

# **RESEARCH INTO THE NEED FOR ASSESSMENT AND RECOGNITION OF COMPETENCIES ACQUIRED IN NON-FORMAL AND INFORMAL LEARNING IN TOURISM SECTOR**

Performing the EU Leonardo da Vinci programme transfer of innovations project “*Innovative non-formal learning recognition methods and procedures in tourism sector*”, a research was carried out aiming at identifying the needs for assessment and recognition of competencies acquired in non-formal and informal education in tourism sector.

Increasing flows of tourists have exerted impact upon the development of various tourism services. Obvious changes have been observed in hotel business, though the numbers of accommodation places in hotels per 1000 inhabitants still lag behind of the EU average considerably. Therefore, tourist accommodation sector has been chosen (hotels, hostels, special accommodation service enterprises) for the research. The development of this sector evidently encounters the need for qualified employees. Though sufficiently qualified specialists graduate from various educational institutions in tourism area every year, accommodation service enterprises still employ a number of employees who have no appropriate education and / or competencies in tourism sector.

The Requirements for Lithuanian hotel, motel, and hostel classification (2003-03-26) affirm that employees should have qualification certificates (diplomas) or training in professional skills and have to undergo in-service training and qualification upgrading, i.e. have to be introduced to new technologies not less frequently than once in three years. Administrative and responsible employees should have documents certifying their qualification (certificates). Therefore, it is possible to state that the need for assessment and recognition of competencies acquired in non-formal and informal education in tourism sector is going increase.

The research was carried out in Kaunas city and Druskininkai resort accommodation enterprises. In larger cities a more rapid development of accommodation service sector has been observed, consequently, the need for employees having the necessary qualifications has been substantially large. During the research, a questionnaire was designed (Appendix 1); the obtained data were summarized, analysed, and correlations identified.

## **Demographic Characteristics of Respondents**

140 respondents were surveyed in the research, including 84% females and 16% males. Accommodation service employees working in different positions in the enterprises participated in the research: waiters, barmen, cooks, administrators, accountants, managers and etc.

Respondent distribution according to age groups is illustrated in Figure 1. Almost half of the respondents belong to 18-25 age group (49%), 20% of the respondents are 26-30 years of age; therefore, it is possible to assert that the majority of the research participants (69%) are up to 30 years of age.

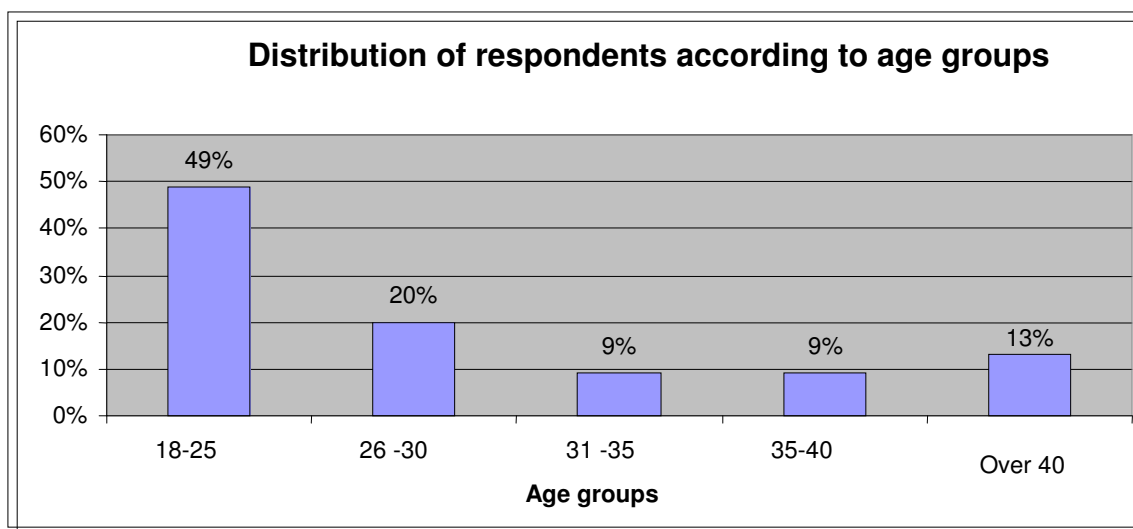


Fig. 1. Distribution of respondents according to age

70% of research respondents have work experience of up to five years, whereas work experience in tourism sector was distributed as follows (Fig.2): almost half of the respondents (48%) have worked in the area of tourism for up to 2 years, the other half (34%) - from 3 to 5 years. It is evident that 82% of the respondents have less than five years experience in tourism sector. Both general work experience and that in tourism sector were impacted by the respondents' age (Fig.1); however, it is often related to general tendencies in tourism and catering service sectors. In enterprises of this sector employee change is considerably great; on the other hand, relatively low payment has been observed.

