TBL 4 Tourism

Project Number: 2021-1-SI01-KA220-VET-000033113

PR1: TBL Tasks for Tourism
Task 1.3 Serbian Focus Groups and Questionnaire Report

Partners:

LUV Slovenia

SLB   Spain

CPIP Romania

York Associates United Kingdom

Blackbird Serbia

1. INTRODUCTION

During project months five and six (September and October 2022), a series of activities were performed in order to complete project task PR1-1.3.

The principal aim of this phase was twofold:
1) **to shortlist and define 10 target tasks performed by (novice) waiters using English in their daily work**
2) **to source and engage local stakeholders with a view of securing institutional support for successful future implementation of the main project result.**

The Needs Analysis for PR1 of the TBL 4 Tourism project was performed using a combined method of Survey /Questionnaire and Focus Groups discussion, in line with conclusions made in the phase preceding the task.

In our preparation for the activity, we also decided to use an opportunity and organise a Panel Discussion at a premium venue of the Cultural Centre in Čačak. Since the date kindly offered by our hosts was 12th October, the deadline for the conclusive FG report was slightly extended. This delay we believe is very well justified by the overall positive long-term effect the Panel Discussion will have, both because it contributed to the quality of our FG members and also because of the considerable media and public attention it generated on the wider local level.

Considering that the process of NA was not a straightforward one and the information was continually gathered at an uneven pace from different sources, this report is also a framework within which we summarise the relevant NA data for the purposes of the project. Nevertheless, we feel positive that the activities have been successful, yielding very useful findings for the ultimate success of the project.
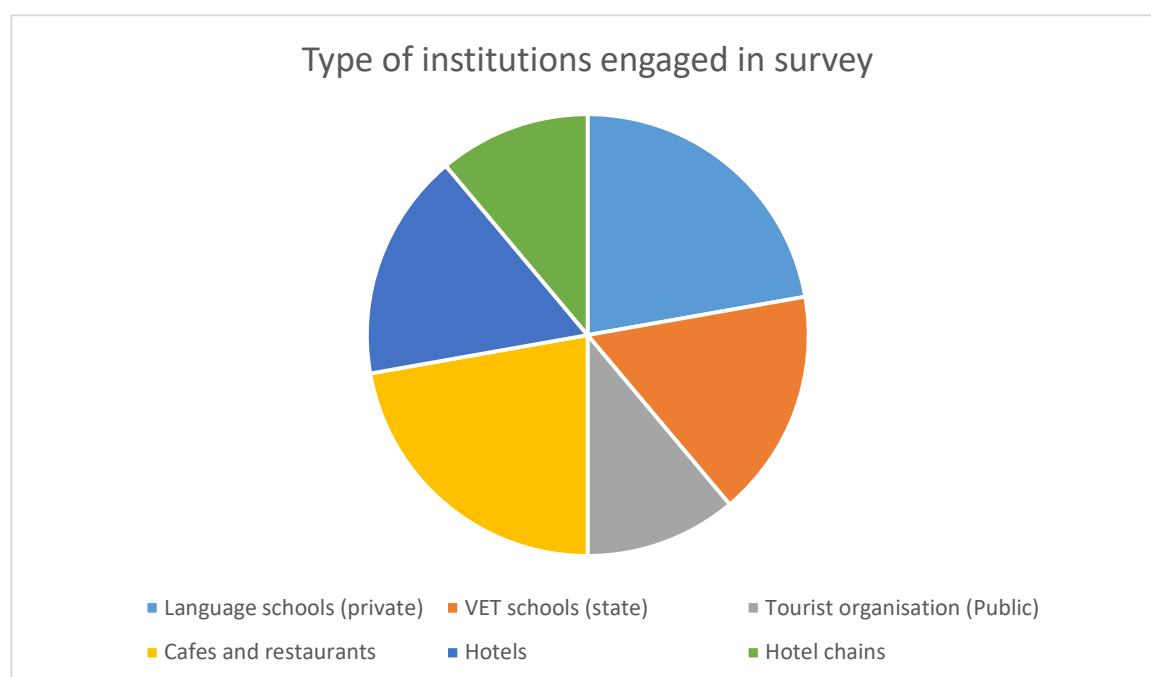
2. QUESTIONNAIRE AND SURVEY

In the preparation for the Focus Group discussion, we conducted the survey designed by SLB according to the list of 22 potential target tasks drawn up in the mid-report in the previous phase.

