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The Routledge Companion to International Hospitality Management

Edited by Marco A. Gardini, Michael C. Ottenbacher, and
Markus Schuckert

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A REGIONAL APPROACH TO ATTRACTING AND RETAINING EMPLOYEES

A Chance for Small and Medium-sized Hotels?

Celine Chang and Katrin Eberhardt

Introduction

Employers in the hospitality industry increasingly face challenges when it comes to attracting and retaining skilled employees. There are multiple reasons that contribute to this phenomenon: Skills shortages due to the demographic change, incongruence between changes in work-related values in society and the work characteristics of the industry, decrease of the number of people who decide to pursue vocational training, and the trend for higher education, to name but a few key trends (cf. Barron, 2008; bsw, 2014; Ameln and Wimmer, 2016; Immerschitt and Stumpf, 2019). In addition, the majority of employers are small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), most of which are not well known outside of their region. They find it hard to compete with national and international hotel chains that increasingly expand into local markets (Henschel et al., 2018; Warnecke, 2019). In more rural destinations, SMEs suffer even more from the migration of staff to urban areas (FMEAE, 2013). Consequently, SMEs struggle to fill open positions or are forced to hire staff that lack critical skills and qualifications needed for their respective jobs. Thus, existing staff members have to work overtime, which is a driver to leave the industry entirely (Bieger et al., 2005).

It becomes clear that the competitive capability is increasingly depending on the Human Resource (HR) dimension (Bohne, 2018). The dilemma for SMEs is that they usually do not have a strategic HR management (HRM) in place. They lack the expertise and the resources for strategic HRM (bsw, 2014). Most do not employ HR professionals. However, SMEs are forced to find solutions in the wake of skills shortage in order to be able to operate their businesses. Besides investing in their HRM, we propose that SMEs join efforts and share costs by forming regional HR alliances.

This case study presents key results of EU-funded research on this topic in three tourism destinations in Austria and Bavaria (Germany). Based on the example of health tourism, our objective was to develop a concept for a regional HR approach. The research looks into current HR challenges, the strategies that are being pursued, as well as the extent to which collaboration with other organizations already exists. Besides empirical results, the chapter presents a concept for a regional HR approach that includes three levels of action, i.e., the enterprise or employer level, the regional level, and the cross-regional level. It argues that a regional HR approach based on an

HR alliance of employers is a promising strategy that not only helps attract potential employees but also enables SMEs to professionalize their HRM through sharing knowledge and costs.

Because the case study focuses on one Austrian and two Bavarian tourism regions close to the Austrian-German border, the following sections on the labor market, HRM, and the situation of SMEs address the situation in both countries; however, international applicability is assumed in similar markets.

The Skilled Labor Situation: The Status Quo

Due to the demographic change, the number of people in the workforce is continuously decreasing. In Germany, since 2013, more people retire than enter the workforce. The labor force potential will shrink from 49 million in 2013 to 38 million in 2060. Until the year 2030, approximately 4 million workers are predicted to be missing in the service industries (Bohne, 2018). Hence, the skilled labor situation in the tourism industry has become tenser in the past years. For instance, it is often impossible to fill job vacancies or to fill them adequately. According to a representative study in Germany, 45% of employers in tourism that have job vacancies cannot fill these positions. In the hospitality industry, every other employer is affected (bsw, 2014). The situation in Austria is similar: 62% of Austrian tourism enterprises say they are affected by the shortage of skilled staff, and three-quarters of the enterprises are currently looking for staff (Kapferer et al., 2018).

The term "skilled" refers to professionals that have completed a formalized vocational training (usually 2–3.5 years) or have a recognized academic qualification (*Fachkräfte*). Austria and Germany have a long-standing tradition of a dual vocational education and training system for apprenticeships, which means that training takes place at two "learning venues" (Deissinger, 2015). One venue is the company that employs the apprentice and provides training on the job throughout the apprenticeship, while the other venue is the part-time vocational school (*Berufsschule*) where the apprentice studies both general and specific subjects related to the vocation. Usually, the apprentice spends either two days at the vocational school and the rest of the week with the company or longer periods at either venue before switching. The collaboration is regulated by law (FMER, 2019) with the regional chambers playing a key role in ensuring that occupational standards are fulfilled (Deissinger, 2015). In Germany, for example, candidates can complete a formal apprenticeship in six vocations in the hospitality area (DEHOGA, 2018a), such as chefs and hotel clerks. The majority of people working in the industry in Austria and Germany are skilled and were trained through this system (IAB, 2018; Schmee and Biehl, 2017).

However, there has been a strong general decline in the number of apprentices in recent years across all industries. This drop has been mainly attributed to the trend for higher education and to the demographic change (Deissinger, 2015). Whereas in 2008, 103,578 apprentices were working in the German hotel and restaurant industry, this number had declined to 52,285 in 2018 (DEHOGA, 2018b). Austria also saw a decline in apprenticeships: the number of apprentices in the hospitality industry dropped from 11,840 in 2011 to 8,905 in 2017 (WKO, 2018). Within the hospitality industry, a large number of apprenticeship positions remain open each year. In Germany, hotel and restaurant jobs are among the top 10 vocations for which most apprenticeship positions remain unfilled. In addition, apprenticeships like chef and hotel clerk have a high dropout rate and a high rate of changes of employers (FMER, 2017). At the same time, the number of study programs in hospitality management at universities in the German-speaking area increases. There are about 4,000 graduates each year (Bohne, 2018). However, not all of them stay in the industry. For example, a survey among alumni of the department with the highest number of students in Tourism and Hospitality in the German-speaking area (Chang, 2018), showed that at the mean age of 31 years, only 34.3% were still working in the industry. The main reasons for leaving the industry were higher salaries and better career development opportunities.

Therefore, in addition to the demographic change and the trend for higher education, employers face the challenge of migration of skilled labor to other industries. This can be attributed to unattractive working conditions and a poor image of the industry for employment (e.g., bsw, 2014; cf. Gardini, 2014). Employers in the tourism industry even consider the latter to be one of the main reasons for their staffing problems (bsw, 2014). The development outlined in this section shows that implementing a comprehensive and strategic HR management has become even more crucial.