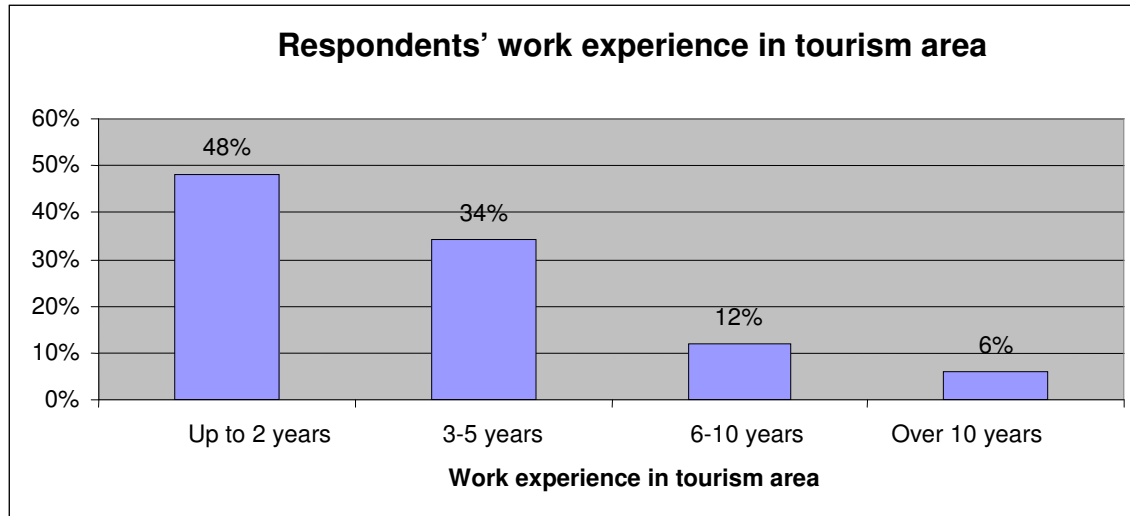


Fig. 2. Distribution of respondents according to work experience in tourism sector

Respondents' distribution according to their educational background is illustrated in Figure 3.

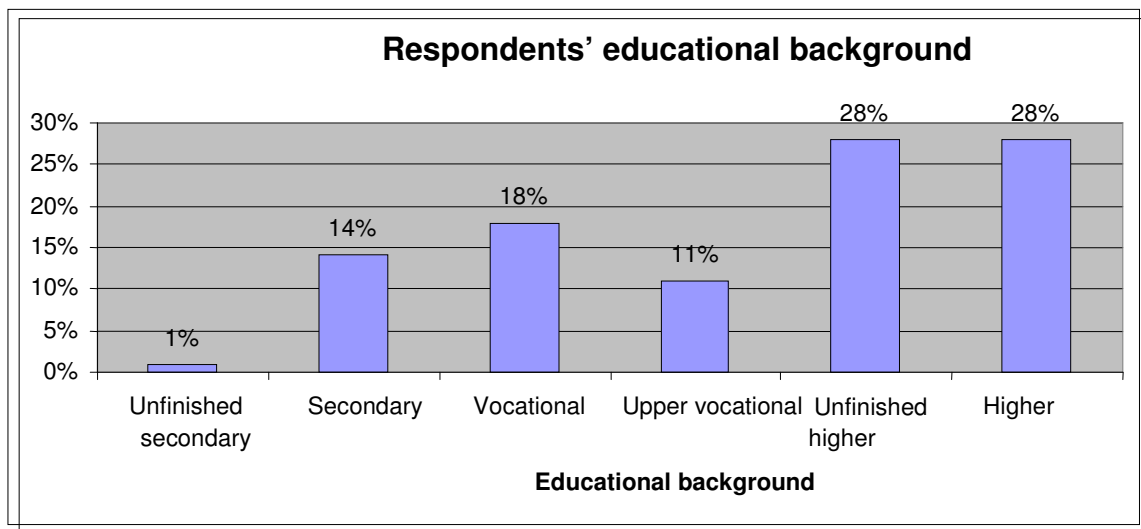


Fig. 3. Distribution of respondents according to educational background

It is evident that 28% of the research respondents have higher education and the same number of the research participants have unfinished higher education. This complies with the situation in hotel and catering enterprise business. A relatively high number of higher education students are employed in hotel and other accommodation service enterprises in different positions (barmen, waiters, administrators). The specificity of these positions creates opportunities to coordinate work and studies more easily than in other employment spheres. Other respondents are distributed as follows: 18% of

research participants are vocational school graduates, a smaller number of them (14%) are people with secondary education, 11% - with upper vocational education and only 1% of research participants have not finished secondary schools. Such respondent distribution according to educational background was influenced by the fact that research participants were people who occupy various positions. Respondents indicated the following positions they occupy:

34% - administrators;

25% - waiters/waitresses/ barmen/barwomen, cooks;

22% - managers, accountants;

19% - other (chambermaids, custodians, janitors).

Respondents' distribution according to the type of accommodation enterprise they work for is as follows: the majority of the respondents (81%) work in hotels, 9% in hostels, 7% in motels and 3% in special accommodation service enterprises (the respondents indicated: "Aqua Park" and "SPA") (Fig. 4).

Figure 5 illustrates the distribution of research participants according to the number of employees in the enterprise they work for; it is evident that the majority of the respondents work in enterprises with over 50 employees and only some (8 respondents) are from organisations with 10 employees. However, the responses to this question may not be exact as not all the respondents were aware of the number of employees in the enterprise they work for.

