

50 Years Specialized Higher Education in Tourism in Bulgaria

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Abstract

The aim of this article is to comprehensively outline the contribution of Bulgaria as a tourist country for the development of higher education and training in tourism. The authors try to trace and critically analyze two important periods of Bulgarian education in tourism. The necessity for development of tourism business on a large scale basis shifted the centrally planned economic model from the early 60s of 20th century on to the market oriented concepts. This revolutionary thinking during that time inevitably led to a specific type of higher education in tourism which went through a certain transformation during the transitional period of Bulgarian society. The authors also try to determine the problematic characteristics of the contemporary Bulgarian higher education in tourism, the opportunities for career development of tourism graduates, the role of the scientific and academic experience as an indispensable fundament for the successful development of tourism education and tourism business. Finally there are stated some issues for further improvement of Bulgarian educational system in tourism studies.

Keywords: tourism training, higher education in tourism, career development, tourist professionals, curriculum in tourism, study programs in tourism

Introduction

Bulgaria is a small country which has a cross road location on the Balkan peninsula. Its history dates back for more than 1300 years now. Bulgaria has witnessed periods of great political and social development and revivals (the "golden ages" during the Medieval centuries) as well as the dark ages of foreign oppression. Nowadays Bulgaria is perceived as a country of a mixture of different cultures and common past experience of several ethnical groups. On such a small territory Bulgaria encompasses diverse set of tourist resources.

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Bulgaria as a tourist destination exists on the world tourism market since the late 50s of 20th century. During the next decades the country has rapidly developed and specialized itself in the field of mass organized recreational incoming tourism. From the very beginning of its tourism industry Bulgaria is mainly positioned as a summer / seaside destination as well as a winter / ski destination on the foreign tourist markets. This tendency continues to be evident even now several years after joining the European Union. No matter there are some efforts Bulgaria's tourist supply to be significantly changed with alternative forms of tourism, the current business activities still predominantly outline a typical destination country running mass organized recreational tourism. In this relation considering its cross road geographical location Bulgaria takes a complex tourist destination position within the boundaries of the European Union, the Balkan Peninsula and the rest of the world. For its small size as a territory (110 994 km²) and population of 7,4 mln. people Bulgaria witnesses tourism development on a relatively large scale basis³. The contribution of Bulgaria's tourism industry to the formation of GDP is about 8% (2013). As for comparison an estimate shows that in 2010 Bulgarian tourism business even forms 14,9% of GDP and 13,7% of all employed people in the country⁴.

Bulgarian inbound tourism mainly streams from the countries of origin as – Romania, Greece, Germany, Russia, Macedonia, Great Britain while the most significant share of tourists (4,3 mln. people traveling with tourism purposes) comes out from the European Union – 68%. Main destination countries for Bulgarian travelers abroad are almost the same as the countries of origin.

In order of significance those destinations could be non-exhaustively enumerated as: Greece, Romania, Macedonia, Serbia, Germany, Great Britain etc. At the same time Bulgaria faces significant competitive pressure by neighboring countries in the face of Turkey, Greece, Croatia, Romania and Montenegro mainly in the field of summer seaside tourism activities.

³ Guide Bulgaria. (2012) URL: http://bg.guide-bulgaria.com/bg_Area_Sizes.aspx

⁴ World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) (2010). URL: http://www.wttc.org/bin/pdf/original_pdf_file/bulgaria.pdf

Bulgarian domestic tourist demand is also revitalizing during the last decade nevertheless its small paces of increase 1,5 – 2% per year⁵. The tourist cost structure of domestic, compared to outgoing travels is in favor of domestic tourism with approximately 74% . Almost 80% of Bulgarian people have a positive attitude towards traveling in their own country⁶.

The accommodation sector enormously grew for the last 10 years. According the unofficial statistics the total number of tourist beds in Bulgaria counts for 600 000 units and approximately 400 000 of them (over 66%) are concentrated at the Black Sea coast⁷. The estimations of the carrying capacity only for the coastal line show that there is a potential for the establishment of 900 000 beds as tourist accommodation capacity.

Having in mind the above stated figures we may suggest that Bulgaria still remains more as a receptive tourist destination i.e. inbound tourism prevails outbound tourism in quantitative and monetary values and this tendency will probably continue in future. Bulgaria has rich and varied tourist resources which hold out the possibility of diversification and attraction of large number of tourists to its resorts and alternative places. In the context of its tourism development Bulgaria as a tourist destination has to provide a resource supply of qualitative and varied tourist products. Nevertheless Bulgarian tourism cannot be up to the required standards unless the industry can employ people with a high level of professional qualification. For that reason comes into view the question about training and educating its own human resources in the field of tourism activities.

The authors of this article set the objective to critically analyze and assess important aspects of Bulgarian training and higher education system in tourism as well as to trace issues for its further development.

