



## **RESPONS**

### **Responsible Skills Alliance for Sustainable Management of Small Hotels and Restaurants**

**539920-LLP-1-2013-1-BG-LEONARDO-LMP**

#### **National Field Research Report**

**Country: Italy**



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## Chapter 1. The survey base and sample

The Italian sample is made of 21 SMEs from the tourism field: 11 hotels, 9 restaurants and 1 catering.

Among the hotels, we have interviewed: 1 hostel, 2 farm houses which offer both board and lodging possibilities, 4 guest houses/B&B and 4 small hotels.

Among the restaurants, CIAPE has involved in the survey different types of structures both from the point of view of the prices applied and of the cuisine proposed (classic, creative and regional). We have 4 “classis” restaurants, 3 specialised restaurants offering regional dishes, 1 creative restaurant and 1 fast food restaurant.

In order to have a broad picture of the topic, CIAPE decided to involve companies located in different geographical areas of the country (1 on 2 of the respondents is located in a big city, Rome, while the others are doing business in towns and villages both on the countryside and on the seaside. Respondents belong to 5 Italian regions: Lombardy, Lazio, Sicily, Marche, Abruzzi.

Most of the structures interviewed are micro-companies; 9 (almost 1 on 2 of the sample) have less than 5 employees, 8 have an annual average staff composed by 5 and 9 people and only 4 of them employ a number of resources per year comprised between 10 and 20.

More than half of the companies interviewed (61,9%) are family-run businesses; however 2 of them consider themselves as semi-family-run businesses; that means that they have started the activity as family-run businesses but, recently, they have decided to hire external managers for the company<sup>1</sup>.

Interviews were conducted by using different means. The link to the survey was disseminated to the target through social networks (twitter, facebook and linkedin) and e-mails. 7 companies decided to fill in the questionnaire directly on [www.surveymonkey.it](http://www.surveymonkey.it), 6 companies preferred to be interviewed by phone, while the remaining 8 were interviewed face to face.

## Chapter 2. Dimensions affecting the HORECA SMEs' performances

Among the proposed dimensions affecting company's performance, the respondents underlined the importance of having **safe working conditions** (almost all structures rated it as "very important"); the reason for this is that many of the issues considered under this voice are compulsory requisites for implementing and carrying on the activity under the Italian law and standards, while other issues are recognised as ethical values by the majority of the HORECA SMEs' managers.

For the same reason, the second most important dimension is **equal working conditions** (half of respondents rated it as "very important" and the other half as "important"). Several managers underlined the fact that they always consider both equal opportunities and non-discrimination issues when selecting their employees.

It is relevant to add that managers emphasized also the importance of respecting certain hygienic and quality standards for the success and the running of their businesses.

The third most important element is **Web 2.0**, considered as crucial both for restaurants and hotels.

Issues as **individualised hospitality experiences/menus** and **sustainable resorts and menus** are considered a plus only for restaurants, because of the changing habits in consumers' tastes; while, talking about the issue **local community and social initiatives**, it is important to underline that some of the interviewed hotels have partnerships with other local businesses and consider important to promote the city and/or beauty of the local territory through their activities.

Respondents do not consider **wellness based offers** and **health friendly food and experiences** important dimensions for their clients (both dimensions were rated "not important" by 11 companies). This is mainly due to the features of the territories in which the businesses are located. However, a different rate for these dimensions could have been achieved if the questionnaires would have been distributed in other regions/areas (e.g. Tuscany and /or Trentino-Alto Adige/Südtirol).

### Chapter 3. Dimensions requiring further information/ training

Analysing the answers related to the company experience, it comes out that issues which were considered as extremely important by the respondents, are also well-known by them; that means that HORECA SMEs are already experienced in implementing them. All target companies consider themselves as “experts” or “competent” in offering **safe working conditions**, while regarding **equal working conditions**, only 3 respondents consider themselves “beginner”, although recognising the importance of this dimension.

The third most rated issue is **WEB 2.0** (18 respondents out of 21 consider themselves “expert” or “competent” in this issue), although its importance for the company’s performance is influenced by other factors like the demand for the service, the affluence of tourists and the competition in the area where the business is located.

Many targeted companies underlined that they do not have or have basic experience about **wellness based offers** and **health friendly food and experiences** (15 companies consider themselves as “beginner” or “inexperienced” in both issues). However, as these dimensions were not considered extremely important by the respondents, there seems not to be interest in further training and/or follow up.

Instead, further information and training is required for dimensions which are considered raising issues by many respondents, because they represent new challenges for the success of the business and emerging needs expressed by the clients. Among them, **ecological workplace** (rated by more than half of the respondents as “very important” or “important”, but in which one on two companies considers themselves beginner).

Further information are requested also for the dimensions **responsible workplace** and **local community and social initiatives** (7 companies, both hotels and restaurants, consider themselves as “beginner” or “inexperienced” in these fields).

#### Chapter 4. Innovative skills owned by HORECA managers

Regarding the self assessment of innovative skills, all targeted companies consider themselves “expert” or “competent” for the skills **cooperative ability/ team spirit** and **innovativeness**; followed by the competences **intercultural management** and **problem solving** (for both competences, only 1 respondent selected the option “beginner”).

The less diffused skills among the managers are: **foreign languages** (5 managers consider themselves “beginner”) and **computer/ICT** (6 respondents selected the option “beginner”). Regarding these issues, managers underlined that, although they lack capabilities in these competences, there is always someone among their workers, usually a younger person, with stronger experience (e.g. someone responsible for foreign clients and/or responsible for the website and social networks).

