

# THEORETICAL ASPECTS OF THE BUILDING PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCES OF THE HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY SPECIALISTS

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***Abstract.** The theoretical aspects of the concept of the professional competences of future hospitality industry specialists are examined and analysed in the paper. The study is carried out within the framework of development of the doctoral thesis “Interrelation of the professional competence theories and the practice in the hospitality industry”. The components and constituent elements of the professional competences of the hospitality industry specialists are defined in the research; the concepts “professional independence” and “professional mobility” are defined.*

***Keywords:** competence, hospitality industry specialist, professional competence, professional independence, professional mobility.*

## Introduction

Topicality of the research topic on the professional competence-building of the hospitality industry specialists in the educational institutions is related with a shift in the education paradigms, which specifies the transition of the study process to a new level of the human pedagogy (Strode, 2010), emphasizing the involvement, cooperation, identification of the human values by means of self-reflection, learning the general and vocational skills, respecting the student's role and tasks in studying at the professionally oriented special programs and during their professional practice. According to the SWOT analysis on the Latvian Tourism Marketing Strategy 2010-2015 carried out by the Tourism Development Agency in 2010, the lack of skilled labour force in the tourism and hospitality, as well as the low level of the professional qualifications are mentioned as one of the potential threats. (Tourism Development Agency, 2010)

The article aims to explore the theoretical aspects of the term of professional competence-building of the future hospitality specialists.

### **The theoretical aspects of the term of the professional competence**

Not merely the amount of knowledge, but as well the ability to solve professional tasks and to prove oneself in unusual situations is evaluated highly in the labour market. Thus, a competitive specialist is a person who possesses the necessary knowledge, practical skills and creative thinking. Theoretical grounds of social and economic interrelation between the labour market and

higher professional education system are provided by a number of authors (Egliņš-Eglītis, 2012; Avots, 2012; Bikse, 2012; Blumenstyk, 2005; Hazans, 2005).

The research literature analysis in the field (Aleksandrou & Field, 2005; Hargreaves, 2004; Garleja, 2006; Rychen & Salganik, 2001; Boone & Kurtz, 1992) reveals that the concept “competence” is interpreted considerably diverse. The development of the competence term has several stages. Rapid changes in the society and in education make it necessary to expand the content of the term and to adapt the nature of the competence to modern requirements. “Competence” is a multi-component concept, which could be defined by different interpretations. The content of the concept is often described and associated with the nouns “adaptability”, “effectiveness”, “efficiency”, “achievement”, “understanding”, “success”, “quality” and so on.

The following statements are mostly found in the research literature devoted to the competence:

- Competences are the qualities of the personality that are expressed in the system of knowledge, skills, experience, and values (Rychen & Tiana, 2004; Boyatzis, 1982);
- Competence is a set of knowledge, skills and attitudes obtained by an individual in the process of learning the profession, acquiring experience, working and developing knowledge and skills in various professional trainings or by self-education; as well, the competence is related with the abilities of the individual, his/ her psychological and social qualities in the particular social environment (Rauhvargers, 2014; Youngmi, 2011; Bagdan, 2013).

In turn, there are other authors dividing the competences into the following groups:

- Professional (subject) competences. These are the competences that are defined in the research literature as a readiness and ability to solve tasks and problems purposefully and systematically on the base of the subject knowledge and skills, including evaluation of the results (Chen et al., 2008; Hoffman, 1999; McLegan, 1997); other researchers (Youngmi, 2011) define competences as professional approaches, skills, technologies and methods that are obtained during the studies;
- Base (basic) competences (Evans et al., 2014). Ability to perform analysis and synthesis, to be a leader, to adapt, to solve tasks, to work both in team and individually – are considered to be basic competences. In other words, these are competences that should be possessed by all individuals disregarding their professional affiliation.

Thus, the competences are the qualities due to which a person can achieve high effectiveness in a particular field of activities.

### **Professional competence-building of the hospitality industry specialists**

According to the several authors (Zopiatis & Constanti, 2012; Kozar et al., 2005; Balode, 2010), due to the changes in the society, the scope of professionally significant and required competences of a competitive hospitality industry specialist have expanded reasonably. Affected by the contemporary requirements, the role of the personal factor grows, often becoming the dominant in the professional career of the specialist. The general preparation, ability to learn and professional independence plays an important role.