⁵ Mediapool.BG. (2011) URL: <http://www.mediapool.bg>

⁶ The Experts. (2010) URL: <http://theexperts.bg/tourism/2-procenta-rast-na-vatreshnia-tourism>

⁷ Marinov, S. (2008) Training and employment realization of human resources in tourism – stakeholders' expectations and assessments. *Economics and Management* 3, pp. 56 – 65

1. Chronological Review of Bulgarian Education in Tourism

The establishment of Balkantourist State Enterprise for Travel and Tourism in 1948 laid the foundations for the development of international tourism in Bulgaria⁸. Tourism industry became a state policy of a very high priority. At this time the socialist government drew a clear distinction between economic (international) tourism and social (domestic) tourism. In addition separate state bodies - Bulgarian Trade Unions were created to oversee the recreation of Bulgarian workers and their families. A State Committee on Tourism was also set up being responsible for the coordination of tourism policy in domestic and international fields.

The state itself started to entirely develop the tourism resources, the supply base and the relevant staff for the industry. In this relation Balkantourist was entrusted with the task of organizing and facilitating the growth of tourism through the development of tourist infrastructure, the construction of hotels and support services and promotion abroad in order to attract foreign visitors to the country.

Actually conditions for the development of mass organized international and domestic tourism in Bulgaria were created after 1956 with the opening of the first centrally planned tourist seaside resort Golden Sands (17 km north of Varna). Several years later as a result of the rapid rate of tourism expansion in Bulgaria the socialist government imposed the transfer of personnel from other branches of the country's economy to the newly formed tourism industry. The basic requirement was that they should know foreign languages and further acquire other professional skills on the job⁹. At this first stage, when tourism changed from being a limited to a mass activity, short – term language courses predominated along with separate job training courses intended for tourism personnel at the lowest service level.

In the 1960's the role of the Bulgarian tourist industry was to provide foreign currency and in particular hard currency which was planned to be used for the improvement of the economic infrastructure of the country. At the same time the tourism industry was regarded as an opportunity for evading the western know – how embargo which was imposed towards the socialist countries.

⁸ Pearlman, M. (1990) Conflicts and constraints in Bulgaria's tourism sector. *Annals of tourism research* 17, pp. 103 – 122

⁹ Rakadjiiska, S. (1990) Tourism training and education in Bulgaria. *Annals of tourism research*. 17, pp. 150 – 153

For that reason in 1963 a special school was opened in Golden Sands which task was to train staff for tourist enterprises such as guides and managers for hotels and restaurants. Two years later the school was transformed into an Institute for Education and Training for Tourism, whose graduates became either tourist organizers or managers of tourist enterprises. The status of this institute was at an intermediate level between secondary and higher education. A similar institute opened a few years later in Bourgas (a city at the southern coastal line).

As the industry and tourist demand grew, it became clear that efficiency would improve only if people were trained to work on middle and top managerial levels, for which they needed not only a first – class professional training, but also a theoretical and general knowledge. At this level of education a pioneer in the hotel, catering and tourism fields was the former Higher Institute of Economics (University of Economics in Varna) which opened the first Department of Economics and Organization of Tourism in 1965. The duration of the program was scheduled for 4,5 academic years and until 1990 (the end of the socialist period) more than 700 people graduated in the economics in tourism. Few years later a five year program opened at the Geography – Geology Faculty at the Sofia University focusing on the spatial and urban aspects of tourism development. At this time graduates from these two institutions were also prepared for the job positions of tourism teachers in secondary schools or in institutes of higher education. Secondary schools with tourism training have proliferated since 1980 having in mind the fact that a higher level of service quality has been demanded by holidaymakers and travelers.

Until the late 80's of 20th century the occupational structure in tourism was centrally redefined by the socialist government as a result of sharp diminish of the importance of short – term training programs. These programs were successively replaced by 6 – 12 month courses with the relevant support by tourist enterprises for which the students were purposely trained. So called job – training centers were set up by the state tourist enterprises both to prepare people for new positions and to retrain their own staff.

New entrants of the courses were secondary school graduates trained predominantly for hotel and restaurant positions. As a whole for the first 25 years the system of education and training for tourism in Bulgaria provided about 15 000 specialists in the field not including those who gained their certificates at the industry – based job – training centers (Rakadjiiska, 1990).

Nevertheless the above stated facts the large scale development of tourism industry maintained a continuous deficit of specialized human resources with higher education. The centralized planned economy provided guaranteed workplaces for the graduates in tourism. The main problem was the low motivation of human resources who were mandatory allocated to occupy job positions somewhere within the system of the large state tourist enterprises.

