

University of “Goce Delcev”- Stip

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“Higher education in tourism, hospitality, and gastronomy: an answer to the need for professional staff in this area in the Republic of Macedonia”

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Abstract

The subject of this article is tourism and the role that higher education institutions have in shaping the professional staff in the field of tourism, hospitality and gastronomy in Republic of Macedonia. For this purpose the need of higher education institutions in the field of tourism is explained, and a review of universities in Macedonia in which function faculties of tourism, hospitality and gastronomy is made. Republic of Macedonia is not a country with a long tradition in tourism but statistics show steady levels of economic development in this area, internationally and in our country, too. In the last ten years efforts are made by the faculties in order to be in step with modern trends of tourism. In this regard, professional studies in the field of tourism, hospitality and gastronomy aim to enhance the quality supply for both domestic and foreign tourists in the provision of a diverse range of services in all segments in the domain of tourism, hospitality and gastronomy.

Keywords: tourism, hospitality, gastronomy, higher education, the Republic of Macedonia

1. Introduction

Tourism is one of the remarkable success stories of today's time. The industry, which launched its runners in the 1960's of the last century, grows fast and reliable in the past 40 years in terms of the revenue it generates and the number of people traveling abroad. According to the World Tourism Organization's data, more than 715 million people traveled internationally in 2002 and generated more than 472 billion US dollars in revenue. Forecasts for the next decade are even more astonishing - 1.6 billion international tourists in 2020 (Frangialli, WTO).

Tourism today is social, economic and cultural phenomenon that affects on many ways over the development of human society. It can be a tool for achieving economic development in undeveloped and developing countries.

More countries and their governments recognize the Important role that tourism plays in generating the needed foreign exchange earnings, job creation and contribution to tax revenues. Interesting for this article is the employment of the population in the field of tourism. According to Medlik, in the United Kingdom about 5% of the total employed population is in the field of tourism. He also believes that in some places in England about

10% or even 20% of the employed population directly or indirectly is connected with tourism.

Research in the United States show that in 1998 the tourist economy of these countries had 7.6 million employed workers. However, if the influence from tourist spending in other areas related to tourism is included, then tourism has provided 9,4 million employments for workers. This means that in 1998 tourism has influenced the employment of 17 million workers (Goldner, Richie: 2003). Similar would be the data for other developed tourist countries where relatively large number of efficient population provide its existence through employment in tourism.

According to David Aabo, "for some people tourism is an escape from work obligations, and for others is the beginning of those." In higher education institutions those for whom tourism is the start of the work commitments are prepared.

2. Need for professional staff in the field of tourism and gastronomy in the Republic of Macedonia.

Within the territory of the Republic of Macedonia there are seven high vocational catering schools, which are located in different cities. Justification for the existence of studies in the field of tourism, hospitality and gastronomy is evident because it allows students with completed catering-tourism profession as cooks, waiters, paster-cooks and bakers to be able to continue their education and further training exactly in this future industry.

On the other hand, increased interest in studying and learning in this field is noticed. More young people see their future in tourism. The best example of this is the Faculty of Tourism and Business Logistics at the University "Goce Delchev"- Stip, where the number of enrolled students has increased three times compared to the previous year.

According to the State Statistical Office of the Republic of Macedonia's data, in 2008 the total number of catering facilities was 5206, of which 4731 were catering facilities and 475 accommodation facilities. According to the laws and conditions for catering facilities categorization globally, there is a need of higher education in the field of tourism for higher categories of staff.

Another fact in favor of the need for staff in the field of tourism in the Republic of Macedonia is the number of tourists, which was 536 212 in 2007, where about 57% were domestic tourists, and the number of foreign tourists was around 43%. Compared with the past years continuous increase in foreign tourists in the total number of tourists is noticed.

The number of overnight stays in 2007 was 2 019 712, of which 74% were domestic tourists, and the number of foreign tourists was about 26%. The number of realized nights, as the number of foreign tourists has grown in comparison with previous years.

The following data from Table no.1 (below) give us a picture of the employment of people in the hotel and restaurant sector as part of tourism activity. In this table are not

covered employment in travel agencies, transport and other activities related to tourism. If you include activities related to tourism this number would be at least twice bigger.

Table no.1

	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
Total working population	545,108	522,995	545,253	570,404	590,234
Employment in hotel and restaurant sector	9,880	12,672	13,558	19,034	18,995
Employment in hotel and restaurant sector in % of the total working population	1.8	2.4	2.5	3.3	3.2
% Growth of the total working population	-2.9	-4.1	4.3	4.6	3.5

Source: State Statistical Office of Republic of Macedonia, 2008.

Table no.1 (above) makes a comparison between the expansion of employment in the hotel and restaurant sector and expansion of the total working population and shows continuous growth in both numbers and percentage of national manpower employed in the hotel and restaurant sector.

It can also be noted that employment in the tourism sector (hotels and restaurants), in fact, grows faster than in the economy as a whole - almost double between 2003 and 2007, compared with only 8 percent growth in the broader economy, taken as a whole in the same period.

All these data are indicative of the tourism development in the Republic of Macedonia and give us awareness that highly educated staff in the field of tourism, hospitality and gastronomy is required.

3. Review of higher education institutions in the field of tourism and gastronomy in the country.

Table no.2 (below) presents the five universities in the Republic of Macedonia from which four are public and one private. In their composition there are faculties and study programs where subjects in the field of tourism, hospitality and gastronomy are taught (study programs not connected with tourism and institutes within these institutions are not covered). From the review can be concluded that there are no major differences in the study programs that are taught.