The survey contained three main sections dedicated to collecting data about frequency of the work tasks, their level of difficulty for staff who perform them in their jobs, as well as how difficult or easy these were to teach or train.

2.1 Composition of the survey sample

The organisations and individuals that took part in the survey included:

- 2 language schools
- 2 mainstream VET schools
- 1 provider of tourist services (public tourist organisation)
- 3 restaurants
- 1 cafe
- 2 hotels
- 1 hotel and restaurant chain

Type of institutions engaged in survey

- Language schools (private)
- VET schools (state)
- Tourist organisation (Public)
- Cafes and restaurants
- Hotels
- Hotel chains

The choice of the respondents was made based on preliminary talks and brief presentation of the project to the prospective participants. In several cases, the respondents were the same ones already participating in the expert interviews during the previous phase of the project. Geographically, most of the respondents come from the wider area of Čačak, but we also managed to engage several participants from the wider area of Central Serbia, including the two major tourist areas, the Zlatibor mountain resort and the Vrnjačka Banja spa, as well as tourism specialists with the country-wide expertise.

A total of 14 respondents completed the survey, with at least 6 more failing to complete it within the set deadline. However, we have managed to include some of the useful information collected from the prospective respondents in the preliminary discussions phase into the overall findings, meaning that the survey did produce certain positive results even with some of the 'non-performance' cases.

2.2 Background and years of experience

Our sample of respondents who provided information for the questionnaire included:

- Language teachers and training specialists
- Language teachers from VET schools
- Cafe owner
- Waiter
- Cafe manager
- Hotel manager
- Hotel chain manager

The average number of years of experience shared by the respondents was 11.3, ranging from 2 years for the least-experienced respondent, to 30 years of experience reported by the most experienced. The majority of the respondents reported between 10 and 20 years of experience.

2.3 Frequency of the tasks, their level of difficulty to perform and their level of difficulty for teachers

Among 22 possible tasks, 16 were chosen by the respondents as the most frequent. **The most frequent tasks** include both those that are straightforward and those that are fairly complex. The mixture also includes both tasks directly connected to dealing with food and drinks orders, as well as those related to 'secondary' topics and functions (such as providing information about the local tourist offer etc.)

The 16 tasks recognised as the most frequent are the presented here, starting from the most to the least frequent one:

1. Process customer bills or payments, deliver checks and collect bill payments
2. Present menu and provide detailed information when asked (e.g. about portions, ingredients or potential alregies
3. Offer menu recommendations upon request
4. Serve food and drink orders
5. Take accurate food and drinks orders, using a POS ordering software, order slips or by memorisation
6. Answer questions and provide information on different aspects of local tourist offer
7. Inform customers about the day's specials
8. Provide basic information about the restaurant/ establishment
9. Communicate with customers to resolve complaints or ensure satisfaction
10. Schedule dining reservations
11. Provide information about timetables, public transport routes, taxis
12. Assist customers with seating arrangements
13. Provide information about prices, currency, methods of payment and local shopping
14. Explain aspects of local/ national culture, customs and tradition
15. Communicate order details to the Kitchen Staff
16. Assist customers with seating arrangements
(17-22: all other tasks)

The relative difficulty of the tasks was assessed by all respondents from the point of view of the task performer (i.e. the waiter who is new to the job).