During the years of the socialist period many foreign students graduated tourism major in Bulgarian universities. From 1974 until 1990 the number of foreign graduates from the University of Economics in Varna was 313 people (25 YITUEV, 1990). For the period stated most of them were coming from other socialist, western or underdeveloped countries like: Poland (63), Vietnam (57), Cuba (48), USSR (26), Czechoslovakia (15), Hungary (8), Ethiopia (6), Afghanistan (6), Yemen (6), Sudan (4), Mongolia (3), Yugoslavia (3), Greece (2), Cyprus (3), Jordan (3), Syria (3), Bangladesh (3), Egypt (3), Benin (3), Sri Lanka (2), Tanzania (2), India (2), Nigeria (2), Federal Republic of Germany (1), Morocco (1), Laos (1), Iraq (1), Nepal (1), Zimbabwe (1) and others (25 YITUEV, 1990). Most of them have shown career development in different tourism areas in their countries like: general managers in hotel chains (Czech republic and Slovakia), tourism specialists, head of departments and ministers in government tourism agencies (Russia, Vietnam, Egypt), university lecturers in tourism (Poland), people running private tourist business (Mongolia, Vietnam, Kuwait, Jordan, Egypt, Greece, Cuba) etc. Nowadays this trend of professional career development of Bulgarian students abroad continues to develop. Bulgarian graduates are very well accepted as managers in well – known world places of tourism business like – Paris, London, Florida, Quebec, Dubai, Italian Riviera, French Riviera, Antalya etc.

For the period 1965 – 1991 the impetus for the start up and development of Bulgarian higher education in tourism was generally due to the academic efforts of the University of Economics in Varna and partially to the Sofia University. From this time on the academic and scientific experience of those institutions became a landmark for the establishment and functioning of other Bulgarian higher educational institutions in tourism.

The University of Economics in Varna became the earliest higher educational institution in Europe which placed tourism as an economic and organizational specialty.

It was due to the fact that during the socialist period the start up of the Bulgarian tourism industry was based on market principles (towards the foreign stake holders) unlike the domestic economic system which was entirely centrally planned.

1989 is a dividing year between the end of the socialist period and the start up of a market economy system in Bulgaria. From this time on the so called transition period witnessed significant changes in almost every field of social and economic life. During the next decade tourism business in Bulgaria was violently privatized. In this way the whole tourism industry was shifted from the concept of state owned and centrally managed tourism activity to almost 100% privately owned and fragmented business under relatively loose government control. For the last 10 years the accommodation capacity of Bulgarian seaside resorts almost tripled along with the vast extension of new holiday places. This process has led the carrying capacity of resorts to become roughly unbalanced with lack of enough and suitable tourist infrastructure. In conjunction with the contemporary tourism development the new requirements of the business also influenced tourism training and education. The need for competitive, sustainable and effective domestic and international tourism posed new challenges for highly qualified human resources.

It was necessary tourism education to be set on a new market basis. New conceptual knowledge was indispensable as well as the need to catch up with well developed tourist countries in: managerial solutions for servicing tourists; marketing orientation of the company's activities; management of human resources; logistic supply of tourist activities; organization, management and financing of tourist companies within competitive environment; reassessment of tourist resources and market structures. From the early period of democracy the educational system was submitted to the chaotic development of market relations within the country, including the tourism business. From one hand the privatization of state owned tourist enterprises along with the emergence of many privately owned tourism firms provokes increasing demand for training in tourism as far as by nature tourism business could be developed with lower investments in people for providing any occupation and relevant incomes in a situation of mass unemployment. On the other hand the process of structural socio – economic reforms in the country dragged along many unprepared stakeholders in the field of tourism business.

In the meantime lots of prestigious professions so far became unpopular and in order to survive many universities and colleges (including newly established ones) readjusted themselves to provide specialized training in tourism for the existing demand¹⁰.

Until 2010 tourism education at the lowest operational level is carried out by 122 state and municipal professional high schools in Bulgaria while in 2005 their number was only 40. During the last several years professional colleges in tourism (educating students on a middle managerial level) have outnumbered to 12 and at the same time the number of other professional colleges providing tourism programs reached to 15¹¹.

Nowadays commonly 17 institutions of higher education are officially authorized by the government in the academic field "Tourism" to provide educational services and to prepare students in professional bachelor degree, university bachelor degree and master degree levels. Of that number 2 public and 4 privately owned university colleges are currently operating in the country¹². The number of legal private business centers providing tourism training could not be enumerated so far having in mind that there constantly pop up many such organizations which are still on the way of their legalization that usually takes between 6 and 12 months.

For the academic year 2000/2001 in Bulgaria studied 1570 professional bachelors and 4500 university bachelors and masters while 10 years later their number grew up to 3600 and 7650 respectively. For the same period the total number of people who have graduated institutions of higher education counts for more than 17 000¹³. This figure is much higher compared to the data stated about the socialist period.

