QUALITY ASSURANCE COURSES IN VET (VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING) FOR TOURISM ORGANISED BY THE CENTRE FOR TOURISM TRAINING

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ABSTRACT. **– Quality Assurance Courses in VET (Vocational Education and Training) for Tourism Organised by the Centre for Tourism Training.** The article seeks to give utterance to the findings of the pilot course on quality assurance designed and organised by the Centre for Tourism Training (CTT) as part of the AQUA.TS European Lifelong Learning project.

The CTT has become involved in research and exchange of experience in the field of *quality assurance* driven by the educational policy-related background set out by the European documents and tools, including EQARF, EQAVET, the principles of lifelong learning and adult education. The main theoretic background to the present paper was assured by the European Commission documents regarding quality assurance in VET, while the experience and good practices acquired by the CTT have profoundly marked its quality assurance–oriented policy. Against this background, The Centre for Tourism Training (CTT) of the Faculty of Geography, University Babes-Bolyai, Romania, delivered a pilot training course on *Quality Assurance in VET* during 16 March and 10 April 2015. The training consisted of a theoretical knowledge-building module (16.03. 2015 - 27.03. 2015) and a practical module (30.03.2015 -10.04.2015), the latter focused on the use of the AQUA.TS TOOLKIT, an IT device aimed at the self-evaluation of the quality of performance of trainers and training providers, whose efficiency was tested during the organised training program.

Keywords: quality assurance, course design, self-evaluation, Aqua.Ts Toolkit, survey results

1. BACKGROUND

Quality assurance systems have become crucial to guarantee effective, usable and sustainable standards in Vocational Education and Training (VET), to enhance the recognition of the learning outcomes, the transparency of the qualifications and to foster the mobility of learners, trainers and workers in Europe. In this regard, one of the main objectives of the EU educational policy is to assist national systems in the implementation of common instruments and indicators. In the Copenhagen process, Member States and social partners have defined a series of common tools and principles, among them the *European Quality Assurance Framework for Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET) (*European Council, 2009*).

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Continuing this direction, one of the strategic goals that the Bruges Communiqué on enhanced European Cooperation in Vocational Education and Training for the period 2011-2020 (European Commission, 2010) has established is fostering the excellence, quality and relevance of both initial VET (I-VET) and career-oriented continuing VET (C-VET). The central aspects of this provision are the quality of teachers, trainers and other VET professionals and the labour market relevance, with a view to providing a better match between its needs and the development of knowledge, skills and competences. The document recommends that the curricula should be outcome-oriented, more responsive to the labour market needs, integrate the key competences and should develop appropriate means of assessment.

Seeking to make VET an attractive educational option, the European 2020 strategy emphasizes the major role played by practical activities and of work-based learning. Providing learners with access to appropriate up-to-date technical equipment, teaching materials and infrastructure, with information and communications b (ICT) skills, and encouraging flexible training arrangements have become very important means of promoting VET.

Greater involvement of VET stakeholders is one of the most important transversal objectives of the 2020 VET strategy, which promotes partnerships between social partners, enterprises, education and training providers, employment services, public authorities, research organizations and other relevant stakeholders.

Based on the 2020 VET strategy and on the findings of the 2012 'Education and Training Monitor, the European Commission developed Rethinking Education (European Commission, 2012), a document that outlines several recommendations. The document's main provisions are the following:

- A stronger focus on developing transversal skills and basic skills at all levels, especially entrepreneurial and IT skills, which are mostly needed
- Improving foreign language learning skills
- Building world-class vocational education and training systems
- Increasing the role of work-based learning
- Improving the recognition of qualifications and skills
- A more consistent exploitation of technology, in particular the internet
- Well-trained, motivated and entrepreneurial teachers
- Funding needs to be targeted at maximising the return on investment
- A proper partnership approach, with both public and private funding, aimed at boosting innovation and increasing cooperation between academia and business.

