

**Task-Based Language Learning Toolkit for Tourism**  
**„TBL 4 TOURISM | Innovative foreign  
language teaching methods in VET as  
support to tourism sector” Project**  
**Report on focus groups**

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## Introduction

Andragoški zavod Ljudska univerza Velenje conducted focus groups with ten stakeholders. The focus groups were composed of language teachers, workers in vocation in hospitality, i.e. head waiters and restaurant managers, and other stakeholders that are involved in this sector, including experts in the field.

Based on the focus group discussions, Andragoški zavod Ljudska univerza Velenje produced a focus groups report, which will be further analysed and incorporated into the summary focus group report.

The aims of focus group discussion were threefold:

- 1. To define ten tasks performed by the waiters as the key vocation identified in the previous phase;*
- 2. To shed light on the profiles and roles of the key participants in the TBL 4 T training course (waiters as the end users and teachers/trainers as the target group)*
- 3. To outline the path for further development of PR 2 and PR3 in view of the expected institutional support, i.e. stakeholders such as policy-makers, networks of schools and employers, etc.*

The focus group process and gathering opinions with an active exchange of ideas was successful and we can have reasonable confidence in results shown in the continuation of the report.

## 1. Focus group implementation

The focus groups were organised by Andragoški zavod Ljudska univerza Velenje. The participants, who were invited to participate received all relevant information about the project via e-mail. The information included information about the project, the national desk research report and aims for the next steps in the project. The focus groups were organised in several parts, the first one with a group of language teachers in gastronomy and tourism sector took part online, the second one was held face-to-face in the premises of Andragoški zavod Ljudska univerza Velenje and it involved a group of tourism and gastronomy experts.

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### O projektu

- **Vrednost projekta:** 226.865 €
- **Koordinator projekta:** Andragoški zavod Ljudska univerza Velenje
- **Partnerji v projektu:** Agencija Blackbird (Srbija), CPIP (Romunija), SLB (Španija), York Associates (Velika Britanija)
- **Trajanje:** 28. 2. 2022 – 27. 2. 2024

Ljudska univerza VELENJE York Associates Haskind C\*

Other focus groups were performed in a form of individual interviews and discussions with tourism experts, waiting staff, hotel restaurant managers, and other experts from target group fields.

Altogether 10 participants took part in the focus groups were comprised of the following roles:

- 3 head waiters
- 1 hotel restaurant manager
- 2 specialists from the tourism sector
- 1 expert from the field of education
- 3 English teachers in VET sector or adult education sector

All participants in the focus groups have relevant work experience in gastronomy, business-conference tourism, hotel industry, formal educational programmes of chef and waiter, teaching and translating for catering and hotel sector and other.

The focus group discussions took into consideration the following aspects that are important for receiving feedback on topics important for implementation of results and preparing national focus group report.

## Task frequency

At the beginning of focus groups a starting list of more than 20 different tasks was used and the process led the participants to narrow down their choice for tasks in terms of frequency.

The complete list of 15 tasks was made and tasks were ordered from **most to least frequent**. The list is as follows:

- *Serve food and drink orders*
- *Present the menu and provide detailed information when asked*
- *Communicate with customers to resolve complaints or ensure satisfaction*
- *Schedule dining reservations*
- *Provide information about prices, currency, methods of payment and local shopping*
- *Process customer bills or payments, deliver checks and collect bill payments*
- *Translate the menu in English*
- *Inform customers about the day's specials*
- *Offer menu recommendations upon request*
- *Explain aspects of local/national culture, customs and traditions*
- *Up-sell additional products when appropriate*
- *Offer menu recommendations upon request*
- *Provide basic information about the restaurant/establishment*
- *Provide information about timetables, public transport routes, taxis*
- *Communicate order details to the kitchen staff*

The participants also gave some reasons as to why the aforementioned tasks were in their opinion the most frequent and important.

Their comments were as follows:

- In the tasks chosen, direct contact with the customer is a must.
- The service staff is often the only source of information that is constantly available to the customer during the vast majority of the day.
- The chosen tasks are a basic element for a customer to feel good.

## Task difficulty

Respondents were asked to rate the difficulty of tasks to be performed in English by the waiting staff.

All aforementioned target tasks were rated as difficult to be performed in English by the respondents. The reasons for that were as the choice of words and grammar in performing those tasks is special and not commonly used by the waiting staff. Also, it was commented that such tasks are harder to be taught independently as the knowledge of a chef who is familiar with ingredients or a tourism expert who is familiar with the local culture, customs and tradition is needed.

