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Innovative techniques in tourism education

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1. Introduction

The present study is the summary of the results of a research project which examines the possibilities of innovation in dual programmes of tourism and hospitality, with regard to the present effects of the law regulating education and vocational training, effective from September 2013, and to the dual programmes in higher education starting this September.

My own research entailed the following activities:

- analysis of documents,
- deep interviews, Q-method.

The hypothesis is not focused on the criticism of reforms in legislation and their functionality, but rather on introducing possibilities which may present an alternative to developing and realizing projects along the lines of innovation. The question is how vocational training schools and institutes of higher education, specifically training programmes in tourism and hospitality, have changed and are changing now that the new laws on education, on vocational training, and the new National Qualifications Register have come into effect. What kind of future can these institutions look forward to, what will they be teaching and in what conditions? This question applies equally to theoretical and practical training. It is mostly in the area of practical training within dual, or tripartite programmes that possibilities for innovation show: independent training workshops, or training factories with a market-based strategy, producing for the general market, and school buildings with multiple functions.

During my work, I have looked over previous changes in trends in national vocational training, with particular regard to social and economic changes during the years following the political change of 1990. Besides providing a literature review, I introduce the results of national education, the present and the predicted future of tourism and hospitality through the analysis of statistics. In my description of the connections between vocational training and employment politics, I present the role of national and professional organizations shaping the educational system. I also present their contributions to the new legislation and a successful example from the field of international tourism, from India.

Within the framework of the current research, I present up to date possibilities for exponential development in national tourism and hospitality training. Through comparing training practices at home and abroad, I argue that the Hungarian educational and training system, in particular the vocational training system, does not meet the expectations of the profession, and its direction is mainly defined by political decisions. It is a basic condition of economics that the operation of any economy be secured by a balance between supply and demand. In the present publication, I investigate how far this principle prevails in current training programmes in tourism and hospitality.

The following hypothesis is explored by the research and its results:

The possibilities for innovation in the dual training system in hospitality and tourism cannot be exploited unless professionals and professional organizations, the main stakeholders, have enough autonomy and room to manoeuvre after the training system has been reformed, without being overshadowed by the interests of political economy and its decision makers.

2. Stating the Problem

During history, social changes have usually been launched by the rearranging and transformation of classes, influenced to a significant degree by the education and qualifications possessed by people on different layers of society. Although most systems, especially despotic ones, have perceived knowledge as a threat, neither has been able to prevent people from acquiring useful information, albeit in restricted numbers. Education systems of modern societies strive to balance the number of learners and the amount of information in order to provide ground for natural selection, and so that demand should always be met by supply of sufficient quality and quantity, strengthening competition on the market.

The socialist system in Hungary placed, as a principle, the person in its centre: citizens' expectations weighed more in the balance than market requirements. Due to the transformation of the economy, the deterioration of industry, privatisation and the appearance of foreign capital, huge groups of society were forced to change careers or became unemployed. As a direct result of this, there was a growing demand for educational reform, for training structures to be tailored to the changed needs of economy and society. Unfortunately, nearly two decades of transformations were followed by the economic crisis of 2008, triggering further changes. The education system is forever changing, with the purpose of improving young people's chances of employment, supplying the market with sufficient quantities of competitive, skilled workers of quality.

This is especially true for the field of tourism and hospitality, for this industry has become one of the most dynamically growing segments of today's economy, in quantitative terms. In order to make it an important part of the national economy, the quality of national training and ensuring that there will be new generations of professionals is just as important as making use of natural resources and advantages. In my study, I explore the actual effect of the new legislation for education, vocational training, and higher education on the quality of training programmes, the expansion of professionals' knowledge, and the connections between professional organizations and training institutes formed over long decades – in short, how far the legislation contributes to the acquisition of practical knowledge.