The following list shows 16 tasks priorities by the respondents for their difficulty, from the most difficult to the least difficult ones:

1. Communicate with customers to resolve complaints or ensure satisfaction
2. Explain aspects of local/ national culture, customs and tradition
3. Offer menu recommendations upon request
4. Inform customers about the day's specials

5. Present menu and provide detailed information when asked (e.g. about portions, ingredients or potential alregies
6. Provide basic information about the restaurant/ establishment
7. Translation of menu into English
8. Up-sell additional products when appropriate
9. Take accurate food and drinks orders, using a POS ordering software, order slips or by memorisation
10. Provide information about prices, currency, methods of payment and local shopping
11. Answer questions and provide information on different aspects of local tourist offer
12. Schedule dining reservations
13. Provide information about timetables, public transport routes, taxis
14. Follow and if necessary explain all relevant safety and health regulations, enforce rules /regulations
15. Communicate order details to the Kitchen Staff
16. Serve food and drink orders

The various tasks were also assessed by the respondents with the teaching background. **The following list show the result of this assessment, with the tasks ordered from the most difficult to the least difficult ones to teach.**

1. Explain aspects of local/ national culture, customs and tradition
2. Present menu and provide detailed information when asked (e.g. about portions, ingredients or potential alergies
3. Communicate with customers to resolve complaints or ensure satisfaction
4. Provide basic information about the restaurant/ establishment
5. Schedule dining reservations
6. Offer menu recommendations upon request
7. Translation of menu into English
8. Up-sell additional products when appropriate
9. Provide information about timetables, public transport routes, taxis
10. Answer questions and provide information on different aspects of local tourist offer
11. Provide information about prices, currency, methods of payment and local shopping
12. Inform customers about the day's specials
13. Process customer bills or payments, deliver checks and collect bill payments
14. Take accurate food and drinks orders, using a POS ordering software, order slips or by memorisation
15. Follow and if necessary explain all relevant safety and health regulations, enforce rules /regulations
16. Assist customers with seating arrangements

2.4 Combined preliminary list of target task types

The results of the survey helped us to come up with a combined and remodelled list of tasks for the Focus Group analysis.

Some of the tasks were noticeably and consistently recognised as infrequent and/or not difficult to perform and teach – these were eliminated, in order to enhance the focus on the key ones.

Despite this, we observed a large overlap between the frequent and the difficult tasks (seven out of ten, i.e. nine out of twelve). As for the level of difficulty, there is a general correlation between the perceived difficulty to perform vs. the difficulty of learning/teaching the performer. The most notable exceptions here being two tasks:

- informing customers about the day specials (this task was seen as very difficult to perform, but easy to teach, and
- and scheduling dining reservations (this task was seen as very easy to perform, but very difficult to teach)

Thus formed, the preliminary list of tasks was taken to the Focus Group discussion phase, with a final aim of defining the ten most important tasks for the development of the Pedagogical Framework in the next stage of the project. The Focus Group stage was conducted in line with the Focus Group Template instructions, while also allowing for the needed flexibility in order to achieve the set goals for this activity.

3. FOCUS GROUP FINDINGS

The activity of preparing and conducting Focus Groups interviews was performed through two main sessions, both held face-to-face and involving seven and three participants, respectively. In the first and smaller group, we had three FG participants, and in the larger group we had seven more, who also took part in the Panel Discussion that was performed before the live audience at the city Cultural Centre.

The following list contains the ten tasks that emerged as the priority for the next project stage, development of the Pedagogical Framework:

	Target task:	Comments:
Group one: tasks directly related to serving food and drinks		
1	Present the menu and provide detailed information when asked	Even though apparently simple, the task was assessed as crucially important and generally complex (despite being deceptively easy to a lay person)
2	Offer menu recommendations upon request	This task was seen as an extension to the previous one, with numerous examples including local specialities, gluten-free dishes, side dishes etc.), but also the inevitable issue of 'lost in translation' when a local dish/specialtity is presented in an inadequate way (the simple example of 'ćevapčići' = 'meat fingers')
3	Take accurate food and drink orders	Failing to perform this particular task to the required standard inevitably leads to failing customer satisfaction. The participants pointed to the importance of good listening skills and asking questions for clarification.
4	Inform customers about the day specials	Similar to offering menu recommendations, it was emphasised that there are different factors at play, not just the technical side of exact description; this conclusion is in line with the high difficulty level attributed to it by the language teachers in the survey.