Tourist educational system in Bulgaria is generally concerned with its legal division into professions and university specialties.

¹⁰ Rakadjiiska, S. (2004) Issues of the specialized higher education in tourism in Bulgaria . *Izvestiya. University of Economics, Varna* 3, 2004, pp. 31 - 40

¹¹Ministry of Education Youth and Science. (MINEDU) (2010).

URL:http://www.minedu.government.bg/opencms/export/sites/mon/top_menu/vocational/plan_priem-prof-2010-knizhka.pdf

¹² National Evaluation and Accreditation Agency (NEAA) (2011). URL:
http://www.neaa.government.bg/bg/institutions/high_schools

¹³National Statistical Institute (NSI) (2011). URL:

<http://www.nsi.bg/otrasal.php?otr=8&a1=954&a2=955&a3=957#cont>

Along with the traditional professions of housekeeping employees, receptionists, food and beverage personnel and tour guides there are new affirming professions like – mountain guides, animators, sommeliers, casino managers and others. This proliferation of tourist professions could be explained with the product and spatial expansion of tourism business in nontraditional tourist regions within the country mainly suitable for the development of new alternative activities. At the same time Bulgarian educational institutions with common profile offer additional opportunities for training students in different tourist professions and specialties.

Bulgarian educational institutions of different types are fairly normally spread over the territory of the country and it could be suggested that they meet the general requirements of the business for the preparation of professionals in various tourism fields. Bulgarian higher institutions (including colleges) which train tourism students are mainly concentrated in country regions (districts) with large scale development of tourism business like: Varna (3), Burgas (3), Sofia (4), Plovdiv (4), Blagoevgrad (2), Veliko Tarnovo (1), Shumen (1), Dobrich (1), Botevgrad (1), Svishtov (1) (NEAA, 2011). Until 2011 the academic capacity of tourism majors (available study places per year) within the higher educational institutions is the following: Dobrich (330), Sofia (310), Botevgrad (300), Varna (290), Plovdiv (250), Blagoevgrad (220), Burgas (100), Veliko Tarnovo (100), Shumen (100).

From 1997 on in compliance with the western educational system Bulgaria adopted the classical double degree approach for the academic levels of higher education in bachelor degree (undergraduate level) and master degree (graduate level). Except the university colleges all other higher educational institutions provide one or more master degree programs in tourism. According the governmental requirements the master degree student obligatory graduates the study course by defending a master degree thesis. In Bulgarian society it is generally considered that acquiring a master degree diploma gives more competitive opportunities for professional career development of graduates. The doctoral degree is preserved for the scientific level of knowledge. Only several universities in Bulgaria (University of Economics – Varna, Sofia University, University of National and World Economy – Sofia, Southwest University – Blagoevgrad) provide PhD programs in tourism.

The new educational legislation allows an exclusive thematic diversity of PhD programs in tourism e.g. the involvement of interdisciplinary areas like: tourism recreation, tourism impacts, alternative tourism, tourism resources, geography of tourism, tourism economics, tourism and competitiveness, tourism planning and others. Until 2012 approximately 30 PhD students successfully defended their PhD theses in the University of Economics – Varna. Their number for Sofia University is 20, University of National and World Economy (Sofia) – 18, Southwest University (Blagoevgrad) – 8. Just before the joining of the European Union in 2007 Bulgaria also adjusted its higher educational system to the implementation of European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) which is a standard for comparing the study attainment and performance of students across the European Union and other collaborating European Countries. Bulgarian higher education in tourism is also strongly bound up with Erasmus, CEEPUS, Tempus programs and others of this type which provide opportunities for mobility and exchange of students and lecturers.

In 1998 is established the National Evaluation and Accreditation Agency which legally accredits the study process and the relevant higher educational institutions according a predefined criteria system. This agency also accredits tourism education in Bulgaria but there are still not any minimal standards for the unification of the study process. At present the minimal standards are primary set by the market conditions i.e. the demand for tourism labour (the private business and public sector) and the supply of tourism labour (those people who are applying for graduate and undergraduate positions in the field).

2. Characteristics of Tourism Education in Bulgaria

Bulgarian tourism education is normatively based and organized according the functional implementation of curriculums and study programs.

The Ministry of Education Youth and Science is in charge of centrally imposing curriculums and study programs like academic frames to all high school institutions in Bulgaria. Unlike the high school system in Bulgaria which is tightly regulated and standardized by the government (Ministry of Education Youth and Science) the higher education institutions have much more academic freedom and opportunities for the provision of different types of tourism training.

