

Part II:

New skills and new occupations in tourism

Trend qualifications in German tourism

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Training adapts to changing job profiles and working process requirements. It evolves within a turbulent atmosphere and is directly or indirectly dependent on numerous interlocking variables and trends also undergoing constant change. Shifts occur in technology, business organisation, the political and economic environment (e.g. the progress of globalisation) and in the needs of individuals and society. Certain developments, the Internet for example, can revolutionise entire sectors within a few years, triggering massive demand for new skills.

The project 'Determining trend qualifications as a basis for early recognition of qualification developments' draws its findings from surveys of trendsetting companies in selected industries. One field of enquiry is the tourism sector. Tourism creates more employment and demand for new skills and qualifications than almost any other economic sector in Germany. This article presents developments and research findings on trend qualifications in tourism. Taking the social context as a starting point, we discuss related changes in employee skills and qualifications. We describe what trend qualifications have emerged for the case study of tour representative services. The project 'Determining trend qualifications as a basis for early recognition of qualification developments' forms part of FreQueNz, the early identification initiative run by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF).

1. Introduction

Swift scientific and technological advances are creating new demands on employees and necessitating rapid skill enhancements. To keep pace, the Federal Ministry of Education and Research launched the Initiative for Early Identification of Qualification Needs and called for implementation of an appropriate early warning system. The aim is to identify skill need trends as soon as possible, particularly at the microlevel of work practice. The project *Determining trend qualifications as a basis for early identification of qualification developments* is part of the initiative, which has been using 'sector scouting' to examine various fields since 1999. The tool has been applied to retailing, IT/multimedia, financial services, life sciences and wellness and tourism. This article focuses on determining trend qualifications in tourism, particularly at intermediate level (Abicht et al., 2002).

2. Qualification developments in tourism: field of enquiry and approach

2.1. Sector scouting: a tool for determining qualification requirements at the microlevel of individual enterprises

The qualitative study conducted by isw on early identification of skill and qualification developments is based on the hypothesis that new qualifications – so-called trend qualifications (Abicht et al., 1999, p. 11 et seq.) – can theoretically be recognised and described in the embryonic stage. Trend qualifications describe training requirements which are often only just beginning to emerge, but which may herald an up-and-coming demand trend. Such trend qualifications within the tourism sector were both subject and goal of the research.

New skills or trend qualifications develop in the course of specific work processes, particularly in the wake of innovative technological, organisational and customer-oriented changes, i.e. at the microlevel of enterprises. Studies of tourism focused on:

- (a) innovative enterprises, in such areas as travel agencies;
- (b) key suppliers, such as booking and reservation software providers;
- (c) sector insiders and experts, e.g. industry associations.

Trendsetting companies, key suppliers and experts are specially selected and committed to active participation in the project.

The emergence of new qualifications in trendsetting companies is almost a natural process, i.e. employment areas and operations within tourism evolve and automatically call for new or adapted skills from employees. Since companies tend to express concern about the lack of suitably qualified workers rather than perceive the appearance of a new type of requirement, open dialogue between researchers and enterprises is a key to identifying trend qualifications.

Describing and analysing work processes is a more effective way to track trend qualifications than traditional survey methods. Enterprises often only learn or recognise that their activities are innovative and that they are themselves trendsetters when their evolving processes are scrutinised.

The underlying research approach (Abicht et al., 1999, p. 36 et seq.; Abicht et al., 2000, p. 45 et seq.) combines stringent logic with experience-based intuition. A strict methodical sequence involving various investigation levels allows eventual identification of concrete trend qualifications. Following the chaos theory (¹), individual stages of the procedural model are

(¹) The search for a scientific basis for certain characteristics of the evaluand (trend qualifications) – infinite complexity, dependency on descriptions of system elements from the observer's perspective, holistic nature, not divisible into separate elements, non-linear processes in the development of training which cannot be reduced to mere cause-and-effect relationships – has led to an application of chaos theory. The central

understood as complex dynamic systems which interact in many different ways. Specifically, these are:

- (a) social systems (e.g. that of the Federal Republic of Germany) as the top investigation level; trends which accompany the development of a social system and affect corporate systems are examined in the light of expertises and publications, particularly findings on trends and futurological research;
- (b) corporate systems (tourism companies in Germany) as components of the social system;
- (c) operating systems (e.g. corporate departments such as sales and marketing of tourist products and services, etc.);
- (d) occupational systems encompassing the tasks of people within an operating system and the necessary credentials, knowledge and skills; examples are advising on and selling tourist products and guiding tours.

Hypotheses on potentially qualification-relevant trends result from social system investigations. The subsequent approaches for empirical research in the enterprise (corporate systems) derive from the hypotheses obtained. The empirical research in the enterprise chiefly utilises the sector scouting method (Abicht et al., 2000; Bärwald/Freikamp, 2003). This market research tool, which the authors pioneered in training research, pursues the basic principle of mobilising employees who have extensive insider knowledge and contacts within the surveyed sector and who are able independently to implement and document the prescribed empirical procedures. These sector scouts are capable of uncovering important details and nuances and elucidating complex interrelations in direct talks with sources, to empathise with their thought patterns and to blend into the corporate 'scene' to determine trend qualifications.