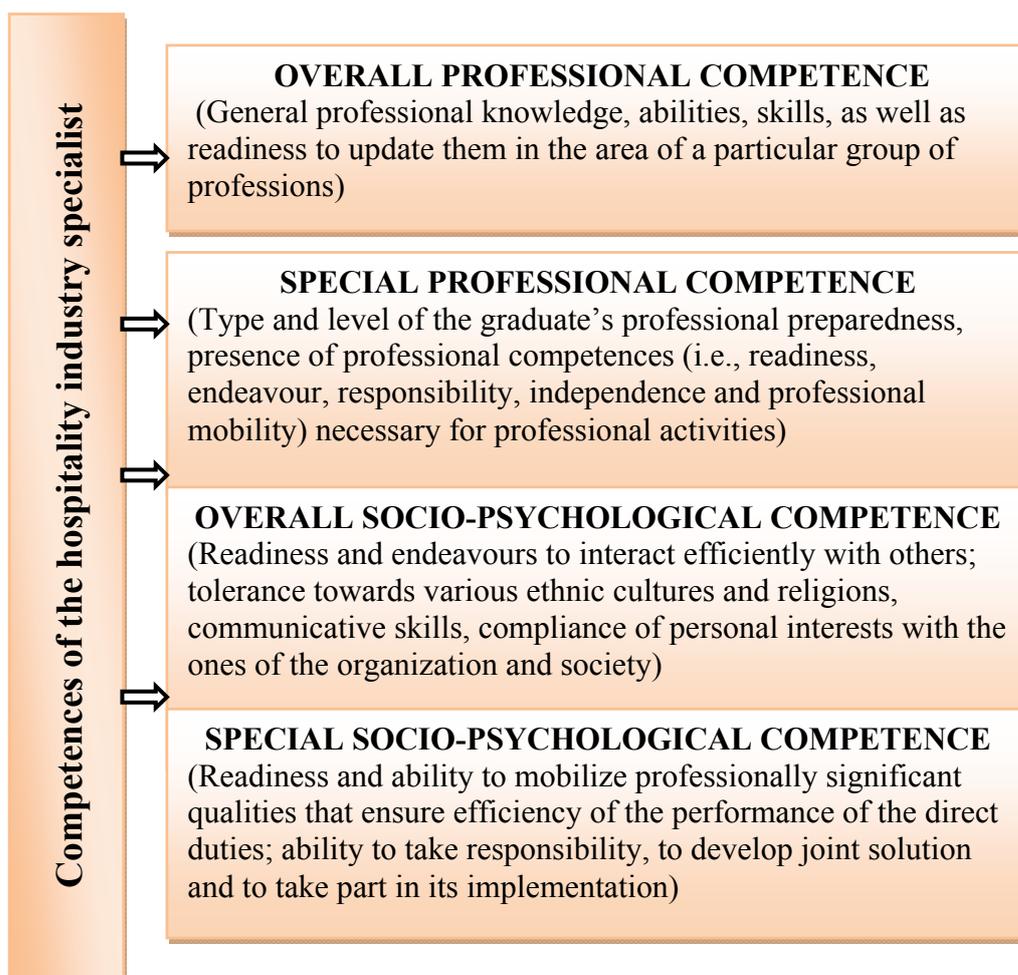
Merely professional knowledge and skills of the hospitality industry specialist cannot be considered as the main criterion for the identification of his/her qualification level. Development of professional and socially significant qualities depends mainly on the individual's psychological characteristics and abilities: direct and indirect attention, skills to perceive, judge, talk, communicate, learn, work, as well as a possibility to organize all of that independently. Therefore, the existence (or lack) of professional motivation plays an important role in the attainment of the professional skills and abilities.

Currently, there is no scientific consensus on the structure of the concept of "competence". For example, the structure of the concept of a competent specialist is based on the content characteristics, which brings together the concept of the professional readiness (i.e., preparedness for the professional activities) with the concept of the professional competence (Cardy & Selvarajan, 2006; Gupta et al., 2007):

- 1) Motivating component – readiness to demonstrate a competence;
- 2) Cognitive component – having a good command of the knowledge comprised in the competence;
- 3) Behavioural component – experience of demonstration the competence in different situations (standard and non-standard);
- 4) Semantic aspect of the competence values;
- 5) Emotional and will regulation of the process.

In each industry, the competences are divided into common (base) and special (professional) competences, i.e., those relevant to the particular specialty. For example, the competence structure of the hospitality industry specialist (Kong, 2015; Long, 2015; Cheng, 2005) could be divided into 4 groups: overall professional; special professional; overall socio-psychological; and special socio-psychological (See: Figure 1).

Summarizing the above mentioned, it can be concluded that the professional competence include the rights and the responsibility for decision-making; communication skills; quick adaptation skills; independency; professional mobility.



**Figure 1. Constituent elements of the professional competence of the hospitality industry specialist** (created by the author I.Silicka)