The *Automatic Quality Control Tool System* (AQUA.TS) project aims at raising the awareness of trainers, training providers and stakeholders of the relevance of EQAVET for an effective implementation of quality assurance systems. At the same time, it seeks to supply the providers with an IT device, an automatic quality control toolkit, capable to help them self-evaluate the quality of their training.

From an operational point of view, AQUA.TS is particularly consistent with the Program priority in that it aims to "design concrete guidelines usable by those involved in VET, in particular by training providers." In fact, the project activities develop and test an integrated system for the improvement of training quality in VET through the experimentation of EQAVET indicators and approaches, and yet, focusing on tourism training.

The European partnership is, henceforth, involved in a two-year roadmap whose milestones are:
- designing and experimenting operational criteria for the implementation of EQAVET indicators, sharing the process with target groups and stakeholders, particularly in the field of tourism;
- drafting 'friendly' guidelines, ensuring the usability of criteria, tools and instruments.
- testing the instruments and approaches in real vocational training activities, according to collaborative methodologies and "job shadowing" methods.

The Centre for Tourism Training (CTT) of the Faculty of Geography, University Babes-Bolyai, Romania, delivered a pilot training course on *Quality Assurance in VET (Vocational Education and Training) for Tourism* as part of the AQUAT.TS Lifelong Learning Program during 16 March and 10 April 2015.

2. THE PILOT COURSE ON QUALITY ASSURANCE. PRELIMINARIES TO THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE COURSE PLAN

2.1. Course Design

The pilot course was developed in compliance with the provision of the European Commission. All the educational aspects: (1) the curricula, (2) the target population, (3) the theoretical teaching-learning process, (4) the practice-based activities, (5) the outcomes' assessment and the evaluation methods and criteria, (6) the flexibility of the schedule, (7) the use of professional trainers, and (8) the involvement of the stakeholders – were very consistently and responsibly approached by the CTT organisers.

The training course was designed to cover 80 hours, 40 hours representing theoretical courses and 40 hours accounting for the practical activities focused on the use of the AQUA.TS TOOLKIT, an IT device aimed at the self-evaluation of the quality of performance of trainers and training providers, whose efficiency was tested during the organised training program. It targeted VET providing organisations' managers and staff, VET trainers and teachers, especially those functioning in the tourism sector, representatives of the national authority (The National Authority for Qualifications - ANC), managers of tourism enterprises, academic staff who deliver tourism courses, and, finally, staff members of the Centre for Tourism Training.

The *trainers* were either quality assurance experts (Ms Alexandrina TEODORESCU – senior counsellor, National Authority for Qualification, Ms Adriana ȘERBAN – senior sociologist, Centre for University Development and Quality Management, BBU, Ms Roxana NICULAE, a trainer qualified in QA and Ms Silvia IRIMIEA, a trainer and the project coordinator, editor of two books on VET and QA in Europe).

2.2. Curricula development

The curricula development was a multi-step process, which included VET professionals, tourism employers and managers, beneficiaries, national authorities and stakeholders. The decision of involving all these categories of people was made based on the European provision and on the good practices presented at the European conference on quality on VET, that took place in Brussels, between 17 and 18 January 2013 *EQAVET implementation: "A European goal to be achieved through national approaches" (*European Commission, 2013*).*The partnership of the projects presented at the conference reached to some empirical solutions for the implementation of EQAVET challenges. One of the solutions proposed by for creating a shared culture of quality assurance and improvement in VET is designing of a proper curricular framework, which is developed in terms of needed knowledge, skills and competencies for those who are holding positions in quality management. Also, for the challenge of involving the main stakeholders (and keeping them involved in the process), one of the proposed solution is to implicate them at the very beginning.

Therefore, the steps for developing the curricula were:

1. Gathering data and information on the European and national provision concerning the legal and methodological requirements regarding the certification / accreditation of the course.
2. Studying several professional standards linked with quality assurance in VET, for establishing the needed knowledge, competences and skills.
3. Interviews with representatives of the national authorities.
4. Conducting a focus group with VET providers in tourism, employers and representatives of the national authority.
5. Developing a workshop were the draft of the courses content was presented.