Considering the opportunities for using loose patterns the curriculum comes to be as more instructive document than strictly obligatory one (in its structural form and contents) for the higher institutions of tourism education in Bulgaria. Following this in mind the curriculum could be regarded as the basic “carrying construction” which forms the volume, the structure and the direction of the content of knowledge and skills that build up a certain specialist (bachelor, master, PhD) in the field of tourism in the educational system. The curriculum determines to what extent theory (knowledge), practice (skills) should be transferred from the trainer to the trained people so that a competent enough specialist to be formed in order to has the relevant capabilities to implement as well as to develop in a creative manner the acquired competencies in response to the changing social and business environment.

Rakadjiiska¹⁴ outlines several focal points (instructive rules) for elaborating a curriculum which are currently met by many of the Bulgarian higher institutions in tourism. On first place comes the general prerequisite for full substantial compliance between the qualification characteristics of a tourism specialist and the content of the curriculum.

On second position the author suggests that every single bachelor degree program in tourism should cover the following aspects: the type of the higher educational institution and its obtained permission to provide bachelor degree programs in tourism; the compulsory length of educational period and the minimum number of academic hours required; forms of training and forms of assessment; requirements for minimum number of trainers having necessary academic ranks; harmonization of the types of practical seminars, state exams, financial support of trained people, legally determined number of credits per academic subject; requirements for institutional and program accreditation etc.

¹⁴ Rakadjiiska, S. (2008) The study plan for the bachelor's educational and qualification degree – a precondition for a good quality training. *Economics and Management* 3, pp. 24 - 28

On third place the curriculum is dependent on the specific character of the higher tourism institution for which it is elaborated for. As for an example in the University of Economics in Varna tourism education is carried out by the department of "Economics and Organization of Tourism" within the faculty of "Management"; in the Sofia University the program is organized by the department of "Geography of Tourism", faculty of "Geology and Geography"; in the South Western University (Blagoevgrad) – department of "Tourism", faculty of "Economics"; in the University of Food Technologies (Plovdiv) – departments of "Economics and Management" and "Nutrition and Tourism", faculty of "Economics"; in the University of Veliko Tarnovo (V. Tarnovo) – department of "Marketing and Tourism", faculty of "Economics"; in the University of Bourgas (Bourgas) – department of "Economics and Management", faculty of "Social sciences"; in the University of Shumen (Shumen) – department of "Geography and Tourism", faculty of "Natural sciences" etc. Considering this apparent diversity the above stated author suggests that there is an evidence about significant discrepancies amongst the subject (topic) contents of the universities' curriculums which may further lead to the deterioration of the specific characteristics of the professional tourist educational process.

On fourth place it is an obligation for the academic society to take into consideration the requirements of the tourism business and labour market while preparing curriculums.

On next place the composition of a curriculum should meet the necessary requirements of the European Union as a result from Bulgaria's membership. In this relation if a curriculum meets the requirements of Directive 2005/36/EU this would facilitate the process for the recognition of any professional tourism training obtained in a member state of the union.

On sixth place the author suggests that the university curriculum in tourism (Bachelor degree) should cover the following 5 groups of disciplines like: courses in the common fundament – philosophy, law, psychology, political science, social science, statistics, some disciplines in natural sciences etc.; economic courses – microeconomics, macroeconomics, accounting, finance, prices and pricing strategies etc; managerial courses – fundamentals of management, planning and forecasting, organizational behaviour etc; special courses which give opportunities for obtaining specific knowledge in tourism like fundamentals of tourism or tourism principles, tourist resources, geography of tourism, hospitality, restaurant industry, travel

agencies and transport for tourism , tourist markets, tourism marketing, tourism management, technology of tourist service, tourist animation, information supply and research in tourism etc.; and finally – supporting courses like information technologies, e-business and others as well as last but not - foreign language disciplines. In Bulgaria it is commonly believed that a bachelor degree student should be fluently speaking at least two foreign languages whereas any proficiency in a third language is regarded as a competitive advantage. According to a report of the National Evaluation and Accreditation Agency (Rakadjiiska, 2008) eleven higher education institutions that provide tourism programs have revealed the following drawbacks in the topic contents of their curriculums like:

- an inappropriate choice and relatively high share of disciplines of technical and natural sciences;
- lack of important disciplines which extend the scientific knowledge in tourism field.

It could be suggested that the structure of topic contents is mainly deteriorated due to the influence of two reasons - the academic profile of the higher educational institution (because of the very large diversity) and the lack of appropriate academic staff.

The academic profile of the higher educational institution determines the fundament and the added superstructure of the study process. During the last decade as a result of the developing market economy and the increasing demand of tourism professionals many Bulgarian higher educational institutions opened bachelor degree programs in tourism by only adding some special tourist disciplines which to complete the general profiles of other programs. In this relation it is mainly relied on the existing habilitated academic staff to lecture disciplines which titles contain any word like "tourism" or a similar term or topics i.e. "technology of furniture in nutrition and tourism", "tourist mapping", "world tourism geography" and others having in mind that such disciplines are far away from respective tourist matters.