Human Resources Management in the Hospitality Industry

Even though the strategic importance of HRM in tourism is widely acknowledged in both the academic debate and among practitioners, it is also widely acknowledged that the industry still lags behind (e.g., Baum, 2007, 2015; Gardini, 2014; Kusluvan et al., 2010). This lag behind seems incomprehensible, given that the positive correlation between staff competence, service quality, and customer satisfaction has been proven many times (cf. Gardini, 2014), and HRM practices link positively to company performance (cf. Madera et al., 2017). Because competent employees are the key to success in the service industry, this is even another rationale to engage in strategic HRM. Many employers in the hospitality industry would agree. In a study conducted among hoteliers and HR managers in Germany (Verlemann et al. 2013), 87% agreed that HRM needs to become more professional in the industry.

It is important, however, to differentiate between large multinational hotel chains and SMEs when looking at the degree of professionalism in HRM. While professional HRM is noticeable in large companies, in SMEs there is hardly any change in that direction. In SMEs, especially in hotels and restaurants, "many things have not changed over the past 20 years – productivity remains stubbornly low, working conditions are poor, and remuneration levels are well below national averages in many countries" (Baum, 2007, p. 1384).

In Germany, 99.9% of the companies in the hospitality industry are SMEs and 90.7% of the employees in the hotel and restaurant industry work in SMEs (FSO, 2018a, 2018b). In Austria, this is true for 99.8% of the companies and 94% of the employees (Austrian Institute for SME Research, 2019). In Germany, 80% of the hotels and restaurants employ ten employees or less (bsw, 2014). This situation is similar in Austria (WKO, 2019). It is thus not surprising that most companies do not have a strategic HRM in place. Eighty-eight percent of the hotels and restaurants are led by the owner who would also be in charge of HR issues. Because such leaders are responsible for a large range of topics and are strongly involved in day-to-day operations, there is little opportunity for strategic reflections (bsw, 2014). Therefore, it is not surprising that most employers do not offer much more to their employees than participation options, consideration of individual requests for work schedule planning, and compensation for overtime (ibid.). The prevalence of HR practices also depends on the size of the company. One example is training/further education. While 84% of the employers with more than 50 employees invest in employee development, only 44% of the small employers with up to five employees do so. Generally, employers do not consider training and further education as overly important, especially in the catering industry (ibid.). This is dangerous, given that training and further education are key factors for employer attractiveness (Lohaus et al., 2013) and employee retention (Qayed Al-Emadi et al., 2015).

An explanation of the lack of interest in investing in cost-intensive HR practices such as training can also be drawn from theory. Ferrary (2015, p. 1008) points out that, from a resource-based view, "human capital resources are related to individual employees and pertain to their knowledge, training, experience, judgment, intelligence, and relationships." Moreover, according to human capital theory, human capital is transferable, which creates a risk for employers when the employee moves to another employer before there was any return in investment. For large companies with a sizeable internal job-market, the investment in transferable HR is justifiable. By investing in HR the firm creates a competitive advantage through building strategic knowledge and by providing job security and other incentives to stay with the employer. For SMEs, in contrast, investing in transferable HR is not attractive: "The small sizes of their internal labor markets do not generate the economy of scale necessary to invest in training, and they do not provide enough job security and career opportunities to attract and retain talented people" (Ferrary, 2015, p. 1012). The question about the reasons and ways SME employers (should) invest in strategic HR under these circumstances thus requires further investigation. Academic literature has not addressed this topic sufficiently yet (ibid.).

In conclusion, most employers in the industry are small. Such companies typically do not employ HR experts (Festing et al., 2013). Instead, the person responsible for HR has several different roles to fulfill, among which HRM is not a priority. HRM tends to be viewed as administrative work (labor laws, payroll, etc.) rather than a strategic management function (ibid.). Issues are rather solved ad hoc. SMEs lack the resources and the knowledge for strategic HRM (Liebhart and Nungesser, 2017) and do not invest in HR development (Panagiotakopoulos, 2011). However, in view of the realities of the labor market which sees more jobs than job seekers, adopting a more professional approach to HRM is critical for SMEs if they want to stay in the market.

A Regional HR Approach Through HR Alliances

The current state of the labor market and HRM in the hospitality industry raises the question of what SMEs can do to find and retain qualified staff. Apart from shifting priorities and investing in their HRM, it makes sense for SMEs to join efforts and to form HR alliances, either on a regional or cross-regional level. In this chapter, we will look into a regional concept, because we argue that such concepts are easier and less costly to implement. In addition, a regional HR alliance enables SMEs to engage in regional employer branding. By "regional employer branding" we understand that principles of employer branding are applied to a whole region. The term "employer branding" usually comprises all activities a company carries out to position itself as a unique and attractive employer among potential and actual employees by communicating their employer brand to specified target groups (e.g., Immerschitt and Stumpf, 2019). The employer brand can be defined as the unique image of a company as an employer (Stotz and Wedel, 2009). Investing in regional employer branding implies establishing an image of the region as a unique place of residence for (potential) employees where it is worthwhile to live and work. Marketing the regional employer brand to potential employees, especially from outside the region, could create a competitive advantage to other regions.

The research presented in this chapter had the objective to conceptualize a regional HR approach for three rural destinations adjacent to the Austrian-German border. This topic, however, is hardly reflected in academic literature. Comprehensive research in both general as well as tourism and hospitality-related literature databases, with approximately 40 different key words, did not yield satisfactory results. The main reasons are that HR literature mainly focuses on the organizational and management perspective (Baum, 2015) and on large, multinational companies (Festing et al., 2013). We found very few sources on HR alliances (other words used in literature are "networks," "cooperation," and "collaboration") and hardly any publications on regional HR approaches.

Generally, HR alliances offer numerous advantages, especially for SMEs. HR alliances can share resources and costs, companies can learn from each other and thus have a high potential for synergies and economies of scale (Festing et al., 2011, 2013). Disadvantages can be the time-consuming set-up and coordination processes, strong dependencies, or the spread of sensible firm data (ibid.). From an employee perspective, HR alliances are beneficial, because they offer more career opportunities and increase job security (Ferrary, 2015). However, in their study of SMEs in

Germany, Festing et al. (2011) reported that only 25% of companies work together with others on HR topics within a network or alliance. In such alliances, SMEs mainly collaborated with other companies (59%), and less with universities, or other public institutions (27%), or firm networks / clusters (14%). There was also evidence that the likelihood to cooperate is higher with larger SMEs. As for the hospitality industry, an early study on family hotel businesses in Austria (Peters and Buhalis, 2004) confirmed that cooperation with other firms was generally low. It showed that family businesses wanted to keep control of the business within the family. However, the study highlighted that the willingness to cooperate correlated positively with the size of the company. In addition, businesses that cooperated with other companies had significantly higher profit growth rates than other companies in the sample. The authors concluded, "family hotels still do not understand their need to collaborate with other firms and to establish long-term partnerships" (Peters and Buhalis, 2004, p. 410).

