

## TOURISM EDUCATION – AN IMPORTANT INVESTMENT FOR THE STAFF DEVELOPMENT

Lubov Ivanova<sup>1</sup>

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### *Abstract*

*Tourism specialty is a broad-profiled specialty, as it offers specialization in different fields. Most schools in Europe offer the largest and most sought-after specialization - Hotel and Hospitality Management or Leisure and Tourism Management. Bulgaria's competitiveness on the tourist market and its establishment as a whole year destination has always been connected with the quality of the services offered. Our country has a good multilevel system of training centers at different levels, centers that should provide good language and professional training, but it seems that the graduates are not competitive on the market, which has led to the search for and attraction of labor staff from smaller and not so developed neighboring countries. Where does the reason lie - in the education system, in the discrepancy between theory and practice, in the wrong selection of staff or in the management of the tourist companies, employers and managers? The author of the following paper has tried to explain these reasons and to give answers to some of these questions.*

**Keywords:** *tourist market, tourism specialty, language and professional training, qualified workers*

**JEL Codes:** *Z 32, A20, A22, A23*

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### **1. Introduction**

The issue of education and qualified workforce in the tourism system is still particularly relevant. In spite of the traditions that the specialized educational institutions in Bulgaria have for the training of cadres in the field of tourism, there is the fact that in the tourist sites there are employees with insufficient or, in most cases, absolutely no professional training for practicing a certain profession or occupation, or a particular position.

Until recently, the positions of the bartender, the waiter or the chamber maid, that were considered to be completely unskilled jobs, now experience hunger that does not go away even the positions that are considered to be more

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<sup>1</sup> South-West University "Neofit Rilski", Blagoevgrad, Chief Assist. Prof. PhD, e-mail: lubovivanov@abv.bg

qualified - manager, receptionist or front office, where also there are no cadres with good preliminary theoretical knowledge or an acceptable level of language proficiency. Our country has a good multilevel system of training centers at different levels, centers that should provide good language and professional training, but it seems that the graduates are not competitive on the market, which has led to the search for and attraction of labor staff from smaller and not so developed neighboring countries. Where does the reason lie - in the education system, in the discrepancy between theory and practice, in the wrong selection of staff or in the management of the tourist companies, employers and managers.

The vocational training should prepare the students for inclusion in public production by creating optimal conditions for personality development in different types of learning and work activities, promoting the development of such qualities as the creative thinking and the entrepreneurship (Stefanova, Bogdanska, Karakova, 2017).

In the recent years, the labor market data show, that there is a shortage of qualified staff for the tourism industry, including the hotel sector, in two directions: both staff and executives. Even not long ago in the press there was written, that some famous hotel chains in Bulgaria are planning to bring qualified staff from abroad. This is, at first glance, a paradox considering the large number of colleges in tourism that are called upon to prepare middle-level specialists for the tourism industry, including hotel and restaurant management, and high schools offering bachelor's and master's programs in tourism.

The mention of the word tourism is always associated with a trip, a new experience, a visit to a new location, or in short, with something pleasant. Few people, however, are thinking about the long way to develop and how much work this profession requires, the practice of which requires solid, durable, exceptional personalities that require good language and professional skills. The advantage of these skills can lead to the success of every young person who has decided to embark on the study of Tourism at the university. The specialty is attractive because globally, 7.6% of the workforce is engaged in the travel and tourism sector, that is, about 220 million jobs are related to the industry. The World Trade Organization (The World Trade Organization, data from 2015) expects every 11th person to be engaged in the sector by 2020, and almost 10% of world exports are due to tourism.

## **2. Why to choose tourism?**

Studying or choosing a university career in one's life is one of the most important decisions that will determine how the rest of his life will be. The world is becoming more globalized and competitive, and this requires professionals to be better prepared and trained. But first we need to clarify the reasons that will turn out to be decisive in choosing the academic specialty that we not only like but also to which we have an inner need to study.

Tourism specialty is a broad-profiled specialty, as it offers specialization in different fields. Most schools in Europe offer the largest and most sought-after specialization - Hotel and Hospitality Management or Leisure and Tourism Management. However, there are also narrow profiled programs designed for professionals in areas such as Restaurant Management, Tourism Management, Event Management, Sports Management. The Master Degrees offer training in even narrower specializations in different types of tourism, such as spa tourism, ecotourism, aviation tourism, cruise tourism, health tourism, golf tourism and others. The specialty is usually part of the business schools / faculties of higher education institutions. There are, of course, also higher education institutions offering training only in this area.

At the same time, however, a review of the curricula and the programs of the educational establishments in Bulgaria preparing managers for the hospitality industry (tourism, hotel and restaurant), shows that they largely fail to meet the labor market needs of this industry, which is developing very dynamically and is constantly posing new challenges and problems to the training institutions.

