

## GRADUATES' WILLINGNESS TO BUILD A CAREER IN TOURISM. A VIEW POINT OF THE STUDENTS IN THE TOURISM PROFILE ACADEMIC PROGRAMMES FROM THE TRANSILVANIA UNIVERSITY OF BRAȘOV

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### **Abstract**

*The sustainable development of the society is based on a solid and efficient educational system. At the same time, the sustainable development of the tourism sector can be achieved only with competent and responsible employees. Such goals represent the foundation in designing academic programs in all universities. But it cannot be ignored the fact that many university graduates do not follow a professional career in the same profile for which they have been prepared. In this context, it was conducted a quantitative marketing research among students in their final years from the Bachelor's and Master's academic programmes in the tourism profile at the Transilvania University of Brasov. The research aimed to reveal the level of students' satisfaction regarding their knowledge and skills acquired during the academic studies. The results which have been obtained highlighted the fact that the majority intends to have a career in the tourism field but, at the same time, the students consider necessary to continue their studies in universities from Romania and other countries. This is a prerequisite in order to improve their knowledge and to increase their chances to be employed in a suitable job. The results are also relevant for improving the education curriculum, to optimize the didactic process, and especially for reshaping the training practice content.*

**Keywords:** Education, undergraduate students, career, tourism and hospitality industries.

**Clasificare JEL:** A22, I250, M31.

### **1. Introduction**

Education is an essential pillar for the development of a sustainable society. Equally, sustainable tourism development is based on competence, skills and commitment of both employees and managers. More people working in tourism, in whatever capacity, raises the significance of the sector in political, economic and social terms at a local and national level [3]. Estimates of the scale of tourism employment vary but suggest that, globally, it is rising in the order of 2 % per annum and will constitute approximately 3.6 % of direct employment and 9.5 % of total employment by 2015 [20]. Kreisel (2011) identifies that one of the principle challenges for educators is how to contribute to sustainable development in our educational offering. If successful, we will be equipping graduates with the research and conceptual skills necessary for them to become the leaders of tomorrow not just in an important economic sector, but in fostering a more sustainable world [17]. The main objective of this paper was to identify the intentions of the students enrolled in the tourism study programmes from the Transilvania University of Brasov about consolidating a career in this field.

### **2. Literature review**

A career is broadly defined as a lifelong process of work-related activities [9], and its development is an ongoing series of stages characterized by unique concerns, themes and tasks [8]. What emerges in the career behavior of young professionals is what might be labeled a “bricolage,” a mixed bag of available short-term work and volunteer activities that when supported by strong professional identity can give rise to adaptability and sense of well-being [18]. As Wan et al. (2014) highlighted that career choice is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon, and multiple factors come into play that shape students' career prospects and commitment to the tourism and hospitality industries. The match between what a person sees as important aspects of a career and the extent to which they believe a particular career offers these factors will play a crucial role in that person's decision-making process [14].

The tourism and hospitality industries worldwide have been confronted with the problem of attracting and retaining quality employees, which has led to a shortage of skilled employees to staff the ever-growing number of hospitality businesses [3, 15]. There are many factors contributing to the problem, and negative disposition toward the industries is one of them. The industries have a poor reputation due mainly to the low financial compensation,

unsociable working hours, menial work, and limited opportunities for career progression [19]. A majority of the career literature in hospitality focuses on exploring students' general attitudes toward the industries, their career prospects, and their intention to enter the industries upon graduation [1]-[10]-[12]-[16]. Students hold vague career aspirations and have a poor understanding of the labour market and hospitality students make intuitive career decisions upon graduation [13]. Many students are entering tourism and hospitality programmes with no real understanding of the types of work available in the industry and with little idea of the employment conditions in the industry [2]. Hospitality students are now more concerned about their careers due to the ongoing challenging labour markets, particularly for youth, found in many countries [6]. Students in general look for jobs that offer good career prospects. More promising career prospects would definitely help increase their intention to enter and commit to the industries. The relationship between perceived social status and career prospects is moderated by salary expectation [19]. Also, those still in the hospitality industry find it more important to have good promotion prospects, an extrinsic motivator, and a career in which they can use their hospitality degree, an intrinsic motivator [5]-[7]. Wan et al. (2014) highlighted that rather than offering higher salary to attract talent to stay and commit to the tourism and hospitality industries, operators might need to use other motivators and strategies to entice employees, such as by creating a fun working environment, improving working conditions, providing a more flexible working schedule and supervisors' encouragement and understanding.