The curriculum addressed major issues in educational quality assurance, starting from a more general perspective on quality and management and ending with the toolkit designed by Dimitra, Greece, for the assessment of the quality assurance performance of trainers and providers.

As compared to the project operational plan, the curriculum of the courses has not been substantially modified. As a result of the entire process, the modification regarded its expansion to include more theoretical issues related to quality assurance, in general, quality assurance at EU level, and, finally, the implementation of the quality assurance policies and strategies in Romania. The trainers insisted on these issues as they considered them necessary for a comprehensive understanding of what quality assurance means. The presentation of the EQAVET indicators received consistent focus, as most of the attendees were unfamiliar with them. Fig.3 includes the revised curriculum in more detail along with the educational materials and supplies used.

The course designers included a basic course on *Basics of the quality management* and *Quality assurance models and standards* for the attendees who were unfamiliar with the notions of *quality* and *quality management.* The next necessary steps in understanding and mastering the management of quality policies were to teach them *The quality of products and services* and then move on to what quality assurance means for

education. An important issue, perhaps second in importance after the adoption and use of the *automatic quality control toolkit*, was analysing and evaluating the level of EQARF implementation in Romanian VET, especially in tourism. Finally, the major purpose of running the pilot courses was to test the toolkit in order to assess its usability and efficiency. In addition, the level of implementation of the European provision regarding the quality assurance in a VET organization was also on the course agenda.

2.3. Expected results

Course planning was accompanied by the estimation of appropriate results. Pursuing the project objectives, the course curriculum was redesigned to incorporate results in terms of knowledge, skills and attitude, which are provided in the table below.

Module	Content	Expected results		
		Knowledge	Skills	Attitude
EQARF for VET	Quality management. Basic points. Quality assurance models and standards The quality of product and the quality of services Quality assurance in education The European Quality Assurance Reference *Framework: Quality Criteria and Indicative Descriptors* The Reference Set of Selected Quality *Indicators for Assessing Quality in VET*	- concepts, their functions, use, and characteristics - the characteristics of quality assurance regarding the products and services. Differences - the content of the European provision regarding the quality assurance in VET	- quality planning - elaborating quality assurance and evaluation instruments - analysing and evaluating the level of implementation of the EQUARF in VET	responsible attitude regarding the quality planning and evaluation - responsible and proactive attitude towards the implementation of the European provision regarding the quality assurance in VET
The implementation of the EQARF for VET	Specific aspects of the quality assurance process in VET for tourism Specific issues for implementing EQARF in VET for Tourism	- the characteristic of the quality assurance in VET for tourism	- elaborating specific quality assurance and evaluation instruments for VET in tourism	- responsible and proactive attitude towards the implementation of the European provision regarding the quality assurance in VET for tourism
The Assistance Toolkit	The utility of the Assistance Toolkit The structure and the functionality of the AQUAT.TS Assistance Toolkit	the structure of the toolkit	providing the appropriate information regarding the implementation of the EQARF in VET organizations	- critical and comprehensive attitude towards the structure and the functionality of the assistance toolkit

Specific national issues	The implementation of the EQARF in VET in Romania The quality assurance system in VET in Romania Specific aspects of the quality assurance system in VET for tourism in Romania	- the content of the Romanian provision regarding the quality assurance in VET, especially in tourism	- analysing and evaluating the level of implementation of the EQARF in Romanian VET, especially in tourism	- responsible and proactive attitude towards the implementation of the EQUARF in Romanian VET, especially in tourism
Testing the Assistance Toolkit	Practical activities of testing the AQUT.TS Assistance Toolkit	the toolkit structure and requirements	using the toolkit in order to evaluate its functionality using the toolkit in order to evaluate the level of implementation of the European provision regarding the quality assurance in a VET organization	- critical and comprehensive attitude towards the structure and the functionality of the assistance toolkit

Fig. 1. Expected results of the AQUA.TS *Quality Assurance* course

The results were estimated in realistic and achievable terms taking into consideration the objective, the attendees' cognitive capacity and their interest in acquiring thorough knowledge and skills which could conduct them to working out their own quality assurance policy and strategies in a fast and friendly way.