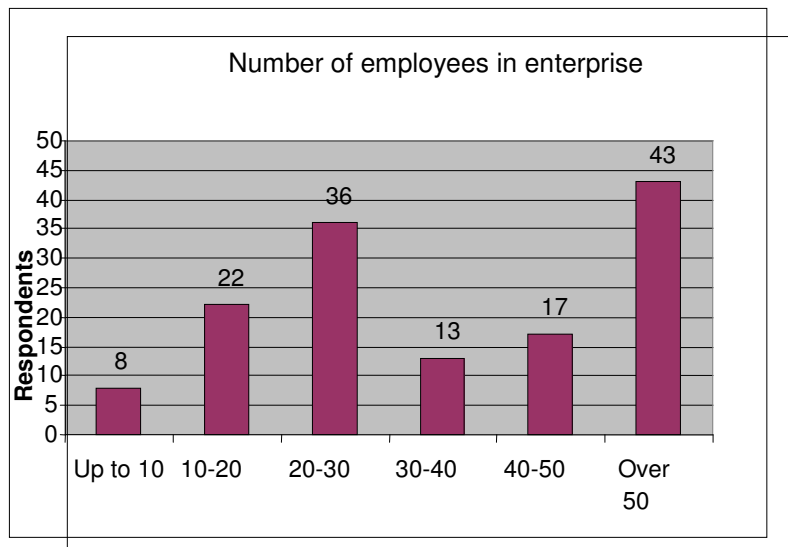
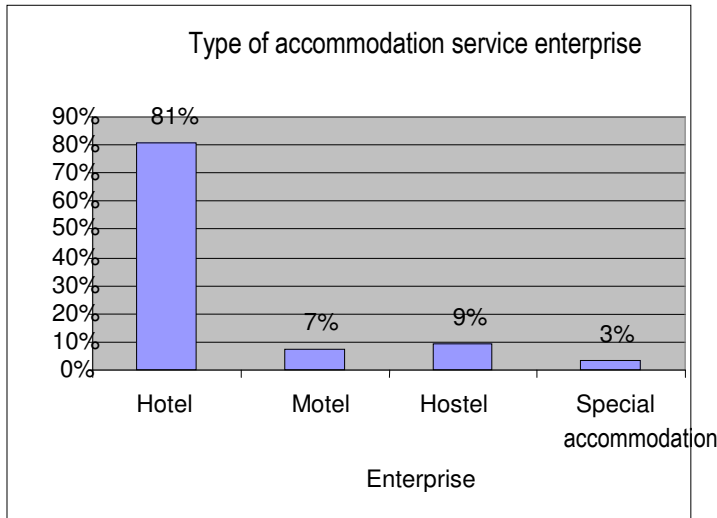


Fig. 4. Respondents' distribution according to type of enterprise

Fig. 5. Respondents' distribution according to type of enterprise size

### **Analysis of Research Findings into Needs for Assessment and Recognition of Competencies Acquired in Non-Formal and Informal Education in Tourism Sector**

If assessment criterion is the respondents' approach to the need for assessment and recognition of competencies acquired in non-formal and informal learning in tourism sector, then survey results indicate that the need for information and competence assessment and recognition in tourism sector is rather high. Research findings are analysed according to the data of the designed instrument (Appendix 1).

## Analysis of the Need for Informing about Assessment of Competencies

In Lithuania the system of assessment and recognition of non-formal and informal learning achievements is at its outset. Scientific research in this area has just started; thus the current situation demands for identification of the need to assess competencies acquired in non-formal and informal way.

Assessment of competencies acquired in non-formal and informal way is a comparatively recent idea in scientific research arena; therefore, the research aimed at identifying the respondents' awareness of competency assessment and recognition opportunities.

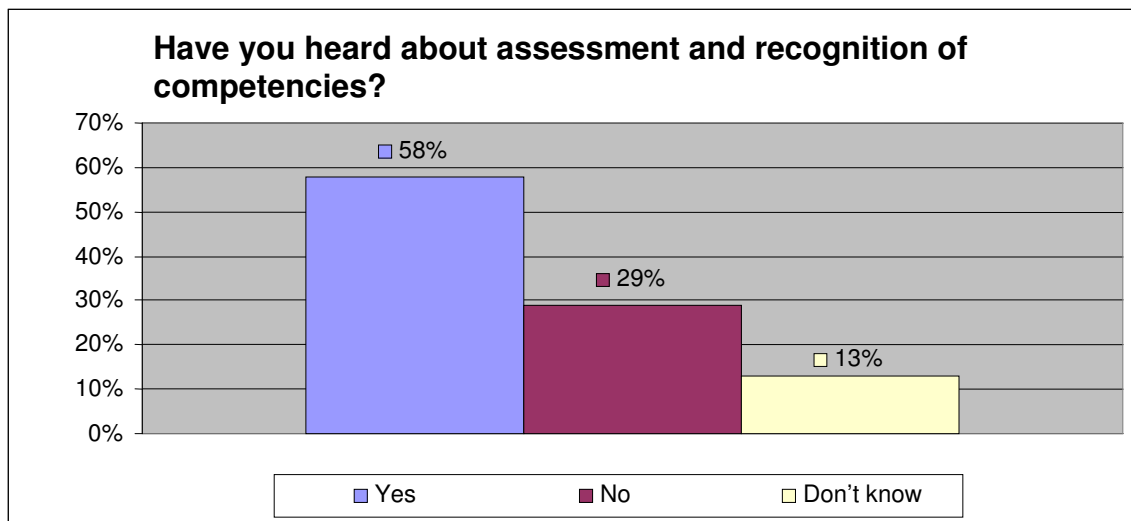


Fig. 6. Respondents' awareness about the assessment and recognition of competencies