3. Society and Education

The connection between society's basic structure and the system of education has become definitive by the present day. Transformations in Hungary in the past few decades have not occurred in a fashion expected by the increasingly middle-class European community, for instead of providing equal opportunities across society, and building a new, strong middle class, what we can see is a society divided, its structure by no means similar to Western democracies formed in the 1950s. Through examining the histories of middle-class societies, we could see that the pillar of development has always been a strong middle class of property. In the opinion of Gázsó, [2000] polarised societies are incapable of reproducing positive values, since the main structural elements – property, income distribution, and the distribution of knowledge and goods between structures, ensuring mobility and exchange, do not meet the conditions of development.

In the early years after the political turning point of 1990, Kozma [1992] drew attention to the problem which is becoming the source of increasingly serious social conflicts today: lack of education and training is the root of severe economical problems. These problems are not solved by selective population exchange – the relocation of population groups of largely similar levels of education in the same area. On the contrary, these relocations increase social tension.

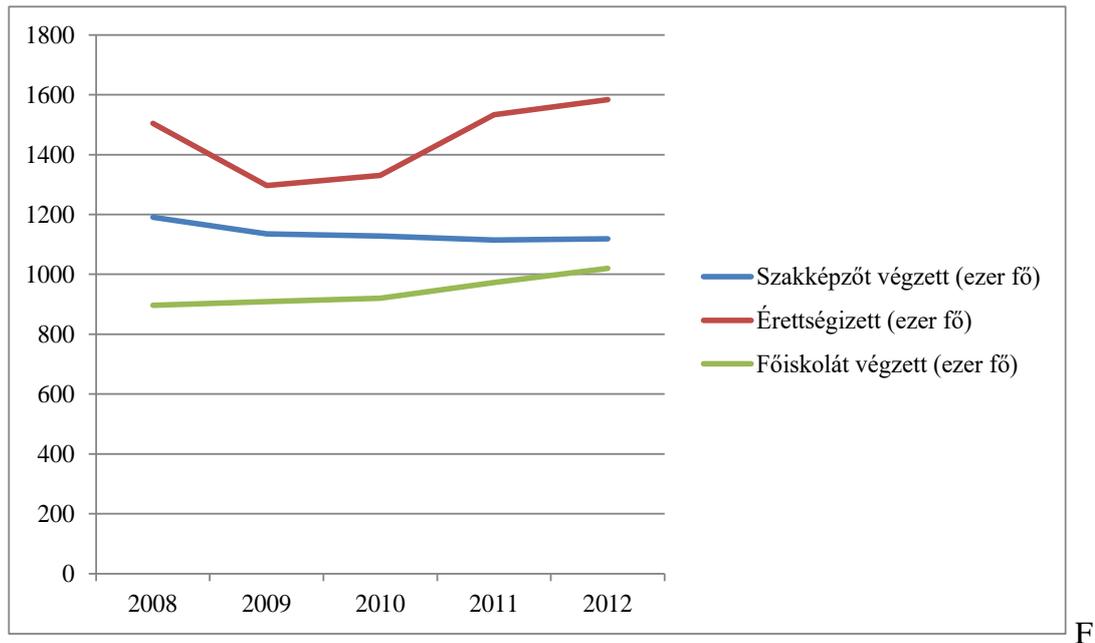
As early as 1963, the European Council laid down those basic principles adhering to which, Hungary too got the opportunity to reform and completely transform its training model.

- During the whole length of active employment, the chance for resuming training has to be kept open.
- Transition from elementary education to vocational training and on to higher education has to be ensured.
- There has to be room for personal development along the lines dictated by economical and technological innovations.
- Training of teachers and vocational trainers needs facilitating.

- A balance between demand and support in the workforce has to be ensured through free transfer of data. [Forgács- Loboda, 2003]

It is one of the main conclusions of the 2003 research carried out by the National Institute for Education that contribution to the employment market grows with increasing educational levels. [Imre, 2003].

