

Students of Tourism Today, and Tomorrow?

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Keywords | Tourism, Students, Education, Employment, Unemployed Persons of Tourism Profession, Demographic Transition, Serbia.

Objectives | The study subjects of the paper are students of tourism and employment opportunities of the tourism professionals in Serbia. The research has been conducted with the following aims: their former high school, where they came from – which geographical area, reasons for studying, dominant sources of information when choosing their future studies and when they made a decision about future studies. Also, the research has been conducted with the aim of establishing what happens with tourism professionals after graduation.

Methodology | A questionnaire was conducted among the 1st year bachelor students (enrolled in the schoolyear 2008/2009) at the Faculty of Sciences, University of Novi Sad in 2008. The sample comprised 254 students of first year (80.64% of the total number of first year students), out of which number 148 of them chose one of the management modules (75.51% of the total number of first year students of these modules).

Statistical data: Document Reports of University of Novi Sad, 2008 and 2009 (Faculty of Sciences - Department of Geography, Tourism and Hotel Management).

Statistical data: Document Reports of The National Office for Employment Novi Sad, 2009.

Basic methods used for data collecting, processing data and the analysis of results are field research, historical methods (reference books, written documents, statistical and cartographic data, archival records), statistical analysis exploring reference books and other documents, quantitative and qualitative content analysis.

The obtained data was further processed in statistical Software package SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) programme.

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Main results and contributions | Students who chose to study tourism at the Department came from different high schools according to the questionnaire survey conducted in 2008. Up to 59.84% completed grammar school. The remaining came from different vocational schools – only 6.3% came from tourism high school.

Foreign students are the smallest group – only 7.87%, which is generally the case in the tertiary education in Serbia.

Among the reasons for choosing the Department, the respondents indicated that they chose tourism mostly because it is they love their future profession (76.10% out of the total). Only 0.46% indicated that the main influence came from the parents. However, up to 63.24% responses indicated parents as the first source of information about the faculty, followed by the presentation of the faculty in their high school (12.25%) and the Internet (11.86%).

Up to 26.48% of the respondents made a decision about the study programme and the faculty in the first semester of their final year in high school, and 20.55% during the final semester of their high school education. It is astonishing that 13.44% of the respondents made their decision after high school graduation (immediately prior to the entrance exam for the faculty).

After completing the studies at the Department of Geography, Tourism and Hotel Management, when looking into the profession, most of them found employment in the tourist organisations of local, regional and national level, then in the hotel industry, travel agencies, carrier and transport companies, marketing, scientific institutions which deal with tourism and the influence of tourism on the sustainable development, scientific and education institutions (primary and secondary schools, faculties, institutes for nature protection, demographic institutes, and in banks (as economists).

Limitations | We can observe a contradictory phenomenon that each year a demand for tourism professionals with a university degree in the municipality of Novi Sad is higher than the number of unemployed persons, registered at the National Office for Employment. What is the reason for this situation?

The required data is difficult to obtain from Document Reports of The National Office for Employment Novi Sad (2009), used for the purposes of this study, which calls for new research to be conducted in the future.

Conclusions | After observing the example of the municipality of Novi Sad, most of the unemployed people with the obtained university education qualifications in tourism belong to the age group 26-30 (50.63% in 2009). It is the segment of population which can still easily adapt to the market changes and should have high motivation and work energy. Why is there such a high percentage of unemployed people in this age group?

This situation is partly the result of political, social and economic crisis in Serbia in the last two decades, which demotivated the young population to become independent (to get away from the parental security).

Among the young population, there is an interest in continuing the educational process, often postgraduate studies, because in this way some see a chance to overcome the period of unemployment and to postpone the time of becoming independent from their parents.

The third reason for the domination of unemployment in the population of the age group 26-30 is that in most of the cases the employers require previous work experience in the job advertisements, often with the minimum of 5 years.

Taking into account all the above-mentioned, we have to emphasize that according to the Reports of The National Office for Employment, there are up to 57.60% of the unemployed with university degrees in the field of tourism without work experience.