



RIGA TECHNICAL  
UNIVERSITY

**Agita Doniņa**

# **DEVELOPMENT OF PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION TOPICAL FOR THE TOURISM INDUSTRY LABOUR MARKET**

Summary of the Doctoral Thesis



**RIGA TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY**  
Faculty of Engineering Economics and Management

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**DEVELOPMENT OF PROFESSIONAL  
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# **DOCTORAL THESIS PROPOSED TO RIGA TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY FOR THE PROMOTION TO THE SCIENTIFIC DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF SCIENCE**

To be granted the scientific degree of Doctor of Science (Ph. D.), the present Doctoral Thesis has been submitted for the defence at the open meeting of RTU Promotion Council at 10 a.m. on December 11, 2020 at the Faculty of Engineering Economics and Management of Riga Technical University, 6 Kalnciema Street, Room 209.

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## **DECLARATION OF ACADEMIC INTEGRITY**

I hereby declare that the Doctoral Thesis submitted for the review to Riga Technical University for the promotion to the scientific degree of Doctor of Science (Ph. D.) is my own. I confirm that this Doctoral Thesis had not been submitted to any other university for the promotion to a scientific degree.

Agita Doniņa ..... (signature)

Date: .....

The Doctoral Thesis has been written in Latvian. It consists of Introduction; 4 parts; Conclusions and proposals; 17 figures; 27 tables; 40 appendices; the total number of pages is 126. The Bibliography contains 467 titles.

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## GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE THESIS

The world is undergoing rapid changes under globalisation affecting not only the society but also sectors of the economy, therefore it is important to adapt to these changes and to be prepared for acting, thinking and planning differently. Students, particularly those engaged in the diverse and rapidly changing tourism industry, require multi-layered knowledge and skills. To be capable of offering the development of the required competence, education needs to change as well. Academic representatives of leading international higher education institutions and tourism industry companies as part of Tourism Futures Education Initiative (TEFI) network proposed this already in 2008 (Sheldon *et al.*, 2008).

The complex nature of tourism education is determined by the variety of sectors involved in the tourism industry. For this Doctoral Thesis, the tourism industry is understood and applied according to the clarification under Section 1 of Tourism Law (1998) as “an economic sector the task of which is the development and provision of tourism services”. Economic activities directly linked with tourism and selected from NACE Rev. 2 for this research, such as accommodation in hotels and similar accommodation (NACE I 55), food and beverage service activities (NACE I 56) and travel agency, tour operator reservation service and related activities (NACE N 79) have been mentioned and used as the tourism industry sectors.

The topicality of the Doctoral Thesis has been determined by the necessity of improving higher education in Latvia to promote graduates’ employability and employment. Employment is understood as opportunities for acquiring a job (Harvey, Knight, 2003), whereas employability is characterised as the existence of the required professional competence (Yorke, 2004), which is the object of this research.

### **The theoretical and methodological substantiation of the Thesis**

It can be considered that the movement towards higher education based on the needs of the labour market in Europe was commenced by launching of the Bologna process in 1999, followed by several documents and guidelines. Although the process is over 20 years old, the agenda of its 48 member states, including Latvia, still involves the promotion of synergy between higher education and the labour market (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2018, 2, 17). The necessity for a shift of paradigm in cooperation among higher education institutions and the industry has been pointed out in one of the most detailed recent researches – the study conducted by Professor Wilson published in 2012 (Wilson, 2012, 23) and in the studies of other authors (Rakovska *et al.*, 2014; Trencher *et al.*, 2013, 4). Due to its multi-faceted nature and globalisation, it is particularly topical in the tourism industry higher education. Many researchers (Cranmer, 2006; Haasler, 2013; Hesketh, 2003; Minocha *et al.*, 2017; Rae, 2008) who have established a discrepancy between the needs of the labour market and the professional competence acquired at higher education institutions, have pointed out the necessity of designing higher education studies in a manner, which would make it possible for graduates to prepare for employment in the industry. Various sectoral and inter-sectoral research projects conducted in Latvia also point to the necessity of improving higher education, moreover, to changing both the contents of studies and its quality. This has been

pointed out in the research conducted by Veronika Bikse, Baiba Rivža, Ieva Brence, Inga Lapiņa and others (Bikse, Riemere, 2013; Bikse *et al.*, 2013; Lapiņa *et al.*, 2017; Rauhvargers, 2010). At the same time, the criticism of scholars has been targeted towards the lack of employability promotion strategies and development tools in higher education institutions (Haasler, 2013; Minocha *et al.*, 2017). Several contemporary researchers (Alsubaie, 2016; Suñé, Urquiza, 2016; Ornstein, Hunkins, 2009, 15) stress the necessity of the development of systemic guidelines for designing curricula or models, the implementation of which would result in reaching the goals required.

The term professional competence, representing a knowledge acquired and skills developed in higher education, has entered the discourse relatively recently. Martin Mulder, a Dutch scholar, has focused most of all on explaining competence and the necessity of its exposition. According to his views and the opinions of other authors and based on the research conducted by international organisations, the author, in the framework of the Doctoral Thesis, has applied an understanding that competence is formed by three complementary components – knowledge, skills, as well as attitude and values (Mulder, 2014; OECD, 2016). Knowledge is a result of the human thinking process, creating a subjective conclusion (Bolisani, Bratianu, 2018; Fajriani *et al.*, 2018; Nonaka, Takeuchi, 1995, 87). Skills, which represent an acquired capability of achieving pre-defined, desirable results, for their better comprehension and application, are divided into specialised or professional skills and general or employability skills. While technical and administrative skills are considered as professional, employability skills are general and are not related to a specific occupation or craft.

Over the past twenty years, several authors (Dhiman, 2012; Lūka, 2015; Sisson, Adams, 2013; Wang *et al.*, 2009; Zehrer, Mössenlechner, 2009) have tried to find an answer to what constitutes professional competence required for working in the tourism industry companies. Studies have been conducted in various regions and all of them conclude that general or employability skills are particularly important in the tourism industry. The EC report of 2016 represents one of the most comprehensive reports on the planning of tourism education and its results (EC, 2016). It notes that employers in several tourism industry sectors consider generic skills as the most important asset. The conclusions of the report state that entrepreneurs particularly stress the insufficiency of the existing skills, particularly generic skills, and point to the necessity of promoting their development. It is completely in line with the results of research conducted in the framework of the Doctoral Thesis and therefore, one can assume that generic or employability skills are the most important ones in the tourism industry sectors not only in Latvia but also across Europe.

Research of the competence required in several industries or professions, which can form the basis for creating a respective higher education curriculum, has been conducted also in Latvia (Lapiņa *et al.*, 2015; Nīkitina, Lapiņa, 2018). However, a comprehensive assessment of professional competence in the tourism industry has not been performed to date. A study conducted by the researchers of Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences is one of the latest in this regard. This study, based on 44 interviews, outlines the skills and attitudes required in the industry (Veliverronena, Grīnfelde, 2018).

Establishing the existing non-compliance, the Doctoral Thesis seeks opportunities for improving higher education to decrease this non-compliance and as a result, to promote the employability of students. This objective requires both comprehension of the approaches to curricula design and promotion of the approaches developed by researchers to enhance employability in the study process. Analysing various approaches, the author singles out two of them as being the most applicable – the outcomes-based and the process-based approaches to curricula. An integrated vision of both approaches serves as the basis for a continued development approach of curricula worked out by the author. The assessment of aspects related to curricula design has been based on the works by J. B Bobbitt (1918) and W. H. Kilpatrick (1918), G. Smith, C. Cooper (2000), L. R. Latuka and J. S. Stark (2009), A. Ornstein and F. Hunkins (2004, 2009, 2018), G. O’Neil (2015), J. Muller (2000), M. Young (2008, 2013, 2014, 2015), L. Wheelahan (2010, 2015), R. Petkute (2016) and others. Since education is a regulated area, the operations and compliance of which are stipulated by the Regulations of the Republic of Latvia as well as by the documents developed by the EU and other institutions, they have been taken into an account in theoretical aspects of the Thesis as an inclusive opinion complementing the views of researchers.

It should be noted that the topic of enhancement and management of higher education, including the development of the study process, has not been an object of the research by many Latvian researchers. The research projects have been largely related to the assessment of students’ knowledge (Anohina-Naumeča, 2018) and the studies of professional competence (Nikitina, Lapiņa, 2018; Pauna, 2001; Zvanguzhinova, 2017). The improvement of the study process has been partially analysed in the Doctoral Thesis by K. Oganisjana (2010), who addresses the promotion of entrepreneurship. The most significant studies in the area of education management in the framework of Doctoral Thesis are related to the development of solutions for the management of studies and competencies (Judrups, 2017) and on the management of the employability promotion of graduates (Līce, 2019).

Research conducted as part of the Thesis provides an understanding of professional competence required in the tourism industry labour market. The continuous curriculum development approach worked out by the author provides an opportunity to design or improve curricula systemically and consecutively. Curriculum design which has been created by introducing additional components – extracurricular activities and cooperation activities with the industry, broadens and provides diversity to learning and skills development.

**The research problem** was determined by the frequently observed discrepancy between the professional competence developed in higher education curricula and the needs of the tourism industry labour market. It is currently problematic to implement the recommendations developed by scientists as well as by international, European and national institutions targeted at providing the kind of higher education, which is required in the sectoral labour market since 1) the professional competence demanded in the tourism industry labour market has not been identified, 2) a general and comparative assessment of professional competence required in the tourism industry labour market and offered by higher education institutions has not been performed, 3) an approach on the ways of systemic and targeted development and curricula improvement by envisaging the development of the topical professional competence



has not been worked out, and 4) an approach providing for a multiform and integrated development of professional competence has not been developed yet.

### **Research questions defined in the Doctoral Thesis**

1. What kind of professional competence is required in the tourism industry labour market of Latvia?
2. What is the compliance of Latvian higher education curricula with the demand of the tourism industry labour market?
3. What is the compliance of graduates' employability skills with the requirements of the tourism industry labour market?
4. What kind of approach to designing or developing curricula could promote the enhancement of topical professional competences required in the tourism industry?

### **The research area**

Professional competence topical in the tourism industry labour market.

### **The research object**

The development of professional competence and the perfection of higher education.

### **The objective of the research**

Based on the evaluation of the importance of knowledge and skills required in the tourism labour market and the possibility to develop them in higher education, create an approach to the continued development of curricula, which would provide students with an opportunity to increase their professional competence in line with the demand of the labour market.

### **Tasks for achieving the objective**

- 1) to analyse the situation in the tourism industry internationally, but particularly in Latvia and its labour market;
- 2) to conduct an analysis of the components of professional competence – the theoretical aspects of knowledge and skills;
- 3) to study the theoretical aspects of designing and developing higher education curricula;
- 4) to evaluate the theoretical aspects of extracurricular activities and their application in higher education institution curricula of various countries;
- 5) by surveying employer opinions, establish the professional competence required in the industry;
- 6) to evaluate the compliance of the curriculum implemented in the study direction “Hotel and restaurant service, tourism and recreation organisation” with the demand of the tourism industry labour market in Latvia based on the defined study outcomes and self-assessment of graduates of tourism studies of Latvian higher education institutions;

- 7) to compare the assessment of the importance of employability skills and the self-assessment of graduates;
- 8) to create an approach to the continuous curricula development by introducing opportunities for multifaceted development of professional competence.

### **Research hypothesis**

If additional components are introduced to the curriculum design and they are formed and implemented by employing the designed improvement approach, a diverse development of students' professional competence is promoted following the demand of the tourism industry labour market.