3. IMPLEMENTATION

The **teaching methods** used by the trainers throughout the face-to-face classes were: power point presentations and interactive methods, including case studies, job shadowing, debates, simulation and problem solving. The participants took part in the discussions and activities actively. The discussed issues turned into springboards for further discussions regarding situations which arose in the participants' organizations. The teaching methods which were used created a friendly and inspiring atmosphere for the participants, who enjoyed the presentations and the discussions.

The participants received (1) the course support materials for each theoretical activity, (2) the AQUA.TS Guidelines and Toolkit in both Romanian and English, (3) an updated reference and a bibliography list. The trainers made themselves available for further tuition, discussions and clarifications both during the class time and outside the classes.

The **practical component** (lasting for 40 hrs) was approached in a more flexible way, allowing the participants to carry out individual activities. The purpose was to enable them to become acquainted with the toolkit through individual study and practice. The practical activity followed the trainer's presentations and explanations.

The **evaluation** of the attendees was geared towards the evaluation of their competences regarding the elaboration of quality assurance plans and assessment instruments. Thus, the attendees were requested to complete the following tasks:

- To carry out a SWOT analysis of the quality assurance activity developed in their own organization
- To design a strategic plan for the implementation of one of the ten EQARF indicators (at their own choice) in their organization
- To fill in the toolkit and provide comments on the toolkit, mentioning 3 strengths and 3 weakness thereof.

The tasks were duly fulfilled by most participants who provided evidence of:

- their understanding of the quality assurance principles and
- ability to design a quality assurance strategy for their organization.

The attendees were distributed feedback questionnaires which they handed in before they received their attendance certificates. The questionnaires were processed by the quality assurance expert and their results are provided in subchapter 4.2. of the present study. The course attendees were awarded attendance certificates, whose template was designed by the project lead organization, Superficie 8 SRL, Italy, and which comprised the logos of all project partners.

After the completion of the pilot course, the examination and interpretation of the results, and, as a result of the acquired training experience in the field of *quality assurance*, the team of experts involved in the project, decided to accredit the course nationally on behalf of the Centre for Tourism Training. It will submit the curriculum along with all due documents to the National Authority for Qualifications (ANC) and will apply for the accreditation of the course, which will, thus, enrich the CTT training offer.

4. ASSESSMENT OF THE COURSE

The assessment of the training course on Quality Assurance developed under the aegis of the AQUA.TS project relied on a few forms of which we mention and discuss two: (1) the validation protocol and (2) the feedback questionnaires distributed to the attendees. Both were designed by the quality assurance expert of the project, Ms Adriana Şerban, senior sociologist and quality assurance expert of the Babeş-Bolyai University.

4.1. Validation protocol

A first form of assessment of the training courses was through the *validation protocol*. Its usefulness consists in its reflecting the achieved results in terms of acquired *knowledge, competences* and *skills*.