The optimal curriculum also reflects a good balance between compulsory, semi – compulsory and optional disciplines.

The core of the compulsory special tourism disciplines in Bulgaria generally include: Introduction to tourism, Tourism management, Tourism marketing, Hospitality, Travel agencies and Transport for tourism, Food and beverage, Tourist resources, Tourist markets, Consumer behaviour and Customer care in tourism, Tourism law, Human resource management in tourism, Technology of tourist service, Information provision and research in tourism, Tourist animation. The optional disciplines in tourism are closely connected with the specific profiles of tourism knowledge and capabilities i.e. subjects in: Social psychology in tourism, Business communications, Integrated marketing communications in tourism, History of civilizations / History of culture, Bulgarian folklore and ethnology, Sports and animation. Certain disciplines contribute for better development of tourist professionals like: Tour guiding, Marketing of leisure and tourism, Reengineering and risk management in tourism, Project management in tourism, Managerial consultation in tourism, Ecology and others.

The freedom for choosing a set of disciplines allows every higher educational institution in tourism to simultaneously achieve two goals:

- to provide enough knowledge and skills for the formation of a bachelor degree specialist in tourism;
- to build its own know - how in the education process that could be turned into a competitive advantage;

The common similarities in curriculums amongst different higher educational institutions in Bulgaria enable a unification of basic knowledge and skills for the bachelor degree students in tourism. The expressed diversities in curriculums provide the trained people to use the system of student's mobility programs in order to obtain other competencies taught in other higher educational institutions.

From the implemented research it could be stated the number of economic and managerial disciplines in tourism education is diminishing in favour of more preference of social and psychologically oriented disciplines. Some 20 years ago certain academic subjects were very popular in Bulgarian universities in tourism like:

Conjuncture and research of tourist markets, Economics of tourist enterprise, Foreign exchange relations in tourism, Economic analysis of tourism activity, Currency operations etc. At present those disciplines could be rarely seen within the curriculums of different higher educational institutions in tourism.

There is a certain withdrawal from the foundations of Bulgarian higher education in tourism in the field of its economic and organizational nature.

Nowadays the Bulgarian higher education in tourism could be regarded as a two sided system. The university educational system is more theoretically based. There is more complex knowledge over the studied matters like: product development, management and coordination of stakeholders' efforts; efficient usage and preservation of tourist resources; social, cultural, ecological aspects; tourism planning etc. The other side of the system, mainly presented by colleges and university colleges is more practically oriented. In other words these institutions offer much more vocational training and also organize paid internships for their students in Bulgaria and abroad.

3.Opportunities for Career Development of Bulgarian Human Resources in Tourism

In 2011 Bulgarian tourist industry employs over 180 000 people who directly occupy tourist job positions along with other 400 000 people working in related branches and activities¹⁵. The forecast of the former State Tourism Agency predicts that in 2013 more than 230 000 people would be directly employed in the Bulgarian tourism business.

There are several types of stakeholders which are generally interested in the career development of educated people in tourism i.e. the employers, the trained people, the trainers, the government and different social groups. From one hand those kinds of stakeholders share common interests and beliefs about the obtained knowledge and skills of trained people, their attitude towards tourism education. On the other hand the stakeholders share common vision about the incomes that employees deserve to receive and employers are "obligated" to pay.

An implemented research study in the University of Economics in Varna gives a relatively representative view about the shared vision of trainers, trained people and tourism business for state owned higher education institutions in Bulgaria.

¹⁵ Uphill. (2011) URL: <http://uphill-bg.com/>

In this respect according to the trainers the strengths of the public university education in tourism are: good opportunities for an excellent theoretical background; the quality of study programs and possibilities to use scientific know – how (qualified teaching staff and scientific literature). The weaknesses come out mainly as: poor relationship between the public universities and private business during the educational process; lack of practical training of students; insufficient abilities for doing analyses and researches.

Trained people confirm as well the very good theoretical background and the high rating of their chosen tourism major which helps them later in their professional career development. They also point out as strengths: the teachers' experience in the field and the opportunities for establishing new prospect contacts; their preparation in foreign languages and the diversity of studied disciplines. The regarded weaknesses are mainly concerned with: lack of sufficient practical issues in the seminar classes; routine, not enough flexible and even uninteresting lecturing of theoretical matters without satisfactory use of visual or illustrative materials; lack of additional internship opportunities after the ending of each academic year; lack of any support / guidelines for job opportunities and internships; state universities do not sustain relationships with the private tourism business for arranging practical experience in the field during the course of education.