Further processing of the empirical data, i.e. the concrete description of the trend qualifications, their justification and classification in larger social and sector-specific interrelations, takes place in cooperation between sector scouts and experienced researchers of training needs.

2.2. Tourism: field of enquiry and approach

The investigations into the sector followed the procedural concept on determining potential trend qualifications outlined at the beginning of this article. The object under investigation is approached systematically via the perusal and analysis of comprehensive specialist literature on leisure, tourism, wellness and other related topics, hypotheses from trend and futurological research, and evaluation of newspaper and journal articles (BAT Germany, 2002; DRV, 2002; FUR, 2003; Krupp, 2002; WTO, 2002).

features of chaos theory are holistic thought and method approaches and the recognition that 'unity' lies in 'diversity', that order is only a temporary state in a world of constantly changing and interactive structures (Mittelstaedt 1997, p. 34) and that complex non-linear systems can never be predicted with any certainty in the long term and are only given as probabilities (Abicht et al., 1999, p. 27 et seq.).

The initial focus was on the following questions:

- (a) What does the term tourism encompass, and might it be necessary to limit the field of enquiry?
- (b) What societal trends influence tourism or the narrower field of enquiry?
- (c) What bearing does tourism have on economic and labour market policy?

After these general questions were answered, we studied more specific ones:

- (a) What main trends are already emerging in tourism?
- (b) Who are the trendsetters?
- (c) What qualifications already exist in tourism or the narrower field of enquiry?
- (d) What trend qualifications are already discernible?

Our investigator, who served as the main sector scout in tourism, has had many years of experience as a trainer in the cosmetics sector. Her extensive contacts with tourism insiders provided widespread access to fruitful research opportunities. She visited travel agents, tour operators, hotels, travel companies, continuing training institutions, associations, etc. A total of 75 enterprises and experts were contacted during this phase. The most important providers and trends were soon identified. It became necessary to restrict the field of enquiry ⁽²⁾.

This made the empirical investigation more specific and targeted. We were able to persuade more than 30 trendsetting companies and experts to collaborate with us. Several discussions took place with most of them. Written programme concepts were evaluated and, in some cases, onsite work processes were observed. The discussions were accompanied by continuing Internet research, monitoring of daily newspapers and trade journals and participation in conferences and trade fairs. The interim findings were discussed and verified in a sectoral workshop attended by corporate partners and experts.

3. The social context and its impact on qualification developments in tourism

Investigations to determine trend qualifications in tourism have demonstrated that the development of this service sector is mainly shaped by social trends such as changes in leisure time preferences, increased individualisation, demographic shifts and greater health consciousness. These trends and their impact on tourism are reflected in different products and services as well as in changing occupational profiles for people working in the sector. The article *Tourism in Germany: trends, facts and figures* (Abicht and Freikamp, in this volume)

⁽²⁾ The survey covered holiday booking and holiday design, travel guiding, business trip organising and travel agency support. The hotel sector, catering and the large segment of holiday transport (coaches, railways, airlines) were initially omitted as the subject of a separate investigation.

provides a detailed picture of social conditions and their influence on German tourist industry trends.

3.1. Tourism qualification trends

The trends outlined above not only affect tourist products and services. They also have an impact on the work of tourism employees. The evolution of tourism has been constantly accelerating. New tourist trends, new technologies and the growing requirements of an increasingly individualised clientele have generated altered demands on tourism employees. Competition within the industry has become tougher. Service, and hence customer orientation and professionalism, are priorities.

According to our sources, the tourism sector lacks well-trained intermediate-level staff. Insufficient basic knowledge and skills in tourist products and services, target areas, marketing, sales, customer orientation, electronic data processing and computerised booking and reservation systems are oft-cited weaknesses. Employees also often lack interpersonal skills, particularly when advising and dealing directly with customers.

In addition to general skill requirements, every individual segment surveyed – travel bookings, holiday design, tour guiding, business trip organisation and travel agent support – has specific skill requirements.

4. Trend qualifications in the tourism sector

The scopes of the new occupations and the related skill requirements identified in the study were delimited following division into the individual areas of holiday booking and holiday design, tour guiding, business trip organisation and travel agency support. The project identified the following new complex skill packages:

- (a) travel designer, online travel agent and event designer in holiday booking and design;
- (b) tour representative for people with restricted mobility, animateur and guest relations and travel services representative;
- (c) business travel manager for business trip organisation;
- (d) agency consultant for travel agent support.

4.1. Tour representatives

This article has restricted its focus to a detailed description of tour guiding as an occupational field. An in-depth description of all skill packages can be found in Abicht et al. (2002, p. 44 et seq.).

Tour-guided holidays offered to various target groups, e.g. single people and lone travellers, are becoming more and more customised. Growing numbers of people are employed to

occupy, entertain and communicate with these guests. The task of tour representatives or *animateurs* on site is to help guests get to know each other, to communicate with them, ensure they have everything they need, provide entertainment, make them overcome social inhibitions, encourage interaction between holidaymakers and motivate them to participate in a range of sport and leisure activities. According to our sources, these tasks are currently being performed mainly by people who are highly motivated and good at communicating but who have other occupational backgrounds and are thus not sufficiently qualified.

