

## PERCEPTIONS AND ATTITUDES OF STUDENTS REGARDING THE WORKING CONDITIONS IN THE TOURISM INDUSTRY

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### Abstract

*Today the tourism industry is considered as very attractive economic activity. However, among undergraduate tourism students, there are various and often distorted information and opinions regarding the skills that are necessary to acquire during the studies, career development, work opportunities and working conditions. The aim of the paper is to measure students' perceptions and attitudes regarding employment and working conditions in the tourism industry. The study was conducted using a sample of students of the Faculty of Hotel Management and Tourism in Vrnjačka Banja, University of Kragujevac, Serbia. The data were collected by a survey, while their analysis and processing were made using The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Based on this research, a general conclusion about students' attitudes will be reached, also about their satisfaction with practice in the tourism industry during the studies and the connection between theoretical and practical knowledge.*

*Key Words: students' perceptions, working conditions, tourism employment, tourism industry*

*JEL classification: L83, Z32*

### Introduction

Tourism is a global spatial as well as social, economic, political, cultural, ecological, aesthetic and psychological phenomenon. There is almost no

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country in the world which does not develop some form of tourism (Lakićević & Žarevac, 2014). Tourism provides benefits for local community, primarily through the increase of employment and provides conditions for higher quality of life (Milićević & Đorđević, 2018). In 2017, travel and tourism generated 118,454,000 jobs directly (3.8% of total employment), while the total contribution of travel and tourism to employment (including indirect and wider effects from investment, the supply chain and induced income) was 313,221,000 jobs in 2017 (9.9% of total employment) (WTTC, 2018).

According to the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC, 2019) tourism offers young people the opportunity to work, and it is viewed as a reasonably attractive industry for university undergraduates, but the problem is that it is still poorly understood and there are scarce information and misconceptions about the skills required for graduates as well as the roles, career development and working opportunities in this industry.

Considering that an employee's commitment to any industry will be determined by his or her perceptions and attitudes toward working in the industry and the types of jobs available in the industry (Richardson, 2008), and that the students are seen as the future employees and managers of the industry (Kusluvan & Kusluvan, 2000), the aim of the paper is to examine students' perceptions about working conditions in tourism. The study was conducted through a questionnaire. The sample consists of students of Faculty of Hotel and Tourism in Vrnjačka Banja (FHT), University of Kragujevac, Serbia. The Faculty was founded in 2011 and is the only state faculty in this field. It has three levels of studies: undergraduate studies, master studies and doctoral academic studies. Currently, there are 695 students and 201 graduated students. Students have the opportunity to gain theoretical knowledge and practical experience within the hotel-tourism industry, in Serbia and abroad, in the duration of a minimum of one month in the fourth, sixth and eighth semester (Faculty of Hotel Management and Tourism in Vrnjačka Banja, 2019).

### **Literature review**

Today, tourism has grown from one small activity to an activity that is crucial for the economic growth and development of a country (Lakićević & Durkalić, 2018). Tourism and hospitality is an industry that struggles to

attain and retain skilled workforce; it is said that there is a skilled labour shortage within this industry (Barron & Maxwell, 1993; Baum, 2006; Kusluvan & Kusluvan, 2000). The tourism employees are faced with structural features such as shift work system, the obligation to work on official holidays and high turnover rate of employees, because production and consumption are in the same place and at the same time. Accordingly, there are many important problems in the career development in the tourism sector, such as stress, unfavorable conditions of the shift work, workload density and low wage (Güdük & Uca, 2019).

The various researches about students' perception towards work and career in the tourism sector have reported that students have a rather negative perception about it mostly because poor wages, low stability, poor working hours and working conditions (Aksu & Köksal, 2005; Barron & Maxwell, 1993; Chellen & Nunkoo, 2010; El-Houshy, 2014; Kim, et al., 2010; Kusluvan & Kusluvan, 2000; Richardson, 2010).

The adolescents' attitudes are important markers of long term social change (Voza, et al., 2016). In order to achieve preciseness in measuring one's perception, it is necessary to define a higher number of groups of factors that can affect it (Đorđević & Kostić, 2019). Kusluvan and Kusluvan (2000) examined students perception through nine dimensions of work and working conditions in tourism: Nature of work (or The work itself), Social status, Industry - Person congeniality, Physical working conditions, Pay/fringe benefits, Promotion, Co-workers, Managers, Commitment to the industry. As Wang (2014) states "in examining students' career perceptions, Kusluvan and Kusluvan's model can be used as a good foundation but meanwhile should also incorporate the components which reflect the characteristics of a specific country's tourism education and industry." In his research based on Kusluvan and Kusluvan's measurement scale, Wang (2014) came to the conclusion that Chinese undergraduate students also have moderate or even negative perception of tourism careers.