Figure 6 illustrates that 58% respondents have heard about the assessment of competencies acquired in non-formal and informal way; consequently, more than half of the research participants are aware about the opportunities for assessment and recognition of competencies; however, further analysis of the research data revealed that the respondents' awareness about the assessment of competencies is insufficient. As illustrated in Figure 7, even 88% of research participants are willing to learn more about the possibilities to assess and recognise competencies acquired in non-formal and informal way. Therefore, it is possible to assert that information about assessment and recognition of competencies acquired in non-formal and informal way is very important

and the research data revealed the need of research participants to acquire information about assessment of competencies.

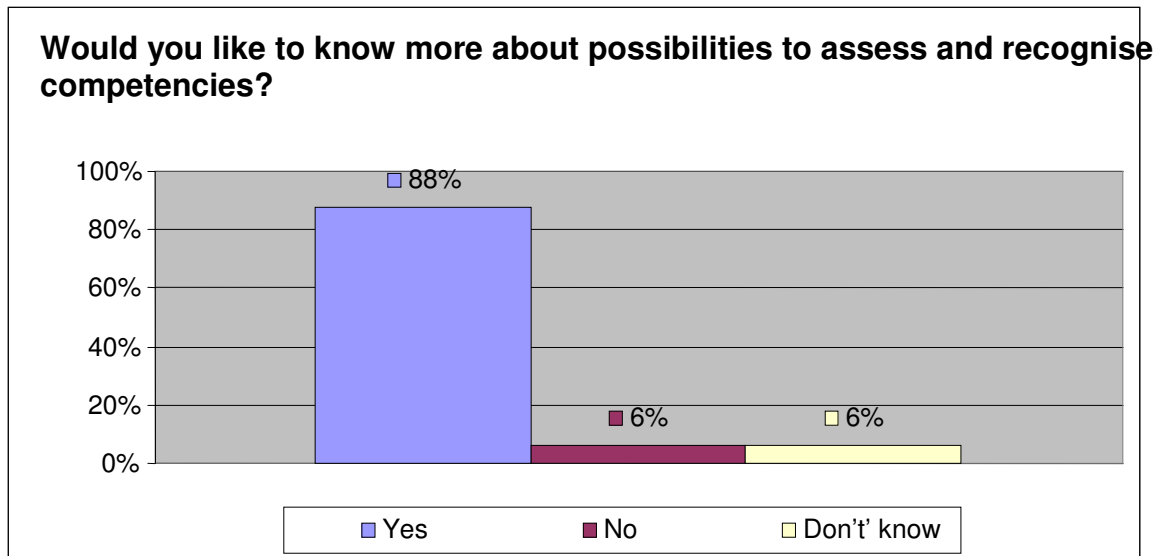


Fig. 7. Respondents' intention to learn more about possibilities of assessment and recognition of competencies

Having identified the need of the respondents to learn more about the assessment and recognition of competencies, further research aimed at identifying in what ways the respondents would like to obtain information about the assessment and recognition. Research findings revealed that the most acceptable ways of obtaining information about competency assessment and recognition are at the work place and in qualification seminars (Figure 8). 75 respondents indicated their preference to obtain information at the work place and 69 respondents chose qualification seminars for obtaining this kind of information. Other means of information such as mass media and information flyers are also acceptable forms of obtaining information for research participants. 32 respondents would like to receive information about competency assessment via media resources and 18 respondents indicated „flyers“. However, the research results show that information provided at the work place and in qualification seminars would be more efficient. Four research participants indicated that it would be acceptable to obtain this kind of information while studying at the vocational school and 17 respondents chose the variant „other“, expressing their preference to receive information about assessment and

recognition of competencies obtained in non-formal and informal way by e-mail and on the internet. One respondent indicated intention not to receive any information.

