable opportunity for the improvement of the employee’s own income, and not of a certain tourism organization.

In this context, the management knowledge focused mainly on the interactional aspects and its formation was the result of the direct practice, because the existence of these relations wasn’t officially admitted. Consequently, the reflection at an institutional academic level of the negative aspects was impossible, and the systematic approach at the organization level didn’t have the needed motivation basis.

The consequence of this fact was a significant deformation, related to the interest associated to the product and to the marketing, as a management function. Practically, the research, the planning and the acquirement of the new products were completely neglected, and have been neglected to this day. On the other hand, applying a “now or never” policy has had dramatic consequences for the image of Romania in international tourism. After 1990, the consequences have been amplified by the waves of emigrant workers, who aimed at the countries from where the majority of foreign tourists came: Germany, Italy, France, and Great Britain. In this context, even if the academic specializations centered on tourism show a certain discrepancy to the marketing courses’ advantage, their content is inappropriate. The fact is proved by the poor quality of the marketing in tourism, which is in use nowadays in Romania, a poor quality which is obvious when speaking about the branding associated to the products, the destinations and the country itself.
As a partial conclusion of the analysis dealing with the past context of formation, one may state that the management knowledge is focused on the secondary functional aspects, in order to achieve the success of a certain business dealing with tourism matters. The main aspects related to the product are being neglected, and also the essential aspects related to the product management. To be aware of the psycho-sociologic elements really connected to the main stakeholders is a problematic matter, due to the fact that the approach is tributary of certain clichés, without an existing basis for an analysis, at least for explanatory purposes.

4. FROM GAP IDENTIFICATION TO THE EXPECTED PERFORMANCE

If the Romanian tourism is compared to the tourism developed in the neighboring countries, there is a sensible difference related to the image management for all the entities interested in, starting with the products and ending with the country itself. The brand is built and managed defectively, and consequently the lack of specific proficiency becomes obvious. If a foreign adviser may be the solution for the country brand and if the franchise may be the solution for certain products and organizations, for the majority of products which can make the difference for Romania as a destination, the branding must be the result of achieving management knowledge in the Romanian schools.

However, the product must support the brand. Activities like innovation, planning, maintenance or research associated to the products are practically unknown in the Romanian higher education. The fact explains the small number of products and their poor quality.

The natural and cultural resources are defectively and insufficiently used. The performance of the spa and health tourism offers the best example. If the faculties prepare experts to create products for other sectors of activity, the same thing must be done for the products associated to tourism. A fact that should be emphasized is that there are serious problems even in the field of innovating and making food products, which can be considered as a category of “ordinary products”.

Supposing the problem of the product has been solved, the attention should focus on the operations and the improvement of their qualities. Because the approach of operations seems to be facile when compared to the sector of the manufacturing industries, the paradoxical result is the neglecting of an approach to stabilize the process and the quality. In the case of the Romanian tourism, TQM seems to be not included in the management knowledge. The discipline labeled as “quality management” is practically unknown for the tourism related specializations in the economic and business faculties.

Taking into account the inheritance related to the way of approaching the tourists, a redesign of the psycho-sociologic components belonging to the syllabuses seems to be a logical measure. Moreover, given the fact that a student has already achieved a behavior due to his family, to the school he has graduated and to the society in general, the training focused on the re-education from the cultural basis point of view should have a positive impact.

A more and more significant number of products are integrated or associated to the destination, as an entity to be managed. The management related to the destination, as its approach in the light of the functional aspects, and especially to the marketing, will impose the development associated to a set of new skills, including the project management and the management of public-private partnerships. The transformation of the managerial behavior to the emergence of a cooperative-integrative component, instead of a purely competition-oriented component, imposes itself as a result of the development of new forms of manage-
The approach related to tourism from the so called “stakeholder perspective” [8] [9] emphasizes the need to assume the cooperative behavior.

5. CONCLUSIONS

When referring it to the neighboring cases, the Romanian tourism presents a more significant number of problems, which reflect in its performance that falls short of expectations. A part of these problems may be associated to the management knowledge level, dealing with a cause-effect relation. The pattern of this relation finds expression in the existence of a significant deficiency, considered to be the result of poor specific skills which should have been acquired, either in the system of institutionalized education, or in practice. The main role in developing the managerial knowledge belongs to the academic environment.

The analysis dealing with the nowadays situation related to Romanian tourism shows a series of quality-oriented significant problems: brand, behavior, product, services quality. The problems suggest the weak points of the academic system associated to the tourism-oriented education, and implicitly the directions to act in order to improve it. In such a manner, a list of ideas is materialized, in order to modify the academic syllabuses.

References