In his notable conceptual paper, Ferrary (2015) argues that an HR alliance creates value for SMEs by providing them with access to strategic knowledge and sharing human resources. Alliances create an "inter-organizational internal labor market" (p. 1009) from which the employer can source qualified staff. The author conceptualizes the alliance as an entity with two stakeholders, employer-provider and employer-user. The employer-provider is responsible for recruiting, training, and deployment of staff to employer-users that need staff with specific competencies (ibid.). In order for the alliance to work, the individual employee's interests have to be taken into account. The alliance is set up long-term based on a contract that specifies the ways of staff deployment.

However, making such alliances work requires that all partners involved be committed to contributing to the "collaborative venture" (Ferrary, 2015, p. 1014). Employees need to be prepared to be deployed to different employers. The chapter does not discuss, however, how to ensure that these requirements are being met. According to the study, there should not be more than one hotel per geographical region (p. 1020). We assume the author introduces this condition to avoid the increase of competition among local businesses. Another reason might be the fear that private information could be conveyed to other businesses in the same market that might use that information to their advantage. As for the required mobility, the risk is that this model mainly works for a specific group of employees, namely professionals, who are single and have no children (cf. Strack et al., 2018). Generally, the willingness for job mobility has been declining in recent years. In addition, the willingness to relocate for the job varies by country. Employees in Germany and Austria are less mobile than employees in many other countries (Strack et al., 2018).

There are some arguments in favor of establishing HR alliances on a regional level. Regions can be characterized by various criteria, such as geography, homogeneity, culture, social, and political factors. Another key characteristic is the interdependent relationships between stakeholders that are similar to networks (Bachinger and Pechlaner, 2011). In regional networks, geographical proximity allows for face-to-face interaction, and stakeholders are part of a social context that shares a common language, culture, and established structures for interaction. Bachinger and Pechlaner (2011) argue that regional core competencies lie in these social structures, which generate resources in terms of social capital. They point out that inherent to the network is the collective regional knowledge and the building of specific knowledge through interaction of the members network. The members of regional networks are mainly SMEs of various industries, which can reach competitive advantages through their adaptive capabilities, knowledge sharing, and activities to reach a win-win situation for both the individual company and the network (ibid.).

Service providers in tourism destinations usually are part of a regional network that frequently follows a joint tourism strategy, creates joint service offerings or packages along the value chain, and invests in destination marketing coordinated by the respective destination marketing organizations (DMOs). It thus makes sense to conceptualize HR alliances for SMEs on a regional level. For a regional and tourism-specific HR approach to work, it is important to embed it in the regional tourism strategy in order to make sure that suitable activities to attract and retain skilled labor are chosen (FMEAE, 2013). In order to draft a regional HR approach, we propose to consider three dimensions.

1. *The employer level*: Even though HR alliances can take over some HR tasks, each employer still needs to manage their key HR tasks themselves. Therefore, a regional HR approach does not take away the responsibility of employers to reflect on their HR strategy and to invest in specific HR practices. Even if an HR alliance is in place to cover specific HR areas such as training, each company still has to carry out certain tasks in that area (e.g., selecting training participants).
2. *The regional level*: When joining efforts and resources in an HR alliance, tasks, roles, responsibilities, and operating procedures such as membership requirements and financial issues need to be defined. In addition, it needs to be decided whether cooperation should be only for employers of a specific industry or whether it should be cross-sectional. In order to increase the attractiveness of each employer in the alliance and of the alliance itself, HR marketing and even employer branding of the alliance, the industry and the region are questions that need to be addressed.
3. *The cross-regional level*: HR cooperation should be complemented by cross-regional activities. On this level, a wide range of activities can take place, ranging from sourcing in a specific area abroad and building networks with professional educational institutions such as universities to employee exchanges between summer and winter destinations. It also includes the acquisition of public funding or grants on a state, national, or international level, which can promote actions in HR management (cf. Panagiotakopoulos, 2011).

Research Questions

The main objective of the study presented in this chapter is to conceptualize a skilled labor concept for selected tourism destinations. Due to the lack of literature on this topic, an exploratory approach was chosen to address the following research questions.

(1) Employer level:

- What challenges do employers in hospitality and tourism face in terms of their human resources management?
- How do employers deal with these challenges? What HR practices do they use to attract, develop, and retain skilled employees?

(2) Regional level:

- What is the as-is situation on regional cooperation in HR management?
- What do stakeholders in the industry think about a regional HR concept?
- Are there best practices for regional HR alliances in the industry?
- How do employees perceive the region as a living environment? What factors do employees find important?

(3) Cross-regional level:

- What is the as-is situation on cross-regional cooperation?
- Are there best practices for cross-regional cooperation?

Methodology

The research questions were analyzed using the cases of three close-boarder rural tourism destinations in Bavaria (Tegernsee and Bad Reichenhall) and Austria (Abtenau/Tennengau). Most tourists visit these regions for their natural resources, such as mountains and lakes, and to do sports like hiking and skiing. The regions are not far from the major cities of Salzburg and Munich. The research was part of an EU-funded project[1] that mainly looked at the effects of a health-focused holiday (here balneotherapy and moderate mountain hiking) on elderly tourists (Prosegger et al., 2019) and, based on the results, on the development of new service offerings in health tourism. All destinations have in common that they have specific geothermal water that is already used or planned to be used for balneotherapy. Therefore, our focus was on skilled labor in health tourism, which meant that, in addition to the "traditional" jobs and employers in tourism we also looked at professions and employers that provide services in health-related areas such as baths and clinics.