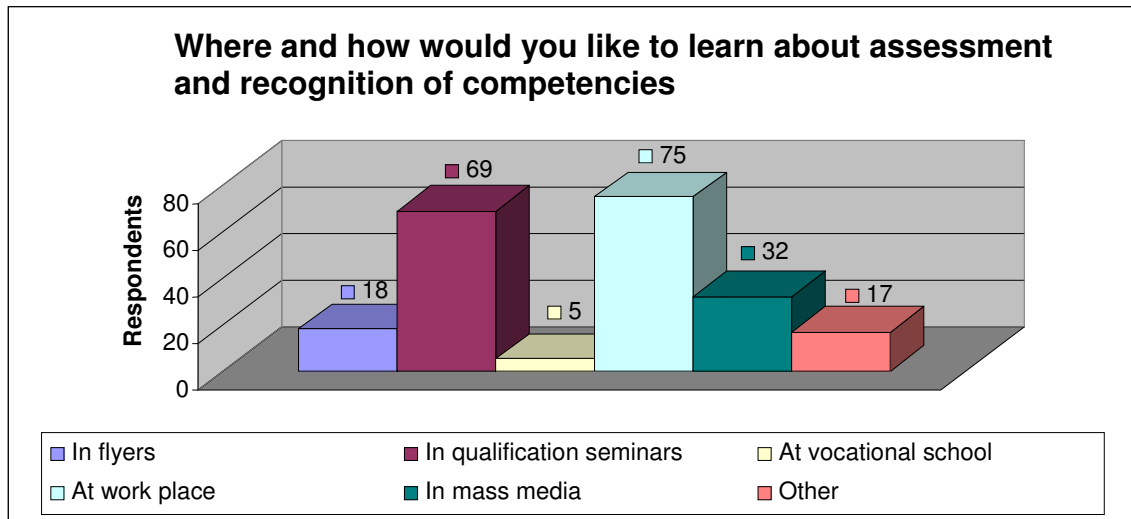


Fig. 8. Forms of obtaining information about assessment and recognition of competencies

Summarising it is possible to assert that information about assessment and recognition of competencies acquired in non-formal and informal way is very important, and the research data revealed the research participants' need to obtain information about the assessment of competencies. Analysing the research data it was determined that the most acceptable form of informing about competency assessment is information dissemination at the work place and in qualification seminars. Information dissemination about assessment and recognition of competencies acquired in non-formal and informal learning will contribute to the designing of competence assessment system.

### **Analysis of Need for Practical Process of Assessment and Recognition of Competencies**

Having identified that research participants would like to learn about the assessment and recognition of competencies, further research aimed at identifying the need for practical process of competence assessment and recognition. As competencies acquired in non-formal and informal learning include knowledge, abilities and skills acquired beyond the borders of formal system of education, therefore the research

pursued to reveal where the respondents acquired professional competencies, after completion of formal schooling or studies. Figure 9 illustrates that most professional competencies were acquired by research participants while working, i.e. at the work place (119 respondents); whereas 51 respondents indicated that they acquired professional knowledge and skills in courses, training, traineeships, and etc. The responses of the rest of the respondents distributed as follows: 19 respondents acquired professional competencies in self-study and 8 respondents indicated the variant “other”. The latter respondents detailed that they had acquired professional competencies while travelling and during practical training in study years. Other research participants stated they were still studying.

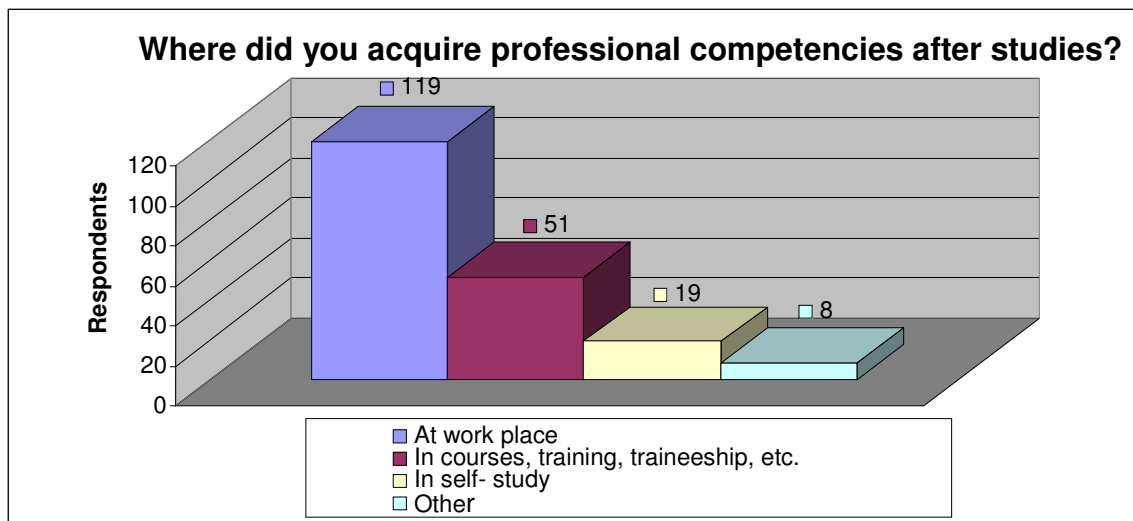


Fig. 9. Professional competencies acquired after formal schooling

As research findings indicated that the respondents acquired professional competencies in non-formal and informal learning, further research was performed into the need for competency assessment, aiming at identifying if the respondents intend to participate in the process of non-formal and informal competency assessment. As illustrated in Figure 10, the majority of research participants intend to participate in competency assessment process (122 respondents), and only 3 respondents expressed their unwillingness to evaluate their professional competencies acquired in non-formal and informal learning, 12 respondents were undecided and indicated the option “don’t

know”. It is possible to assume that the latter responses were caused by lack of awareness and information about the assessment opportunities; therefore, having been informed about such opportunities the responses may differ.