An important and largely integral part of education in higher education institutions in the field of tourism is practice in tourism companies. (Sekulić, et al., 2017). According to Sadikoglu, and Oktay (2017) the implementation of internships during university education provides students with the opportunity to apply the theoretical knowledge they have gained during their studies in practical situations experienced in business life. The results of their research about students' perception

toward training program in tourism revealed more positive opinions, showing that students had the opportunity to increase their understanding of the industry through their internship and that the internship they had done would contribute to their success in the working life after graduation (Sadikoglu & Oktay, 2017). Also Bury and Iwasaki (2018) in their research found that students indicate an overall positive attitude towards the industry and that completing internships had a significant positive effect. Many researchers believe internships generally help consolidate aspirations to enter the industry, however it has been posited that negative internship experiences actually deter students from pursuing a career in the industry (Boud et al, 2001; Busby, 2005; Fox, 2001; Lam & Ching, 2007).

### **Data collection**

A five-point scale (from 1 to 5) questionnaire which consist of 102 questions was used for data collection. Participation in completing the questionnaire was voluntary and anonymous. Questionnaires were distributed in class or in the form of a Google questionnaire. A total of 208 valid responses were collected, representing a sample of 29.93% of the total population. The time period of the research relates to January - March 2019.

The questions were adapted and adjusted based on a combination of the results of previous research (El-Houshy, 2014; Kusluvan & Kusluvan, 2000; Sadikoglu, & Oktay, 2017) with certain revisions in accordance with local conditions in Serbia. The questionnaire is divided into 4 sections. The first section gathers general information about respondents. The second section is related to factors in choosing a career. The third section, with the greatest number of questions, presents the attitudes of tourism students towards the dimensions of working in the tourism industry. The last, fourth section, analyzes the attitudes of students towards practice in tourism.

When looking at the characteristics of the respondents, 208 students were involved in this survey (shown in Table 1). A large number respondents are female, which is an expected result, given that the total number of students at the observed Faculty consists of 31% men and 69% women. Most respondents (192) stated that they chose studies in hospitality and tourism with her own will. A significant number of respondents had some experience in the tourism industry (45%).

Table 1: *The survey sample*

Question	Answer option	Number of respondents
D1. Gender	1) Male	169 (17%)
	2) Female	39 (32%)
D2. Level of education	1) 1st year	63
	2) 2nd year	50
	3) 3rd year	32
	4) 4th year	31
	5) postgraduate	32
D3. Chosen tourism and hotel management studies willingly	1) yes	192
	2) no	11
	3) undecided	5
D4. Would still prefer studying tourism if informed about employment conditions in the tourism industry	1) yes	162
	2) no	16
	3) undecided	30
D5. Finished vocational tourism and hotel secondary school	1) yes	97
	2) no	111
D6. Practical work experience in tourism	1) 3 months	37
	2) More than 3 and less then 6 months	33
	3) 9 months and over	24
	4) No work experience	114

Source: *Author's own elaboration*

### Methodology

As mentioned above, the questionnaire is divided into three key parts where each section contains relevant statements and assessments of these statements by students regarding employment in the tourism industry. These questions / statements are divided as follows:

- Statements from FCC1 –FCC17 are related to the importance of factors in choosing a career;
- Statements from NW1 – CTI12 measure attitudes of tourism students towards dimensions of working in the tourism industry;
- Statements from PIT1 –PIT11 define the attitudes of students towards practice in tourism.

The central part was at the same time the largest part of the questionnaire (74 questions) modeled on the research by Kusluvan & Kusluvan (2000).

Having in mind the structure of students, subject and aim of research, the authors proceeded from basic hypothetical questions:

- Do FHT students intend to continue their careers in the field of tourism and hospitality?
- Which factors are important when choosing a career?
- What are the student attitudes regarding different factors in choosing a career in the field of tourism (such as nature of work, social status, industry-personality congeniality, physical working conditions, pay / benefits, promotion opportunities, coworkers, managers, commitment to the tourism industry)?
- Are the students satisfied with the practice at FHT?

### Analysis of results

The testing of the validity of the theoretical model of perception and attitudes of students in relation to working conditions in the tourism industry was performed using SPSS 17.0 software package.

The assessment of the internal consistency and validity of the sample was carried out using the Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA). Cronbach's coefficient  $\alpha$  (Cronbach, 1951) was used to estimate internal consistency. Cronbach's alpha factor for the total population is 0,914, while the values per groups are shown in Table 2. Nunnally (1978) suggests that the values of  $\geq 0.7$  are considered priority, which indicates that the condition of the internal consistency of the observed model is achieved. All alpha coefficient values even exceed 0.8, which meets a more rigorous criterion from 0.50 to 0.60, suggesting by Nunnally (1967) for initial research scales. For this purpose, it is not necessary to calculate the standardized Cronbach's alpha factor. Table 2 shows the obtained values of Construct Reliability Statistics.