The tourism employers also confirm the very good educational level of theoretical background along with the professional competencies which students receive. The employers see as well other educational strengths in the following directions: relatively high level of learned common tourist culture, very good foreign language preparation; the existence of popular tourist disciplines within the curriculums; the bargaining power of state universities that may become beneficial for students. The implications for educational weaknesses which are issued by the employers mainly resemble the statements of trained people (mentioned above) i.e. the insufficient practice / practical exercises, seminars, open discussions which could replace to a very large extent the uninspiring theory; unsatisfactory skills for business correspondence and other types of business communications.

Some 12 years ago part of the results of a similar survey were significantly different. In the year of 2000 the theoretical background is evaluated on a very good level and during this time trained people considered that theory headed practice¹⁶. For that period considerable part of responding graduates from the University of Economics in Varna noted that they have occupied upper level managerial positions, academic and scientific ranks in the tourism field as well as positions in the professional education. As a drawback at this time it was noted that in tourism business there were no good rules and mechanisms for drafting and selecting employees.

Excluding the approved practice of large tourist companies, small and medium sized Bulgarian firms still maintain an amateur vision about the human resource management. On an operational level it is predominantly relied on “self – creation” of a company staff on the principle “show me how to do this and that” in accordance with a current business situation. As a result Bulgarian tourism is still regarded by people as an industry of low social status with highly expressed labour turnover and large shares of labour expenses. In this relation training and qualification of people seems not to become priorities for a major part of the Bulgarian tourism firms.

Considering the end of the transitional period it could be suggested there are still evidences that the pyramid of education and training of human resources in tourism has a clear up - side down position. It means that instead of educating (universities and colleges) limited number of highly qualified students due to the constrained number of top management positions in the tourism business, there is just an opposite tendency – the number of those graduated people is the highest possible. The main reason for this could be seen as a result of the vague commitment of the state and business in tourism training along with the high differentiation of students’ financial support for education i.e. very small taxes (in public universities and colleges) and considerably high taxes in private institutions. From other point of view in a market environment the higher diploma level provides better opportunities for starting a job nevertheless it is not a guarantee for career development.

¹⁶ Rakadjiiska, S. (2000) Career development of tourism students from the University of Economics in Varna. *Izvestiya. University of Economics, Varna* 1, pp. 48 - 55

Until recently the training of people for the lowest operational job positions was almost missing in the human resource strategies. Many of the tourist firms are still not searching for trained operational personnel because they consider the front line functions as very simple and easy for implementation. They rely instead of hiring friends and relatives in order to diminish labour costs. Although there are already in Bulgaria lots of tourist firms which train their staff in a manner of foreign companies, our educational system still suffers of bad differentiation of training for different levels of professional competencies in the tourism business. After all people who have graduated universities and colleges are compelled to go abroad for their career development unlike those people who stay in Bulgaria and begin to acquire again skills for new tourist job positions. This fact leads to the devaluation of specialized higher education in tourism in the country.

4. Scientific Research Achievements in Bulgarian Specialized Higher Tourism Education

From the very beginning of the first university tourism major in Bulgaria academic people started to do scientific researches in order to support and develop the educational process. At first the foreign scientific experience was entirely used and transformed to the local tourism circumstances. Bulgarian tourism science began its development on its own way of generating original knowledge which helped for better managerial decisions in the local tourist industry. For that reason many conferences, round tables, scientific meetings and other events have been typical for the last 50 years tourism education.

In chronological aspect the first Bulgarian academic edition in tourism matters was published in 1965. This is the university textbook "Economics and organization of international tourism in People's Republic of Bulgaria", followed by some other publications like: "Economics and organization of travel agencies and passenger transport" (1969), "Economics and organization of hotel keeping" (1970), "Analysis of the business activities of tourism organizations" (1974), "Organization and technology of service and social psychology in tourism" (1976), "Foreign tourism contracts and currency purchase relations in international tourism" (1976), "Tourism publicity and advertising" (1977), "Economics and organization of travel agencies and passenger transport" (1977), "Research and forecasting of tourist markets" (1979), "Social psychology in tourism" (1979), "Tourism quality" (1980) and others.

For the first time in Bulgarian scientific literature are revealed and explained the nature, the content and the specific characteristics of separate tourist activities, the scientific approaches for their empirical research, their role and impact over the national economy, the social and psychological aspects of the relationships between tourists and personnel etc. (Rakadjiiska, 2010).

Every publication offers a theoretical basis of the relevant scientific field which builds on specific tourism knowledge enriched with practical cases and prescriptions for managerial issues. At this time those publications became leading information sources both for academic and scientific institutions as well as for the state authorities and managerial teams of tourist enterprises.

During the first period of tourist scientific development also started successful issues of PhD publications and monograph theses in the following directions: international competitiveness of Bulgarian seaside resorts; the role of publicity and advertising for the increase of tourism demand towards the littoral areas; research and forecasting of tourist demand towards the Black sea tourist resorts; economic efficiency of hospitality in Bulgarian seaside resorts and others.