### **Theses for the defence**

By summarising theoretical conclusions and the results of the empirical study obtained in the course of developing the Doctoral Thesis, the following **theses** are put forward for presentation:

1. The analysis of knowledge and skills required in the tourism industry labour market of Latvia indicates employability skills as the key component of professional competence in the industry.
2. The assessment of higher tourism education curricula in Latvia and the self-assessment of graduates reveals a discrepancy between the employability skills developed during the study process and the needs of the labour market.
3. Introduction of the continuous improvement approach makes it possible to identify the topical needs of the tourism industry labour market and to include the development of the required professional competence in designing curricula and their further improvement.
4. Extracurricular and the industry cooperation activities included and managed in the curriculum design represent an additional opportunity for students to develop and expose their professional competence in line with the tourism industry requirements.

### **The logic of the research**

The logical structure of the study is determined by its objective and logical sequence of research steps. The logical structure of the Doctoral Thesis and the logical sequence of the research steps are reflected in the Fig. 1.

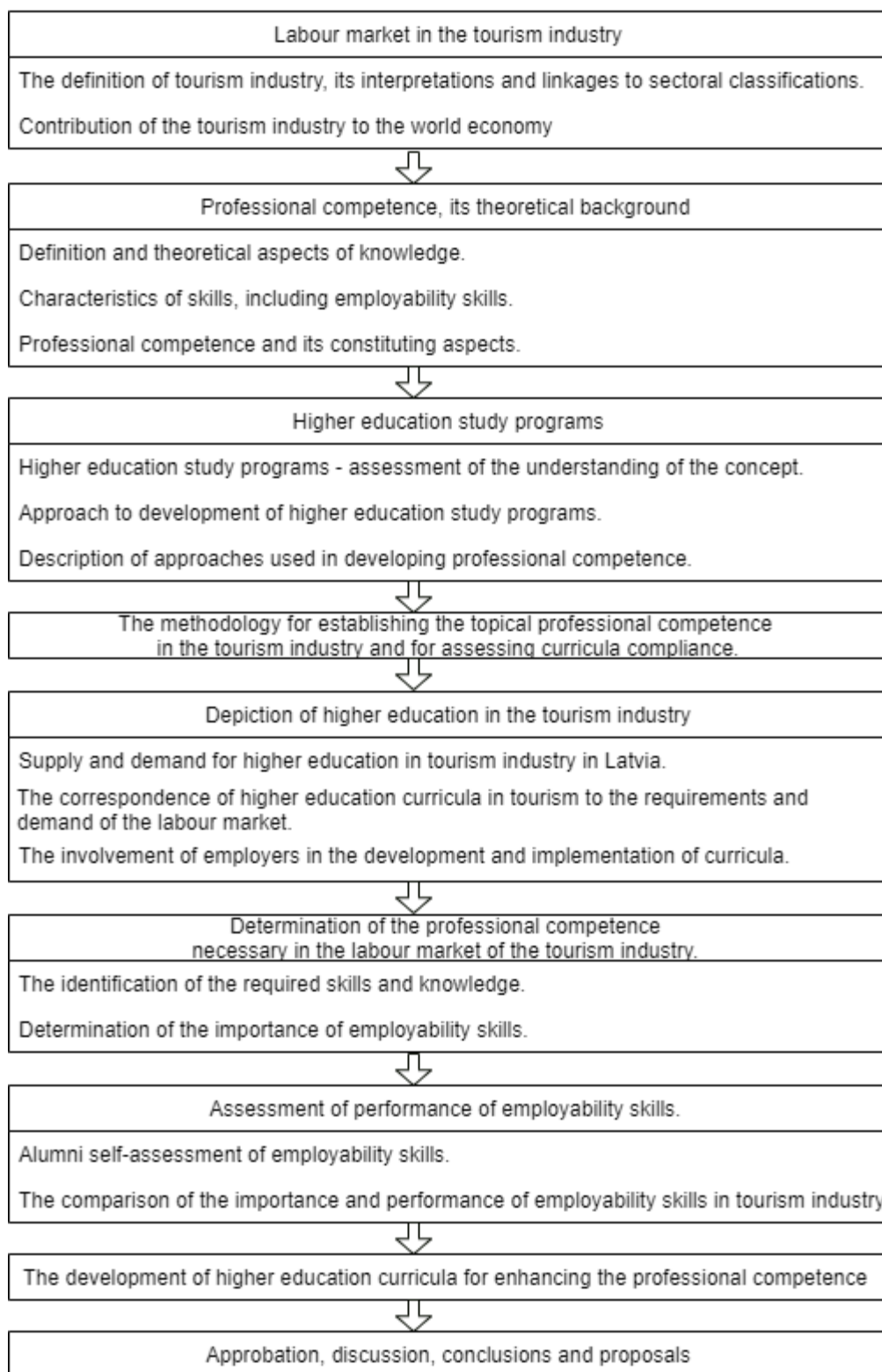


Fig. 1. The logic of research.

## **Research methods**

To attain the objective of the Thesis, analysis of the latest literature on management, professional competence, design of higher education curricula as well as research method theory was performed. The Thesis utilises the norms defined in the latest regulatory acts and the author has also conducted an analysis of statistical data.

Data triangulation – the analysis of documents (job advertisements), a structured survey of industry employers and interviews with employers has been conducted. To assess graduates' employability skills, a structured survey of graduates of tourism study programmes of Latvian higher education institutions was conducted. The assessment of the compliance of the tourism industry curricula is based on the analysis of documents (the analysis of self-assessment questionnaires created by higher education institutions and joint opinions of curricula assessment commissions).

The descriptive statistical indicators (indicators of the central tendency and variation indicators), as well as the following inferential statistics methods were used in data processing and analysis:

- defining differences between the industry sectors was performed by employing the Kruskal–Wallis  $H$  test;
- for the calculation of the internal reliability – Cronbach's alpha coefficient;
- for data compliance with the normal empirical distribution – Kolmogorov–Smirnov test;
- the binominal distribution test was employed for a comparison of the proportion of skills and knowledge in job advertisements;
- Mann–Whitney  $U$  test was used for determining the differences between two independent groups where the dependent variable has been measured on a nominal scale;
- the importance-performance analysis was performed employing the IPA method;
- Fischer's  $\phi$  criterion verification was used for verifying hypotheses.

Validation of the continuous curriculum development approach and curriculum design validation was performed by implementing individual, semi-structured expert interviews.

## **Research tools**

Office Excel version 2013, IBM SPSS Statistics software Ver. 22, Stata/MP software Ver. 14.

## **Limitations of the research**

Given the resources at the disposal of the author of the Doctoral Thesis, the author has established several research area limitations.

1. The study direction included in the research, according to the regulatory acts in effect, has been used only as a term summarising related curriculum the operations of which have not been addressed in the framework of the Thesis.

2. In the framework of the Thesis, the author has analysed only those curricula implemented in the Republic of Latvia, which at the moment of conducting the research were accredited under the study direction “Hotel and restaurant service, tourism and recreation organisation”, but has not analysed curricula, which have been accredited in any other study direction or where tourism and/or hospitality is studied as a specialisation.
3. The characterisation of the tourism industry and the analytical overview of employment structures have been performed for the following tourism service companies: accommodation (NACE Rev. 2 I 55), food and beverage service activities (NACE Rev. 2 I 56) and travel agency, tour operator and other reservation services and related activities (NACE Rev. 2 N79). Other sectors, which are statistically less significant in the economy of Latvia, have not been analysed.
4. There is no statistics in Latvia on the graduates of tourism direction who work in the industry and no data on how many graduates of higher education institutions leave the country after graduation. Therefore, it is difficult to determine precisely the population. For this study, the population is defined by the number of students who have acquired a degree or qualification at higher education institutions and colleges under the educational thematic group “Services”. Since it is impossible to separate the number of the tourism sector study programme graduates from the rest, it is assumed that the results obtained are believable against the acquired education;
5. The Thesis has not taken into an account and analysed the impact of the 2020 crisis on the tourism industry in general and the employment in tourism.

### **The scientific novelty of the Doctoral Thesis**

1. The Thesis is a study of the professional competence required in the tourism industry labour market by providing a detailed evaluation of the importance of employability skills. It is the first study of this scope conducted in the Baltic states and it is significant for the development of a map of professions included in the tourism industry structure and for higher education institutions regarding the inclusion of the topical industry labour market needs in the study outcomes of their curricula.
2. According to the needs of the tourism industry, professional competence has been defined as a complementary co-existence of knowledge, specialised and employability skills as well as values and attitudes required for a purposeful and meaningful performance of a particular job and professional development of a person. The significance of employability skills has been stressed based on the needs of the industry labour market.
3. The approach to the continuous improvement of curricula has been enhanced by including the following aspects of curricula as a process approach:
  - involvement of students by improving their employability skills;
  - diversity of the study process where higher education institutions and a student’s plans and organised activities coexist and interact.

4. Curriculum design has been defined as a concept involving a study objective, defined expected learning outcomes and the key components for attaining them as well as additional components. It envisages the inclusion of extracurricular activities and the industry cooperation initiatives in the curricula implementation process.
5. Organising and implementation of the components included in curriculum design of the higher education studies in tourism: extracurricular activities and the industry cooperation programme, which provide an opportunity to assess the additional professional competence developed by a student.

### **The practical applicability of the research**

1. The evaluation of knowledge and skills demanded in the tourism industry labour market provides an opportunity to use the conclusions acquired for improving **the map of professions included in the tourism industry structure** as well as for developing professional standards and designing and improving the tourism industry curricula in higher education institutions of Latvia.
2. A comparison of the self-assessment of the tourism curricula graduates of Latvian higher education institutions in terms of their employability skills and the skills required in the labour market, by assessing the established shortcomings, provides for the improvement of curricula.
3. The created continuous curricula development approach provides for their designing and improvement systemically and sequentially following the demand of the labour market.
4. The scheme for planning and implementation of activities for the developed extracurricular activity and the industry cooperation programmes provide an opportunity for targeted management of additional components of curriculum design in the framework of a study programme of a particular higher education institution in line with the long-term requirements of the tourism industry labour market.
5. The term employability skills in Latvian – “*nodarbinātību veicinošās prasmes*” – was suggested and coordinated with the Terminology Commission of Latvian Academy of Sciences and the term curriculum design in Latvian is “*studiju programmu veidols*”.
6. The inclusion of the curriculum design and the definition of *curriculum* in legal acts would pave the way for a more unambiguous interpretation and use of those terms.

### **The structure and scope of the Doctoral Thesis**

**The Doctoral Thesis** consists of an introduction, four chapters, conclusions and proposals as well as a list of literature and sources used. The Thesis is supplemented and elaborated by 40 annexes.

**The structure of the Doctoral Thesis** is formed per its objective and tasks; the Thesis consists of four chapters.

**In Chapter 1**, the author provided an overview of the tourism industry internationally as well as in Latvia establishing its economic importance and its projected development. In this

chapter, the author identifies the needs of the labour market as being based on professional competence rooted in knowledge and skills' theories.

**In Chapter 2**, the author researches the theory of designing higher education curricula and their further development. The author establishes the necessity of the formative components of curricula for responding to the demand of the tourism industry labour market as well as assesses additional study activities being part of curricula design as providers of the development of employability skills.

**In Chapter 3**, the author analyses professional competence required for the employees of the tourism industry and the current situation in higher education, selects research design and elaborates the research methods. The chapter analyses the requirements of the industry employers for the labour market and establishes that skills, particularly, employability skills are expected more than knowledge. The evaluation of the offer provided by higher education institution curricula reveals clearly that they are only in partial compliance with the needs of the industry. The author establishes the discrepancy between the evaluation of the importance of employability skills by employers and the self-assessment of skill performance of graduates.

**In Chapter 4**, the author employs the results of the research to develop the approach of continuous development of higher education curricula and their constituent design, which provides students with an opportunity to develop the professional competence required for employability in the tourism industry in a versatile way.

The results of the research have been validated by presenting its findings at international scientific conferences, practical tourism industry-related conferences and by means of scientific articles published.

### **Validation and approbation of the research results**

The results acquired in the research process have been reflected in twelve publications.