Staff for this tourist service ought to have educational and psychological qualifications and creative, theatrical, communication and sports skills. Travel representatives need to be helpful, friendly, enthusiastic, independent, and communicative and to possess organisational skills, considerable initiative and the ability to foresee potential difficulties, maintain an overview and work under pressure. Additional requirements are general (job-related) knowledge and skills in their specific area of activity, such as: sales and customer advice; awareness of legal matters; familiarity with destinations, tourist products and services and extras; computer and Internet skills; ability to use various holiday booking and travel reservation software; basic educational and psychological training. Other prerequisites are business sense and skills in areas like economics, marketing, public relations, cost-benefit accounting, auditing and statistics. Skills in foreign languages, communication and presentation techniques, discussion leading and rhetoric are other essentials.

Tour guiding encompasses the following skill packages. Tour representatives accompany organised trips to provide information and coordinate the holidaymakers at the destination. They must be competent, knowledgeable contacts and advisors who can provide background information on the destination, offer guided tours, give travellers an accurate picture of the location and insider tips on sightseeing, etc. They are responsible for clarifying issues regarding accommodation, food, medical care, travellers' financial needs and events on site, and must ensure that their charges are comfortable and well cared for.

Tour representatives for people with restricted mobility accompany and support travellers on trips outside their familiar surroundings, taking their limitations into consideration (see more in Section 4.2).

Animateurs work in hotels, holiday clubs and complexes and at sport and leisure centres. They are contacts and entertainers for various groups. They often team up with other *animateurs*. They encourage tourists to participate in specially organised entertainments, sports events, contests, courses, etc., to get involved, have fun and enjoy themselves.

Guest relations and service representatives are primarily employed by trade fair organisers or upmarket hotels. They act as contacts and provide all-round care for guests at hotels, wellness resorts, spas, trade fairs and business occasions. Guest relations and service representatives support their customers from the point of booking right up to planning daily and evening programmes.

4.2. Tour representatives for people with limited mobility

Tour reps require increased professional and social qualifications and personal skills, particularly when the target group is older or disabled people. This clientele needs a different form of tour guiding. They require people to provide continuous personal attention from the planning stage through to onsite supervision. Planning for this target group demands high levels of special knowledge and careful preparation, as spontaneity is not feasible. For example, wheelchair users need extra-wide doors, accommodation with ramp access and/or a user-friendly lift. Tour representatives for people with restricted mobility accompany and support travellers on trips outside their familiar environment, taking the travellers' limitations into consideration. They are responsible for providing information and organising the holiday on site. Tour reps must be competent, knowledgeable contacts and advisors for the elderly, accident victims, pregnant women, disabled people or those with restricted mobility. They can provide background information on the destination, offer guided tours, give travellers an accurate picture of the location and insider tips on sightseeing, etc. They are responsible for clarifying issues regarding accommodation, food, medical care, travellers' financial needs and events on site, and must ensure that travellers are comfortable and well cared for.

In the trendsetting companies surveyed, these tasks have, until now, been performed by staff whose personal abilities and interests have equipped them with the necessary competence or who have acquired skills through experience or training. However, our project partners believe that serving this specific target group demands basic training which incorporates not only rudimentary knowledge of destinations, tourist products and travel law but also medical and nursing skills. Workers in this field require further personal skills in addition to the ones mentioned in Section 4.1. They should be patient, sympathetic, communicative and conciliatory. They should possess other basic, job-related knowledge and skills such as medical and nursing qualifications and rudiments of health, legal, social, insurance and senior citizen policy and of tourism *sans frontières* (standard norms like the German DIN system ⁽³⁾, available aids, construction consultancy, etc.). Business skills are also required, as described in Section 4.1.

5. Conclusions and outlook

The research to determine trend qualifications in tourism resulted in an industry report containing short descriptions of skill packages as well as the findings presented here. The skill packages have been elaborated, discussed and verified with the sources. The descriptions only contain tasks and skills which are already discernible in trendsetting companies or which corporate representatives and experts have identified. They do not claim to be comprehensive or universally applicable. The structure and division of the skill packages generally corresponds to the brief descriptions of occupational profiles, which the German Federal

⁽³⁾ DIN – Deutsches Institut für Normung e.V. (German Institute for Standardisation).

Labour Office, for example, employs ⁽⁴⁾. We must reiterate that the specifications do not involve new occupations but constitute additional ideas and material to stimulate discussion of the existing initial and continuing training systems in the tourism sector. The study findings help initial and continuing training decision-makers in tourism, particularly the social partners, to improve existing training and update various occupational profiles. Decisions on regulating discernible or suspected skill requirements, by adapting existing initial and continuing training courses or creating new ones, remain the brief of policy-makers. These issues must be negotiated and settled by the stakeholders.

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⁽⁴⁾ Cf. the brief occupational descriptions at <http://berufenet.arbeitsamt.de>

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