In order to increase external validity, we investigated the research questions from the perspective of various stakeholders and used a mixed-methods approach (cf. Kuckartz, 2014) following four steps. First, we conducted semi-structured interviews with *N* = 54 experts (90% face-to-face) from the tourism industry (DMOs, selected employers, associations), employment agencies, chambers of commerce, politics, education, and diverse other labor market protagonists in Austria and Bavaria. The objective was to develop a comprehensive picture of the research topic. The interviews were transcribed and analyzed with a qualitative content analysis based on Mayring (2015) using the software MAXQDA (Kuckartz and Rädiker, 2019).

Based on the findings, we developed two questionnaires, one for employers and one for employees, which were then used for anonymous online surveys. The objective of the survey for employers was to validate the as-is HR situation and HR practices. The employee survey intended to include the view of the target group in focus because employers and employees might have different views on the research topic. The surveys mainly consisted of questions with closed answer options, such as multiple-choice answers and Likert scales. They each took approximately 10–15 minutes to complete. The DMOs of the respective destinations compiled a mailing list with all employers involved in health tourism in their destination. The mailing list mainly included hotels and restaurants, but also service providers in health tourism and medical institutions, where available. The project partners also sent out the emails with the invitations to participate. The invitation to participate in the survey for employees was sent out through the same list. Thus, employees could only be reached if their employers forwarded the email.

As the response rate was unsatisfactory, additional employers in (health) tourism were contacted through various associations; however, this did not substantially increase the number of participants. In the end, a total of 106 usable online questionnaires for evaluating the employer responses were received, of which 60% came from the hospitality industry, 28% from the health sector, and 6% from the tourism industry (remainder: others). In the project regions, the response rate for the employer survey was 64%. The response rate across all employers contacted was 37%. The response rate for the employee survey was also low. A total of 95 questionnaires were found suitable for evaluation. Ninety-five percent of the employees surveyed work in SMEs. Eighty-four percent work in the hospitality and tourism industry, the rest work for medical institutions or for health service providers.

The data collected from the questionnaires were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences). Because there were no significant differences between regions and employers in the health sector and employers in tourism for both questionnaires, the data analysis was conducted across all cases respectively. In parallel, an analysis of best practices was carried out. Best practices were identified through the interviews as well as desktop research.

Based on the results, it was possible to derive six strategic fields of action for a regional HR concept for skilled labor. For each field of action, relevant measures and recommended actions for implementation on a company, regional, and cross-regional level were laid down. The concept was validated in a workshop together with the project partners from the regions.

Results

Key Challenge: Skills Shortage

"*We lack service personnel, chambermaids, cooks. We lack people who simply love the hospitality industry and love serving and looking after guests.*" This quote of one of the experts summarizes the key challenge employers are facing. Overall, 57% of employers say they sense the skills shortage. For 53%, it has become more difficult to fill vacancies. Fifty-three agree that the number of applications has decreased in recent years, and according to 56%, the quality of the applicants' profiles has declined. Twenty-six percent agree and 26% partially agree that the skills shortage affects their competitive ability.

The migration of skilled labor also presents a challenge to companies. Seventy percent say that the migration of skilled staff to other industries is a problem. Thirty-six percent reported movements of regional skilled employees to the cities as problematic. Among the most frequently named reasons for staff handing in their notice were better job alternatives (46%), the possibility to acquire new experience working for other employers (44%) and a lack of attractiveness of the respective region as a working and living environment (29%).

Ninety-six percent of the participating employers are small and medium-sized enterprises. Thirty percent have up to 9 employees, 37% up to 49 employees, and 29% up to 249 employees. Only 20% have their own human resources experts. Many do not have the time (55%), the personnel (40%), or financial resources (29%) for implementing professional HR management. Eighty-seven percent of the respondents agree, however, that good HR management increases staff competence and thus satisfaction among their guests. Hence, the need for action in this field has indeed been recognized, but employers have not yet taken sufficient action.

Results on Company, Regional, and Cross-regional Level

Results relating to the research questions are presented along the six strategic fields of actions that were identified as important for a regional HR concept (see Figure 32.1), based on the dimensions – employer, regional, and cross-regional level. On the employer level, the key HR areas every employer needs to deal with professionally, especially in times of skills shortage, are recruiting, learning, and development as well as retention of staff. On a regional level, the HR alliance comes into place where joint activities in key HR areas are organized. Besides employers, regional stakeholders, such as regional development agencies, DMOs, and regional politicians, will play a role in the successful implementation. Another strategic field of action refers to the region as a living environment. This takes into account the role the region plays in the decision for a specific employer as well as the question of what a region needs to offer in order for an employee to decide to move or to stay there respectively. On a cross-regional level, the focus is on additional cooperation, e.g., with institutions such as employment agencies, chambers of industry and commerce, federal-state organizations as well as universities.

Employer Level: Recruiting

Sixty-six percent of the employers had job vacancies during the survey period. As reported above, the majority finds them difficult to fill. For 47%, it has also become increasingly difficult to hire apprentices. About 61% offer apprenticeship positions. Finding candidates is particularly difficult