1. Donina, A., Lapiņa, I. (2020). Employability Skills: the Needs of Tourism Industry versus the Performance of Graduates. *Proceedings of the 24th World Multi-Conference on Systemics, Cybernetics and Informatics: WMSCI 2020, September 13–16, 2020*. Orlando, Florida, U.S.A.: International Institute of Informatics and Systemics (SCOPUS indexing planned by December 2020).
2. Doniņa, A., Svētiņa, K., Svētiņš, K. (2020). Class attendance as a factor affecting academic performance. SOCIETY. INTEGRATION. EDUCATION. *Proceedings of the International Scientific Conference, Vol. 6, May 22nd, 2020*. Rēzekne: Rezekne Academy of Technologies, pp. 578–594. <http://journals.rta.lv/index.php/SIE/issue/view/140> (indexing at Thomas Reuters planned within a year).
3. Doniņa, A. (2020). The development of the European higher education area for the needs of the sectoral labour market. *60th International Scientific Conference of Riga Technical University: Proceedings* (article accepted for publication).

4. Doniņa, A., Lingli, W., Luka, I., Ping, L., Ubbelohde, G. (2019). Chinese and Latvian tertiary tourism and hospitality education graduates' professional competence. *Acta Prosperitatis. No. 10*, pp. 61–86. ISSN 1691-6077 [EBSCO, ProQuest]. <https://www.turiba.lv/storage/files/10-acta.pdf>
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Reports on the key findings of the Doctoral Thesis were delivered in the following international scientific conferences and seminars.

1. 16 October 2020, report “*Extra Curricular Activities as a Complementary Element of Study Programmes – Problems and Challenges*” at the Riga Technical University 61st international scientific online conference “Scientific Conference on Economics and Entrepreneurship”, SCEE’2020 (co-author Lapiņa I.).
2. 15 September 2020, report “*Employability Skills: The Needs of Tourism Industry versus the Performance of Graduates*” at the WMSCI 2020 international conference (co-author Lapiņa I.) (the article published).
3. 22 May 2020, report “*Class attendance as a factor affecting academic performance*” at the 14th international scientific conference of Rezekne Academy of Technologies “Society. Integration. Education” (co-authors Svētiņa, K., Svētiņš K.) (the article published).
4. 17 October 2019, report “*The development of European higher education area for the needs of the sectoral labour market*” at the 60th international scientific conference of Riga Technical University (the article accepted for publishing)
5. 26 April 2019, report “*Chinese and Latvian tertiary tourism and hospitality education graduates’ professional competence*” at XX international scientific conference of Turība University “The human factor at the age of digitalisation” (co-authors Lingli, W., Luka, I., Ping, L., Ubbelohde, G.) (the article published).
6. 26 October 2018, discussion at the international conference “*Study Quality in Terms of Multiculturalism in the Baltic Countries*” organised by Estonian Entrepreneurship University of Applied Sciences, Tallinn, Estonia.
7. 3–8 September 2018, report “*Inclusion of Relevant Competencies in the Expected Outcomes of Tourism and Hospitality Study Programmes: The Theory and Reality of Latvia*” at international scientific conference “*Inclusion and Exclusion, Resources for Educational Research?*” organised by European Educational Research Association (EERA), the Free University of Bozen-Bolzano, Italy. (co-authors Luka, I., Jurkane, E.) (the extended synopsis has been published).
8. 19 April 2018, report “*Staffing Challenges in the Restaurants in Riga*” at the XIX international scientific conference of Turība University (co-author I. Bukovska) (the article published).
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10. 9–11 April 2014, report “*Significance of internship in tourism and hospitality education*” at the 56th scientific conference of Daugavpils University (the article published).

11. 26 March 2010, report “*Developing students’ leadership skills in tourism studies*” at the XI International scientific conference of Turība University “Person, society, the state in the contemporary changing economic environment” (co-authors Niedrītis, J. E., Lūka, I.) (the article published).
12. 5 October 2010, report “*Learning environment and study process as a tool for developing leadership skills: the case of Turība Business School, Latvia*” at UN WTO TedQual programme international conference “The Role of Education in Developing Leaders for the Global Tourism Industry”, Switzerland.
13. 16–17 October 2009, report “*Challenges of Tourism Education: Emotions versus Business*” at UN WTO TedQual programme international conference “Higher Tourism Education: Issues and Practices”, Bologna University, Italy (co-authors Niedrītis, J. E., Lūka, I.) (the synopsis published, the report is available online).

The Doctoral Thesis has been approbated in seminars, conferences and meetings in Latvia and internationally.

1. May–August 2020 – an expert at the rounds of discussion on the improvement of the map of professions in the tourism industry organised by LDDK.
2. 26 September 2017 report “*Development of Life Skills: Case of Turība University (Latvia)*” at an international seminar “Best Practice in Promoting and Extending Education/Industry Links in Tourism & Hospitality” organised by Estonian Business School and Haaga-Helia University (Finland), Tallinn, Estonia.
3. 26 September 2016, report “*Current Challenges in Tourism and Hospitality Studies: Case of Turība University (Latvia)*” at an international seminar “Trends and Current Developments in Education/Industry links” organised by Estonian Business School and Haaga-Helia University (Finland), Tallinn, Estonia.
4. UN WTO European regional conference “*Improving Competitiveness of Higher Tourism Education Institutions through Cooperation for Development Projects and Social Media Tools*”, Portugal, 2012.
5. An expert (practical approbation) on designing and modernising of tourism and marketing management study curricula, April and May 2012, V.A. Graicunas School of Management, Kaunas, Lithuania.

# 1. THEORETICAL EVALUATION OF THE TOURISM LABOUR MARKET AND PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCE REQUIRED IN IT

The term tourism industry is being broadly applied when talking about a separate unit, which functions everywhere, wherever tourism is present. At the same time, it should be noted that there is no unified definition of the tourism industry (Lew *et al.*, 2005; Munar, 2007). The Doctoral Thesis employs the term the tourism industry, which is the most broadly used term in the academic and practical tourism environment. The term is understood as a totality of all tourism and hospitality sector services analysed, but those parts of the Thesis requiring specifying the differences and similarities between the sectors researched, employ the term tourism sectors.

Tourism occupies a significant place in the world economy. According to estimates, the overall contribution of the tourism industry to the global GDP was USD 8.9 trillion (EUR 7.94 trillion) in 2019 (all conversions have been made according to the currency exchange rate of the Bank of Latvia effective on 1 July 2020), which constitutes 10.3 % of the global GDP (WTTC, 2019c). The direct input in the GDP constituted USD 2.750 trillion in 2018 (EUR 2.465 trillion), which was 3.2 % of the overall GDP. In Europe, which represents one of the largest tourism regions, the contribution of tourism was USD 2 trillion (EUR 1.72 trillion) in 2019. The total contribution of the tourism industry of Latvia to the national GDP was USD 2.8 billion (EUR 2.41 billion) in 2018, representing 8.3 % of the total GDP (World Data Atlas, 2020).

The forecasts of the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) reveal that the direct and consequently also the overall input of the tourism industry will continue to increase. Forecasts show that the overall contribution of tourism to the global GDP will already represent USD 13.085 trillion (WTTC, 2017, 2019a, 2020). The calculations and forecasts reveal that the European and Latvian tourism industries will develop proportionately.

Until 2020, tourism was the third fastest growing industry in the world, which provided directly over 150 million jobs worldwide, while in Europe (data available for 15 countries) the tourism industry directly employed 16.5 million persons. Despite the current crisis in the industry, the forecast for the period until 2029 shows a positively growing trend from 3.8–3.9 % even up to 4.3–4.4 % (WTTC, 2019a).

The tourism industry is a significant source of employment also in Latvia – the industry employed over 38 000 persons in 2019. 76 % of all the employed in the industry work in the catering service sector. It should be noted that during the period from 2010 onwards, when the industry started to develop after the previous recession, the number of persons employed in the industry has risen by 56 % (Darbvietas pa darbības veidiem vidēji gadā, 2020). The labour market forecasts point to the increase of the various level of short-term and long-term employees in Latvia (EM, 2020; RAIT Custom Research Baltic, 2019).

Human resources are the main source of success in the provision of tourism services and the most important tourism resource. Therefore, professional competence of people employed

in the industry becomes increasingly important. Hereinafter the author analysed the theoretical aspects of professional competence and its components.

Professor Mulder (Mulder, 2014, 110) is one of the researchers who has particularly concentrated on the research professional competence. He believes that professional competence is a general, integrated and internationalised capacity to provide sustainable, effective performance in a specific professional area, work, in an organisational context and a task-related situation. Mulder stresses that professional competence is a coordinated totality of knowledge, skills and attitude, which can be used in real implementation conditions. National Centre for Education similarly defined competence in 2017, pointing out that professional competence is “a provable ability to use knowledge, skills and attitudes for job execution and professional development” (VISC, 2007, 33).

The basis of knowledge is information to which the mind assigns meaning and objective based on learning and experience (Bolisani, Bratianu, 2018; Markie, 2017; Nonaka, Takeuchi, 1995, 87). Therefore, knowledge is more profound and important than information since it involves comprehension gained by experience or research as well as by acquiring comparisons, determining consequences and forming interconnections. Skills in their turn represent the ability to use one’s knowledge effectively and with ease in execution or performance (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2019), and they refer to the ability to act and not to the basic competence itself (Vanpatten, Benati, 2010, 39). Since skills can be understood, interpreted and applied very broadly, they are divided into groups according to their application and opportunities for development. The literature mostly talks about the division of skills into specialised or professional and generic skills. Specialised or professional skills are understood as skills related to the technical aspects required for performing various job-related tasks and they are often based on knowledge (Rainsbury *et al.*, 2002). Generic skills in their turn manifest themselves as behavioural skills, characterised by intangible features, with a common emotional intelligence. They are skills related to communication, teamwork, leadership, conflict management, the ability to converse, professionalism and ethics (Azim *et al.*, 2010, 397). Analysing various definitions, categories and notions of general skills, the author concluded that the term, which best characterises the skills needed for acquiring a job, its performance regardless of the area and the type of job, is employability skills. The term employability skills did not have an equivalent term in the Latvian language. The author suggested and the Terminology Commission of the Academy of Science of Latvia supported the term *nodarbinātību veicinošās prasmes*, which expresses precisely the essence of the term.

Summarising the afore-mentioned, the author concludes that professional competence in the tourism industry is formed by a mutually complementary existence of knowledge, specialised or professional and employability skills as well as values and attitudes of an expert required for a targeted and meaningful performance of a specific job and professional development. The opportunities for its development must be provided by higher education curricula based on the needs of the industry. Professional competence is not stagnant. It means that the tourism industry will constantly require new competences in future. Hence, the development of curricula targeted at raising professional competence must be commenced by studying and identifying knowledge and skills topical in the industry.

## **2. THEORETICAL ASPECTS OF HIGHER EDUCATION CURRICULA AND THEIR DEVELOPMENT**

Development is a specific growth or advancement process (Oxford English dictionary, 2019). Conversely, any growth and advancement are ensured by the management of an organisation or a specific process. Education, as defined in the Education Law (Education Law 1999, 4), is a process of systematic acquisition of knowledge and skills and development of attitudes. According to Amundsen and Wilson (2012, 90), the development of education involves all the activities targeted at learning and the improvement of teaching. In the context of higher education, the development is primarily attributed to the development of a curriculum as the main product of a higher education institution.

### **2.1. Higher Education Curricula, the Key Aspects and Approaches to Their Designing and Development**

The designing and development of curricula have received varying attention at various times and in different countries. The Curriculum by Franklin Bobbit was published in 1918 and is considered the first work, which scientifically analyses curricula and their designing. Since then there have been efforts made at a regional or national level to address the development of education systems, which unequivocally also means evolution in understanding curricula and their development.