There are also reports of many tourism and hospitality management graduates leaving the industry or even failing to enter the industry upon graduation due to low job satisfaction, poor employment conditions and absence of motivating factors resulting in high staff turnover and wastage of trained and experienced personnel [10]. Progress was identified but, at the same time, clear evidence was forthcoming that change was slow at best and, in many countries and organisations, entirely stalled with respect to key areas such as working conditions, remuneration, status of work, diversity management and workplace relations [4].

### 3. Research method

The Faculty of Economic Sciences and Business Administration coordinates eight full time Bachelor's degree programmes of study (out of which the Economics of Trade, Tourism and Services study program) and nine Master's degree programmes of study (out of which the Business Administration in Tourism study program), being the largest faculty of Transilvania University of Braşov. The two academic programmes in the tourism field counted in January 2016, 116 students in their final year, out of which 91 were attending full time and distance learning Bachelor program and 25 the Master program.

A quantitative marketing research was conducted among these undergraduate students in order to reveal the level of their satisfaction regarding the knowledge and skills acquired during the academic years and their intentions on the future career. The questionnaire included 14 questions, and a number of 107 questionnaires were completed, representing the results from 92% of the population studied.

### 4. Results

A first element examined was the identification of the reasons which have determined the respondents to enroll in the tourism study programmes. The responses highlighted that the vast majority, i.e. 74% of the subjects have chosen the tourism study programmes from the desire to build a career in this field. Also, 17% out of them were influenced by parents and friends, while 3% indicated they were unable to access the study programmes chosen initially. A low percentage, 6% of the respondents said that other reasons represented the basis for their decision, such as the desire to travel or to continue a program similar to the one studied in high school.

When asked whether they intend to engage in the tourism field after graduation, the subjects expressed a positive answer at a rate of 87% (figure no. 1).

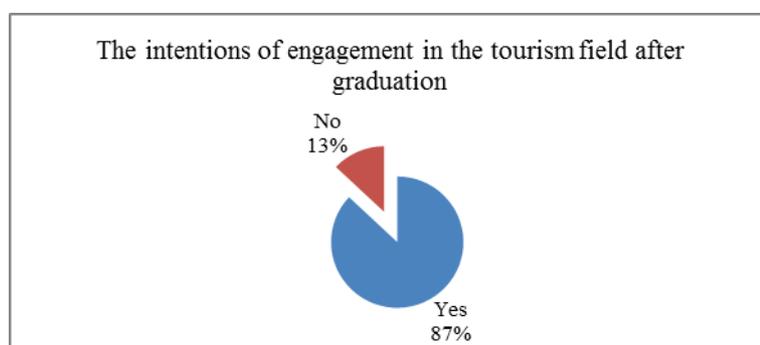


Figure No. 1. The intentions of engagement in the tourism field after graduation

The respondents were asked to evaluate the knowledge acquired during academic studies, the results of their practical training, and also to evaluate the content of the education curriculum. As for the level of satisfaction related to the knowledge acquired, half of the respondents, respectively 51% out of them were satisfied with the level and content of the knowledge gained, 26% of subjects had a neutral assessment in this regard, 13% were dissatisfied, while 10% of respondents were very satisfied (figure no. 2).