Module	Teaching contents	(Please evaluate them in comparison with expected results) Achieved results in terms of			Used evaluation methods
		Knowledge (to know)	Skills (to do)	Attitude (behaviours)	
I. Introduction in management	A brief introduction to management Definitions and approaches to management Functions of management Strategic management and operational management	The content of concepts, their functions, utility, and characteristics	To identify the functions, and the utility of strategic planning and of operational planning and the relationship between this two forms of planning.	Responsible and proactive attitude towards the strategic and operational planning of the activity.	Test - exercises on the examples delivered by the trainer.
	Methods, techniques and instruments used in management Vision, mission, scope, objectives Criteria, standards and indicators	The content of concepts, their functions, utility, and characteristics	To identify and to use different methods and techniques of management. To use, to elaborate and to evaluate management instruments.	Critical and comprehensive attitude towards the structure and the functionality of different management methods, techniques and instruments.	Test - exercises on the examples delivered by the trainer. Group or individual project: elaborating a SWOT analysis and a strategic plan.
II. Quality management	Brief historical overview, approaches and definitions of Quality assurance Strategic and operational quality management	The main theories and their role in the QA history	To use planning, implementation and control techniques	Responsible and proactive attitude towards the strategic and operational QM.	Debate, group and individual exercises
	Organizational culture Product and services quality Internal audit and performance indicators	The content of concepts, their functions, utility, and characteristics	To develop audit techniques, according to their specific organizational needs	Comprehensive attitude towards employee engagement in quality goals	Debate, group and individual exercises
	Quality assurance in education	The specific content of concepts regarding the quality assurance in education (especially in VET), their functions, utility, and characteristics	Quality planning and evaluation in education, especially in VET. Elaborating quality assurance and evaluation instruments for education area, specially for VET.	Responsible, critical, comprehensive and proactive attitude regarding quality planning and evaluation in education.	Test - exercises on the examples delivered by the trainer. Group or individual project: elaborating a SWOT analysis and a strategic plan.

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Module	Teaching contents	(Please evaluate them in comparison with expected results) Achieved results in terms of			Used evaluation methods
		Knowledge (to know)	Skills (to do)	Attitude (behaviours)	
III. Quality Assurance in VET	The European Qualification Framework EQARF guidelines, criteria and indicators – an overview	The content of the European provisions regarding quality assurance in VET	To understand, analyse, interpret the provisions of EQARF, their importance, for training providers, trainers, stakeholders, etc	Pro-active attitude regarding awareness about the European recommendations (EQAVET) and their relevance for organisational activities	Question-answer, debate
	Specific aspects of the quality assurance process in VET for tourism Specific issues for implementing EQARF in VET for tourism	Specific issues that characterise VET in tourism and which contribute to the elaboration of QA strategies The adaptation of QA strategies to particular contexts of use	To understand, analyse contexts of use and adapt the QA framework indicators to the peculiarities of the context, specific needs etc	Responsible, substantial involvement in the design, implementation and evaluation of QA strategies	Summary of the discussions Drawing up a flow chart for the specific activities
III. Quality Assurance in VET	The Romanian Qualification Framework Specific issues for implementing EQARF in VET in Romania The Romanian National Quality Assurance System for VET and 2020 objectives	The content of the Romanian provision regarding the quality assurance in VET	Analysing and evaluating the level of implementation of the EQUARF in Romanian VET and the 2020 objectives	Responsible, critical and proactive attitude towards the implementation of the EQUARF in Romanian VET	Test-exercises (trainer asked examples from the participants' organisations)
	The utility of an automatic quality control toolkit for the VET activity The structure and the functionality of the AQUAT.TS Assistance Toolkit – theoretical aspects	The structure of the toolkit	Providing the appropriate information regarding the implementation of the EQARF in VET organizations.	Critical and comprehensive attitude towards the structure and the functionality of the assistance toolkit	Simulation-debate regarding the implementation of the EQAVET indicators 1 and 2.

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Module	Teaching contents	(Please evaluate them in comparison with expected results) Achieved results in terms of			Used evaluation methods
		Knowledge (to know)	Skills (to do)	Attitude (behaviours)	
IV. AQUA.TS TOOLKIT	Testing the AQUAT.TS Assistance Toolkit (practical activities)	The toolkit structure and requirements	Evaluating the functionality of the toolkit. Using the toolkit in order to evaluate the level of implementation of the European provision regarding the quality assurance in a VET organization.	Responsible attitude towards the data required for the completion of the assistance toolkit.	Filling in the toolkit EXCEL model.