A curriculum is a totality of implementing the acquisition of specific knowledge and the development of skills targeted at completing the objectives of a study programme (Beigi *et al.*, 2011; Kapur, 2018; Moore, 2004; Tucker, 2011; Young, 2014). However, there is no unequivocal opinion on how broadly it should be treated. Some authors believe that a curriculum must also include the strategy for reaching the defined and, perhaps, the undefined study outcomes and should reflect learning, teaching and assessment (Bath *et al.*, 2004, 315; Ornstein, Hunkins, 2009; University of Bradford Curriculum Framework, 2012). Other authors stress that a curriculum must be separated from its broader interpretation and singled out in its most narrow or technical interpretation by understanding it as an enumeration of study courses (Jonnaert *et al.*, 2007). This means that there are two tendencies in the application of the term curriculum. One practice envisages viewing curricula in a single approach, encompassing such significant processes as planning, instruction, evaluation and management (Sng, 2008, 90). The other practice envisages establishing a clear separation of the narrow or technical interpretation of a curriculum from the broad understanding, which involves the objectives of a curriculum, expected outcomes and other aspects. Scientific literature employs two terms for characteristics of the two different interpretations – curriculum (study programme) and curriculum design, which does not have a specialised and approved translation and elaboration in the Latvian language. Therefore, as part of the Doctoral Thesis, in coordination with the Terminology Commission of the Academy of Science of Latvia, the author offers the introduction of a Latvian version of the term curriculum design – *studiju programmas veidols*. Curriculum design, which is a term derived

from the broad interpretation of the notion, is formed by a curriculum objective based on the industry needs and the respective strategy of a higher education institution and study outcomes manifested as the expected professional competence, study contents derived from them as well as various forms of curriculum implementation and assessment approaches. The term curriculum is understood as the contents of studies and its implementation through such curriculum components as study courses, internship and state examination.

After assessing various approaches and definitions, the author agrees that it is necessary to separate the definition of curriculum in the narrow understanding from its broad interpretation. Moreover, to achieve a more unequivocal understanding and application, by introducing two terms – curriculum (for the narrow interpretation) and curriculum design (for the broader interpretation). To adhere to a more common understanding, in the theoretical part of the Thesis the author applies the term curriculum without separating the narrow and the broad interpretation.

There are various notions on designing and development of higher education curricula, where the most established ones are 1) the development of a curriculum as a product, where the most widespread ones include proficiency-based, performance-based and outcomes-based models and their modifications, and 2) the development of curriculum as a process where the established student-oriented scientific model is the competence-based approach to designing a curriculum (O'Neill, 2010; Ornstein, Hunkins, 2004). Plans and intentions are the most important aspects of the product approach, whereas the process approach highlights the importance of actions and consequences (Neary, 2003, 39). The process approach envisages a more intuitive planning of curricula with a hope of attaining the result. The product approach is focused on the development opportunities of professional competence as a specifically desired final product. It is valuable for developing visible study results providing an opportunity to move away from a simplified list of contents (O'Neill, 2010), which often is a list of study courses. It should be noted that not all the authors unequivocally understand, interpret and support one or the other approach. The current biggest debate is focused on which of the approaches is more appropriate for Europe, and subsequently for Latvia, for the established progression of higher education towards promoting graduates' employability – the competence-based (primarily oriented towards the actions a student must perform) or the outcomes-based (the model of curriculum development as a product). If the competence-based approach is primarily focused on the development of specific skills within a set period, the outcomes-based approach involves focusing on the organisation of the educational system in a manner, which would let students reach the defined study outcomes at the end of their studies (Kelchen 2015, 17; Sessums, 2016; Sturgis, 2018). There is a view that the outcomes-based approach is a way to make curricula closer to “real life” and the needs of the market (Psifidou, 2009). It should be noted that there are authors who think that the differences between the outcomes-based and competence-based curricula models are insignificant and even use them as synonyms (Morcke *et al.*, 2013). For the Doctoral Thesis, the author believes that the differences exist, and the two models are not used as models representing the same approach.

The outcomes-based approach is based on the constructive alignment approach by Biggs (Biggs, 1999), which is based on a view that a curriculum must be designed in a manner, which establishes a clear and direct link between the defined expected study outcomes and the results of students at the time of graduation. This means that the study contents, methods and assessment tasks used must result from the defined expected outcomes of a curriculum. It can be argued that the outcomes-based approach means organising and structuring a curriculum in a manner that a student could develop the defined professional competence (Sessums, 2016).

Like other researchers (Alfauzan, Tarchouna, 2017; Houghton, 2004; Howard, 2007; Psifidou, 2009; Tam, 2014), the author believes that the outcomes-based approach represents a principle, which should serve as a basis for designing the contemporary higher education curricula by moving towards higher education based on the needs of the labour market. Moreover, the author stresses that the objective of a curriculum, the importance of substantiated study results and enhanced study opportunities are the key aspects in this context. At the same time the author believes that with the development of competence-based education, the approaches will eventually merge forming a new hybrid approach. The continuous curriculum development approach worked out as part of the Doctoral Thesis is based on the approach to the curriculum as a product, integrating some aspects of a curriculum as a process approach.

Designing and developing curricula is not a simple process. Bobbit and Kilpatrick were one of the first authors who addressed the designing of curricula at a scientific level. Kilpatrick developed the methodology in 1918, which established four stages of designing curricula: 1) defining the intention; 2) planning; 3) execution; and 4) assessment (Kilpatrick, 1918 from Kelting-Gibson, 2013, 44–43). Assessing the approaches developed later one can conclude that they have been modified and developed further. However, Kilpatrick's theory of four stages continues to serve as their basis. It has been retained in the continuous curriculum development approach worked out by the author.

## **2.2. The Approach to the Development of Professional Competence in Curricula**

In the climate of knowledge economy and globalisation, the preparation of graduates for work is set as the key goal of higher education (Cranmer, 2006; Hesketh, 2003; Rae, 2008). This is why there has been a lot of international discussion over the past few years on the issues of employment and employability, particularly in the context of higher education. The focus of this debate has largely been the change of the concept of higher education envisaging the inclusion of employability promoting contents and activities (Cranmer, 2006). Several authors believe that the aspects of the development of employability must be included in all the components of curriculum implementation – mandatory and elective study courses, internships as well as voluntary tasks, activities offered by various career centres, etc. (Becket, Kemp, 2010; Cranmer, 2006; Hermann *et al.*, 2008). The inclusion of the aspects of employability only in theoretical courses can create problems, since the implementation of such courses prescribes that it takes place per definition of the subject, concept and learning

of other academic contents. This is the reason why some scientists argue that the development of professional competencies, particularly employability skills, as their currently weakest aspect (Brown, Heskeths, 2004), must be integrated not only in one particular study course, but is cut across the whole curriculum and at all levels (Hind *et al.*, 2007; University of Kent, 2018). Taking into an account the afore-mentioned and by merging several scientific views researchers Olibie and Madumere (2015) have concluded that employability can be best developed by three means – in a curriculum in its narrow sense (includes academic study courses), various cooperation events, particularly involving industry representatives, programmes of activities (involving extracurricular study activities and experiences) and mentoring programmes (involving career consultations and other assistance). According to Olibie and Madumere, the existence of all three programmes serves as the basis for an effective curriculum (Olibie, Madumere, 2015).

Therefore, the author, following the research, holds a view that to create an opportunity for students to develop their professional competence in a versatile way, the regular curriculum design components should be complemented with such additional elements as extracurricular activities and various industry cooperation activities involving employers. The engagement of employers can be multiform – internship opportunities in a company (Barrie *et al.*, 2009; Hooley, 2014; Jackson, Wilton, 2016), guest lectures and implementation of various forms of discussion. By providing students with an opportunity to learn more about a company and an organisation in person, they not only experience and comprehend the nuances of their operations, but also develop a sense of responsibility, critical thinking, etc. Extracurricular activities are activities, which are implemented in addition to the studies but are considered as significant for comprehensive development and employment (Extra Curriculum..., n. d.; Extra Curricular..., n. d.; Hooley, 2014; Thompson *et al.*, 2013). Studies of literature reveal that authors hold different opinions on the types of activities, which fall into the extracurricular category. For instance, Thompson and her colleagues believe that hobbies, sport, cultural or religious events, volunteer or paid work should not count as extracurricular activities. This group of researchers think that extracurricular activities are usually structured and provide a public good or produce public interest (Thompson *et al.*, 2013, 136). Others believe that activities, which assist in learning a specific job, volunteer work, participation in various skill-enhancing activities, additional practice, study tours, seminars, lectures, etc. can be considered extracurricular (Barrie *et al.*, 2009; Jamjoom, 2016). Thus, the approaches are extremely different, and each higher education institution can select the most appropriate and acceptable one.

The key issue is whether extracurricular activities increase the professional competence of students. Several studies reveal that they promote the development of generic skills of students, thus facilitating their employability (Chmielewski-Raimondo *et al.*, 2016; Clark *et al.*, 2015; Hager, Holland, 2006; Kaufman, Gabler, 2004; Lau *et al.*, 2014; Stuart *et al.*, 2011). Assessing the opinions of various authors one can conclude that all of them unequivocally stress the positive impact of extracurricular activities on study results and the development of skills. However, the issue of the necessity for assessing extracurricular activities and their inclusion in academic records is still topical. That is, whether the



extracurricular work of students is considered as an additional component of studies or it is considered only as a tool for improving job opportunities after graduation. The research conducted by the author demonstrates a mixed approach. There are higher education institutions, which have defined their extracurricular activities and established their value in terms of credit points. Other higher education institutions grant activity points for participation in extracurricular activities. One can conclude that the importance of extracurricular activities in higher education is gaining importance with an increasing number of higher education institutions including such activities in the study process. The more higher education institutions begin to use the approach of assessing extracurricular activities of students, the higher their value will be (Clegg *et al.*, 2010; Thompson *et al.*, 2013, 143).

The conclusion is that the importance of extracurricular study activities is increasing and it is significant for the development of professional competence to find a balance between gaining academic knowledge and the development of skills as part of the core study activities and extracurricular activities. Moreover, taking into an account the frequently accented opinion on the importance of inclusive and multiform studies envisioning learning of various types of knowledge and the skill development approach in higher education, an increasing number of higher education institutions are seeking ways for diversifying the study process. The co-existence of curricula and various extracurricular activities with the engagement of industry experts ensures that graduates develop their professional competence required in the labour market and enhance their employability more profoundly. Consequently, the totality of all components opens a way for developing a concept, which would integrate the contents of various academic areas, the acquisition of knowledge and the development of skills by offering students more profound choices and extends the studies outside lectures in real-life situations.

Several approaches to the inclusion of professional competence in curricula have been developed in the course of the last twenty years. One of the first approaches was developed by Bennet (2000) and his colleagues in 1999. Currently, EDGE is considered as one of the most established models (Pool, Sewell, 2007, 280). The authors of this model claim that at the moment when students have developed their knowledge, skills and generic skills in line with the respective curriculum and have learned about the essence of career building, gained experience and emotional intelligence, the assessment of their performance will create “a higher degree of self-effectiveness and self-confidence, which is important for employability” (*ibid*, 281).

### **3. THE COMPLIANCE OF HIGHER EDUCATION OF LATVIA WITH THE DEMAND OF THE TOURISM INDUSTRY LABOUR MARKET**

This chapter outlines the selected methodology of the research reflecting the five consecutive stages of the study. The beginning of the chapter provides a general description of the tourism industry higher education outlining the development of higher education since the introduction of the first curricula in this area at the end of the past century. The outline of the establishment of topical professional competence and the evaluation methodology of curriculum compliance in the tourism industry involves both the study design and data collection and processing. The chapter is continued with a reflection of research data analysis and interpretation. The conclusions create the basis for the continuous curricula development approach and the worked out curriculum design for the development of professional competence.

#### **3.1. Characteristics of Tourism Industry Higher Education**

Higher education in the tourism industry was commenced in Latvia in 1993 with the inclusion of the first study courses on tourism in the entrepreneurship curricula of the University of Latvia. The first bachelor study programmes in the tourism industry were launched in 1995. Education in the tourism industry was offered by two state-run higher education institutions and by one private higher education institution in the academic year 1996/1997. Since then 165 students have been matriculated – 45 in the state-run higher education institutions and 120 in the only private higher education institution.