Regardless of the difference in the name of the chosen specialty, there are also compulsory disciplines, such as: Tourism management - management of tourism services, Management – Marketing, Social sciences - communication skills, Business Sciences, Fundamentals of finance and accounting, Tourist policy, Human resource Management, Tourism and international tourism, science for the different cultures around the world.

According to the requirements of the school or the desire of the respective student, more specialized modules, such as Food and beverages, Transport, Event management, Ethics and Responsible Behavior, Health, Spa, Eco, etc., can be studied. There are also Innovation in tourism, Cruise management, Casino management (<https://studyabroad.bg/statii/turizm>).

The problem of finding qualified workers at the seasonal and small hotels outside of the sea resorts is serious and is due to the following reasons:

The difference in the payment of the workers and the length of the season, existing between the winter and sea tourist sites. It should not be forgotten that the labor price offered by the employer is predetermined by:

- the worker's education, qualifications and occupational skills;
- the expected contribution of the worker to productivity and profit.

The average pay levels in the tourism sector in Bulgaria range from around BGN 700 (JobTiger.bg data). According to various comments, the level of payment for the average managerial staff in the Bulgarian 4 and 5-star hotels amounts to at least 2 - 3 000 levs, and higher managers are also commented on and considerably higher levels of payment.

The presence of more specialized schools with traditions close to the sea resorts of the country compared to the rest. More qualified staff lives permanently in the areas where there is sea tourism. Smaller hotels often have to combine more than one function of the staff, requiring the presence of cadres with more specific knowledge and skills.

There is almost no contractual relationship between universities and employers for organizing internships during their studies. Rarely the universities mediate between the students and the employers in the field of tourism, in terms of finding traineeships or jobs.

As a result, employers give quite a negative assessment to the vocational schools in tourism. The main problem of the training is the lack of practice and obsolete programs and equipment for students' training.

The legislative changes made it possible in 2017 to provide staff for the sector from third countries. Will it solve the problem of attracting cadres through this short-term solution. This has led to the initiation of joint initiatives of the Ministry of Tourism with the Ministry of Education and Science to establish a Center for Qualification and Re-Qualification of Personnel in Tourism for which the experience of other countries (<http://www.tourism.government.bg>).

There are always pros and cons in all professions but the subject of this article is to prove that the need for good qualification in tourism is pressing. First of all, anyone who has decided to study tourism has to clarify why he has chosen this specialty.

According to Entorno Turístico (<https://www.entornoturistico.com>), there are 10 reasons why tourism should be taught:

1. It gives you the *opportunity to meet people from all over the world*. Work in every hotel, meet foreign people with different cultures and this will allow you to practice and learn new languages.

2. *To practice different professions*. There is an opportunity to work in restaurants, cruises, as tourist guides, in many other areas where you will always interact with people from different nations.

3. *To have the self-confidence* that you are among the most enjoyable students at university during your training. If something characterizes students in tourism, it is their attitude to life. They need to know the world and enjoy new experiences, want to travel, travel for exchange aims, know new cultures and so on. These young people are fun, charismatic, restless, cheerful, talented, narrators. Be ready to enjoy your time while you work.

4. *Know people with different criteria*. In general, the students (and not just in tourism) develop a wider capacity for adopting different ways of thinking and acting, even the clash with people with different sexual preferences should be considered to be completely normal. They meet with individuals of all kinds, different cultures and countries; with different tastes, desires, dreams, motivations, etc. This diversity can be achieved by expanding consciousness by entering new horizons with the aim of the individual development of the personality that helps to look differently in the world.

5. *Language learning*. Everyone who practices tourism should be aware that in order to excel in the rest of the sector, you must know at least two languages other than your native one. English has not long been a priority in the tourist market, at least one more language is required. The Chinese, French, German, Portuguese or Japanese Mandarin have also been imposed. Every prestigious academic institution must have two or even three different languages in its academic curriculum.

6. *Try to expand your knowledge in any way*. The curriculum in tourism is perhaps one of the most extensive, going through the main subjects such as economics, administration, human resources and information technologies, to specialists in culture, archeology, art history, gastronomy, psychology, marketing.

7. *Develop respect for nature and culture.* The natural and the cultural resources are the most valuable thing the tourist destinations can offer to their visitors. They are the main tourist attraction that motivates the tourists to visit a country. The tourist resources are responsibility of everyone. Especially the tourism service providers have to take care of them and protect them.

8. *The labor market is abundant in job offers.* Various of jobs are offered by hotels, restaurants, travel agencies, cruise ships, bars, government agencies, specialized magazines, congresses, banquets, in short, the opportunities to work are not a problem.

9. *It is a great source of income for the country's economy.* The gross domestic product of one country depends on tourism activities. For everyone who works in the tourism sphere, must be proud that he is engaged in one of the most important economic sectors in Bulgaria and in the world.