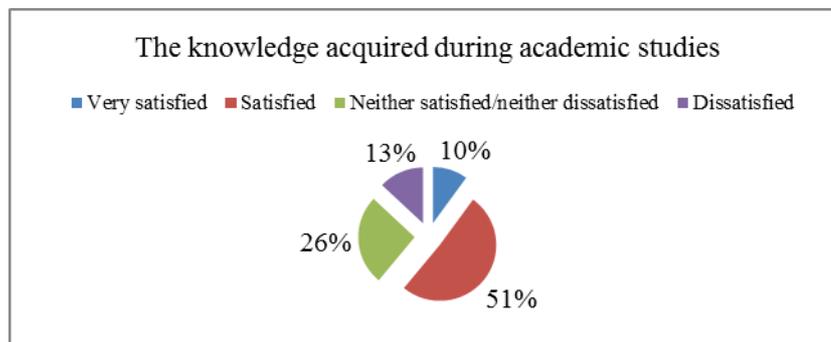


Figure No. 2. The assessment of the satisfaction level on the knowledge acquired

The interviewed subjects were asked to assess the content and results of the practical training conducted during the academic studies. It can be noticed a dispersion of the answers. Approximately 33% of the respondents revealed their good opinion on this subject, while 21% out of them indicated a neutral attitude. At the same time, 21% of the subjects considered that the practical training had unsatisfactory results, 18% out of them said they have been very satisfied, while 7% expressed their total dissatisfaction on this aspect (figure no. 3).

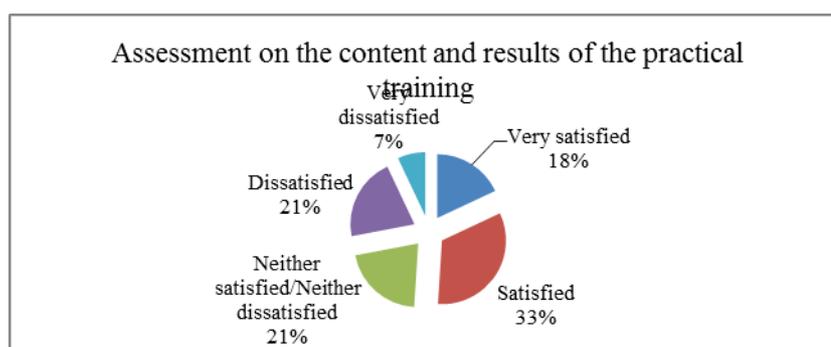


Figure No. 3. The assessment of the satisfaction level on the content and results of the practical training

Regarding the assessment of the education curriculum which was the basis for the academic training, the analysis of responses revealed that most of the respondents, i.e. 48% are satisfied about the content of the education curriculum, 32% expressed a neutral attitude, similar percentages were recorded for the respondents who expressed their satisfaction and also for the dissatisfied ones, respectively 9% out of the recorded answers, and 2% of the respondents said they were very dissatisfied about this aspect.

Moreover, the respondents appreciated in a percentage of 79% the necessity to continue their studies in the field in order to increase their chances of employment in tourism and also, 25% out of them intend to continue their studies at universities in other countries. The reasons that cause them to turn to universities abroad are the following: acquiring a more valuable theoretical background (3 answers), improving the practical skills (16 responses), improving the chances for employment in more suitable positions (14 replies), the foreign universities have a more professional organization (12 responses), while 4 respondents were dissatisfied with the quality of teaching in the Romanian universities.

## 5. Conclusions

Sustainable tourism and sustainable tourism education are important characteristics of the tourism research and education curriculum [17]. The findings presented in this article show that, contrary to the results from previous articles based on studies carried out in other countries on the intentions of students to have a career in tourism, in Romania, the tourism industry is still a very attractive field for the workforce. The students' willingness to practice in this economic sector is very high (87%). It was also revealed the fact that the percentage of students who were enrolled in a tourism study program from the initial desire to have a career in the field is smaller in comparison with the percentage of those

who expressed the willingness to practice in this sector after graduation, being thus satisfied with the content of education curriculum and knowledge gained. However, there cannot be overlooked the negative findings reported, especially those related to the training practice content and results. In this context, it is important to mention that at a very large extent (75% out of them), the students consider necessary to continue their academic training in universities from Romania or abroad in order to achieve their goals.

For a sustainable education system in tourism and hospitality the role of the key stakeholders (policymakers, educators and employers) is to ensure that students have a more accurate understanding of the industry and the nature of the changing graduate labour market [13]-[14]-[15]. The education, training, skills and motivation of staff play a key role in an organization gaining a competitive advantage, while their commitment to the industry or firm will determine if the company can sustain this competitive edge [12]. To encourage more graduates to commit to the field, industry partners and hospitality educators have to join hands in order to attract competent employees with a positive attitude towards their work.

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