Assessing and comparing higher education in tourism from its beginnings to the present moment one can conclude that it has changed both qualitatively and quantitatively (Doniņa, Rozīte, Vinklere, 2018). In nine years, the overall number of tourism students increased more than 3.2 times, reaching 3421 students in 2007/2008 (Ministry of Education, 2008). Since then the total number of tourism students has decreased and totalled 1797 students in the academic year 2018/2019 (Ministry of Education, 2018).

Higher education in the tourism industry can be currently acquired in Latvia in the curricula of higher education institutions offering either study direction “Hotel and restaurant services, tourism and recreation organisations” or “Management, administration and real estate management”, which are either accredited programmes or are being implemented as a specialisation within the curricula of other fields of studies. Higher education institutions of Latvia currently offer 15 accredited programmes, which are being implemented according to four different occupational standards or outside any of the standards.

#### **3.2. Methodology for Establishing the Topical Professional Competence in the Tourism Industry and for Assessing Curricula Compliance**

Since the Doctoral Thesis envisages identifying and interpreting the opinions of employers and graduates and analysing them both separately and in comparison, (Creswell, 2005, 521), the Doctoral Thesis has employed the mixed (Mārtinsone *et al.*, 2016, 190) or

multimethod (Saunders *et al.*, 2009, 152) research design methods. Based on the selected research design they were considered as the most appropriate to attain the objective of the Doctoral Thesis. They envisage the application of several quantitative (a survey of employers, a survey of graduates, an analysis of job advertisements) and qualitative document analysis, (interviews with employers, programme directors) data collection and processing methods (Belli, 2008; Saunders *et al.*, 2009, 152; Tashakkori, Teddlie, 2003).

The author has methodologically divided the process of working out the evaluation and the development approach into five consecutive steps and subordinate actions in terms of content:

- 1) **preparatory step** (establishing of the research topic, type, problem, formulation of research questions; putting forward the research objective and tasks, establishing a timeline, performers, users and areas);
- 2) **commencement of the research** (evaluating primary and secondary data sources, selection of resources of research methods and tools);
- 3) **the step of data collection and aggregation** (acquiring of primary and secondary data, data aggregation according to research methods);
- 4) **data analysis and interpretation** (interpretation and analysis of the data acquired according to the selected research methods, including the drawing of conclusions);
- 5) **the development and verification of the continuous curriculum development approach and curriculum design as its integral part.**

Information and data collection and aggregation step has been divided into seven steps together forming the assessment of knowledge and skills required in the tourism industry and the evaluation of the compliance of professional competence indicators under development by the curricula of higher education institutions with the requirements of the labour market (Fig. 3.1).

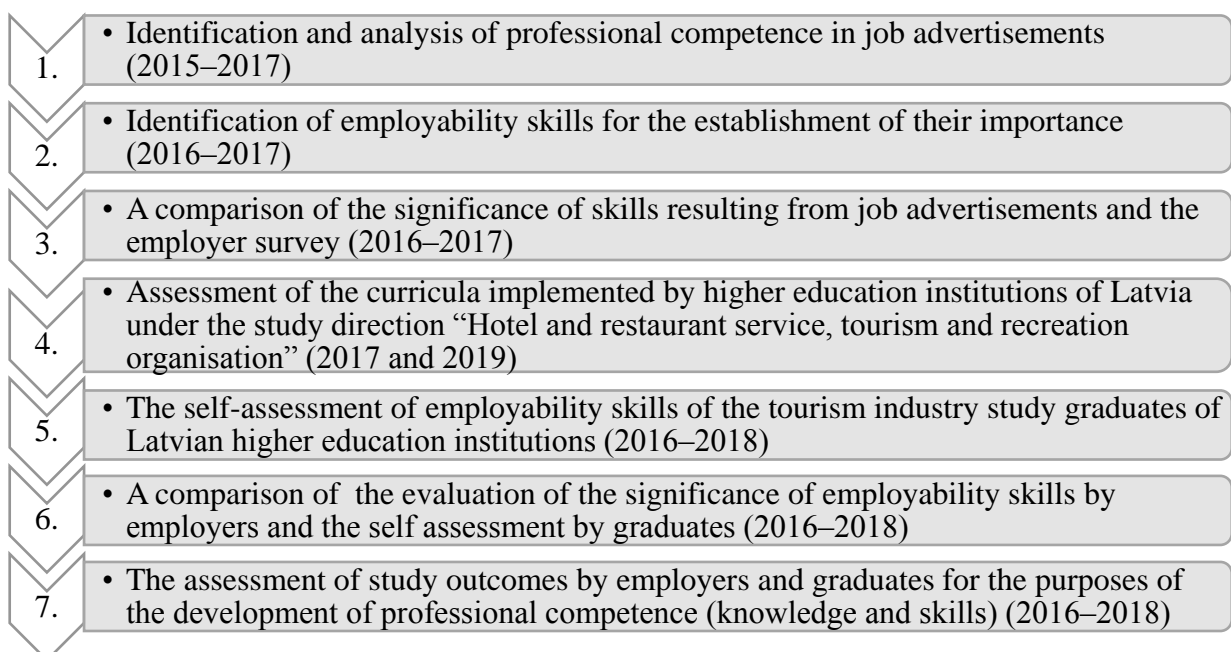


Fig. 3.1. Empirical research scheme.

**Step 1** involved data collection to evaluate professional competences required in the industry from portal *www.cv.lv* for 444 job advertisements under the category of Tourism/Hotels/Catering.

**Step 2** involved a survey of the tourism industry company managers operating in Latvia resulting in information on the significance of specific employability skills. A detailed survey on employability skills provides a better understanding of the significance of individual skills, thus providing more diverse information and an opportunity for drawing credible conclusions regarding the demands of employers on employability skills. The significance of employability skills has been analysed across 67 skills, which were divided into the following pre-defined skill categories: communication skills (14 skills), teamworking (6 skills), problem-resolving skills (8 skills), the skill of displaying initiative and courage (7 skills), planning and organisational skills (12 skills), self-management skills (5 skills), learning skills (9 skills), technological skills (6 skills). The division has been formed by adapting the Australian national employability skill definition (Employability skills for the future, Skills framework, 2002), which the author considered as the most thorough one.

The research employed random selection by interviewing randomly selected employers/companies for each of the industry sectors analysed. Altogether, data from 268 employers have been analysed.

**Step 3** involved a comparison of skills put forward in job advertisements and the skills emphasised in the survey of employers. For hypothesis verification, the survey data were verified employing Fischer  $\phi$  criterion.

**Step 4** involved collecting and analysing the data necessary for the assessment of curricula of Latvian higher education institutions under the direction “Hotel and restaurant service, tourism and recreation organisation”. It consisted of two parts.

1. An analysis of knowledge, skills and competences to be obtained at Latvian tourism-related higher education study programmes was performed in 2017. It involved qualitative content analysis of a self-assessment report and characteristics of specific curricula under the study direction “Hotel and restaurant service, tourism and recreation organisation” was performed.
2. A qualitative content analysis of a joint opinion of commissions involved in the assessment of accredited curricula included in the study direction was performed in 2019. Its objective was to assess if the existing system in Latvian higher education institutions envisages the engagement of employers in articulating and reviewing of study outcomes.

The self-assessment of graduates’ employability skill performance (**Step 5**) was conducted by surveying graduates of the respective study programmes of Latvian higher education institutions. The objective of the survey was to assess the performance of employability skills by graduates themselves for each of the 67 skills assessed by the employers. The results served as a basis for providing a qualitative assessment of the groups of skills. 276 graduates were surveyed who completed the questionnaire either face-to-face or electronically.

**Step 6** involved producing a comparison of the assessment of the significance of employability skills by employers and the self-assessment by graduates. The comparison was performed by employing the Mann–Whitney *U* test, which provides for a comparison of the differences between two independent groups if a dependent variable is measured on the ordinal scale (Arhipova, Bāliņa, 2006, 177). The IPA method with the median-based middle line was employed for the importance/performance analysis. This made it possible to reflect visually the comparison of the significance and the performance, placing each skill in its respective square.

**Step 7** involved the assessment of results for competence (knowledge and skills) with the engagement of employers and graduates by first applying the Mann–Whitney *U* test.

To obtain a higher scientific quality for the establishment of professional competence and the assessment of higher education institutions' curricula, thus improving the diversity and substantiation of the research report, the author used research triangulation – the triangulation of data and methods.

1. Data sources have been triangulated determining the professional competence required in the tourism industry. Job advertisements, data of the employer survey and interviews with employers have been analysed.
2. Triangulation of methods was applied for both establishing the professional competence (document analysis, a survey, interviews) and for assessing the curricula of higher education institutions of Latvia (document analysis, a survey and interviews).

### **3.3. Knowledge and Skills Required in the Tourism Industry According to Employers' Opinion**

The chapter further provides a comparative assessment of the comprehensive needs of the tourism industry (demand) and curricula of higher education institutions (supply). According to the empirical research design elaborated in Chapter 3.2, the assessment was performed in seven research steps. This reflects the most significant outcomes of each step.

The first step involved analysing the texts of job advertisements. All knowledge and skills were analysed according to each of the tourism industry sectors addressed in the Thesis, furthermore: for each group of indicators – for knowledge and skills separately, as well as by providing a comparison of both indicator groups. The content analysis of 444 job advertisements included in the overall analysis leads to a conclusion that employers in all the tourism industry sectors prefer skills over knowledge in their potential employees. A comparison of knowledge and skill proportions in job advertisements was performed using a binominal test the results of which revealed that with a 95 % of probability job advertisements mentioned generic or employability skills more often than knowledge. While the demand for professional skills and knowledge is equal, the employability skills are mentioned considerably more frequently. 70.5 % of the advertisements did not request knowledge at all.

The second step involved a survey of employers, where the significance of employability skills was measured across 67 skills, divided into 8 groups of skills. The answers of 268

respondents were analysed in total. The internal reliability result acquired by employing Cronbach's alpha test is higher than 0.9, which testifies of a high degree of coherence among the responses ( $\alpha = 0.960$ ). The results of Kolmogorov-Smirnov test revealed that with 95 % of probability the distribution of responses in the employer group in general and in the skills groups do not correspond to a normal empirical division ( $p = 0.00 < 0.05$ ). Performing an in-depth analysis of the significance of employability skills in the tourism industry, one can conclude that employers rate the skills in all groups as either highly important or important. The lowest very important evaluation has been allocated to technological skills (36 %). Further studies revealed that the significance of 22 employability skills was not affected by employment in a specific tourism industry sector.

The third step involving the application of Fischer  $\phi$  criterion test to analyse the data led to a conclusion that the demands of employers to the skills of employees were higher compared to the skillset defined as required in job advertisements. This attests that there are no uniform requirements at all stages of employment – the initial requirement by employers at the time of recruitment is lower compared to the demands later during the actual employment, which can create a discrepancy between the skills required in the labour market and what skills are being offered.

### **3.4. The Analysis of Curricula of the Study Direction “Hotel and Restaurant Service, Tourism and Recreation Organisation”**

The 4th step of the empirical study involved qualitative analysis of the self-assessment report of the study direction of Latvian higher education “Hotel and restaurant service, tourism and recreation organisation” including the characteristic indicators of its curricula. The keywords were searched according to the components of professional competence established in the industry research (first and second step) – knowledge, professional and employability skills. The chapters of the study direction self-assessment reports and characteristics of curricula dealing with the objective and expected outcomes were analysed in full while in the part dealing with tasks the author singled out only those parts of the text, which were directly concerned with the development of the competence of students. The results acquired lead to a conclusion that the Latvian tourism industry-related curricula only partially offer an opportunity to acquire knowledge and develop skills demanded by the industry. The self-assessment reports analysed reveal that knowledge in management and strategic management is the most frequently acquired areas in higher education institutions. This is in line with a fact that six study programmes have been developed according to the company and institution manager occupational standard. The analysis of the opportunities for skill development in Latvian higher education institutions leads to a conclusion that all curricula develop communication skills, teamworking, the skills of resolving problematic situations and planning and organising skills. Less than a half (44 %) of curricula include an opportunity to develop skills related to initiative and courage and 56 % of curricula include the development of self-management skills. At the same time, only one curriculum offers the

development of technological skills, which is in contrast with the views of scholars on the significance of this skill group.