The participants were asked to compile a complete list of tasks ordered **from most to least difficult**. The chosen tasks are as follows:

- Offer menu recommendations upon request
- Present menu and provide detailed information when asked
- Translate the menu in English
- Inform customers about the day's specials
- Communicate with clients to resolve complaints or ensure satisfaction
- Answer questions and provide information on different aspects of local tourist offer
- Explain aspects of local/national culture, customs and tradition
- Provide information about the restaurant/establishment
- Provide information about timetables, public transport routes, taxis
- Provide information about prices, currency, methods of payment and local shopping
- Schedule dining arrangements
- Assist customers with seating arrangements
- Communicate order details to the kitchen staff
- Follow and if necessary explain all relevant safety and health regulations, enforce rules or regulations
- Check customers' IDs to ensure they meet minimum age requirements for consumption of alcoholic beverages

## Task teachability

In the third part of the focus group, respondents were asked to state their opinions and choose tasks that are in their views more difficult to be taught by the educator in class.

The participants were asked to compile a list of tasks ordered from **most to least difficult** to be taught. The chosen tasks are as follows:

- Communicate with customers to resolve complaints or ensure satisfaction.
- Translate the menu in English.
- Present the menu and provide detailed information when asked.
- Offer menu recommendations upon request.
- Explain aspects of local/national culture, customs and tradition
- Answer questions and provide information on different aspects of local tourist offer.
- Inform customers about the day's specials
- Up-sell additional products when appropriate
- Schedule dining reservations
- Up-sell additional products when appropriate
- Assist customers with seating arrangements
- Meet with restaurant staff to review daily specials, changes on the menu and service specifications for reservations (e.g. parties)
- Serve food and drink orders
- Provide information about timetables, public transport routes, taxis
- Provide information about prices, currency, methods of payment and local shopping

The reasons they chose these tasks to be among those that are harder to be taught in the classroom is that the waiting staff needs assistance from other experts to perform them correctly. Vocabulary seems to be a problem when using locally specific expressions that are difficult to translate in English and using English language in such situations is problematic due to the fact that there are no patterns that could be used.

## 2. Target tasks

The most important objective in focus group discussion was to define **ten concrete tasks** for the waiters as the target profession. These tasks will provide the base for the development of project result 2, the Pedagogical Framework. The process of defining the ten tasks will move from more general to more specific, starting from more than 20, and narrowing the choice to ten - taking into consideration the needs of both end users (waiting staff) and capacities of the target group (EfT teachers and trainers).

The starting list of tasks is as follows:

1. *Greet and escort customers to their tables*
2. *Assist customers with seating arrangements*
3. *Schedule dining reservations*
4. *Present menu and provide detailed information when asked (e.g. about portions, ingredients or potential food allergies)*
5. *Translation of menu into English*
6. *Take accurate food and drinks orders, using a POS ordering software, order slips or by memorization*
7. *Communicate order details to the Kitchen Staff*
8. *Meet with restaurant staff to review daily specials, changes on the menu and service specifications for reservations (e.g. parties)*
9. *Serve food and drink orders*
10. *Inform customers about the day's specials*
11. *Offer menu recommendations upon request*
12. *Up-sell additional products when appropriate*
13. *Communicate with customers to resolve complaints or ensure satisfaction*
14. *Provide basic information about the restaurant/ establishment*
15. *Provide customers with general information or assistance*
16. *Process customer bills or payments, deliver checks and collect bill payments*
17. *Check customers' IDs to ensure they meet minimum age requirements for consumption of alcoholic beverages*
18. *Follow and if necessary explain all relevant safety and health regulations, enforce rules or regulations*

19. *Answer questions and provide information on different aspects of local tourist offer*
20. *Explain aspects of local/ national culture, customs and tradition*
21. *Provide information about timetables, public transport routes, taxis*
22. *Provide information about prices, currency, methods of payment and local shopping*

According to aforementioned aspects, i.e. difficulty, teachability, and frequency, a list of 10 target tasks was made. It is as follows:

1. *Present the menu and provide detailed information when asked*
2. *Communicate with customers to resolve complaints or ensure satisfaction*
3. *Translate the menu in English*
4. *Offer menu recommendations upon request*
5. *Inform customers about the day's specials*
6. *Explain aspects of local/national culture, customs and traditions*
7. *Schedule dining reservations*
8. *Provide information about prices, currency, methods of payment and local shopping*
9. *Provide information about timetables, public transport, routes, taxis*
10. *Communicate order details to the kitchen staff.*



### 3. Further comments

All participants agreed with a desired outcome of the TBL 4 Tourism project being assisting learners, the VET sector and employer to achieve higher levels of employability, showcase their businesses and be more resilient to crisis situations. Also, it was emphasized that the resources developed within the project will provide a unique opportunity for educators that will encourage further use and distribution.