It is important to underline that respondents never selected the option “inexperienced” for any of the proposed competences.

4 respondents added as a fundamental skill **communication toward the client/attention to client**.

There are no relevant distinction in the answers between hotels and restaurants.

## Chapter 5. Learning and training

Analysing the data related to barriers to continuous learning and training, respondents identified as main barriers the **lack of time** (selected by 15 respondents) and the **costs of the training**, (selected by 13 respondents). Talking about these issues, some of the respondents emphasized the fact that, according to their opinion, courses should be financed by BIOs responsible for the HORECA sector. Moreover, some of the managers believe that the necessary competences should be learnt in high school (in Italian “Istituto alberghiero”).

The **lack of motivation** among HORECA managers is the less selected option (only 2 companies consider it as a barrier); however it is a common opinion that there are less and less young people willing to work in HORECA industries.

It is relevant to say that companies located in the countryside emphasized the fact that sometimes it takes too much time and/ or it is complicated to reach the location of the courses because it is too far; normally courses are held in the biggest city of the region.

Regarding the preferred types of training, respondents believe that both **theoretical** and **practical\_training** are necessary, due to the concrete and dynamic aspect of the job. Regarding **online based training**, some respondents believe that it could be a solution to solve the problem of the lack of time and of the distance of the courses location; however it must be accompanied by practical sessions.

There are no relevant distinctions in the answers between hotels and restaurants.

## Chapter 6. Final conclusions

The key dimensions of a training course addressed to the HORECA managers have been defined by considering the gap between importance and experience in the different fields surveyed.

From the results collected it is evident that the prior subjects for the Italian companies should be, in order of importance, the following ones:

1. **HEALTHY FRIENDLY FOOD AND EXPERIENCES:** how to incorporate health in marketing activities; how to plan healthy menus and options; how to inform consumers about nutrition facts, including food labels, calories, nutritional information and analysis.
2. **RESPONSIBLE WORKPLACE:** how to manage responsibly the entire chain from the supplier to the client; how to develop an internal Code of conduct; how to implement anticorruption rules; how to manage non financial accounting; how to implement fair price policy; how to implement ethic advertising; how to work with social partners.
3. **ONLINE SERVICES:** how to activate Internet reservation systems; how to guarantee online product selection, ordering, fulfilment, tracking, payment and reporting.
4. **SUSTAINABLE RESORTS AND MENUS:** how to offer alternative transportation initiative programmes (e.g. bikes, Nordic walking) and eco-tours; how to use of organic food and products and seasonal menus.

If we consider the transversal skills, the priority competences to consider as the following ones:

1. **COMPUTER/ ICT:** how to use computers and attend online training programmes
2. **LANGUAGE SKILLS:** how to communicate properly in at least one foreign language, i.e. English
3. **ADAPTATION TO THE NEW BUSINESS ENVIROMENT:** how to easily deal with suppliers, foresee new marketing strategies, manage human resources and stocks easily
4. **ADAPTATION TO CHANGE:** how to accept feedbacks and handle of complaints from customers and clients.

Trainings should be preferably quick, free of charge and based on the real needs of the sector.

The online training is seen as a good opportunity, because the course can be followed during free time.

<sup>i</sup> Here you can find a list and a brief description of the different interviewed businesses.

<b>Name</b>	<b>Tipology</b>
<b>La Corte Ghiotta</b>	Farm house located in the countryside, 50 km from Milan. It offers regional specialities and possibility to sleep over for groups.
<b>Agriturismo Cascina Corte Grande</b>	Farm house located in the countryside, 50 km from Milan. It offers regional specialities and possibility to sleep over for groups.
<b>Pensione Altamira</b>	Small hotel/pension located on the seaside in the Centre of Italy (Abruzzi).
<b>Eats and sheets B&amp;B</b>	B&B located in the centre of Rome.
<b>Hotel Romance</b>	Small hotel located in the centre of Rome.
<b>Residenza Anastasia Colosseo</b>	B&B located in the centre of Rome.
<b>B&amp;B Palazzo Reale</b>	B&B located on the seaside in the South of Italy (Sicily).
<b>Ca'D'La Tonilla</b>	B&B located in the countryside, 50 km from Milan.
<b>B&amp;B Perbacco</b>	B&B located in the countryside, 50 km from Milan.
<b>Residence degli aranci</b>	Hotel located on the seaside in the Centre of Italy (Marche).
<b>Castello di Foglia</b>	Hotel located in the countryside, 50 km from Rome.
<b>Brad restaurant</b>	Restaurant located in the centre of Rome; it offers innovative high quality cuisine.
<b>Poss caffè</b>	Restaurant located in a small town in Lombardy.
<b>4 all events</b>	Company offering catering services, located in Rome.
<b>Triclinium ristorante</b>	Restaurant located in the centre of Rome; mainly serving tourists.
<b>Pizza forum</b>	Restaurant, pizzeria located in Rome; it offers traditional cuisine.
<b>La Mansarda Ristobraccipizzeria</b>	Classical restaurant located in Rome; specialities are pizza and grill.
<b>Ristorante da Romano</b>	Restaurant located in the countryside, 50 km from Rome. It offers regional specialities.
<b>Ristorante San Gallo ai Coronari</b>	Classical restaurant located in Rome; it works also as cocktail and wine bar.
<b>Ristorante Pasqualino al Colosseo</b>	Regional restaurant located in Rome.
<b>L'Invincibile restaurant and wine bar</b>	Restaurant located in the centre of Rome; it offers classical but also innovative cuisine.