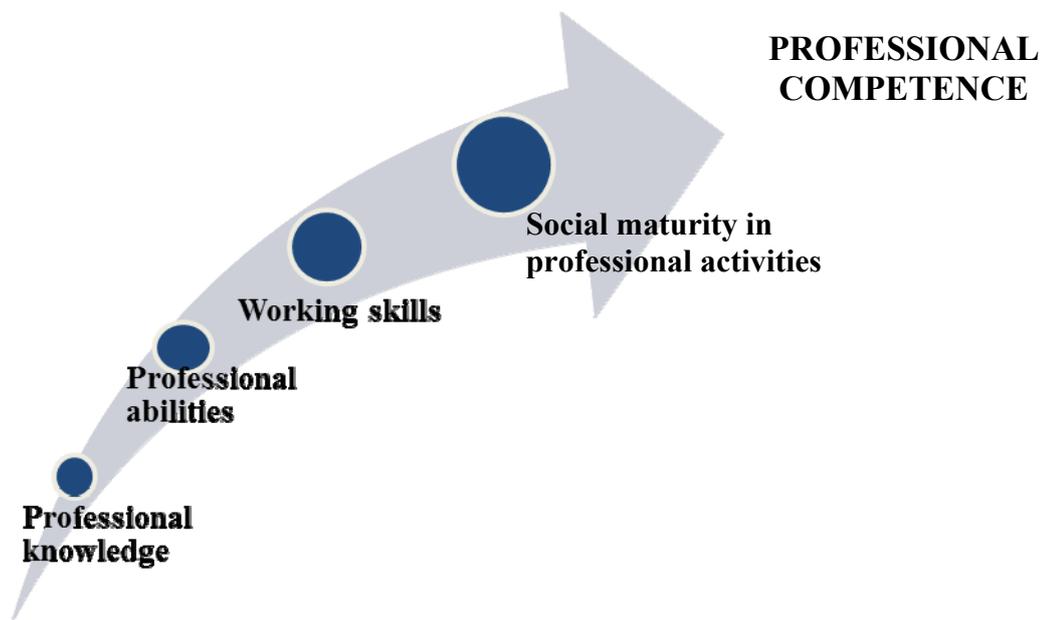
In the process of formation of a competitive specialist, considering the professional competences, the following main functions are recognized: possibility to determine the social demand for young professionals; to ensure the conditions for the student's personal qualities development in the education process, overcoming their alienation from education; to apply the knowledge, skills and different types of activities in complex and targeted way; to develop the student's experience of subject-based learning which is necessary for practical preparedness in relation to the real objects; to discover the content of the study subjects and education areas as the inter-subject elements of the education system; to combine theoretical and practical knowledge to be used in solution of the specific professional tasks; to understand the properties of the overall quality of preparing the students and to implement a complex and socially significant monitoring over person being educated.

Higher professional education is focused on the individual's professional, cultural and intellectual development; its aim is to prepare qualified specialists in all the main areas of public activities in accordance with the needs of society and the state, as well as the need of an individual for widening and deepening of

education. Thus, the professional competence of the hospitality industry specialist is the individual's readiness and ability to effectively perform his/her work.

In the result of the research, which is carried out within the framework of development of the doctoral thesis "Interrelation of the professional competence theories and the practice in the hospitality industry", it can be concluded that the components of the professional competence are (See: Figure 2):

- Professional knowledge obtained during the study process;
- Working skills and abilities obtained and developed during the process of practical activities;
- Social maturity in professional activities.



**Figure 2. The components of the professional competence** (Created by the author I.Silicka)

Based on the above mentioned, the authors of the article in addition distinguish two more related concepts – “professional independence” and “professional mobility”. The term “professional independence” can be defined as ability for independent analysis and satisfaction of all requests. For instance, for the hospitality industry professionals, it would include an ability to create a menu and, in accordance with it, to choose and to work with the technological equipment and inventory; according to the company's quality of service, to select and to use different table layout techniques necessary for work; to overcome independently all complications in planning and self-monitoring; ability to think technically; to demonstrate activeness and creativity. Professional independence is based on a willingness to perform any action, to take a personal responsibility and to demonstrate an ability to make decisions independently.

In turn, the concept “professional mobility” can be defined as a formation of the thinking of personality and level of the personality development. This concept is more related to the development of an individual’s personal qualities and is manifested in readiness to tackle any production tasks. It is a quest for self-improvement and self-development, an ability to act quickly and flexibly in the light of the situation. Professional mobility also indicates to the ability to learn quickly the technical innovations and new specialties.

The study leads to the conclusion that the professional competence of the hospitality industry specialist reflects as well a particular level of the individual social maturity in professional work, development of the employee’s personality, his/her individuality and self-actualization.

### **Conclusions**

1. The term “competence” as one of the research topics, up to this time, is still debatable. Different sources provide a broad explanation of the term; however, most often, a certain level of professionalism and qualifications are indicated by it. A person possessing a certain level of knowledge, skills and abilities as well as having an ability and willingness to implement all of those in professional work is considered to be competent (Cardy & Selvarajan, 2006; Gupta et al., 2007). Being competent also means that the specialist has an internal motivation to perform professional duties at high-quality, as well as a willingness to develop professional values (Rychen & Tiana, 2004; Boyatzis, 1982).
2. The study carried out within the framework of doctoral research suggests that a competent professional should be mobile and being able to “step outside” the professional frames, he/ she must have a potential for creativity and determination for self-determination, self-improvement and self-actualization. Based on the above mentioned, the authors of the article offer a definition of terms “professional independence” and “professional mobility”, which both are important for building the professional competence of the hospitality industry specialist.
3. Based on the previous experience and research, the constituent elements (overall professional competence, special professional competence, overall socio-psychological competence, special socio-psychological competence) forming the professional competence of the hospitality industry specialist and the components of the professional competence (professional knowledge, professional skills, working skills, social maturity in professional activities) are analysed in the paper.

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