Below are the comments that were taken for each of the 10 target tasks.

Target task	Comment
<p>Present the menu and provide detailed information when asked</p>	<p>This task was regarded as a more or less one-way. However, providing detailed information needs to include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Methods of cooking,</li> <li>➤ Ingredients,</li> <li>➤ Special diet meals (e.g. diabetics and allergies)</li> <li>➤ Culture &amp; religion influences.</li> </ul>
<p>Communicate with customers to resolve complaints or ensure satisfaction</p>	<p>The task includes two different aspect, i.e.:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Resolving complaints via e-mail and</li> <li>➤ Resolving complaints and ensuring satisfaction on site and with a wider team.</li> </ul> <p>It was commented that most common customer complaints in restaurants are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Dirty utensils,</li> <li>➤ Inadequate service,</li> <li>➤ Food temperature, order mistakes and overall quality,</li> <li>➤ Bad waiting times,</li> <li>➤ Etc.</li> </ul> <p>The task of communicating with customers and ensuring satisfaction is known for its complexity and should therefore include several points, such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Who does the complaint apply to and who can resolve it,</li> <li>➤ Way of resolving it and people involved,</li> <li>➤ Presenting solutions to the customer and ensuring their satisfaction.</li> </ul>

<p>Translate the menu in English</p>	<p>It was commented that food and beverage menus are typically done by machine translations. The problem goes further as many people translating menus may not be translators at all, therefore translations are made literally, leaving some things lost in translation.</p> <p>Some foods in Slovenian culture cannot even be literally translate, but need descriptive translation. The task should therefore include descriptive ways of presenting food and beverage.</p>
<p>Offer menu recommendations upon request</p>	<p>It was regarded that in some high-end restaurants beverages are not included in the menu (price) and are available upon request. Also, waiting staff are often asked to make recommendations about the wine, which involves interaction and responding to questions. Moreover, what involves interaction and responding to questions is also addressing customer's dietary specifics and allergies.</p>
<p>Inform customers about the day's specials</p>	<p>It was emphasized that when informing customers about the day's specials one needs to know how to <b>describe</b> the meal as well as <b>promote</b> it.</p>
<p>Explain aspects of local/national culture, customs and traditions</p>	<p>It was regarded that, in Slovenia, restaurants are regarded as influencers of different cultures through their commitment to providing authentic, cultural food. To create a well-rounded cultural experience it is important that the waiting staff is well-equipped with the knowledge adapted to this important aspect of promoting the local environment.</p> <p>It is therefore of significant importance that the waiting staff knows how to present:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Local dishes and method of preparation,</li> <li>➤ Customs related to local dishes.</li> </ul>
<p>Schedule dining reservations</p>	<p>When scheduling dining reservations, it should be considered that the majority of reservations are done over the phone, therefore task design should include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Potential misunderstanding(s) between the caller and the receiver due to noise and insufficient phone connection,</li> <li>➤ Accents and difference between British and American English.</li> </ul>

<p>Provide information about prices, currency, methods of payment and local shopping</p>	<p>The task is considered as a frequent one, however its level of complexity can be relatively high, depending on the situation.</p> <p>It was therefore commented that the task should take in consideration the following elements, i.e.:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Splitting the bill in larger groups,</li> <li>➤ Customers' desire to pay in different types,</li> <li>➤ Resolving mistakes and problems in payment procedure.</li> </ul>
<p>Provide information about timetables, public transport, routes, taxis</p>	<p>It was commented that in this task, one should consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Different routes and (unfamiliar) locations,</li> <li>➤ Different means of transport (by car, by train, by bus, on foot),</li> <li>➤ Presenting several ways in case of rush hour or closed roads.</li> </ul>
<p>Communicate order details to the kitchen staff.</p>	<p>This task was considered as reasonably manageable, but it still includes special characteristics of tasks which include accents, difference between American and British English, etc.</p>

## 4. Conclusions

The report on Slovenian focus group discussion ten target tasks that the focus group participants were asked to choose, considering aspects of frequency, difficulty, and teachability. The report also offers some comments that are to be taken into consideration while forming the tasks.

Such comments are as follows:

- When presenting food and beverage, detailed information on methods of cooking, ingredients, special diet meals and culture & religion need to be considered.
- When communicating with customers about complaints, different persons solving the complaints need to be included.
- It is important to include descriptive language of food.
- Different accents or differences between American and British English need to be taken into consideration.