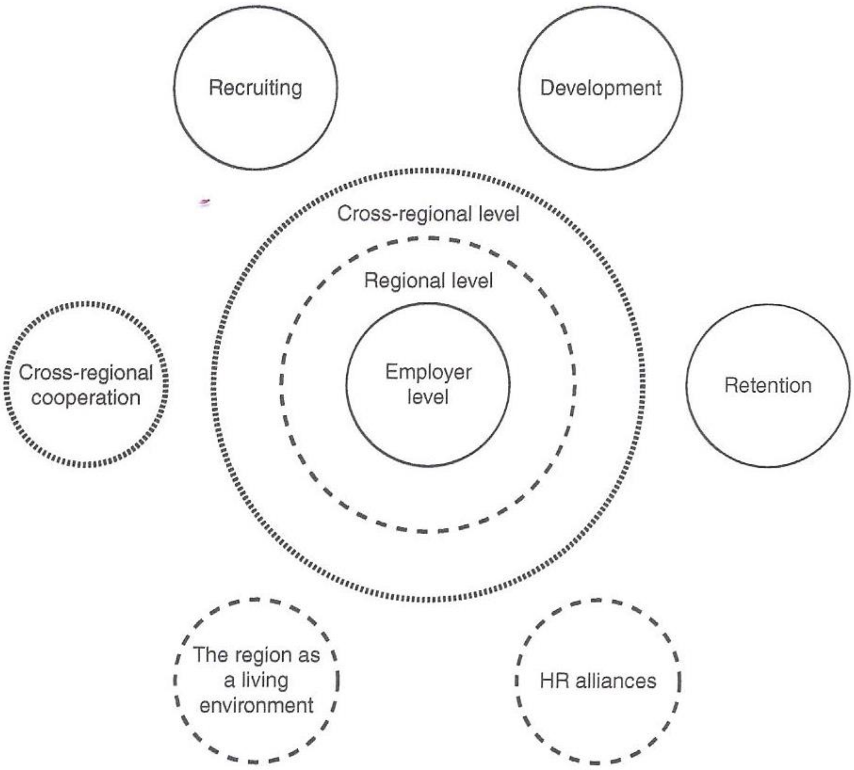

Figure 32.1 Six strategic fields of action for a regional HR concept. Types of lines indicate which level (employer, regional, cross-regional) this strategic field is mainly allocated to in terms of responsibilities.

for service, cook, and kitchen roles. For positions related to health tourism, notably masseurs and physiotherapists are difficult to hire. Regarding the recruiting channels used most frequently, more employers still publish their job vacancies in print media (73%) than on online job portals (58%), and only 55% on their own website. Forty-three percent use external support through services provided by federal employment agencies (which is free of charge). Cooperation with secondary schools, professional schools, or universities as a recruiting channel is not widely common yet (29%).

A surprising finding is that 70% of the enterprises do not have a "careers" section on their website and thus fail to convey to potential candidates what the company stands for as an employer and why candidates should choose them over other companies. Careers pages and the company website, however, are among the most important sources of information for job seekers (Seng et al., 2012).

In the interview study, some examples of recruiting abroad were mentioned, e.g., in Spain. These initiatives mainly developed through personal connections of business owners or managers. However, experts pointed out the high investments that are required (recruiting abroad, language training, accommodation, etc.). Especially in a market with a majority of German-speaking tourists, German language skills are a key selection criterion to them. Therefore, skilled labor from abroad is highly welcomed when candidates speak the language. Most employers have skilled staff from neighboring countries, especially Eastern-European countries such as the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, the Balkans, or Bulgaria.

Employer Level: Development

Personnel development is an important HR area when it comes to attracting and retaining employees. It mainly comprises training, further development, career planning, and performance appraisal (Lee-Ross and Pryce, 2010). The employee survey revealed that career prospects and opportunities for development are among the top five motivating factors for staff in their current jobs. Furthermore, for better development and career prospects 51% of respondents would consider a change of employer. Appraisal interviews (66%) and the opportunity to participate in shaping the company (44%) are also very important to the respondents.

As regards the employers, 75% of the companies on one hand said that they offer internal and external further education and training courses for their staff in equal measure. On the other hand, only 35% offer a comprehensive range of education and training courses as well as a systematic staff and management development program. Forty-one percent of companies spend on average €100 up to a maximum of €300 per year on employee on further training. Twenty percent of the employers in the project regions believe that insufficient development and career prospects are one of the most frequent reasons for staff handing in their notice.

Employer Level: Employee Retention

In order to retain qualified employees and to reduce undesirable fluctuation rates, it is important to understand which factors motivate employees to stay in their current jobs. The top five motivating factors mentioned by the surveyed employees out of a list of 12 items were (1) the tasks themselves, (2) job atmosphere, (3) job security, (4) contact with guests/clients, (5) a good relationship with the superior, and (6) fair working hours.

Development opportunities were not among the top 5, but on rank 6. Results also show that, once most employees have opted for the tourism/hospitality industry, they consider staying in the industry. In the sample, 74% of the employees stated that they could imagine working in the industry until they retire. Sixty-three percent said that, if they handed in their notice, they would only change their employer but not the industry. The main reasons for changing the employer are to gain experience (57%), an increase in salary (57%), and to carry out new and interesting tasks (53%).

Employees were also asked which HR practices or activities are most important to them and which were already in place at their company. Table 32.1 shows the top 5 most important HR

Table 32.1 Ranking of personally most important and the most frequently implemented HR measures from the employees' point of view ($N = 95$).

HR practices important to employees	*HR practices most frequently offered by employers*
1 Appraisal interviews	1 Team events
2 Flexible organization of working time	2 Appraisal interviews
3 Comprehensive range of training and further education opportunities	3 Flexible organization of working time
4 Monetary incentives	4 Involvement opportunities to shape the company
5 Involvement opportunities to shape the company	5 Non-monetary benefits
6 Team events	6 Comprehensive range of training and further education opportunities
7 Salary above industry average	7 Measures to promote health
8 Promotion of individual career goals	8 Promotion of individual career goals
9 Measures to promote health	9 Salary above industry average
10 Promotion of study programs	10 Monetary incentives

practices and the five most frequently offered HR practices in the company. It is evident that the measures only partly coincide with what is important to the employees. In particular, employers seem to underestimate the importance of monetary incentives.

Regional Level: HR Cooperation

Employers were asked to what extent they already cooperate with other stakeholders in the field of HR. As shown in Figure 32.2, the majority of companies do not cooperate on HR issues and have no plans to do so. A smaller percentage are planning cooperation on HR issues. In most cases, employers cooperate with associations, external consultants, and trainers as well as with educational institutions. Thirty-four percent work together with other tourism enterprises in their region, 24% with tourism enterprises outside the region. Only a few consider cooperation with non-tourism enterprises in the region to be relevant and see the chances that lie in the cooperation to provide more benefits to staff, such as reduced fares for leisure activities.

The experts interviewed also considered regional cooperation in HR issues to be a sensible field of action. They were skeptical as to its feasibility as the urge to compete would lower the willingness to cooperate. It was recommended to begin with a few "strong enterprises" that support the idea and that the example might attract other employers to join the alliance.

As for HR alliances, research for best practices of HR alliances also did not yield many significant results. Out of a handful of examples, three cases qualified as best practice examples based on the following criteria: sustainable concept, several years in place, very good results, outstanding example and role-model for the industry, award-winner. Table 32.2 gives an overview of the three best practice examples. In-depth interviews were then conducted with responsible contacts of each alliance. The following success factors for HR alliances were identified by the interview partners.