Fig. 2. Validation protocol for the training course on Quality Assurance (LLP AQUA.TS)

As it may have been understood from Fig.4, the assessment of the participants was carried out by means of exercises, individual project activities, debates and simulations. In comparison with the expected results, the reached performances of the participants can be qualified as *good* (overall average of 3.68 on a five scale steps, where 1 means *unsatisfactory* and 5 means *very good)*. These results were calculated based on a points-scale developed by the examiner. The assessment of the participants' performances included the following tasks.

Task 1
Elaborate a SWOT analysis, mainly regarding the quality assurance activity in your organisation.
Goal: to evaluate the participants' knowledge and competences regarding
- the elaboration and use of a SWOT analysis, as an evaluation/self-evaluation instrument of quality management;
- the content and the significance of the four elements of the SWOT analysis (Strong points, Weak points, Opportunities, Threats).

Task 2
Elaborate a strategic plan for the implementation of one of the three EQAF indicators (at your own choice) in your work institution/organisation.
Goal: to evaluate the participants' knowledge and competences regarding
- the steps needed for the implemention of an EQARF indicator;
- the elaboration and use of a strategic plan as an evaluation/self-evaluation instrument of quality strategy;
- the elaboration of SMART objectives;
- the use of a correct quantification of objectives and its importance for the evaluation/self-evaluation process.

Task 3

Fill in the EXCEL model of AQUATS TOOLKIT for your institution/organization. Please indicate your comments and/or concerns at the end of row cells.

Goal: to evaluate the participants' knowledge, competences and attitudes of

- a critical and comprehensive thinking regarding the content and the requirements of the toolkit, as an evaluation/self-evaluation instrument of the quality assurance system;

- a responsible and proactive attitude regarding the implementation of the EQARF indicators in the participants' institutions/organisations.

Task 4

Please indicate 3– 5 strong points and 3 – 5 weak points of the AQUATS TOOLKIT regarding its use for the evaluation and/or self-assessment of the quality assurance system in your organisation.

The most frequent **strong points** and **weak points** that the training participants have mentioned are presented below.

Strong points	Weak points
✓ Facilitates the integration of the European principles and recommendations, and it is appropriate to the European and national objectives.	✓ Some items are not applicable to any type of VET organization; especially to smaller, newly established VET organisations or newly initiated/accredited programs this approach is not totally appropriate.
✓ Creates a structured framework for quality assurance in VET.	✓ The *learners' employability* indicator is a little too high at the moment because this is a sensitive situation on the present unstable labour market. Therefore, presently, more emphasis should be put on the quality of teaching and on evaluating indicators.
✓ Encourages the development of a result-based research and analysis at the system level.	
✓ Enhances an in-depth monitoring and analysis of the quality assurance process in VET organizations.	✓ Some items are difficult to be implemented in some countries because of the gaps inherent in the systems, and not due to the shortcomings inherent to organizations.
✓ Tackles, in a detailed manner, multiple issues and situations of the quality assurance process.	✓ Some questions are unclear, confusing, or do not specify the requirements.
✓ Enhances a clear and specific definition of the concepts and categories of quality assurance in VET.	✓ Some items have not enough answering options to cover all possibilities.
✓ Highlights the obligations of every VET-involved person, especially the socio-economic responsibilities of the management and decision-making staff.	✓ Some answering options are unclear or do not specify the option.
✓ Provides support for the identification and analysis of the trainers'/ students'/ employers' expectations.	✓ The answering options are irrelevant for some items.
✓ Contributes to the identification of possible partnerships in VET.	✓ In general, it is an elaborate, branching out and difficult to use assessment tool.
✓ Provides support and information for further development of training programs.	

4.2. The results of the feedback questionnaires

The assessment of the activity was based on a satisfaction questionnaire, which was elaborated by a quality assurance expert in education (Ms. Adriana ŞERBAN) and was applied to the participants after the final evaluation. In addition, during the training module, free discussions and interviews with the participants were initiated by Ms. Silvia Irimiea and Ms. Adriana Şerban.

