

Examination and potential actualization of Hungarian recreation studies at higher education level according to the market needs

Abstract of PhD thesis

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Budapest

2013

1. Significance of the topic, research questions

The social consequences of the 1989's Hungarian political and economical transformation inevitably changed the lifestyle of the entire population. Time has become an important factor, especially leisure time. This has a direct influence on the leisure market and the labour market. According to the TUNING Model (González, Wagenaar, 2007) all study programs should meet basic conditions such as „Has the need for the programme been identified at a regional, national or European level? Has this been done on the basis of consultation among stakeholders: e.g. employers, professionals and professional bodies?“ In the World Leisure Charta (1993), signed by Hungary as well, declares that all countries should have its own leisure supplier system and specific, national leisure education curriculum according to the need of the population. „In Hungary we need a national recreation theory and recreation education curriculum.“ -said Kiss (2002). Since the establishment of Recreation studies in 1989 there has been the curriculum reconstruction but yet market needs have not been studied. The purpose of this paper was twofold: 1. to investigate the demand for leisure professionals in Hungarian society and 2. to identify the success of the curriculum to meet the market needs of leisure professionals. It would give hints to the actualization of leisure curriculum on higher education level and under.

Hypotheses:

1. I expect there is a real need for recreation professionals in the Hungarian labour market however the market is yet prepared to accept that high number of graduates without specialization.
2. I take it that hotel animation and leisure organiser positions can be seeded work options for recreation professionals and also their education meet these job descriptions and expectations.
3. I expect that the Hungarian recreation higher education curricula are strongly physical recreation oriented, and the work place internships have a very low weight in the structure.
4. I take it that graduates from recreation studies meet serious problems in finding jobs, also because the degree is not yet well known in the labour market.

2. Methodology

Examining **labour market needs** in-depth interviews with key persons were conducted. A longitudinal study was completed in three sections 2001, 2003 and 2008 parallel to major curriculum changes. Sampling was taken by snow-ball method. Besides these we focused specifically for two rapidly changing areas.

Leisure organiser positions were examined by on-line questionnaires and follow-up phone calls were also made. Research included all primary schools, having e-mail addresses, according to the official school catalogue. All together 192 telephone interviews were conducted

In **hotel animation** telephone interviews were conducted. The sample included all 3-5 hotels listed at the Hungarian Hotel Organisation's homepage (www.hah.hu). Based on this list all 261 hotels were called. Besides that 12 in-depth interviews were also conducted.

Since the further goal was to use this information as a background data of the existing leisure studies curricula a third question appeared. For **curriculum analysis** Erdmann's (1995) method based on the variety of subjects covered by the different curricula options was used. All subjects were classified according to the different options that Erdmann used to analyse European leisure curricula of the 2 Hungarian curricula used at the moment and the 2 original ones (we started to work with) from 2001 and 2003. As a result of that it could be seen what options/areas are weak or strong in this study.

Graduates opinion on their chances at the leisure labour market was studied through a homepage to give information on the study (www.rekreatorok.hu), and we also sent the questionnaires through that.. Since it was not effective enough, we changed to an on-line filled questionnaire system. All together we sent out 879 letters in 2009-2010. 174 responses were accepted what means nearly 20 % per cent of the studies population (19, 8%) responded.

Finally, we tried to compare the graduates' areas of suggestions and feedbacks to the major areas of the curriculum.

3. Results

Need for leisure professionals

Whereas in 2001 many of the interviewees didn't even know the meaning of the word recreation nor that a bachelor course existed in this area, by 2008 recreation became a popular and fashionable word and field. While old-new professions appear such as recreation programmer, hotel entertainer, lifestyle consultant or spa manager, these are mainly connected to commercial sector. For these positions a degree from recreation seems applicable. Although from the reports it became clear that three areas of recreation seem to get strength in the Hungarian leisure market: 1. health and wellness, 2. outdoor recreation and 3. leisure events, amusements management and these diverting directions need specialized knowledge from their professionals in the specific field.

However there are decisive differences among the three big areas such as for-profit, non – profit and governmental sector both at direct leadership and supervisory positions. Governmental sector showed major differences to the other two because in this area it is basically one level of occupation and that is closer to supervisory, managerial level. At the same time it was possible to find a common basis of expectations for non-profit and for-profit sector both at supervisory and leadership level. Naturally, characteristic differences were found as well. In summary we can say that the market expects the following personal characteristics, competences from an ideal leisure professional: good organisational and leadership skills, communicative, open-minded, enthusiastic of the work, have good problem solving skills. In point of expected knowledge the following areas were pointed out: practical field experience, recreation theory and methods, program management and leadership, sport sciences and practical knowledge, animation, communication, pedagogy, psychology and sociology.

Results form the two specific areas such as hotel animation and leisure organisers

Our expectations that hotel animation and leisure organiser positions could be seeded job opportunities for recreation graduates were partly verified. Research has showed that hotel animation is a dynamically developing area where sport and active leisure have a major role. There are already a number of recreation professionals working on that field at the Hungarian hotel industry in entertainer positions. Besides, our study proofed that it is a growing need for these professionals. However many of these positions are only part time and basically focused in the summer season. The other difficulty for graduates that hotels also accept lower qualifications to fill those positions as well.