Nowadays Bulgarian tourism science entirely helps the processes of revealing problems and finding practical solutions. Global tourism aspects have become at the same time regional ones and local fields of scientific research.

In this relation Bulgarian academic researchers try to stay with the modern and advanced concepts of tourism business as well as to add specific knowledge according to the local socio economic characteristics of tourism stakeholders.

Most of contemporary publications are mainly devoted to popular and some classical research areas like: tourism competitiveness; competitive strategies in tourism; competitiveness and price competitiveness of tourist destinations; management of tourist destination; reengineering and risk management in tourism; social psychology and tourist behavior; human resource management in tourism; organizational behavior in tourism; career development in tourism; e-trade and tourism intermediaries; tour operators and on-line travel agencies; tourism branding and franchising activities; tourism and entertaining industry; monitoring of the tourism business; special purposes tourism; rural tourism; eco tourism; suburban tourism; cultural tourism; religious tourism; sports tourism; sex tourism; innovations in tourism; technological design of restaurant and entertainment business; tourism clusters; tourism economics; hospitality and restaurant marketing; international tourism business; tourism impacts; tourism resources; tourism geography etc.

There are also some initial publications in: tourism law; managing tourism contracts; property management and tourism etc.

The academic staff along with other branch nongovernment organizations also takes part into the work out, formulation and implementation of tourism strategies on municipal, regional, national and international levels. An example of a holistic strategy is "The National Strategy of Sustainable Development of Tourism in Republic of Bulgaria 2009 - 2013". This document incorporates the vision, the strategic goals, the priorities, the specific objectives, tasks, practices and projects which implementation is supposed to lead to the creation of sustainable models of development and management of tourist activities.

Other governmental programs include the elaboration of "Strategy for national tourist advertising of Bulgaria" and "Strategy for the development of cultural tourism".

Conclusion

Bulgarian higher education and training institutions still meets several major problems in the process of preparing professional human resources for the tourism business.

There are few higher educational institutions in Bulgaria which rely on their own qualified academic staff for the level of training they perform. The system of guest lecturing could be complementary one for the training process but should not be paramount for the higher education institutions. The deficit of qualified lecturers is completed by their small number related to the number of people in class. On average one lecturer is training 25 – 30 students at a single seminar.

There is no good correspondence between the conceptual views of the training institutions and the expectations of the tourism business for the preparation of tourist professionals. This leads to disparities between the acquired knowledge and skills from one hand and their relevance to the job positions on the other hand. Following this in mind most of trained people are dissatisfied of the major they studied while the tourist business is not willing to employ a considerable number of graduated human resources in tourism. There is an explicit deficit of qualified human resources in tourism (especially for some regions in the country) and at the same time those people can not find a relevant job. On the territory of the country lots of prestigious tourist business units are constantly created but there is no real demand of managerial or operational staff appropriate for them. In addition those people who are already employed do not meet the requirements of the occupied positions.

Bulgarian human resources in tourism who are relatively well trained in foreign languages go abroad to search for a career development and this process forms a considerable labour outflow of capable young people. Our higher educational institutions in tourism prepare tourist specialists who economically contribute to other tourist countries and this process contradicts the requirements of the domestic business environment. After the joining of Bulgaria to the European Union the problems in this direction have immersed.

There is also some domestic labour migration process which currently helps the supply of year – round employment in the country (for example a migration from the mountains to the sea side and back) but this process can hardly make people to feel secure about their further career development in the tourism business. It could be suggested that the tourism educational system in Bulgaria is not so ineffective at first sight unlike the system which has to absorb the graduated human resources.

Many of the country regions actually do not provide the necessary conditions for attracting, motivating and developing professionally trained human resources.

There is no targeted governmental strategy and planning for human resources in tourism. Still it is not involved a differentiated state financial support for the budgeting of public higher educational institutions. At the same time there are too many higher educational institutions in tourism for the constrained conditions of the socio economic environment in Bulgaria.

From the above stated it could be summarized that there are traditions and opportunities for providing tourism education in the country. This could be regarded as a reliable basis for the sustainable development of tourism education. Considering the drawbacks and the respective weaknesses the authors suggest several issues for the improvement of Bulgarian educational system in tourism.

First of all the training institutions and the tourist business have to coordinate their conceptual positions in order to formulate variants of particular activities in the field.

Second, there should be a methodological and substantial individualization of different levels and types of specialized training in tourism. It seems abnormal universities to provide training on operational level and colleges and other training centers to insist on developing much theoretical background, strategic thinking and top management skills.

Third, the "pyramid" of tourism education in Bulgaria must take its normal position. In our opinion the main initiator for this should be the tourist business.

Fourth, the educational institutions must cooperate in a more tightly manner by establishing a formal academic organization. In this relation there should be adopted legal requirements about the minimum topics (disciplines) which should be covered in every curriculum.

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