Diagram 1: Markers of employment and institutional qualification 2008-2012



Source: KSH [2012/2], edited by me

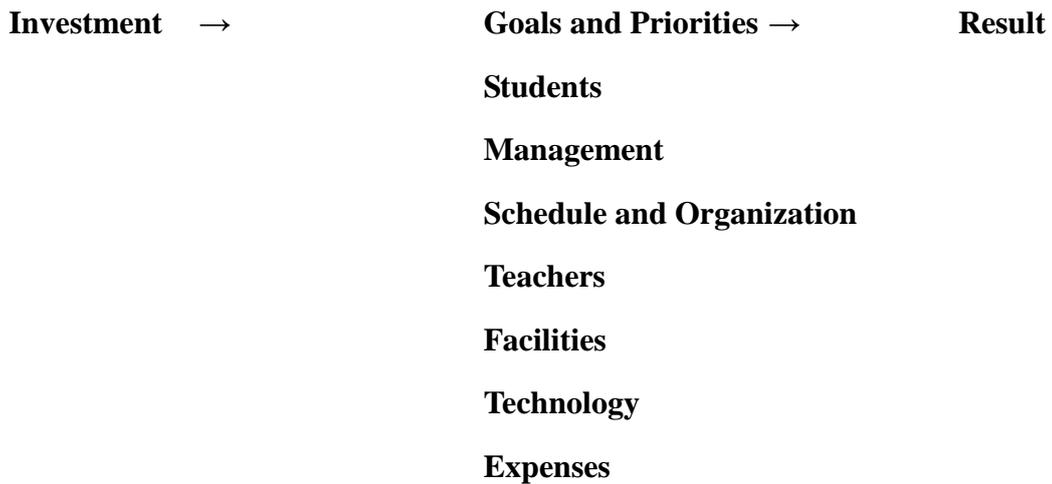
(blue line: graduated from vocational training school (1,000); red line: graduated with secondary school certificate or the equivalent of GCSEs (1,000); green line: graduated from college (1,000))

It is plain to see that those with a secondary school certificate and/or college degree have increasingly good employment markers, while those with a vocational training certificate have decreasing or stagnant chances of employment.

The value-creating factor of societies built on the foundation of information is competitive knowledge which adjusts to demands and requirements, transmitted by training systems to the professionals of the future. The direction of development are dictated by what has been seen on the employment market during the last few decades, and the demands shaped by the more differentiated expectations of employers. *Fig. 1* below shows that the working of the Hungarian education system

is a complex process: if we change one segment, that will inevitably affect all the other components or project a future change. The concept of the “illiberal state,” a new idea announced in 2014, has so far not included the factors needed to create value on the basis of knowledge and information.

