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EHL CASE STUDY

A school turnaround that re-uses empty buildings and boosts the local economy

How Vocational Education brought an
empty school building back to life

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Local economies rely heavily on education and schools for prosperity, so when schools fail to adapt to the changing areas of development for their regions, or face management issues, turnaround strategies are called for. Picking a successful turnaround strategy is crucial for both school leaders and for city councils having to deal with empty school buildings and talent shortages.

The case of Oradea in Romania

Romania's economy is mainly centered on the services sector, which employs around 49% of the nation's workforce. Tourism has been flourishing in recent years in the country, In Oradea, a city located in Crisana, a subregion of Transylvania, considerable grant funds have been secured for boosting tourism and supporting the hospitality industry. The number of tourists increased by 40% and the need for qualified personnel grew sharply.

With a former school building available in the city center, the City Hall of Oradea was looking for a Highly skilled operator to swiftly transform the space into an education facility that would directly support the local market.

Vocational Education: a promising way to refocus a school

Oradea was looking for a model that could provide a large talent pool of skilled workers, ready for hospitality operations. Vocational education and training was identified as the best option, as it opens opportunities for upskilling programs, reintegrating adults into training through second chance programs, and expanding apprenticeships and other work-based learning schemes, all having the potential to support the local economy's need for a skilled workforce. Selecting a Vocational Education and Training program, focused on hospitality, enabled Oradea to support its local economic development with a pool of talents ready to respond to the market demand.





Choosing the right partners to support the turnaround strategy

Oradea's stakeholders were searching for partners that could provide the following:

- a renowned brand for a faster pace to market and to reassure both students and the industry about the quality of the provided education.
- a ready-to-use curriculum to provide the best learning experience from the start
- an operational implementation blueprint to benefit from the best-in-class management practices

Oradea decided to select the best-in-class partner for a Vocational Program - VET by EHL,, EHL, the education group ranked world #1 in hospitality education. The local market expertise was brought by winsedswiss education group (WEG) and out of this strategic partnership, Oradea Management Hotel Academy (OHMA) was born.

4 steps for a successful investment in education

Oradea's government officials and school leaders took 4 strategic steps to make Oradea's new hospitality school successful:

1. Identify the right market opportunity

When it comes to turning around schools, there are generally lots of redevelopment or repurposing opportunities, however it is important to analyze options with consideration of:

- Economic redevelopment options
- Capital investment
- Operating cost
- Strategic agency needs

Keeping a long-term vision was seen by Oradea's stakeholders as extremely useful to make sure the opportunity was sustainable and would have a significant impact on the community. Vocational Education and Training for the Hospitality industry was the perfect match.

2. Choose a License model

A franchise model was selected for Oradea as the best way to benefit from an existing, well-proven model, while reducing the efforts to develop infrastructures and learning content. Ready-to-use programs would provide consistent quality and quick turn-around-time to go to market.

3. Invest in staff training

All staff involved in the new learning center underwent a training on the latest facilitation skills and VET by EHL Product knowledge. Oradea found that by investing in the train-the-trainer program provided by its franchisor, it could provide the best possible learning experience to students involved in its Vocational Education and Training center.

4. Implement quality standards

The long-term success of a turnaround project relies on the quality of its operations. It is therefore essential to adopt best practices from the start. Oradea's project benefitted from a comprehensive set of infrastructure guidelines and operational standards inspired by the best practices used by the EHL Group.

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For me, OHMA is not just a school, it is a lifestyle. Once you get to understand the hospitality industry, you also change your vision, your behavior, and habits. Without realizing it, I apply in my daily life everything that I have learned in courses. With an authentic teaching approach, the trainers manage to educate, support and guide me to gain as much experience as possible. OHMA is a challenge that I'm going to enjoy, and I can't wait to see what comes next.

Ecaterina Parşenco VET by EHL Hotel Administration Student

The Results: A school turnaround in less than 6 months

When strong partners bring the right mix of expertise to the table, they can greatly accelerate the turnaround: Oradea's new OHMA school was brought to life in less than 6 months.

In addition to this fast time to market, Oradea's leaders saw 4 essential achievements.

1. Quality of teaching : All trainers were trained according to defined standards and could deliver the same quality to the students.
2. Development opportunities for both the institution and students: with the learning materials already developed, the institution could focus their time and energy on recruiting more students and continuously improving the student experience, as well as working in partnership development with the local economy.
3. Proper guidance on building infrastructure, budget forecasting and timeline management helped ensure that planning targets were realistic and the needs of the investors were met.
4. Sustainability of the school programs respond to the requirement of the local economy and talents will have a high rate of employment after their training program.

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OHMA is the school that I was looking for! It provided me a proper culinary education and all the tools to grow and develop myself professionally while having fun. I learned so much in such a short time because of the amazing learning methodology and fun training sessions and also thanks to our mentors, who are passionate about what they are doing, and eager to pass on their knowledge to us. For the first time in my life, I'm actually excited to go to school. I feel proud to be part of the OHMA family. Thank you!

Andrada Mardale VET by EHL Culinary Arts Student



Conclusion

From a vacant school building to a high quality vocational training center that fuels the local economy

Oradea's experience proved that the adoption of vocational education and training programs with a franchise model can:

- Develop competencies and knowledge required in the hotel and restaurant sectors
- Successfully turnaround of a former school building into a modern training center
- Dramatically reduce set up time thanks to expertise, saving valuable time and costs for the investor
- Offer opportunities to scale. Through the franchise model, OHMA has already expanded to a 2nd location in Romania, Brasov, with a training hotel, Belgrade in Serbia with an apprenticeship model and is delivering a pilot in Cyprus in early 2022.

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With time of the essence, our investors were looking for a quality assured education solution that was ready to welcome students in a short period of time. The infrastructure guidelines, quality education materials and EHL's international reputation gave us the confidence we needed to give the green light on this project.

Professor Dr Ray F. Iunius Chief Executive Officer winsedswiss education group

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