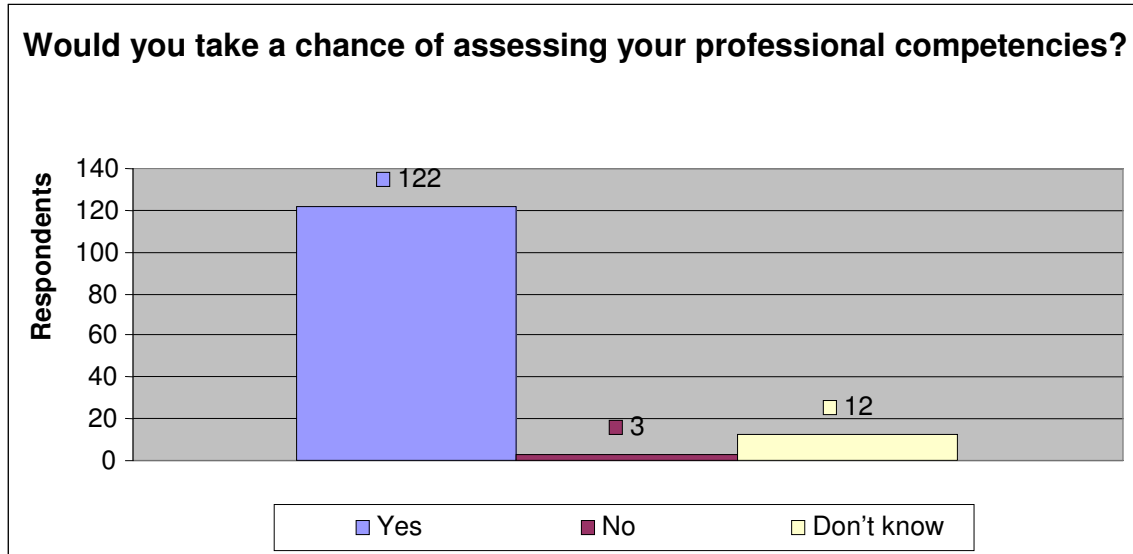


Fig. 10. Respondents' distribution according to intention to participate in competency assessment process

Analysing the findings of research survey, it was determined that the majority of the respondents intend to participate in the process of assessment of competencies acquired in non-formal and informal learning; therefore, further research aimed at revealing the most preferable ways for the respondents to participate in the assessment process of competencies acquired in non-formal and informal way. As illustrated in Figure 11, the most preferable form of assessment of competencies, according to the respondents, is assessment at the work place (indicated by 95 respondents), as well as at higher education institutions: 44 respondents indicated colleges and 40 – universities. The research findings revealed that both, informing about the assessment of competencies acquired in non-formal and informal learning (Fig. 8) and the assessment process itself (Fig. 11), in respondents' opinion, should take place at the work place and in higher education institutions. 3 out of 4 respondents who chose the option “other” indicated their unwillingness to participate in competency assessment process and one respondent would prefer to have professional competencies assessed during seminars.

Analysing the research findings, it is obvious that the need to assess competencies acquired in non-formal and informal learning in tourism sector is high and the respondents consider the role of organisation they work for as very important in the process of assessment. The results show that information about the assessment of competencies, in respondents' opinion, should be disseminated at the work place, and the competency assessment process should be performed at the work place as well.

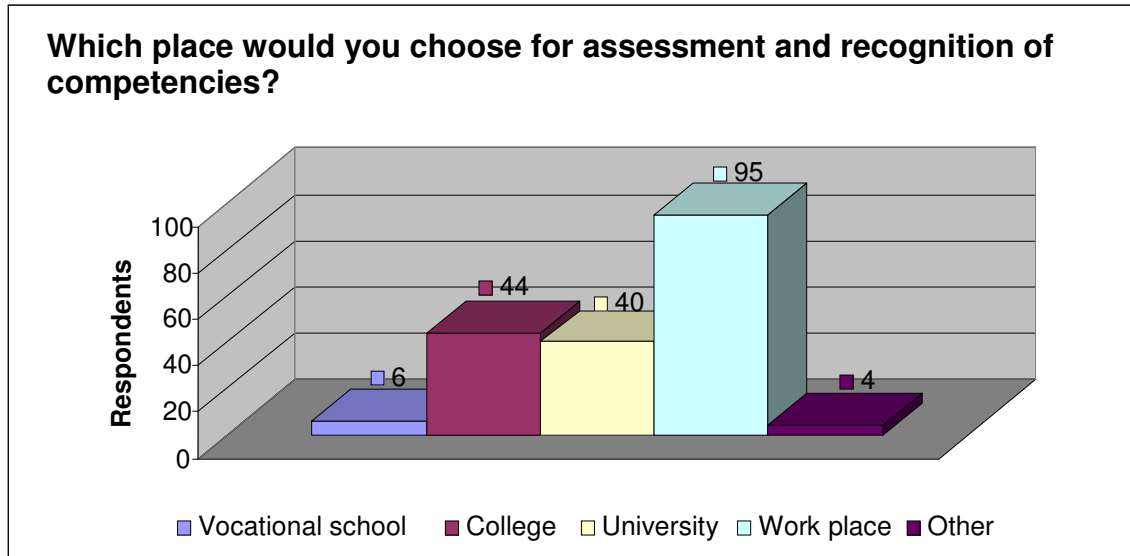


Fig. 11. Places that respondents would choose for assessment process

As the majority of research participants (Fig. 10) would like to participate in the assessment of professional competencies acquired in non-formal and informal learning, it is evident that the respondents see the value of competency assessment (Fig. 12). Most of the respondents indicated that the most important issue in the assessment of professional competencies acquired in non-formal and informal learning is a possibility to acquire a certificate that is recognised by employers (indicated by 97 respondents). The responses of other respondents distributed as follows: 51 respondents would like the assessment of competencies to lead to the possibility to study at a higher education institution (after the assessment of the current competencies, 37% of them would like to study at colleges, whereas 63% of them - at universities). A small number of the research participants (3 respondents) would like to choose professional assessment of competencies as it would encourage them to study at vocational schools and 3 research participants indicated the option "other" as they would not like to participate in the process of assessment of competencies.