Leisure organiser position could have been a great occupation chance for recreation graduates at the governmental sector. Nevertheless this turned not to be the case. Since the legal background was not supported and the law yet not became force not many positions were created. Research showed there are only a low number of positions available on that field. Schools are not able to finance the position however all respondents emphasised that there is a need for such work-power. It was also suggested that the profile of recreation qualifications would basically meet the expectations of this job description.

Results of curriculum research

Results suggested that Hungarian both leisure curricula are very much physical recreation oriented. However it differs from many international examples but it is absolutely acceptable and not surprising. At the same time a positive change curve can be detected since both curriculum used in 2008 were already created in a much broader sense (at both bachelor courses). Socio-cultural and business administration, management areas were tailored at these new frameworks. Nevertheless the weights of internships are extremely low still. Out of the 180 credits of the new bachelors it only takes 6 credits what means 3% per cent of all. If we recall what employers suggested this data definitively has a capital importance.

Graduates opinion on their chances at the leisure market

Results showed that there is an expressly low number of graduates who manage to get jobs in the leisure field, it is only 7 % that really got job as a recreation professional. Many leaves the

field because they simply do not find a position, up to 60 % is leaving the field and does something totally different after graduation. Among reasons the low numbers of free positions are definitively one of the most important ones. It is very often the case that vacancies are not even advertised but are filled through connections. It is also a difficulty that possible employers do not have a clear picture of the recreation degrees and have a problem to specify it among other sport related degrees. Graduates all suggested lengthening the field internships in order to have a chance to create their own professional networks.

Demand versus supply

Our results showed (Figure 1.) that all examined Hungarian curricula contain over 60% physical recreation and sports, which remained unchanged after 3 revisions during 8 years. In contrast, the market research indicated that not more than 30% of sports are sufficient at a bachelor level. For supervisory positions, administration and management should take up the majority of the subjects, which is only about 10% of the current curricula. Although some positive changes can be seen in the curricula since both are slowly moving to the required direction but they are still far from market expectations. It also became evident that specialization is needed in the training, since there are a high number of unemployed graduates who cannot apply for the few jobs in the for-profit sector due to their lack of ready-to-use special skills.

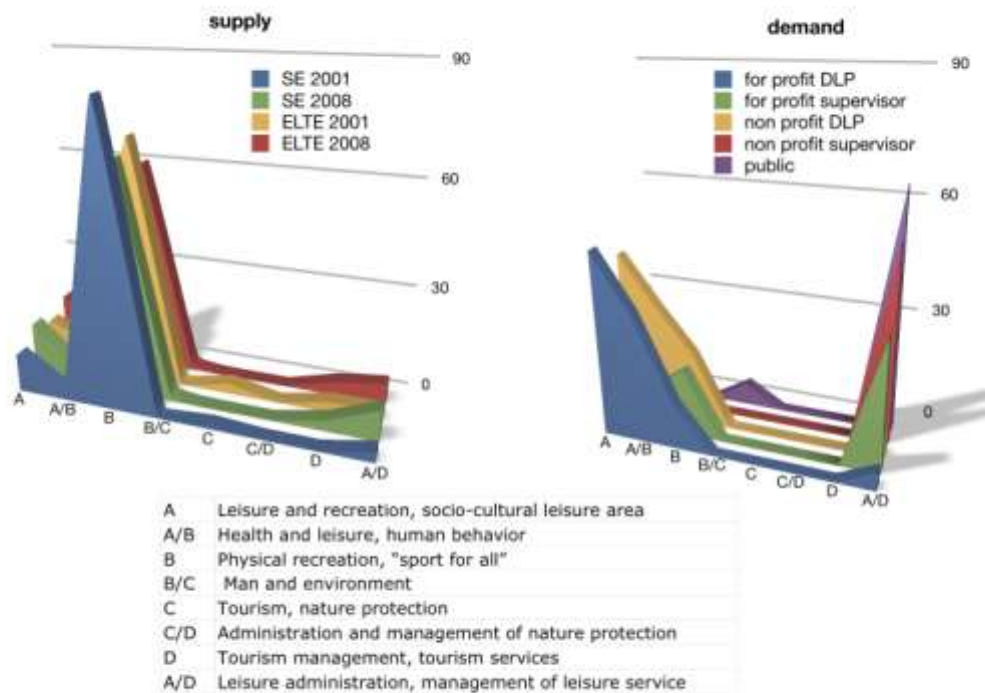


Figure 1. Demand versus supply

One can see positive changes between 2003 and 2008 in the curriculum, the structure is getting closer to market expectations however it is still far from ideal. The labour market demand showed that general set of skills are not enough they need specialized experience based knowledge. Stronger relationship among higher education institutions and stakeholders could also help graduates to succeed. However market is not homogenous either often not even stakeholders could describe their expectations. For that reason it should not be expected from labour market to give direct and unified feedback to institutions.

4. Recommendations

Recreation, and physical recreation is a relatively new profession in the Hungarian labour market. It is still the so called 'growing up' period, and market actors' opinion is not yet coherent. Hence there should be much more active formal and informal communication among professionals and educators.

Possibly higher education institutions could do a lot to help introducing and integrating graduates to labour market. Specifically through well organised work place internships.

Possible solution could be to generate stronger connections between universities and market actors. This can be done through formal and informal channels. For instance building of a stronger recreation network, an 'Alumni system' could be a possible solution.

Besides offering specialization opportunities as part of the formal education could also help graduates to have better positions at the labour market.

Legal background should be supervised as well, since Master degrees are not yet legally regulated. Institutions should have a strong lobby in order to reach recreation degrees a good position at the market.

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