Fig. 1: The main components of the education system

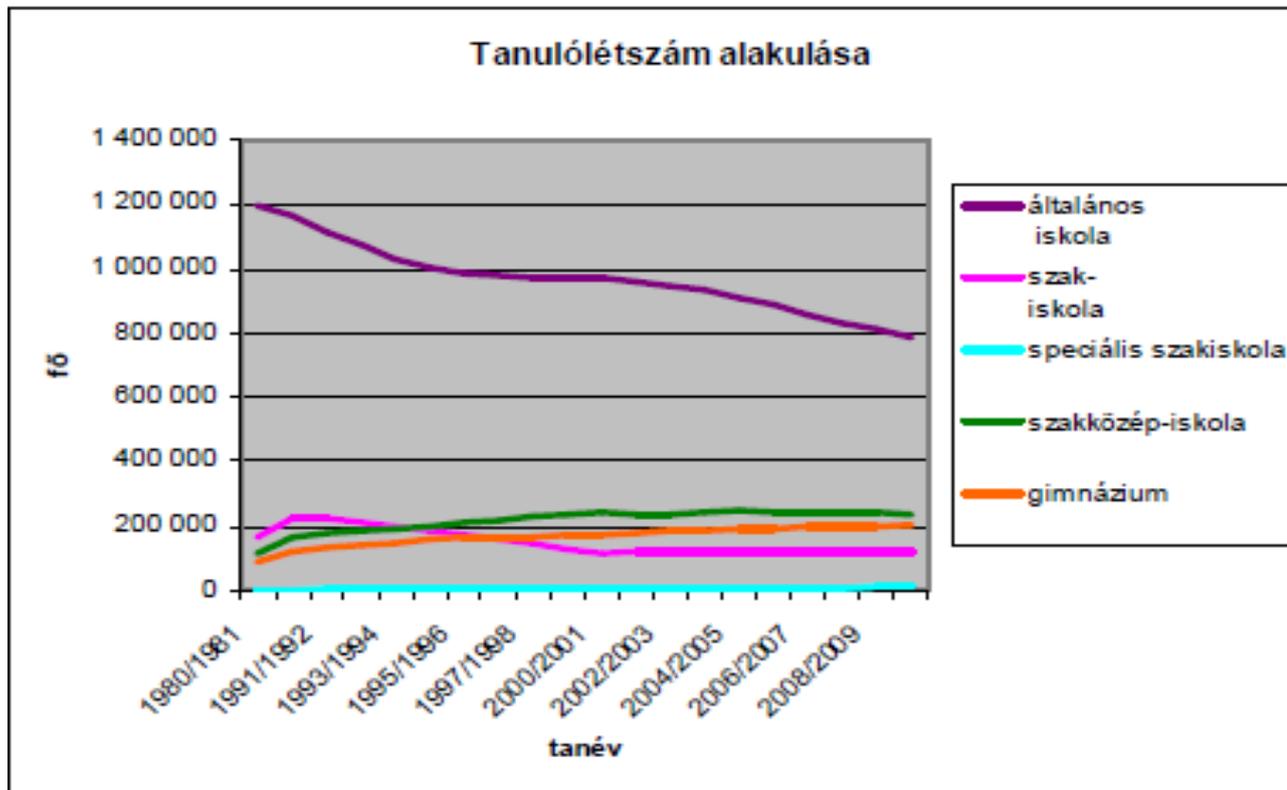


Source: Dr. Szűcs [1993.7.], own edition

3.1 Reforming the Curriculum of the “Programme”

After the new government came into power in 2010, politicians immediately set to work to introduce the dual training system, with vocational training schools and colleges providing theoretical education and companies, industrial chambers and their manufacturing plants taking care of practical training. A research study of the Ministry of National Economy [NGM, 2011] concludes that graduating students do not possess knowledge of the quality required by the jobmarket and the stakeholders of the economy. Diagram 2 shows the enrolment numbers between 1980 and 2008.

Diagram 2: Enrolment numbers 1980-2008



purple line = elementary school

pink line = vocational training school

neon line = special training school

green line = vocational training school providing a school certificate

orange line = high school

Source: NGM, [2011.5.]

The graph indicates that the proportion of students starting elementary school fell drastically (by 32.4%) in this interval. At the same time, the structure of secondary education underwent significant changes, with the number of students choosing vocational training schools continuously decreasing after a period of stagnation, while enrolment numbers at schools offering a school certificate (the equivalent of GCSE) grew dynamically.

3.2 The National Qualifications Register

The goal of a more efficient, integrated training system, adjusted to market requirements, is to balance supply and demand and create a cost-effective education system. Market experience shows that there are more and more young professionals with college or university degrees in jobs for which a vocational training certificate would suffice. Although this seems to indicate reducing time and money taken up by training, it has to be noted that the overall number of university or college graduates would decrease simultaneously. The effects of this are unpredictable in the long run, for the changes of society and economy can swiftly rewrite the system of requirements accepted today. Complex impact assessments would have been needed beforehand.

4. Specifics of Hospitality and Tourism Education

Tourism has become increasingly popular since the start of the 21st century, with the increase in discretionary income and free time. It is now practically always changing, evolving. Professionals point out that despite the increasing significance of mass tourism, tourists tend to be drawn by quality, increased services, unique attractions (Michalkó, 2012) In order to make Hungarian tourism more able to meet increasing demands and challenges, and be up to providing high quality service to guests, an adequate number of quality professionals needs to be provided for the industry.

The Hungarian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (HCCI) has been contributing to establishing and maintaining connections which promote quality training in the field of tourism and hospitality. The Chamber has taken part in creating the new system of exam requirements, establishing the corner stones of requirement systems for 16 professions, as well as defining and describing the competencies necessary for adjusting to the demands of the jobmarket. The following points, drawn up by the Committee of Vocational Training while preparing plans based on the new law on education, define the weaknesses of the new legislation:

- There has been no accurate system for predicting and warning about changes which would ensure a strong foundation for launching training programmes. The reason for this, according to the study, is lack of adequate information. It

is not clear, not even from the point of view of the economy, what kind of qualifications and competencies will professionals need in the future.