Having summarised the research results, it is possible to assert that the most important benefit of the assessment of competencies acquired in non-formal and informal learning is, as seen by the research respondents, the acquisition of the certificate that will be recognised by the employers. Other important opportunity provided by the assessment of competencies acquired in non-formal and informal learning is the possibility provided by the assessment process to study at a higher education school (Fig. 12)

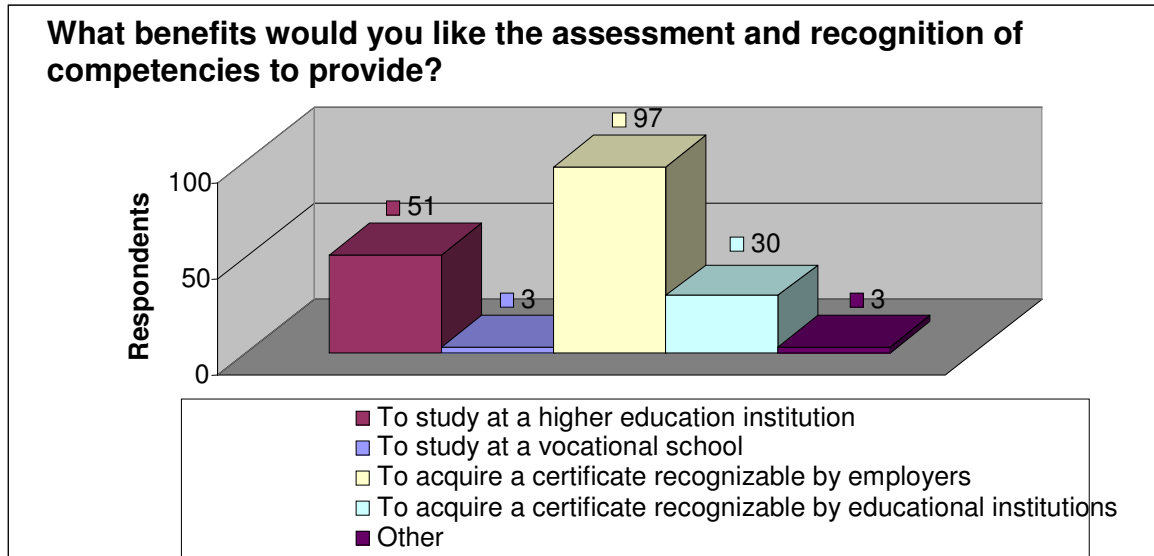


Fig. 12. Benefits as seen by the respondents of assessment of competencies acquired in non-formal and informal way

### **Impact of Assessment of Competencies Acquired in Non-formal and Informal Learning upon Career Planning**

Analysing the research data, not only the need for information about the assessment of competencies acquired in non-formal and informal learning and for assessment as a process was identified but also another tendency was determined, i.e. the impact of assessment of competencies acquired in non-formal and informal way upon the respondents' career. The prior analysed data revealed that the majority of the respondents give priority to organising dissemination of information about assessment of competencies at the work place; in a similar manner they consider that competency assessment process should be performed at the work place as well. Furthermore, the acquisition of a certificate recognisable by the employers is seen by the respondents as

the most important benefit of assessment of competencies. It can be assumed that the assessment and recognition of competencies can have impact upon the respondents' career (Fig. 13). According to the research data, assessment of competencies acquired in non-formal and informal learning is more related to the world of work. Figure 13 illustrates that respondents see the impact of competency assessment and recognition upon their career in the following way: 104 respondents answered "yes" to the question if the assessment and recognition of competencies has impact upon the career, 4 indicated "no" and 31 research participants said "don't know". The research data illustrate that the respondents assume that competency assessment and recognition can have impact upon their career.