The participants' level of satisfaction with the training courses was assessed through a questionnaire-based survey. The participants were asked to evaluate, on a five steps scale (from 1 – Very displeased to 5 – Very pleased), their level of satisfaction with 21 issues regarding the structure and the content of the courses, the teaching and the evaluation methods used by the trainers, the learning resources, the working atmosphere and the learning experience as a whole. They were also asked to mention three aspects that pleased them most and three aspects which unpleased them. At the end of the questionnaire, they had the opportunity to express other opinions.

All the attendees who completed the questionnaire (the 18 participants who received the attendance certificates -ten women and eight men) were pleased or very pleased with all the 21 presented issues. The most well appreciated aspects of the courses were *The general work atmosphere* and *The usefulness of the examples presented in the theoretical presentations* (average 4.83). They were also very pleased especially with *The newsworthiness of the presented information* and with *The acquired theoretical knowledge* (average 4.78).

At the other end of the scale, *The usefulness of individual work tasks*, *The specificity of the acquired information regarding QA in VET for tourism*, and *The assessment methods* were situated (average 4.39, meaning that the participants were pleased but not very pleased with).

The satisfaction regarding the participation in the course, in general was very highly scored by the participants (4.72). All the participants except one brought up the aspects that they found *positive*. The most frequently mentioned issues were: the professionalism of the trainers and the general, work atmosphere. Half of the learners (9) also noted some aspects of the training that, according to their opinion, could have been improved, such as, in particular, the poor advertising campaign and the low number of attracted participants.

The final questionnaire box was used by six persons. They expressed their appreciation for the initiative of organising QA courses in VET and of presenting the EQARF criteria and indicators. Some of them underlined their intention to attend other training courses organised by CTT in the future.

These results show that the more appreciated aspects were those related to the trainers' professionalism and to the content of the curricula.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Making VET a more attractive and inclusive learning option is one of the main goals of the European education system. This purpose requires significant efforts for improving the quality of the provided services, in all its aspects - the curricula, the target population, the theoretical teaching-learning process, the practice-based activities, the

assessment of outcomes and the evaluation methods and criteria, the use of the information and communications technology (ICT), the flexibility of the schedule, the professional trainers, and the involvement of stakeholders. In this regard, the EU educational authorities, the Member States and social partners have defined a series of common tools and principles, among them the *European Quality Assurance Framework for Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET) (*European Council, 2009*)*. The EQAVET system is not a self-sufficient, closed system, but can integrate other quality assurance models with a set of criteria and indicators contributing not only to a shared vision but also to a better operational connection between different national educational systems.

The *Automatic Quality Control Tool System* (AQUA.TS) project aims at raising the awareness of trainers, training providers and stakeholders of the relevance of EQAVET for an effective implementation of quality assurance systems and seeks to supply the providers with an IT device, an automatic quality control toolkit, capable to help them self-evaluate the quality of their training. The pilot courses delivered by the Centre for Tourism Training (CTT), Faculty of Geography, Babeş-Bolyai University between 16 March and 10 April 2015 as part of the AQUA.TS European Lifelong Learning project was developed closely following the EU provisions.

The training course was designed to cover 80 hours, 40 hours representing theoretical courses and 40 hours accounting for the practical activities which were approached in a very flexible manner, allowing the participants to be more responsible for their own achievements, including the use of information and communications technology (ICT). The curricula design and development stages consisted in a multi-steps process, involving all stakeholder categories – beneficiaries, VET providers in tourism, employers, trainers and representatives of the national authority. The evaluation of the participants' activity was outcome-based, namely it mainly rested on the evaluation of the knowledge, competences and skills needed for the implementation of a quality assurance process and of the EQAVET criteria and indicators, which were all compared with the developed or expected results.

The results of the survey regarding the attendees' level of satisfaction with various aspects of the training course indicate a high level of the trainers' professionalism, and an appropriate content which included very current, useful and applicable information, presented in an attractive way. This feedback allows us to conclude that the responsible and creative use of the local provisions and resources in a European context and manner can be successful and very beneficial for all those involved.

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