- The system of vocational training institutes does not motivate the stakeholders of the economy to regard vocational training as an investment for the future. A counter-productive funding system suggests to teachers providing practical training to keep students in the study workshop as long as possible, and release them to become active on the jobmarket as late as possible.

Besides generalities, neither training strategy has elaborated on practical issues, on improving the quality of practical training which makes up 70% of dual training programs. Programme managers' training has been transferred to higher education. According to the preferences of market stakeholders, programme managers' qualifications are less valuable than university or college degrees, but it is still worth more on the jobmarket than a certificate earned on a training course offered by the National Qualification Register. Dual training programmes in higher education are to be launched for the first time this September. However, as they are surrounded by questions in secondary education, there is little chance for their immediate success.

4.1 Examples of Success in Practice

1. As a result of globalism, more and more foreign investors in the hospitality industry are interested in Hungarian tourism. Quality tourism, wellness – and health-tourism draw investors offering facilities and services to satisfy every request into our country. Besides the newly introduced dual training system, based on a German idea, tripartite training programmes of French origin may also have potential. It is an idiosyncrasy of the Hungarian hospitality industry that the market is dominated by only 10 big companies and more than 24,000 small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), a large part of which are running a deficit. It does not require deep thinking to see what kind of standard these companies can offer as training partners to the Chamber, what the quality of training acquired on their premises can be, considering they are struggling with everyday liquidity problems. Compared to this, increasing the number of training restaurants and hotels created and run for training purposes in the previous tripartite system, would greatly increase the quality of training. From

the plethora of positive examples, I would like to point out the activities of the Swiss Hotel Management School in Switzerland. Here, students acquire the secrets of the trade in a residential setting, within the framework of undergraduate and graduate programmes. Degree requirements include training practice spent in a European hotel run for profit, serving customers in a real-life environment, beside meeting the requirements in the school's own training hotels.

2. Incredible India, brought about as a result of a successful international marketing campaign, lifted a country with the world's second largest population (1.2 milliard people) out of economical agony and started it on an upwards course, thanks to which tourism has, in the past 10 years, shown a steady economical growth of over 20%. In 2002, the Indian Ministry of Tourism ordered a campaign for tourism which became the most successful worldwide campaign in the industry so far. The Indian government, spurred on by the incredible success of the campaign, transformed its education system according to the demands of tourism in 2008. The Incredible India campaign transformed the system so that today all other spheres of the economy involved in the campaign, such as education, the financial and cultural sectors, tourism, etc. are standing on solid ground. As a result of reforming the education system, vocational training in tourism and hospitality, manager training, teacher training and the training of professionals in the hotel industry have been placed on new, innovative, and modern foundations. The campaign's effect can be seen globally, in multiple sectors, not only in increased numbers of employment in fields tightly connected to tourism. (incredibleindia.org)

In Hungary, education reforms have been finished by today, so it makes sense to shift our focus on the field of innovation. In many cases, innovation has been phrased as a broader form of reform, but innovation has a much narrower radius. Reform refers to radical, overall change. Innovation can never be reform, although a reform can, in itself, be innovative.

5. Potential for Innovation in Hungarian Education

The competitive potential of modern societies and the quality of life of its citizens are largely dependent on how efficient the system is based on which they can plan for the future, organize their everyday lives.

From a survey conducted among students of a tourism and hospitality training school in Budapest, it seems that full-time students rate the standard of their practical training as just about satisfactory, but not up to the level of their expectations. Part-time students (taking evening classes or corresponding courses) rate their practical training as entirely inadequate.