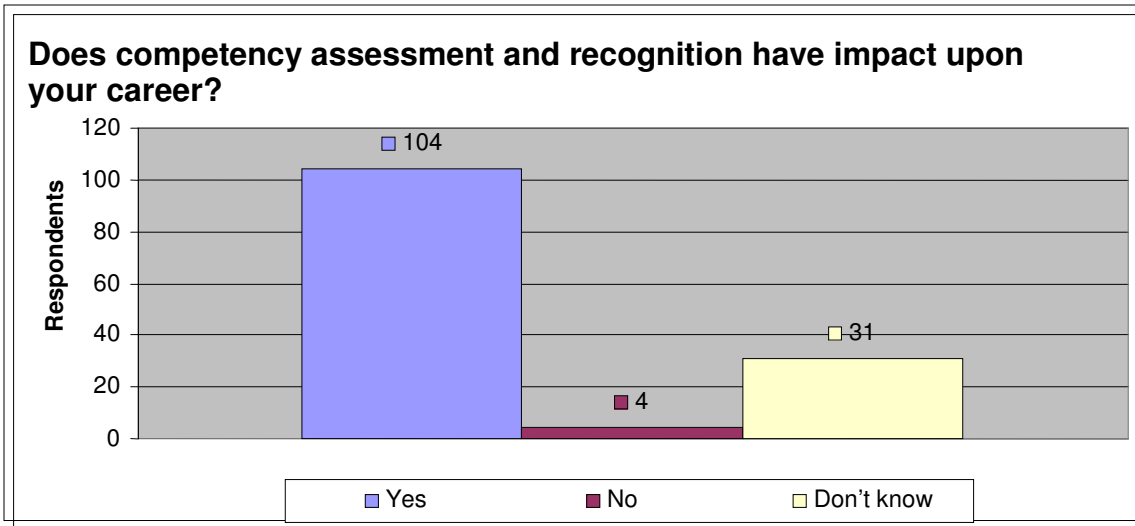


Fig. 13. Impact of assessment of competencies acquired in non-formal and informal learning upon the respondents' career

Having identified that competency assessment and recognition will have impact upon the research participants' career, further research aimed at identifying what impact the assessment and recognition of competences would have upon the respondents' career. As it is possible to see in Figure 14, the respondents assume that having assessed and recognised their current competencies their work salary would increase (88 respondents), 61 respondents think that the assessment of competencies would allow them to change their work position and would provide opportunities for vertical and horizontal movement in the organization, changing their work position in the enterprise. 37

respondents assume that their competency assessment and recognition will lead to their acknowledgement by other people, 33 respondents claim they would change their work place. Therefore, it is possible to state that research participants see the link between assessment and recognition of competencies acquired in non-formal and informal way and career and foresee concrete changes that should happen, having implemented the process of non-formal and informal competency assessment. One respondent out of those who chose the option “other” indicated personal growth, the rest emphasised that competency assessment and recognition would have no impact upon their career and would not change anything.

Summarising it is possible to state that the research respondents see concrete benefits of the system of assessment and recognition of competencies acquired in non-formal and informal way and the link between the assessment of competencies and career in the world of work.

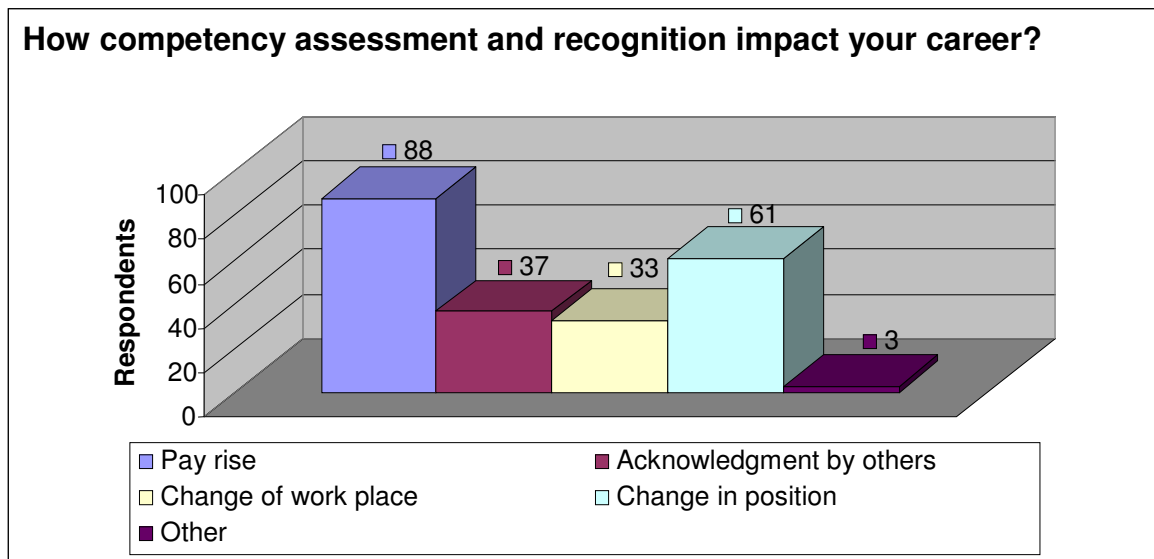


Fig. 14. Impact of competency assessment and recognition upon respondents' career

### Conclusions

- Information about assessment and recognition of competencies acquired in non-formal and informal way is an important part of the process, and research data revealed the need expressed by the respondents for obtaining information about the

assessment and recognition of competencies. Analysing the research data it was identified that the most accessible form of obtaining information about assessment of competencies is information dissemination at the work place and in qualification seminars.

- The process of assessment of competencies acquired in non-formal and informal way can be performed in the work setting or higher education schools.
- The most important benefit of assessment of competencies acquired in non-formal and informal learning, as seen by the respondents, is acquisition of a certificate recognizable by employers and a possibility to study at a higher education school.
- Research participants see the links between assessment and recognition of competencies acquired in non-formal and informal learning and their career, foresee concrete changes that could happen having implemented the process of assessment of competencies acquired in non-formal and informal learning: pay rise, acknowledgement of others, change in their work position and work place.