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Topic:

Knowledge and skills for casino jobs: standards and certificates

Purpose of the contribution : To present the Slovenian experience in the standardization of required knowledge for gaming, for typical gaming professions as well as for the leading function in gaming companies and local and state agencies which make decision on development issues related to gaming activities.

Operational goal: To introduce the idea about the establishment of the system for qualification of typical gaming professions and to introduce the suggestion for establishing of the »European certificate« of qualification of gaming workers, which would enable easier movement of gaming employees among the European casinos

1. The good old times of the “Slovenian” gaming

The Slovenian gaming industry has its origins right in this region. In Gorica, which is a neighbouring town of Nova Gorica, the first casino opened its doors already in 1790, when Gorica belonged to the Austrian Empire. Later, the town developed into a popular tourist resort known also by the name of Austrian Nice. Still later, the number of casinos or casino clubs as they used to call them fluctuated, but by the start of World War I, there were several in the town. Nearby, in Portorož on the Slovenian coast, another casino (Casino des Etrangeres) operated from 1913 to 1915. Employment requirements were more or less the same as in Austrian casinos. Employees, who were reliable and well paid, learned the art of game management from their colleagues, the same as other craftsmen in

those times. To conclude, let's just say that gaming in this region really has a very long tradition.

2. Slovenian gaming in the modern times

Modern gaming in Slovenia started in 1964 in Portorož. Slovenia was then one of the republics of Yugoslavia. Under its socialist regime, only foreigners were allowed to enter casinos. Residents were not allowed to gamble, which was for “their own good, as it saved them from this immoral activity typical of the decadent capitalism”.

As regards casino employees, they had to be “socially and politically suitable”, it is, immune to the said immoral activity. The first casino employees obtained their knowledge and skills from their colleagues employed in the San Remo casino. Later on, they themselves imparted this knowledge and skills, similarly as did other craftsmen within the various then existing guilds. However, knowledge and skills were only transferred internally, it is, at casino level.

Moreover, knowledge and skills of employees who had typical casino jobs were not standardised. This is not surprising, as these typical casino jobs themselves were not officially recognised. At that time, the fact that theirs was not a valid and recognised profession was not a problem for casino employees. What was important was that they had a relatively well-paid job.

This was also not a problem for the state: the number of casinos in the country was small and their activities were far from the eyes of the public. However, as the number of casinos and their employees grew, it became necessary to do something about it. Casino employees too wanted their jobs to become officially recognised. Two things had to be done: first, knowledge and skills of casino employees had to be standardised and, second, a system of relevant skills certificates had to be designed and implemented.

3. The Slovenian gaming industry in numbers

During the first twenty years after 1964, when the first casino opened its doors in Portorož, the number of casino visitors was relatively small. As I

mentioned, they were exclusively foreigners: rich individuals, preferring almost exclusively table games.

In 1984, when the first casino opened its doors in Nova Gorica, the number of casino visitors in Slovenia was below two hundred thousand per year. Then the Hit company started to introduce a more “American” type of gaming, and their numbers jumped.

At the end of 2007, there were thirteen casinos in Slovenia and thirty-six slots halls. During the year, they had almost five million of visits, of which one-third is attributable to residents. Together with the number of casinos and their visitors, the number of casino employees grew too. Currently, they are three thousand, of which more than two thousand need a licence for their job.

4. Licences for casino jobs

Together with the size and importance of the gaming industry, the necessity to regulate the human resource aspect of this industry grew. Already the first Gaming Law adopted in the independent Slovenia provided for licences for typical casino jobs: dealer, slots or table supervisor, cashier, surveillance officer and floor manager. Later, this area was covered in more detail by the “Regulation on licences for employees in casino industry”. In order to obtain such a licence, a person must demonstrate that he or she is a socially responsible person and possesses the knowledge and skills specified in the said regulation. The body responsible for verifying whether the person meets the prescribed conditions is a commission within the Office for Gaming Supervision, a body within the Ministry of Finance. They do this following a special prescribed procedure. The same commission is also responsible for revoking the licence. Although the license is personal, it has a “defect”: if the employee changes the employer, he or she has to go through the procedure once again and obtain a new licence.