- Clear responsibilities: Successful alliances require leadership. Such leadership can be assumed by members of the hotelier network/tourism board or an external coordinator. An external and neutral coordinator might be helpful to build trust among members to share internal information on HR topics.

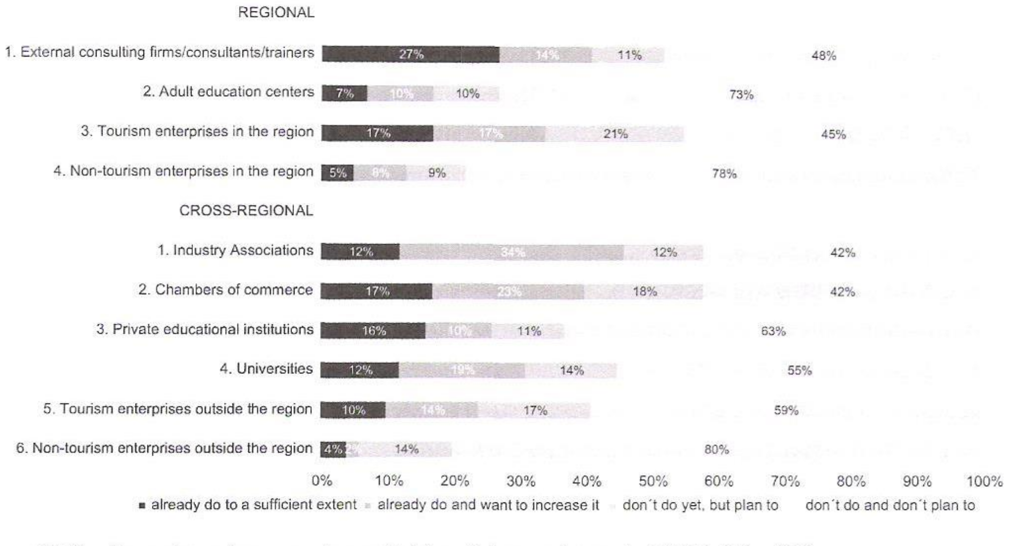

Figure 32.2 Overview of cooperation activities of the employers in HRM ($N = 106$).

- Common basis: There needs to be a shared understanding and clear rules for the cooperation to create commitment and trust among members.
- Long-term perspective: Investing in an alliance is a significant financial commitment that does not yield immediate results. It may take several years until the investment pays off and results become visible.
- Budget: Members need to be committed to their financial investment. Therefore, they need to understand the business case behind.

Table 32.2 Description of three best-practice examples of HR alliances in the industry

	FRANKFURT HOTEL ALLIANCE FIRST CLASS HOTELS RHEIN-MAIN	YOURGSTAAD.CH	WORK FOR US IM TOURISMUS
Overview	The Frankfurt Hotel Alliance is a group of 60 hotels that represents the political and commercial interests of the hotel industry in Frankfurt (Germany). Within that alliance, there is a group of members that focus on the work of HR topics ("HR Ressort").	YOURGSTAAD is an online platform hosted by the Hoteliers Association of Gstaad Saanenland (Switzerland) that bundles a job website for open positions in Gstaad with information on working and living in Gstaad and Switzerland as well as regional employer branding ("Why Gstaad?"). In addition, YOURGSTAAD offers trainings and a discount card for shops, hotels, and restaurants.	"Work for us" is an alliance in the district of Zell am See (Austria). All members are employers in tourism, most of which are hotels. Founded in 2008 as an EU-funded training alliance ("Qualifizierungsverbund"), it is now funded by its members. The alliance not only offers high-quality trainings and other benefits to their employees, but also promotes jobs in Tourism to secondary school students.
Founded	2013	2007	2008
Number of members	60	38	29
Main objectives	• Enhance the image of jobs in the hospitality industry • Market Frankfurt as an attractive city to work in	• Advertise the destination as an attractive place to work • Establish an effective recruiting and joint employer branding	• Promote the professional and personal development of their employees • Offer an attractive working environment
Fields of HR in focus	• Employer Branding • Training • HR politics	• Employer Branding • Recruiting • Training • Benefits	• Employer Branding • Recruiting inland and abroad (Spain, Croatia, Germany) • Training • Benefits

	FRANKFURT HOTEL ALLIANCE FIRST CLASS HOTELS RHEIN-MAIN	YOURGSTAAD.CH	WORK FOR US IM TOURISMUS
Main activities	• Regular HR meetings: build task forces, discuss results, lectures by external speakers • Host annual graduation ceremony for apprentices after successful completion of their apprenticeship • Branding and recruiting projects, e.g., lectures at secondary schools, job fairs, marketing materials • Collaboration with vocational training school: exam preparation for apprentices, additional trainings on demand	• Maintain platform • Social media activities (e.g., facebook) • Trainings open to all employees • Staff events and parties • Member meetings to further develop platform (twice/year) • Discount card	• Joint training program (ca. 50 trainings/year) • Discount card (selected shops, service providers) • Discounts for rooms and dining at member hotels • Job website • Apprenticeship promotion days • Collaboration with secondary schools (lectures) • Representation of members at job fairs
Specific characteristics / differentiators	• Strong focus on apprentices • Tribute to apprentices with high-profile graduation ceremony and ball • Intensive collaboration with CCI*, DEHOGA**, employment agencies & vocational schools	• Potential applicants find all relevant information on one website • All local hotels/restaurants can promote themselves as employers • Application can either be sent in response to a job posting or application can be uploaded to reach all hotels	• Independent coordinator for the alliance (part-time) • Trainings with trainers that are well-known in the industry • Alliance was established out of an EU-funded project
Success factors	• Consistent efforts of dedicated people who established the network • HR professionals of member hotels are included and invited to work in the HR group, not only General Managers	• Clear responsibilities and commitment of the Hoteliers Association • All local hotels and restaurants are featured on YOURGSTAAD • Funded through the Hoteliers Association (member fees) • Platform can easily be promoted through staff	• Independent coordinator important to build trust among members • Coordinator funded through member fees, costs for trainings split per participant • Well-known alliance with comprehensive concept

(*Continued*)

	FRANKFURT HOTEL ALLIANCE FIRST CLASS HOTELS RHEIN-MAIN	YOURGSTAAD.CH	WORK FOR US IM TOURISMUS
Achievements	• Primary contact and established partner for federations and other institutions • Increased HR competence of members • Hospitality HR Award 2018***	• Volume of website-based applications and number of application recipients have increased • All open positions for the season can be filled • Platform has around 2,200 visitors per month, ¾ of which are new visitors • Hospitality HR Award 2018	• Increasing number of applications • Increase in employee loyalty • Concept workshops and think tank for owners • Cost savings for trainings • Increase in trust and collaboration among members • Hospitality HR Award 2016 • HR Award 2018 (Austria)
Website	https://frankfurt-hotel-alliance.com [in German]	https://yourgstaad.ch/ [in German, English, French]	https://www.workforus.at/ [in German]

Notes:
* CCI: Chamber of Commerce and Industry.
** DEHOGA: Deutscher Hotel- und Gaststättenverband (German Hotel and Restaurant Association).
*** The Hospitality HR Award is an established prize in the German speaking area for excellent and innovative HR practices.