10. *A wonderful opportunity to develop by traveling.* No doubt this will depend on your desire to travel. It is essential to take the internships that your lecturers or some travel agencies (which are doing pretty much) can offer, where you can apply some of the acquired knowledge or just know and learn from cities, history, people and the culture in these places.

### **3. What are the possible reasons most of the graduates not to come into the field of tourism?**

1. *They believe that what is being studied in class is enough.* Most students are happy with what they see in the lessons and do not go further into the information. But it turns out to be a serious mistake. Because it is more important for a student to face what is happening in the real world. The current situation in the sector will allow you to understand it much better, but you need regular consultations with newspapers, magazines, radio or television programs that will expand your knowledge of the subject.

2. *Professional practice or finding a job related to tourism.* The ideal combination is to study simultaneously with work, but it is difficult for any institution to offer work to someone without experience. For this reason, after graduating, to get a good job, you have to practice. Surely, your responsibility will be less than that of a farm worker because the work in tourism provokes,

gives experience, and most importantly, it will be that, being a specialist you will have the opportunity to train the others.

3. *The need to know what skills to develop in order to be competitive.* A good piece of advice is to take advantage of the resources the university gives us. Most of the universities have a library, a language lab, a computer center, an archive of graduate papers and articles, and a number of scientific sources that will allow you to increase your knowledge and professional skills. A serious mistake is the lack of interest in scientific developments and the current state of tourism that will guide us appropriately, how we need to think forward and to prepare ourselves in the best possible way.

4. *Learning a second or third language.* If the world of different professions requires more, better professionals with greater skills, the demand for the tourist sector is double. The second language becomes mandatory from the moment you leave the university.

5. *The students have to attend the classes and believe that the teacher always tells the truth.* There are several reasons why students do not attend lectures. This may be due to a lack of motivation to follow, apathy because we do not like the teacher, a lack of interest for the material, unwillingness to communicate, and inactivity for learning, but simply to account our presence or having meaningless conversations with friends and colleagues.

These deficiencies lead to one very important mistake - not to build a critical sense and an opportunity to analyze ourselves, which is important in the real world. To take for granted that what the teacher says is true, which is another serious mistake - everyone can be wrong because he or she is not prepared or is prepared only theoretically but has no practice. To criticize, you have to be prepared, to read, to have an opinion. "There is no stupid question, there are fools who do not ask" (Dian Griesel, 2012 p. 2).

6. *To read.* There above it was mentioned in the article, that it is important to know what is happening in the tourist world; to read everything about tourism, hospitality, travel, and so on. This additional knowledge will build you up professionally, so you will be able to distinguish false information; to develop understanding and analysis skills that awakens your imagination and helps you create new ideas and do new things.

7. *Have a clear goal.* From here begins the clarification and the answer to the question "Why to study tourism?". To answer, you must have built up a

theoretical idea of what tourism means and what chances of realization you would have.

If you have already studied, explore yourself and determine what your vocation is and how your life will develop further and especially in tourism. So you will find the right way and resources to develop to get what you want.

8. *You do attend events and participate in trips to exchange abroad or in Bulgaria.* There is no better experience in the lives of students in tourism than to visit another country, to get to know another culture, another way of thinking and probably another language. The journeys with the aim of exchange offer another experience, growth, experience for at least 5 months of your life. For that purpose, the Erasmus training programs plays the biggest role for Bulgarian students.

9. *Do not put the fun to knowledge.* One should not forget the duties and responsibilities that each student has. This does not mean that students should be deprived of their student life.

It is a good opportunity to take part in the trips organized by some lecturers. Through them you can expand your cultural knowledge, which is ultimately the most important, not just a visit to beaches in the season where cultural events are limited to discos, drinking and dancing. This can be done daily, but in order to acquire knowledge, of great importance, is the visit of an expert (the teacher) to a specific destination.

10. *Try to be entrepreneurs.* Take time to invent, plan, implement innovations. Be different from the others, try to start a project. The world of tourism is too broad to think of just getting to the position of a regular employee. A question of time is to realize your possibilities and to believe in yourself.

11. *Do attend conferences and congresses.* In many universities, an Entrepreneur's Week is organized, and on the occasion of the International Day of Tourism, conferences, workshops, conferences and conferences are always held. Many students prefer not to attend such events, because they think it is a waste of time or they will not be interesting and have nothing to learn. It is during these events that you can learn the most, even more, than in the lessons.

No effort is required to try not to stay away from the learning process. It is not the most appropriate decision to mislead your lecturers just to get a better score, to leave half the job done, believing the teacher will not check it out, to



study only one night or a day, to copy at exams, to leave the lessons in half, and a number of other things, since the only one you are misleading and who is losing, this is you.