Group two: soft skills and possible written (email etc.) and telephone communication		
5	Communicate with clients to resolve problems or to ensure satisfaction	This was seen as highly important (within three or four most important tasks on the entire list), even though not all that common. A question was raised regarding the sensitivity of the staff to recognise a problem and/or satisfaction, as these can easily pass unnoticed, but can have a major negative (or positive) impact on business.
6	Scheduling dining reservations	Depending on the establishment, this task potentially involves telephone and email communication. The participants largely agreed that this might be one of the least favourite tasks performed by the staff, where they feel out of their depth (no eye contact in telephone conversation, communication happening in real time…)
7	Translation of the menu into English	This task was seen as more common in smaller establishments in mid-to-low price range; however, it was also seen as a common problem and a good starting point for upgrade of English skills.
Group three: tasks beyond food and drink orders		
8	Provide information about the restaurant or establishment	This was seen as also a very useful asset for waiting staff, i.e. a knowledge of this kind makes a lot of difference in one's attitude to the place of work and contributes to the overall warm atmosphere.
9	Explain aspects of local/ national culture, customs and tradition	This task was seen as a frequent one, considering the wide range of possible situations and topics it encompasses. However, it was agreed that the task was also a complex one and highly important for the complete customer's experience.
10	Provide information about prices, currency, methods of payment and local shopping	Effective communication with clients and providing them with information on items such as local shopping, currency and

		methods of payment/currency (but also public transportation, buses, etc.) is perceived as a frequent one and also very useful and important in contributing to the overall quality of service and customer's experience.

The sub-division of the tasks in the above list is only tentative and partly reflects the grouping of the discussion during the FG interviews.

While the above list presents the choice of ten most important target tasks, there are several other tasks performed by the waiting staff that were close to being short-listed and these will be considered in combination with findings made by the other partners in their FG interviews.

---

4. CONCLUSION

Project task 1.3 – needs analysis supported by the FG discussion was conducted in order to define ten concrete tasks for the waiters as the target profession. These tasks will provide the base for the development of PR2, the Pedagogical Framework.

The process of defining the ten tasks gradually moved from more general to more specific, starting from more than 20 activities 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).

Despite the varied profile of the participants in the respective activities in this phase, all of the parties showed interest and support, as well as readiness to continue collaboration in the future stages of the project.

In addition to Focus Groups interview and a complementary activity to the main one, we conducted the survey using the questionnaire specially designed to this purpose.

We also managed to use the momentum and organise a public Round Table discussion, which at the same time brought some of the key FG participants face-to-face and in front of the public, in order to raise awareness of the main topic of the TBL 4 Tourism project and ultimate importance of quality training and teaching for staff working in the tourism and catering sector.

In an overall conclusion, we feel that the objectives set by the Project Plan for this phase have been fully accomplished:

- We have managed to define ten target tasks for the waiting staff; together with the findings of the other partners, hese tasks will provide the base for the development of the Pedagogical Framework
- We have also managed to collect valuable information accompanying in essence the tasks that have been identified; this information will no doubt help us in the design of the Pedagogical Framework and the training /teaching activities, to the best possible effect
- We have also managed to establihs and reinforce a sizeable network of local/national stakeholders, whom we can rely on in the future stages of the project development and implementation.

ENCLOSURES

Photo: Panel Discussion 'TBL 4 Tourism' – Tourism as potential for development and education, Cultural Centre in Čačak, 12th October 2022

Photo: Panel Discussion 'TBL 4 Tourism' – Tourism as potential for development and education, Cultural Centre in Čačak, 12th October 2022