- Industry focus: All three alliances stressed the importance of the industry focus. Members are either only or mainly hotels. This would ensure a clear profile both internally and externally.

Regional Level: The Region as Living Environment

Both employers and employees were asked about their perceptions of the region as a living space. In general, both employers and employees consider their regions to be attractive places to live and work in. All three project regions offer a wide range of sporting activities as well as leisure and medical facilities and services. However, housing is expensive compared to salary level. Only a few companies are able to offer housing for staff in Bavaria, while this is more widely offered in Austria.

The employees see room for improvement in particular with regard to the development of the local public transport system, affordable housing and family-friendly services (e.g., childcare facilities). The findings from the employer survey confirm this assessment. In addition, employers see a need for improvement as regards collaboration between the players on the services provider side and the marketing of the region to skilled employees.

Marketing a region to (potential) skilled staff in and in particular outside of the region is not widely common yet. Similar to a company's career website, the information should provide answers to any questions potential staff might have ("know why"), e.g., about regional characteristics, infrastructure, quality of life, employers, and employment. A website on living and working can thus help build a regional brand for employment and employers respectively. A best practice example is the marketing of the region Allgäu in Bavaria (www.allgaeu.de), which is targeted not only to tourists but also to qualified employees. The greater objective is to position the Allgäu as an attractive place to live and work. The website includes all relevant information for potentially interested employees. Moreover, it features a welcome guide and good reasons why the Allgäu is an attractive region to live in (https://standort.allgaeu.de/karriere).

Cross-regional Level: Cooperation

Figure 32.2 also shows the as-is cooperation of employers with stakeholders that mostly are located in another region. Cooperation is mainly sought with industry associations such as the hotel and restaurant association as well as chambers of commerce that offer advisory services and training programs. Cooperation with universities is less popular. One reason might be that the traditional educational path in the industry is the apprenticeship. The number of university graduates working in the industry is much lower, but slowly increasing (Bohne, 2018). Cross-regional cooperation with tourism enterprises outside the region seems to be relevant for only some companies. Here, some employers see the potential in employee exchange for different seasons. As one Austrian employer put it: "*[There should be] better cooperation on a country level, better promotional programs for exchanging apprentices. When companies at the Baltic Sea close in winter-time, employees could come to Austria and work in the winter sports resorts.*" In this area, we found a best practice example with the platform jobs2share (www.jobs2share.ch/en). The platform posts jobs of two destinations in Switzerland, one being a summer and the other a winter season destination. Once a candidate finds a position for both seasons respectively, the two employers involved sign a contract of collaboration. This gives the candidate a longer employment perspective and each employer has the chance to rehire good employees in the following year.

Cooperation with non-tourism enterprises outside the region does not seem to be relevant for most employers, however. Although the regions are located in a border-area (Bavaria/Austria), cross-border cooperation on HR topics has only been pursued by 21% of the employers so far.

Discussion

The study confirms that the situation in terms of skilled labor in the tourism industry is already tense. Employers are fully cognizant of the need for taking action to manage this challenge. However, the majority of the type of employers investigated still do not assign strategic HR management the priority it requires. Regional cooperation on HR issues has hardly been taken into consideration to date. Key obstacles for companies seem to be the lack of resources, but also the barrier of cooperating with other companies that are viewed as regional competitors (cf. Panagiotakopoulos, 2011). In addition, establishing cooperation is a long-term endeavor that requires the commitment of all stakeholders involved.

When looking at the results it becomes evident that, in addition to focusing on effective recruiting strategies, employers need to concentrate on their existing employees and adopt suitable measures to develop and retain them. To do so, it is important for employers to understand what motivates their employees as well as which development goals and career aspirations they have. Moreover, HR development and retention activities, when jointly realized in an HR network, create prospects that are even more attractive for the employees. Based on the results a number of recommended action steps were identified that are summarized in Table 32.3 along each strategic field of the HR concept. The objective of the employer-based measures is to professionalize HR management. Regional measures aim at making the region more attractive as a working and living environment and to establish regional cooperation in the HR field. Finally, the measures on a cross-regional level are intended to create a suitable framework for implementing employer-based as well as regional measures. The cooperation with policy-makers and access to funding might facilitate the barrier of investing in HRM, especially training and development (cf. Panagiotakopoulos, 2011).

Table 32.3 Recommended actions to implement a regional HR concept

Level	*Strategic field of action*	*Stakeholder*	*Recommended actions*	*Expected benefits*
Employer	**Recruiting**	Employer	• Create a meaningful careers page which includes "know-why information" (Why should someone work for us?) • Create individual employer brand • Increase online and social media presence • Define and use target-group specific recruiting channels	• Increased distribution of employer information • Professional employer information is more convincing to job applicants
	Development	Employer	• Develop training and further education opportunities tailored to requirements • Create individual development and career prospects • Work together with other employers to provide a wider range of further education and training courses	• Qualified staff • Retention of qualified staff • Further training of staff for new tasks and positions
	Retention	Employer	• Tailored staff retention through retention measures geared to staff requirements • Integration of staff in decision-making processes in order to increase empowerment and involvement • Provision of housing solutions	• Higher job satisfaction • Lower staff fluctuation • Committed and motivated employees • Higher employee loyalty