This step involved the production of analysis of thematic documents – curricula assessment reports. Its goal was to evaluate the engagement of the industry employers in designing and developing curricula. It reveals that one cannot claim that the needs of the industry labour market are being taken into an account in planning and implementing the development of study directions. According to the quantitative content analysis conducted, none of the higher education institutions has assessed the topical needs of the tourism labour market.

### **3.5. The Self-Assessment of Employability Skills of the Tourism Industry Study Graduates of Latvian Higher Education Institutions**

The 5th step involved conducting the assessment of the employability skill performance of graduates, which was performed in Latvia for the first time. It revealed that at the time of the survey, similarly to other EU countries and internationally, a part of Latvian graduates (30.1 %) worked at companies unrelated to the tourism industry. Moreover, 11 % of the graduates had never worked in the tourism industry.

The graduates' self-assessment analysis shows that graduates provide the highest evaluation to the following skills: the skill of listening and comprehension (average assessment 5.41), the skill of reading individually (5.38), the skill of working individually and in a group (5.28), as well as two skills from the learning group – the skill of being open to new ideas and methods (5.21) and preparedness to invest time and effort in acquiring new skills (5.23). The lowest rated skill was the use of mathematical knowledge for resolving problems (3.75).

A study conducted by employing the methods of descriptive statistics reveals that only 48.2 % of all graduates of the tourism industry study programmes of Latvia completely agreed or agreed that knowledge and skills acquired as part of the higher education curricula were sufficient for professional activities. In turn, 25 % of respondents noted that they disagreed or completely disagreed with an assertion that knowledge and skills acquired during the studies were sufficient for performing the required tasks. This shows that the contents of curricula and the manner of their implementation do not fully provide for the development of professional competence, therefore for the graduate's competitiveness in the labour market.

### **3.6. A Comparison of the Significance of Employability Skills and the Performance of Graduates**

According to the methodological description, to assess if the opinion of employers regarding the significance of skills coincides with the graduates' self-assessment of their employability skills, a comparison of opinions of 268 employers and 276 graduates was performed. The comparison was made by employing the Mann–Whitney *U* test, which provides for comparing the differences between two independent groups if the dependent

variable is measured on an ordinal scale. The test was selected based on a previous study of data acquired from the employers' and graduates' surveys where the reliability was calculated by employing Cronbach's alpha test and the empirical distribution with Kolmogorov-Smirnov test ( $p = 0.000 < 0.05$ ), which showed that overall, with a 95 % of probability, the distribution of replies for both company employees and graduates does not comply with a normal empirical distribution ( $p = 0.000 < 0.05$ ).

Employers, with a 95 % of probability, have assessed the importance of nine skills in the Communication skills group significantly higher than graduates have assessed their performance in this skillset. The most significant differences between the average ranks for both groups of respondents were established for the following skills: the skills of speaking clearly and directly ( $df = 137.97$ ); the skill of convincing ( $df = 134.19$ ); the skill of understanding the needs of clients ( $df = 108.93$ ).

Employers, with a 95 % of probability, rate all the skills of the Teamwork skills group higher than graduates ( $p < 0.05$ ). However, the maximum difference between the average ranks in this group is not as high as in the Communication skills group.

Employers rated higher seven out of nine skills analysed in the skill group Skills of resolving problematic situations.

In the group of skills Initiative and courage, employers, with a 95 % of probability, rated six skills higher than graduates ( $p < 0.05$ ). The most significant differences were identified in the assessment of the skill transforming ideas into action ( $df = 97.70$ ) and the skill of developing a strategic, creative and long-term vision ( $df = 70.84$ ), while the smallest difference was observed for the skill of creating various options, opportunities for choice ( $df = 20.38$ ). Employers rated the skill of adapting to new situations highest of all in this group, but the difference for this skill is statistically insignificant.

Employers rated higher 10 skills in the group of skills Planning and organisational skills with statistically significant results. The most significant difference was identified for the following skills: 1) the ability to act in various situations ( $df = 110.02$ ); 2) the skill of adapting to the existing resources to cope under various conditions ( $df = 110.70$ ).

Assessing the group of skills Self-management skills employers have evaluated 3 skills significantly higher ( $p < 0.05$ ) than graduates, but the most significant difference was for the skill of assuming responsibility ( $df = 119.86$ ).

At the same time, only two skills of the group of skills Learning skills produced a statistically significant assessment. The assessment of employers of both skills is lower than the assessment of graduates.

The assessment by employers of two skills in the group Technological skills is statistically significantly higher than the one provided by graduates. The differences between the other five skills cannot be viewed as statistically significant.

Therefore, it can be concluded that there exists a non-compliance between the assessment of employees regarding the necessary employability skills and the assessment of the graduates' performance of skills since the assessment of 48 skills out of 67 included in the study (71.6 %) produced statistically significant differences. In 64 % of cases (43 skills), the skill assessment by employers is statistically considerably significant, but the assessment of



graduates' performance is higher only in 7.5 % of cases (5 skills). It points to insufficient development of employability skills in higher education curricula.

A comparison of the significance of employability skills and performance conducted by employing the IPA methods reveals that the development of 12 skills must be particularly addressed during the study process. The 12 skills located in quadrant D are less important according to the employers, while the graduates evaluated them as sufficiently well-developed. It should be noted that five skills in this quadrant are from the group Learning skills.

## **4. THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE TOURISM INDUSTRY CURRICULA FOR ENHANCING PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCE**

According to the hypothesis put forward in the Doctoral Thesis, the inclusion of additional components in the curriculum design, if designed and developed further, by applying the continuous development approach promotes a diverse development of the professional competence of students in line with the requirements of the tourism industry labour market. This chapter is devoted to the development of the tourism industry higher education curricula developed by the author and the subsequent verification of the research rigour of its novelty.

The curriculum development worked out by the author consists of:

- 1) the **approaches to continuous curricula development**;
- 2) the curriculum **design** forming the second segment of the approach;
- 3) the **planning and implementation scheme** of additional components included in the curriculum design – extracurricular activities and the industry cooperation programme.

### **4.1. The Continuous Development Approach of Tourism Industry Curricula for Enhancing Professional Competence**

To decrease the existing gap between the needs of the tourism industry and the offer of higher education institutions it is necessary to examine the topical professional competence required in the industry and design curricula enabling students to develop the defined competence as part of the study process. For this purpose, the author proposes a novelty – a systemic, structured and consecutive approach of continuous curricula development for enhancing professional competence required in the industry and working out a curriculum design where the basic components of curricula would be complemented with additional activities and the industry cooperation programme activities. A broadened approach to curriculum provides students with a possibility to develop professional competence required in the tourism industry more substantively and diversely.

The continuous curricula development approach has been viewed holistically and it is based on a systemic, structured and consecutive approach envisaging mutual interconnectedness. The approach has been organised in segments, where each segment has a defined objective.

A detailed continuous curricula development approach, divided into four segments (reflected in green), showing the results for each segment (in orange), is reflected in Fig. 4.1.

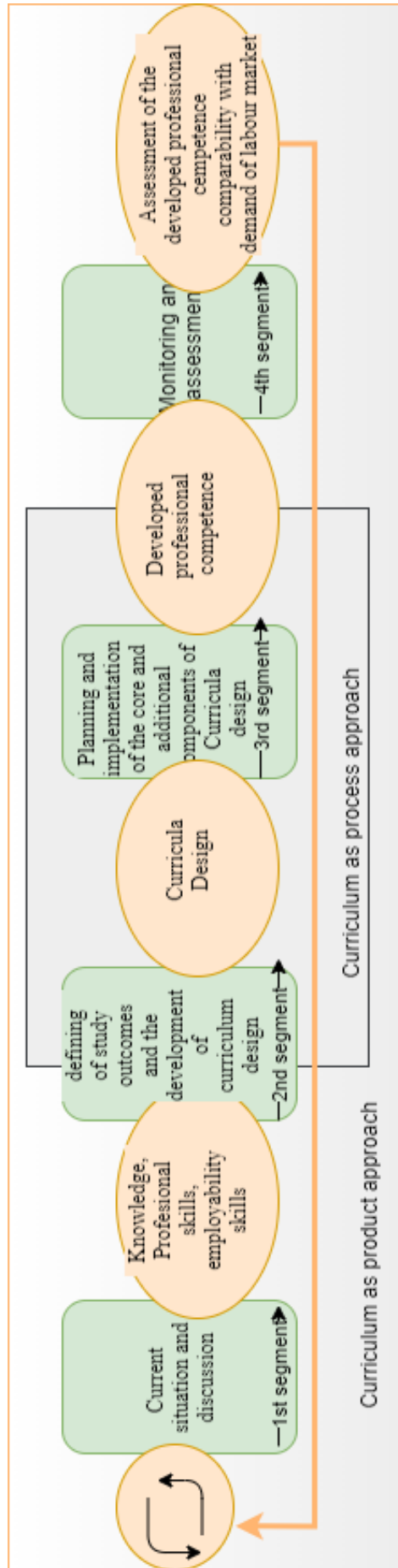


Fig. 4.1. The continuous curricula development approach.

**First segment – Situation analysis and discussion** – knowledge, professional skills and employability skills required in the industry have been defined as the key result. The created list of knowledge and skills forming the topical professional competence in the tourism industry stands as the basis of curriculum objectives and the expected study outcomes.

Defining knowledge, professional and employability skills, which a graduate of a study programme will be obliged to have a good command of, takes into account the topical knowledge and skills required in the tourism industry labour market. During the process of establishing them, one must take into account the views of commercial agents of the tourism industry sectors and experts on the current needs of the industry and the tendencies in the development of tourism in the region (country, Europe, internationally). The necessity to base curricula not only on the already developed and approved occupational standards is determined by the fact that due to the impact of globalisation, knowledge and skills required in the industry change rapidly, whereas the implementation of any changes in documents requires a longer period.

The result of the **second segment: defining of study outcomes and the development of curriculum design**, is study outcomes defined based on knowledge, professional and employability skills required in the industry, which were established during the previous stage. The assessment of the necessity for developing professional competence as the expected outcome of studies is followed by elaboration of curriculum design. The objective and essence of curriculum design developed by the author is explained in depth in Section 4.2.

In the **third segment – Planning and organisation of the implementation of basic and additional components of curriculum design** – involves establishing and implementation of specific actions for planning and organising the implementation of the curriculum design developed during the previous stage. The main outcome of this stage is a study process in compliance with the development of topical professional competence. Implementation of any studies involves ensuring that a student can reach the defined expected study outcomes (de Bruijn, 2016). Therefore, the results of this segment must provide for the development of a system and processes, which enables attaining the study outcomes defined in the second segment. Thus, this stage involves organisation of planning and implementation of the basis of curriculum design and its additional components.

The **fourth segment** involves **monitoring and assessment** to establish if the expected outcome has been attained. The main outcome in this segment is the assessment of the compliance of the professional competence developed with the needs of the industry. It involves establishing if all the components of the curriculum design have been developed and implemented in a manner, which makes it possible for students to reach the study outcomes defined. The assessment forms a feedback opportunity for employers in the tourism industry and other stakeholders.

## 4.2. Curricula Design for the Development of Professional Competence

The objective of studies is to provide an opportunity for the students of the tourism industry higher education study programmes to develop topical professional competence in a diverse and integrated manner resulting in increasing their employability. The author believes that reaching this objective requires broadening and diversification of the ways of teaching and learning. Therefore, by broadening the notion of a curriculum and based on the views of various scholars analysed in Chapter 2, the author proposes the introduction of the notion curriculum design. The author defines that **curriculum design is a concept, which involves a study objective, expected study outcomes defined and basic components required to attain them** (per learning and teaching activities the basic principles of assessment) **and additional components** (following teaching and learning activities).