All faculties as a basic study program have tourism. The Faculty of tourism and business logistics has study program Gastronomy, nutrition and dietetics, and the same study program Gastronomy has the Faculty of Tourism and Hospitality. The only difference in the study programs is in the Faculty of Tourism and Hospitality in Ohrid, which has Hotel-restaurant study program, while the Faculty of Tourism in Skopje has study program for sports tourism. Only the Faculty of Economics of Tetovo and NSM in Skopje has one study program.

Programs and courses that are taught in the study programs Tourism at the five universities are similar to each other with the exception of a few subjects that are included in one and do not exist in other programs. The programs at each faculty comply with the principles of the Bologna Declaration with application of the European credit-transfer system and the modern way of organizing teaching (interactive lectures, presentations, preparation of projects, seminar papers, case studies etc).

Table no.2

University	Faculty	Study program
“Goce Delcev” Stip/Gevgelija/Skopje	Tourism and business logistics	1. Tourism 2. Gastronomy, nutrition and dietetics 3. Hotel-restaurant*
“Ss. Kliment Ohridski ” Bitola/Ohrid/Veles	Tourism and hospitality	1. Tourism 2. Gastronomy 3. Hotel-restaurant
“State University of Tetovo” Tetovo	Faculty of Economics	1. Tourism
“Ss. Cyril and Methodius” Skopje	NSM, Geography	1. Tourism
“Tourism and management” Skopje (private university)	Tourism	1. Tourism 2. Sport tourism

Source: Official websites of these institutions, 2010.

The Faculty of Tourism and Business Logistics pays serious attention to practical work which students perform. They carry out their practical work in the country and abroad (on the basis of a cooperation agreement between the faculty and companies in the tourism sector). Research carried out among students show that the practice is an additional motive and one of the reasons for great interest in studying of tourism by young people. This faculty, as the other faculties within the University "Goce Delcev", applies e-learning.

The outlook is expected increase in the number of study programs that are taught in the faculties related to tourism, overseas and in Macedonia. This tendency arises because changes in the hospitality industry affect the changes in higher education (Wiermair, Bieger).

As comparison, in Great Britain in 1991/1992 there were 15 higher education institutions which had 22 study programs related to tourism. In 1997/1998 there were already 50 higher education institutions, and 99 study programs related to tourism (Airey, Johnson: 1998).

4. Goals for educating professional staff in the field of tourism and hospitality, with particular emphasis on gastronomy in the Republic of Macedonia.

4.1. The goal of the study program on the basic academic studies in Tourism is to educate highly skilled and specialized personnel in the field of tourism. Lectures, practical exercises and training are designed so that allow formation of highly educated personnel who can be complete and competitive in the modern work environment in tourism.

Students acquire knowledge and skills to work in the field of tourism activity, or work in hotels, travel agencies, centers for promotion and development of tourism and so on.

By acquiring the study program the student is gaining values and practical attitudes for promotion and tourism development as an important economic activity which can successfully survive and profit from.

4.2. The goal of the study program on the basic academic degree in Gastronomy is to educate highly skilled and specialized personnel in the area of restaurant working, gastronomy, nutrition and dietetics. Lectures, practical exercises and training are designed so that allow formation of highly educated personnel who can be complete and competitive in the modern work environment in restaurant working or nutrition and dietetics.

Students acquire knowledge and skills to work in the field of hospitality, hospitality-restaurant business, or working in restaurants of various kinds, diet centers and dietetics and so on.

The student will acquire knowledge of food preparation, food quality, caloric value of food, and also preparation and research of the needs for food of more specific aspects of a healthy population, determination of diet by age (children, pupils, students) employees by work difficulty and working places, as well as studying the overall operation in restaurant business and gastronomy as well as in kitchen units.

Gastronomy is the art and science of good eating (Gillespie: 2001).

Food is one of the essential elements of the tourist experience. However, although it is so important and integral part of the tourist experience, even in the recent years it managed to become the subject of study (Hall, Sharples: 2003).

As competition between tourist destinations increases, local culture is becoming an increasingly valuable source of new products and activities for tourists attracting and entertainment. Gastronomy has a particularly important role, not just because food is a center for tourist experience, but also because gastronomy has become an important source of identity formation in postmodern societies.

More often, saying “we are what we eat” is understood not only in the physical sense, but also because we identify ourselves with certain types of food that we found while on vacation (Richards: 2002).

We believe that for the Republic of Macedonia the great gastronomy offer and the specific culinary specialties is the thing that are characteristic for these areas and represent strengths and opportunities for tourism development through enrichment of tourist products.

5. Conclusion

Higher educational institutions are places where people acquire the knowledge and degree. For realization of vocational studies of tourism, hospitality and gastronomy, basic needs are:

1. Human potential - the greatest wealth of tourism in higher education (Stuart-Hoyle: 2005);
2. Equipment and laboratories (labs for practical training);
3. Space.

The deficit of adequate vocational training during studying is the primary motive for the vocational staff need in the tourism, hospitality and gastronomy in the Republic of Macedonia. Our country is not the only example of this phenomenon. All over the world is looked for highly educated personnel in the field of tourism, who are committed to delivering high quality of service.

Due to the rapid pace of tourism development there is appearing of critical need for professional staff (CHRIE: 1999). On one side, as demanders of professional staff appear larger companies and those involved in mass tourism. On the other hand, there are more people interested in operating their own business. For the latter, tourism continues to provide a wide range of opportunities if they have a strong entrepreneurial spirit. For hard-working, creative, and people oriented to services business who want to own and operate their own business, tourism, hospitality and gastronomy offer almost unlimited possibilities.

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