Level	*Strategic field of action*	*Stakeholder*	*Recommended actions*	*Expected benefits*
Regional	**HR cooperation / alliance**	Employer	• Establishing regional HR networks • Cooperation in particular in training and further education for employees • Defining rules for the cooperation (e.g., no poaching of employees)	• Bundling of resources and cost savings • Creation of development perspectives for employees • Increased attractiveness of the employer and the region
		Regional stakeholders	• Support in the setting up and execution • Support an independent coordinator	
	The region as living and working environment	Employer	Provision of housing options	• Increased promotion of the region as an attractive place to work and live • To make it easier to attract skilled labor from outside the region • To increase the attractiveness of the region through improved infrastructure
		DMO / Regional marketing	Bundling of information on living and working in the region	
		Politicians / Community administration	Improvement of the infrastructure, i.e., provision of housing, development of the local public transport system, provision of places in child day-care centers	
Cross-regional	**Cooperation**	Employers & regional stakeholders	• Cooperation with other tourism regions (e.g., exchange of skilled staff for changing seasons) • Capitalize on cross-border offerings (e.g., further education and training courses offered) • Cooperation with employment agencies as regards applications for support/funding, recruiting from abroad, information on instruments for SMEs (piloting function) • Cooperation with universities on applied research projects and recruiting channels	• Create synergies and bundle resources • Regional, national, or international support programs help to start initiatives and minimize financial risks • Knowledge transfer and external perspective add-value to own approach

The components of a regional HR concept with a strong focus on cooperation are a first step towards a holistic approach to attract and retain skilled employees in the region. The characteristic feature of the concept is its multi-level perspective and it illustrates the importance of cooperation on HR issues, in particular for SMEs. The basic conditions for setting up a successful HR cooperation scheme are, on the one hand, that the partners in the network show their willingness to pursue the same goals by working together instead of independently. On the other hand, the partners should benefit from pooling existing competencies and resources and agreeing on what common measures they want to carry out, what entities can participate and what role they can play (FMEAE, 2013). Establishing an HR network takes time as mutual trust has to be built first (Möhring-Lotsch and Spengler, 2009). Questions to be decided upon refer to the coordinator (internal vs. external), the industry (sectional vs. cross-sectional), and funding. If an industry-specific HR alliance is set up, the DMO or hoteliers association may take up the role of the coordinator. Moreover, it has to be clarified what role the location marketing and business promotion agencies should assume. Further research should also investigate the different scales of structure and formalization HR alliances can have (ranging from loose networks to formalized alliances with detailed requirements for membership) in relation to success.

In the HR approach presented in this chapter, cross-regional cooperation has a supportive function to the regional focus of the HR approach. However, in case a regional approach is not feasible to realize, a cross-regional HR alliance might be a suitable option for individual employers. While in this case, employers would not access regional competences and benefits, they would have the advantage that there is less or no competition between members of the alliance and that they can offer different regional experiences to their employees for staff exchange, training, and other joint HR activities. One option would be to implement HR alliances within hotel alliances. Hotel alliances mainly focus on joint sales and marketing activities; cooperation in the HR area still seems to be rare (Chang and Konzack, 2016). This option also needs further investigation especially concerning challenges and success factors.

Because the results presented were from selected destinations in Austria and Bavaria (Germany), the question arises in how far the results are internationally relevant. We argue that in regions with a majority of SMEs and similar HR challenges, the drafted HR concept is applicable and that HR alliances are one serious solution strategy to meet the challenges successfully.

Limitations

In order to obtain a valid overview of the research matter, we pursued a triangulation of methods and perspectives (employer, employees, and experts) within an exploratory research design. The small samples sizes of the questionnaire studies are a limitation, however. Only very limited inferential-statistical data analysis was possible and so results are of descriptive nature. A larger database should be used in future studies, with the objective of generating knowledge on relationships between variables and influencing factors on the success of HR alliances. We recommend cooperation with a larger number of project regions and the inclusion of multipliers to promote the research to the target groups. The willingness of the employers to take part in the study seemed to be low, even though their respective DMO addressed them directly. Therefore, additional promotion through various stakeholders seems necessary. Another critical point is the dependence on employers when recruiting employees for the study. This can lead to a positive bias in case only employers with a professional HR management or attractive employers forward the request for participation to their employees. Additional channels to reach skilled employees should be evaluated in further research.

Another aspect to look at critically is the composition of the samples. Even though no differences were found between employer types, and the samples predominately consisted of hotels and employees of hotels, the studies did include a few service providers in health tourism due to the project context. For the sole view of employers in the hotel and restaurant business, different samples should be used in further studies.

In addition, the rather broad approach adopted in the project has its disadvantages. Although it did provide a comprehensive perspective, a more in-depth research is needed in some subject areas. Further explanatory studies should now build on the results of this study. In the process, the employees' viewpoint should also be taken into consideration. Generally, further research on HR networks and HR cooperation schemes in tourism destinations are necessary.

Conclusion

The skills shortage that employers face will become even more pronounced in the near future (e.g., Prognos, 2012). Thus, the tourism industry, and the hospitality industry in particular need to find solutions for a challenge that will affect their competitive capabilities. Regional HR concepts to attract, develop, and retain skilled employees in the region would contribute considerably to the competitiveness of tourism destinations. However, in order to form effective HR alliances, some obstacles need to be overcome, mainly on the employers' side. Given that the majority of alliance members would be SME who lack the necessary resources, it might make sense to think about installing the role of an independent "regional HR manager" in a destination. This role would drive the alliance and raise awareness on the importance of the activities on the employers' side. In addition, the regional HR concept needs to be aligned with the tourism strategy (FMEAE, 2013).

Overall, the presented draft of a regional HR concept provides a framework for action for the tourism industry. We hope that it initiates further projects with scientific evaluation. This topic requires further attention from both the industry and the academic world. In the end, no regional tourism strategy and no employer's HR strategy can be implemented effectively if there are not enough employees with the right skillset available.

Note

1 EU-Interreg Program Austria-Bavaria 2014–2020, project "Trail for Health Nord" (AB40), project duration: 09/2015-12/2018; project partners: Paracelsus Medical University (Salzburg), Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München, Munich University of Applied Sciences, Innovations- und Technologietransfer Salzburg GmbH, Tegernseer Tal Tourismus GmbH, Bayerisches Staatsbad Kur-GmbH Bad Reichenhall/Bayerisch Gmain, Verein Gästeservice Tennengau.

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