By including managed additional components in the curriculum, in addition to the basic curricula components such as study courses and modules, internships and state examination, a student is provided with an opportunity to develop his/her professional competence and the capacity of acquiring knowledge and improving skills regardless of the previous educational experience.

The curriculum design (Fig. 4.2) developed by the author is formed by the following components.

- Study objective and expected study outcomes based on knowledge, skills and competences defined in the 1st segment of the curriculum development approach by systematising, summarising and prioritising them following the requirements of regulatory enactments and the needs of the labour market.
- The basic component – a curriculum in its narrow meaning formed by its basic components (study courses, state examination, and internships) with teaching and learning activities and the developed basic assessment principles and system.
- Additional components:
  - additional study activities consisting of those activities, which following the theoretical aspects addressed in Chapter 2.2, involve only teaching and learning activities providing students with opportunities for additional development of their competence;
  - industry cooperation programme, which involves a broad spectrum of cooperation with the industry experts and employers. This segment also deals only with teaching and learning activities.
- Integrated activities, which represent newly created integrated activities. These activities can be created by integrating various components of curriculum design except for state examination. For instance, the following components can be integrated: 1) several study courses resulting in a more comprehensive study module; 2) a tourism industry company or a destination the evaluation of which as well as its development opportunities elaborated are integrated into a study course; 3) extracurricular activities integrated with the activities involving industry experts, etc.

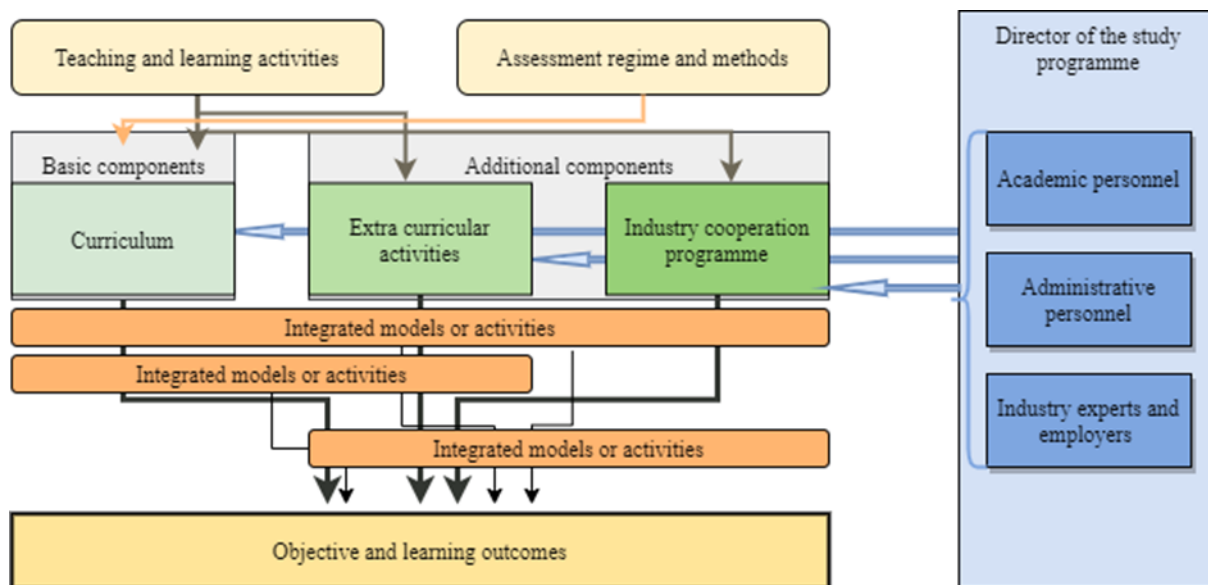


Fig. 4.2. Curriculum design for the development of professional competence.

For curricula management, mutual interconnectedness and responsibilities, as well as the stakeholders involved in planning, implementation and supervision, have all been indicated in the developed curriculum design.

### **Planning and implementation of additional components of curriculum design**

According to the expected result envisaged in the 2nd segment of curriculum development approach – the creation of curriculum design and the implementation of the components of curriculum design envisaged in the 3rd segment, the author has worked out a pattern for introduction and implementation of additional components.

Planning, organisation and implementation of additional components is the most significant aspect for attaining the objective. The approach developed by the author is a recommendatory approach based on the studies of literature, and higher education institutions can apply the approach in full or just some of its stages.

According to Fig. 4.3, the key elements of the planning stage are:

- creation of activity groups, which, in line with the overall objective of curricula design and the study outcomes defined, would provide the best means of acquiring additional knowledge and developing skills;
- defining (specifying) the expected results for each activity group;
- establishing a value coefficient of each activity group, which reflects the possible contribution of each group in the knowledge acquisition or skills development ( $k > 1$ );
- setting a minimum value acquirable to consider that a student has acquired additional knowledge or developed additional skills;
- planning of specific activities for each activity group.

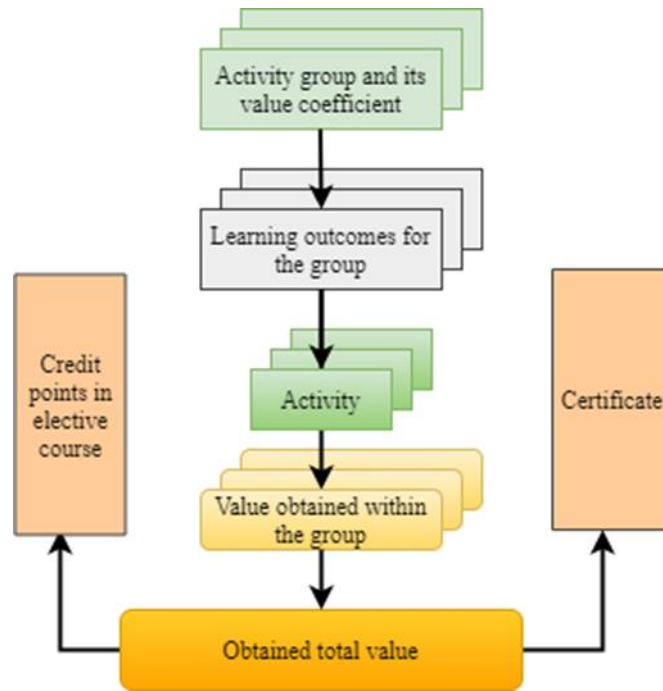


Fig. 4.3. The pattern of planning and implementation of extracurricular activities or the activities of the cooperation programme with the industry.

The activity groups and the events included in them are planned by the head of a programme together with the creation of curriculum design. The inclusion of a sufficient yet not excessive number of activities in each of the activity groups represents a significant challenge. The bigger the number of activities, the more it complicates regular acquisition of data. It concerns also the activities included in the industry cooperation programme.

As stated above, the assessment of the development of students' professional competence is based on an assumption that participation in a specific activity to a defined extent develops knowledge and skills of a particular group.

The construction of a formula providing for a mathematical calculation of the value of the participation of students in extracurricular activities and the participation value in the industry cooperation programme is provided further in the text (4.1). By summarising both values acquired one can assess the value of the additional knowledge and skills acquired by a student (4.2).

The value of the participation of students in extracurricular activities is calculated according to Formula (4.1):

$$S_p = k_a \sum_{i=1}^n a_i + k_b \sum_{i=1}^n b_i + \dots + k_z \sum_{i=1}^n z_i, \quad (4.1)$$

where  $S_p$  – the value for student participation in additional activities;

$k_a, k_b, k_z$  – value coefficient allocated for each group of activities, which designate the significance of an activity group in acquiring knowledge or developing skills (per provisions of the extracurricular activity programme);

$a, b, \dots, z$  – a specific extracurricular activity comprising several activities;

$i$  – the number of activities a student has participated.

The value of the participation of a student in the activities of the industry cooperation programme is calculated similarly.

The next step for calculating the participation value of a student in each of the components of extracurricular activities involves summing up of both values acquired, thus obtaining the total value. To estimate if a student has gained additional knowledge or developed his/her skills, one must compare the value a student has acquired with the minimum acquirable value.

$$S = S_p + S_n \geq M, \quad (4.2)$$

where  $S_p$  – the value of student participation in extracurricular activities;

$S_n$  – the assessment of student participation in the industry cooperation programme;

$S$  – the overall assessment of a student;

$M$  – the minimum value acquirable for receiving a positive assessment as established in curriculum design.

To consider that a student has acquired in-depth knowledge required in the industry and has developed his/her skills, the assessment acquired must be higher or equal to the minimum evaluation established during the planning stage. According to higher education institution regulations, the assessment acquired by a student can be converted either 1) into acquired credit points in optional study courses or 2) into a certificate recognised and approved by the industry.

The developed curriculum design, which, according to the defined objective and expected study outcomes, is formed by a curriculum in its narrow understanding, extracurricular activities and the industry cooperation programme is in full compliance with the EDGE model reviewed earlier (see Chapter 2.2). A comparison of the developed components with EDGE, reveals that by engaging in extracurricular activities and the industry cooperation programme students can additionally develop their generic skills and emotional intelligence and acquire a diverse professional experience.

### **4.3. Characteristics of the Research Rigour Criteria**

The chapter provides characteristics of the research rigour criteria of the study. The characteristics has been performed for four scientific rigour criteria – truth-value, applicability, consistency, and neutrality (Mārtinsone *et al.*, 2016, 103).

The research quality strengthened by data triangulation and methods triangulation makes one conclude that the elaborated continuous curriculum development approach and its design as a part of it facilitates systemic designing or developing of curricula to provide students with an opportunity to raise their professional competence required in the tourism industry.



Table 4.1

## Characteristics of the Research Rigour Criteria

Research rigour criteria	Characteristics
Truth-value	The internal validity of the quantitative part of the research is characterised by the conclusions drawn, which are based on 1) random selections employed (of employers ( $N = 279$ ) and of graduates ( $N = 277$ ) by analysing data with a 95 % of probability (5 % margin error), 2) in the selection of documents by employing documents created for a single goal have been made publicly available and contain sufficient information in terms of volume and contents.
	The credibility of qualitative research is characterised by the selection criteria of experts and the neutrality of the interviews conducted.
Applicability	The external validity is characterised by 1) survey selections, which encompass graduates of higher education institutions of Latvia and employers in the tourism industry of Latvia; 2) the analysis of advertisements published on the web portal <i>www.cv.lv</i> ; 3) the assessment of curricula implemented by higher education institutions of Latvia in the study direction “Hotel and restaurant service, tourism and recreation organisation”; and 4) the analysis of reports by the national accreditation experts of Latvia.
	The transferability is characterised by the results of expert assessment acquired by employing individual, quantitatively structured interviews with programme directors and interviews with employers.
Consistency	The characterisation of reliability is based on the educational traditions and the sustainability and stability of study programmes established in normative acts as well as on the relative stability of the labour market.
	The dependability is characterised by the written records of the research methods employed.
Neutrality	is characterised by 1) the objectivity of the data acquired: a) a proportional selection of the tourism industry sector employers; b) the selection of graduates of all the tourism industry study programmes of Latvia; c) the selection of advertisements from the web portal (unique advertisements within a time-span of a year); d) publicly available self-assessments of the study direction of Latvian higher education institutions; e) joint reports of the national accreditation experts, as well as 2) the methods applied to data processing.
	The confirmability is characterised by triangulation of data and methods.