5. Certificate of skills for casino jobs

Knowledge and skills required for casino jobs have been defined, but a relevant system of training for the various casino jobs has still to be finalised. Through inertia, persons recruited by casinos are still trained internally, by the casino company that employed them. The state would

therefore like to define the minimum knowledge and skills required for casino jobs. This would have two effects: first, it would raise the standards in the entire gaming industry and, second, it would increase mobility of casino employees. By introducing official skills certificates, the state would also like to increase the importance of casino jobs and therefore of the entire industry in the eyes of the public.

The first skills certificate has already been introduced for dealers. The training that they have to undergo is compliant with the dual-system training of the National Vocational Education Centre. Let me just briefly explain this dual-system training: it means that a student is trained by one of the several certified institutions and then tested by the National Examination Centre. In the case of dealers, they are trained by one of the certified institutions that participated in a state tender. The most important amongst them is the Casino School of the Hit company. Once they complete their training, candidate dealers are tested by the National Examination Centre. Successful candidates are granted a valid and recognised skills certificate for dealers. The same system is currently being introduced also for other casino jobs.

I'd just like to tell you about the knowledge and skills required from dealers. In addition to job-specific technical knowledge and skills, successful students have to know also the following: social and economic aspects of the gaming industry, applicable regulations, game psychology, customer relationship management, problem gambling, social benefits and costs of gaming, as well as the code of responsible gaming.

So now we've covered the system applicable to casino jobs that we have already introduced or are about to introduce in Slovenia. Now I'd like to digress here a moment and tell you about a similar system that might be introduced also at management level in the Slovenian gaming industry.

6. Leading positions in the Slovenian gaming industry

As I mentioned before, the Gaming Law provides for licences for casino jobs, but not for management positions. In other established industries, for example in banking and insurance, one can not be appointed to a management position without a licence. For this reason, there has been an initiative to introduce a similar system also in the gaming industry. According to the advocates of such a system, this is necessary as the gaming industry has its specifics and can also cause a lot of social costs.

The general public is in favour of having very responsible management teams at the helm of the gaming industry. Very responsible not only to the owners, that is, profit-oriented, but also towards the society, that is, observant of the accepted social mission of the gaming industry.

Those behind the said initiative have already prepared a draft list of the key knowledge and skills required for occupants of the leading positions in the Slovenian gaming industry. Let me just mention that this includes not only members of management boards of the various casino companies, but also officers at national and local level that make decisions that affect the course of development of the Slovenian gaming industry. So the key knowledge and skills required for all these officers has been classified into four major groups:

- macro-management of the gaming industry (regulation, development policy, etc.)
- micro management of the gaming industry (at casino level),
- responsible gaming (mitigating the negative effects), and
- public relations management.

Introducing licences for key officers in the Slovenian gaming industry is necessary for various reasons, but above all for the following: given that casinos and most notably slots halls have been mushrooming, the general public is getting increasingly aware of the problems and costs that poorly managed undertakings can cause. If the general opinion should thus become unfavourable, this could seriously hamper the future development of the Slovenian gaming industry. For this reason, the government should ensure responsible management of the gaming industry.

People behind the said initiative have already put these requirements in black and white, in a document entitled “Management standards in the gaming industry”, but the views of this issue differ. Experts and trade unions support this idea, but owners of slots halls, as well as politicians that are currently responsible for the appointment of management boards in the state-owned casinos, are hesitant. If this system is introduced, the number of people that could be appointed management board members would become much smaller. However, I am of the opinion that in order to enable sustainable development of the Slovenian gaming industry, Slovenia will eventually introduce relevant licences for occupants of the leading positions.

7. What about the European union?

One of the key freedoms in the European Union is also the free movement of workers. This requires standardisation of casino (and other) jobs across the European Union. Such standardisation has its support also in the Bologna process.

For the time being, training programmes for the various casino jobs have not yet been standardised. Maybe there has been no need for this. Gaming is one of the areas that each member states regulates according to its own policies and objectives. However, workers are becoming more and more flexible and mobile. In order to ensure comparability of knowledge and skills, as well as mobility of casinos employees, the European gaming industry would first have to adopt an European gaming code and agree the minimum standards of knowledge and skills required for typical casino jobs. This would also make certificates issued in one member country valid in any other member country. This could later on be upgraded, so that eventually we would have an European certificate. The knowledge and skills required would have to be defined in accordance with the envisaged course of development of this industry.

I think that this is a very good idea: first, it would enhance the reputation of the entire gaming industry. And, second, it would increase mobility of casino employees: this would be of benefit both to employers and casino visitors. The first would have less difficulties finding qualified employees at a lower cost, while the second could be sure to find the same level of service everywhere.