According to World Travel and Tourism Council data in 2015, the number of people directly employed in tourism in Bulgaria is just over 92,000, which is 10% less than in 2014. Also last year, the total number of jobs directly or indirectly related to tourism, are about 340 thousand, which again drops by 6.5% compared to 2014 (<http://www.akgb.bg/>).

The table below shows general information about the types of tourism organizations experiencing staff shortages, which sites, what cadres they need and how they attract the necessary staff.

<b>Types of tourist organizations</b>	<b>Searched specialists</b>	<b>Ways to find staff</b>	<b>The turnover of the cadres</b>
<i>Business, city hotels and tourist sites working in the field of congress tourism</i>	Narrow specialists / administrators / management staff	Own ads and competitions / Vocational schools and universities	
<i>Seasonal hotels and tourist sites</i>	Chefs, bartenders, waiters, administrators	Professional schools and universities	High turnover of lower positions
<i>Small family hotels and accommodation houses</i>	Chefs, waiters, chambermaids	Close friends, acquaintances, neighbours	Average turnover
<i>Spa hotels, balneological and rehabilitation centers</i>	Rehabilitators, medical staff, specialized chefs / bartenders, waiters	Professional schools and universities	Medium for the sector

<b><i>Tour operators and tour agencies</i></b>	Administration of agencies, organizers of tourist activities, guides	Professional schools and universities	High
<b><i>Restaurants and food chains</i></b>	Chefs, bartenders, waiters	Professional schools	Medium for the sector

Source: <http://www.referati.org/choveshki-resursi-v-turizma/64832/ref/p12>

Many tourism employers see skill gaps in sustainability-related areas for both staff and management positions ([www.trainingaid.org](http://www.trainingaid.org)). The field of tourism is one of those areas where *personal qualities* are crucial for the professional realization in every field, regardless of the academic level achieved. The good schools should emphasize the improvement of each student's personal behavior so that he or she can be prepared for the needs of the labor market. Among the most frequently asked personal qualities are: communication; ability to work in a team; good organization skills; ethics; problem solving skills; viewing skills in the details; customer service skills; adaptability; sales skills; skills to work with different nationalities and cultures; excellent computer skills;

Among the valued qualities in the sector are the international experience and the rapid adaptability. There is no way a manager to develop himself, if he manages from a place, in his own office and country. Trips are needed, as well as observations of the international situation in the development of tourist services. It would be good for any candidate student or current student to have this in mind if he is motivated to develop his/ her skills in the tourism industry or seeks a high position in hotel management.

Undoubtedly, perhaps the best opportunity for each student to get, this is the one, related to the entry and the first steps in the practice - the internship during the training. There is no way to get started right away in some hotel chains or tour operator with great development, without a preliminary basis, namely the practice through which experience is gained. In Europe, it is not possible for a school to be elite, if it does not provide an internship for its students. Elite is any university that has signed contracts with leading hotel

chains or has its own hotels and/or restaurants where students can spend their traineeship. According to the European standards, a minimum of 6 months of internship is required, but very often students have to work for at least 1 year in order to obtain a Bachelor's degree. Tourism is a business science, but unlike other sciences, the professional traineeship here must be mandatory during the Bachelor's degree.

#### **4. Conclusions and recommendations**

Bulgaria's competitiveness on the tourist market and its establishment as a whole year destination is always connected with the quality of the services offered. The service received by the end-user can add value to the tourist brand Bulgaria ([www.tourism.government.bg/bg/kategorii](http://www.tourism.government.bg/bg/kategorii)). Because the image of our country in the world depends on the quality and the professional service. The Ministry of Tourism is in continuous dialogue with the branch and in our regular meetings with representatives of the sector. One of the most discussed topics is the **sustainable provision of sufficient and highly qualified professional staff**. All initiatives should be directed to tourism services that are professional and world-standard.

Immediate actions must be taken on one of the main problems - **the lack of guaranteed full-year employment of professionals** in the sector.

Another key point on which to emphasize is **the importance of internships and practices in tourism. To provide more hours of practical training** in the training material and more opportunities for specialization during training through the organization of internship programs.

Periodically to update the study material to track and cover new trends in the tourism business development.

To establish closer links between education and business in order to adequately meet the needs of the labor market. In this respect, we must recall the old training system for training of tourism staff operating in Bulgaria, of course we also appreciate the good foreign practices from Germany, Switzerland and other countries with experience in dual learning. The system should focus on recruiting high school students to practice and specialize in line with the possibilities of their school curriculum (<http://www.akgb.bg>).

Every future cadre in tourism must establish for himself whether he has the ability to socialize in a completely different environment than his own one,

whether he has knowledge on psychology and the traditions of other cultures. Does he have the patience and the sense of tolerance towards other cultures, religions, races and nationalities. With a positive look and faith for a continuous development forward.

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