The opinion expressed during programme director interviews regarding the substantive importance and systemic approach of the continued curriculum development approach lead to the following conclusions:

- the developed approach provides for designing or development of curricula in a systemic, structured and consecutive manner;
- the approach reflects the necessity for a continuous curriculum development, which provides for a review and update of the curriculum with knowledge, professional and employability skills in case of establishing an existing non-compliance;
- additional components of the curriculum represent an important aspect for a more diverse development of professional competence;
- mutually complementary participation of all stakeholders – higher education institutions, students and employers in the planning and implementation of the additional components of curriculum design, is highly important;
- monitoring and evaluation of curriculum represent a substantial part of its development wherein to have an objective evaluation of the views of all parties, including graduates, are essential.

The curriculum design developed by the author has been verified by interviewing employers. A total of eleven employers were interviewed – six of them represented accommodation sector companies who also deliver catering services, one interview involved the head of the association of companies offering catering services, and four interviews involved travel agency representatives. Summarising the views expressed one can conclude that generally, the employers of all sectors consider that employability skills are highly important for working in the industry, and they were positive about the possibilities of supplementing curricula with activities developing professional competence, particularly employability skills. Employers stress the importance of communication between a higher education institution and an employer by informing organisations and explaining the competence developed in the framework of additional curriculum design activities. Managers of the industry companies reiterated their interest in employees who would have additionally developed their professional competence by participating in the activities of a higher education institution.

The opinion of experts and employers **confirm the suggested hypothesis**: If additional components are introduced in the curriculum design and they are formed and developed by employing the continuous developments approach, worked out by the author, it would promote a diverse development of students' professional competence as per requirements of the tourism industry labour market.

If additional components are introduced to the curriculum design and they are formed and implemented by employing the designed improvement approach, a diverse development of students' professional competence is promoted following the demand of the tourism industry labour market.

## CONCLUSIONS AND PROPOSALS

The following conclusions were drawn resulting from the research of scientific literature and the empirical research, confirming the hypothesis put forward in the Thesis:

1. The importance of the term **professional competence** has significantly increased since the end of the past century. There exist various definitions and interpretations. Assessing the interpretations of both researchers and various institutions, one can conclude that it is understood as knowledge and skills as well as attitude and values, which as a whole promote effective execution of a specific job. Furthermore, the separation of professional skills and employability skills is highly important in the tourism industry.
2. Analysing the approaches of various authors to the interpretation of knowledge and skills as well as definitions of both terms, one can conclude that there exists a broad variety, particularly in the definition of skills and their categorisation. For scientific and practical purposes skills are most often divided into two groups – **professional** (specialised) and **employability** skills.
3. **Employability skills** are a type of skills required for the employability of persons and success at work regardless of an industry or a company, but the importance of which is determined by the labour market of the specific industry.
4. There are two approaches to the definition of **curriculum** in the scientific literature – the narrow or technical one and the broad interpretation. The narrow interpretation understands it as an enumeration of study course, while the broad interpretation also involves the study outcomes of the curriculum as well as the aspects of teaching and assessment. For the denomination of the broad interpretation of the curriculum, the term **curriculum design** is being applied.
5. The notion of the curriculum of higher education institutions has not been defined in the regulatory enactments of the Republic of Latvia. Therefore, there exists an interpretation of the application of this notion. Section 55 of the Law on Higher Education Institutions includes a set of regulations establishing the form and contents of study programmes but does not provide its definition.
6. Given the existence of various interpretations of curricula and their respective models, the **outcomes-based approach** still is the most frequently applied term internationally. It envisages the necessity to bring curricula closer to the needs of the labour market. The basis of this approach is **constructive alignment approach** envisaging an interconnection between the defined expected outcomes of the curriculum and the results of students after graduation.
7. The participation of students in extracurricular activities raises their professional competence, thus also increasing their employability. In practice, extracurricular activities are implemented as an addition to the formal curriculum.
8. In line with the diversity of the tourism industry, the map of professions included in the structure of the tourism industry of Latvia encompasses 21 professions. Three of them correspond to the 6th LQF Level, but none corresponds to the 7th LQF level. At

the same time, the tourism industry qualification structure includes both the 6th and 7th LQF qualification level characteristics. The curricula included in the study direction “Hotel and restaurant service, tourism and recreation organisation” have been designed following four different professional standards with two of the standards not being included in the map of professions of the tourism industry structure. Several curricula have been designed without complying with any professional standard. This marks the existing non-compliance between the industry needs, the established requirements regarding the development of a professional study programme, and the actual situation in Latvian tourism industry higher education.

9. There are several countries (the United Kingdom, Belgium, Finland, etc.) which have introduced guidelines for some industries or sectoral groups regarding the expected outcomes, but without a professional standard set, according to which higher education institutions would design their curricula.
10. After conducting a comprehensive assessment of the requirements of the tourism industry employers to the potential workforce, analysing 444 unique job advertisements, one can argue with 95 % of probability, that in the labour market skills are preferred over knowledge. Employability skills are requested more often than professional skills.
11. The implementation of a detailed evaluation of the importance of employability skills in the tourism industry, conducted in Latvia for the first time, shows that their importance among various sectors of the industry differs for 22 out of 76 skills. In 71 % of cases, no significant differences among the tourism industry sectors were identified. This means that their importance can be attributed to the industry as a whole.
12. The tourism industry curricula of Latvian higher education institutions are only in partial compliance with the needs of the industry labour market as attested by the assessment of the study programme objectives and expected outcomes. An insufficient examination of the needs of the labour market and the insufficient engagement of employers in designing curricula is one of the reasons for this situation. An analysis of the joint expert reports (none of the curricula assessment reports of higher education institutions mentions a developed pattern of learning the opinion of employers) points to this factor.
13. The survey reveals that 26 % of all graduates of the tourism industry studies work in positions, which correspond to the 6th LQF level. Altogether 69 % of respondents work in the industry (in positions corresponding to various LQF levels). This shows the interdisciplinary nature of the studies resulting in a situation when graduates can also successfully work in other industries.
14. Less than a half (48.2 %) of graduates surveyed think that knowledge acquired during their studies and skills developed are completely sufficient for professional activity. 25 % of all graduates currently employed in the industry believe that the knowledge and skills acquired are not sufficient for performing their jobs.

15. The self-assessment of employability skill performance of the graduates of the tourism industry higher education programmes, conducted in Latvia for the first time, reveals that graduates give the lowest ratings to their skills of speaking clearly and directly, the skill of convincing, the skill of applying various strategies to resolving problems, and the skill of assuming responsibility.
16. The self-assessment of the graduates of the tourism industry higher education programmes and the opinion of employers in the industry points to a discrepancy between the needs of employers and the skills of higher education institution graduates. It is apparent that the assessment substantially differs in 71.6 % of cases. In 64 % of cases out of 67 skills analysed, the assessment of the importance of skills by employers has been higher, while the rating of graduates has been higher only in 5 cases. This shows the discrepancy between the needs of employers in the industry and the actual skills of graduates.
17. Taking into account the role of education as an intangible asset, the developed approach and curriculum design as its integral part represents a comprehensive concept of developing knowledge, skills and competences required by the industry and managed by higher education institutions. In addition to science and innovation, curricula created in line with the needs of the labour market form the value of higher education institutions, which, in turn, is determined by the satisfaction of all stakeholders, including the relevant sectors, with higher education product.
18. The continuous curricula development worked out by the author is recognised as a systemic approach encompassing the complete curriculum implementation cycle and targeted at promoting the development of the topical competence required in the industry.
19. Curricula design verified by employing the triangulation method leads to a conclusion that employers in the tourism industry are positive about the development of additional employability skills as part of curricula of higher education institutions and point out that it raises graduates' competitiveness in the labour market.

Based on the theoretical findings and conclusions, the author has developed **proposals**, which have been divided into 3 parts: 1) proposals for the development of the tourism industry higher education; 2) proposals in the context of continuous curriculum development approach; and 3) proposals in the context of curriculum design.

### **Proposals for the development of the tourism industry higher education**

1. To reduce the varied interpretation of the essence of curriculum and promote a joint understanding at a national level, policy-makers in the area of education should define two basic interrelated terms in higher education – **curriculum**, understanding it as its basic components of study contents – an enumeration of study courses, internships and state examination, and **curriculum design** understanding it as a concept involving a study objective, defined expected study outcomes and basic and additional components required for achieving them.

2. Analysing the views reflected in scientific literature and the notions applied in the documents of international institutions and their explanations as well as based on the opinion of the Terminology Commission of the Academy of Science of Latvia expressed in its letter, the author proposes to introduce a term in the Latvian language “*nodarbinātību veicinošās prasmes*” (employability skills) understood as generic skills required for employability and success at work regardless of industry or company.
3. To apply the English language term **extracurricular activities** in Latvian not with a meaning of “outside”, but as **additional study activities**, which expresses the essence of the activities involved more precisely.
4. Based on international higher education guidelines, including European guidelines, and by examining the existing practice in several European countries as well as taking into account the diversity of the tourism industry, it is recommended to evaluate the necessity and possibilities for designing the tourism industry higher education curricula in Latvia per professional competence required in the industry’s labour market. This requires conducting a comprehensive study of the industry needs involving an assessment of the knowledge, professional skills, and employability skills required. Due to the internationalisation of higher education and labour mobility, this study must be conducted not only at the national level but in the overall European area. Therefore, it is recommended that professional organisations of the industry sectors perform a comprehensive review of knowledge, professional and employability skills required in the industry in general and in its sectors.
5. Professional organisations of the industry sectors are also recommended to initiate the supplement to the map of professions included in the structure of the tourism industry, by including the 6th and 7th LQF level professions, thus ensuring that the higher education institutions of Latvia implement their curricula in conformity with the needs of the industry labour market.

### **Proposals in the context of the continuous curriculum development approach**

It is recommended that the directors of study programmes apply the continuous curricula development approach worked out by the author to the process of developing a new curriculum or elaborating the existing ones. For this purpose, higher education institutions engaged in the implementation of the tourism industry curricula or their organisational units should do the following:

- a) establish that curricula development processes are addressed continuously;
- b) introduce a way for examining and assessing topical needs of the industry in the context of higher education involving fixed intervals, a responsible official or an organisational unit, and the methodology required;
- c) develop a curriculum based on the defined study outcomes envisaging introduction of additional components in the curriculum supplementing the existing basic ones and the conditions for their implementation;
- d) integrate curricula as a component of the process approach – the participation of a student in the study process. This envisages that a student not only participates in the

study process established by the higher education institution but develops his/her activities or participates in activities worked out by others;

- e) perform regular monitoring and assessment of the compliance of curriculum with the needs of the labour market; this requires working out methodology and establishing responsible persons or organisational units;
- f) include the self-assessment of employability skills of graduates in the monitoring methodology, which is essential to assess if the development of employability skills have been sufficiently and adequately included in curriculum design.

### **Proposals in the context of curriculum design**

Higher education institutions implementing the tourism industry curricula or their organisational units should introduce curriculum design in addition to the basic curriculum components – study courses, internships, and state examinations, thus providing students with an opportunity to develop professional competence employing extracurricular and the industry cooperation programme activities. This requires:

- 1) earmarking of resources for planning, organisation and implementation of extracurricular and industry cooperation programme activities;
- 2) introduction of a system of evaluating students' participation in extracurricular and industry cooperation programme activities based on a pattern developed for planning and implementation of such activities, converting the assessment acquired into credit points for elective study courses or issuing a document (certificate) attesting that professional competence has been developed in-depth;
- 3) working out a plan for extracurricular and industry cooperation programme activities for a study period establishing activity groups, defining their study outcomes and their value coefficient, simultaneously establishing a minimum number of points to be acquired in the programme;
- 4) working out a plan for extracurricular and industry cooperation programme activities for an academic year envisaging specific activities for each group;
- 5) creating a system for accounting the points acquired by students;
- 6) communicate with all the parties engaged on the opportunity of developing additional professional competence as part of additional components of curricula, thus raising the understanding of their importance and additionally generating the interest of students;
- 7) performing monitoring of the participation of all students in extracurricular and the industry cooperation programme activities in a longer period to assess their usefulness. Monitoring should include the assessment of both graduates and employers.

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