The steps of innovation include recognizing the problem, voicing needs and demands, developing a model for the future, and finally executing the necessary actions. Educators have, due to one major system-changing reform after another, completely lost faith and become jaded in their work. Decades of telling people involved to hang in there for just a little longer for success simply does not work. It is a fundamental characteristic of innovative thought that it questions the working order of the status quo, and highlights the deficiencies of the system. Politicians responsible for education imagine the transformation of the national education system within the framework of a German-type dual training structure. However, the numerous big German industrial plants the vocational training system used to rely on have changed: those who have survived, have become multinational companies. The question is, where the corporate environment of the 1970s-1980s is to be found on which the new Hungarian dual training system can be built today? Could it be possible that political decision makers are chasing after the illusion left behind by the adoration of “West Germany” so prevalent in the 1980s?

At the long-term planning for a vocational training school, the population numbers of the area and matters of accessibility have to be considered as basics. It does not take complicated mental arithmetics to see that there will always be a demand for education. Schooling will, even in the midst of cyclical fluctuation, generate a steady demand. Technological development has made mass production based on mostly artisan manufacturing work (which characterised the last century) completely redundant. Mass production generated poverty, restricts mobility, for it adds minimal amounts of income from taxes to the GDP. In future, only a wide range of products and services with a high added value will be competitive and profitable on the market.

Judging from interviews I have conducted with leaders, young entrepreneurs have created a rich culture in Hungary today. They are competing with half the world

on exclusively foreign, mainly North-American markets, completely free of politics. Companies such as PREZI, LogMeIn, USTREAM – to list but a few – have, by now, attained world levels of quality, after starting on Hungarian initiative and mentorship, nurtured in a hothouse of ideas. Now they can develop further with success. There is a great number of tried and proven systems all over the world which can motivate innovative schools, such as the YMCA (Young Men's Christian Association) of anglophone countries, all operating according to a complex service-providing model.

6. Conclusions, Suggestions

The changes projected by the new law on education and vocational training are, on the whole, advantageous and serve to increase the quality of training. Effectively, they meet the requirements of the European Union's education politics which are an organic part of the long-term principles of the employment politics of the community, Hungary included. In her book entitled *Strategical Planning and Leadership*, published in 1994, Magdolna Csath writes: "Every strategy is worth as much as far it is put into practice." In order for this to happen, I deem the following points to be first priorities:

- Every possible strategical partner has to be taken into account, regardless of their political conviction or ethnic background
- The primary goal of processes of rationalization is to increase efficiency and decrease costs, but this cannot be allowed to negatively affect the quality of training.
- Making professional decisions has to fall exclusively within the purview of professional organizations, without undue influence from economical and political lobbyists.
- Although the end goal is achieving economical stability through putting a sufficient number of quality professionals on the jobmarket, the primary factor has to be the individual in vocational training.

7. Summary

Tourism and hospitality in this country has, since the turnover of 1990, become fair prey for dreamers and people self-employed-by-circumstance. Unfortunately, this has been made easy by loopholes in legislation which, at the beginning, did not lay down clear expectations from the industry. Travel agency in tourism has become unaffordable for a broad layer of entrepreneurs, due to international online agents offering accommodation, travel arrangements, and airplane tickets. The market for travel organization, with the exception of one or two foreign companies with lots of capital, only exists in traces and does not offer much selection. Hospitality is area-bound, which is why it has managed to survive the IT revolution, but its future development remains uncertain.

The strategy preceding the creation of laws introduced in my work, the studies, and the stances represented by organizations of varying levels of influence, mostly correspond to the government's opinion. The question whether this constitutes professional consensus and if so, to what extent, or if it is the result of ad hoc political decisions, will not be possible to answer until such time as we can clearly see the results of decisions acted on, and the true value of new products. Decision makers have a great responsibility, for it extends to long years ahead and will directly affect the training standards and professional quality of a future generation of professionals. The Hungarian population, due to the recession, is becoming increasingly impoverished, and unfortunate demographical tendencies are making it older, too. Therefore, it is vital that decisions should be well thought through, with a view to the long-term, and that they should bring advantageous changes for the future.

In conclusion, I believe that there could be massive potential in creating legislative frameworks (such as a law on tourism) and a complex, self-reliant system of vocational training initiating changes from below. For this, decision makers open to innovation should all step up. A vocational training system, united in a structured system offering innovative solutions and any number of successful possibilities, would be set up for success.

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