Table 2: *The results of Reliability Statistics*

<b>Construct</b>	<b>Cronbach's Alpha</b>	<b>N of Items</b>
Importance of factors in choosing a career	0,895	17
Attitudes of tourism students towards	0,880	74

dimensions of working in the tourism industry		
Attitudes of students towards practice in tourism	0,935	11
<b>All variables</b>	0,914	102

Source: *Author's own elaboration*

A further, more detailed analysis was performed in the software package SPSS 17.0. using descriptive statistics.

Table 3: *Results of descriptive statistics- importance of factors in choosing a career*

Statements	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
FCC1	208	1	5	<b>4.55</b>	.714
FCC2	208	1.00	5.00	4.4471	.73366
FCC3	208	1.00	5.00	<b>4.5337</b>	.65114
FCC4	208	1.00	5.00	<b>4.7692</b>	.61747
FCC5	208	1.00	5.00	4.4375	.77767
FCC6	208	1.00	5.00	4.2356	.83827
FCC7	208	1.00	5.00	<b>4.7163</b>	.57426
FCC8	208	1.00	5.00	4.1346	.95359
FCC9	208	1.00	5.00	4.5240	.88432
FCC10	208	1.00	5.00	4.4904	.87361
FCC11	208	1.00	5.00	4.5000	.71560
FCC12	208	1.00	5.00	4.3125	.83025
FCC13	208	1.00	5.00	4.2788	.88963
FCC14	208	1.00	5.00	4.2308	.87068
FCC15	208	1.00	5.00	4.2740	1.02947
FCC16	208	1.00	5.00	4.2019	.84419
FCC17	208	1.00	5.00	<b>3.8702</b>	1.00120
Valid (listwise)	N 208				

Source: *Author's own elaboration*

In the first part of the questionnaire, students ranked different factors that are important for them to choose a future career. In this part of the questionnaire there were 17 questions, and the results of the assessments are given in Table 3. Most of the students (175) gave a high grade - 5,

which is 84.1% of sample, for question / statement *FCC4 - A secure job* as a career choice factor.

The next three factors that students identified as important in choosing a career are *FCC7 - High earnings over length of career* 158 (76%), *FCC1 - A job that I will find enjoyable* (135 students rated 5 which is 64.9 % of sample) and *FCC3 - Pleasant working environment* (124 students rated 5 which is 59.6% of sample).

Table 4: *Frequencies for most important factor in choosing career - "A secure job"*

Rate		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1.00	2	1.0	1.0	1.0
	3.00	9	4.3	4.3	5.3
	4.00	22	10.6	10.6	15.9
	5.00	175	84.1	84.1	100.0
	Total	208	100.0	100.0	

Source: *Author's own elaboration*

The lowest ratings and the average score of 3.87 were obtained by *FCC17* statement - *A job where I can care for others* (65 students rated 3 and 31.3% of the sample). This indicates that students have a lower degree of social responsibility, which means that they could not care for others while doing their job. They are more interested in finding a job that they will enjoy doing.

Table 5: *Results of descriptive statistics- attitudes of tourism students towards dimensions of working in the tourism industry*

Statements	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
NW1	208	1.00	5.00	4.3654	.86318
NW2	208	1.00	5.00	3.4183	1.13914
NW3	208	1.00	5.00	3.6298	.98416
NW4	208	1.00	5.00	<b>1.9952</b>	1.15678
NW5	208	1.00	5.00	4.1779	.93359
NW6	208	1.00	5.00	3.3125	1.15614
NW7	208	1.00	5.00	3.4808	1.04471
NW8	208	1.00	5.00	3.1538	1.16112
NW9	208	1.00	5.00	4.4519	.82098

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NW10	208	1.00	5.00	2.7933	1.25130
NW11	208	1.00	5.00	4.0817	1.03469
NW12	208	1.00	5.00	2.4856	1.12923
NW13	208	1.00	5.00	<b>4.5625</b>	.75241
NW14	208	1.00	5.00	3.7067	1.11014
S1	208	1.00	5.00	4.2067	.96336
S2	208	1.00	5.00	<b>3.1923</b>	1.20448
S3	208	1.00	5.00	3.7837	1.32473
S4	208	1.00	5.00	3.5817	1.16431
S5	208	1.00	5.00	3.2356	1.34318
S6	208	1.00	5.00	<b>4.2596</b>	.96804
PC1	208	1.00	5.00	<b>1.4712</b>	.86205
PC2	208	1.00	5.00	4.1490	.85798
PC3	208	1.00	5.00	3.2308	1.28710
PC4	208	1.00	5.00	4.1538	.89301
PC5	208	1.00	5.00	1.8894	1.14305
PC6	208	1.00	5.00	4.1010	.95016
PC7	208	1.00	5.00	1.9904	1.11204
<b>PC8</b>	208	1.00	5.00	<b>4.5673</b>	.79569
PC9	208	1.00	5.00	1.9183	1.08483
PWC1	208	1.00	5.00	<b>3.4231</b>	.97497
PWC2	208	1.00	5.00	<b>2.6298</b>	1.05979
PWC3	208	1.00	5.00	2.8702	1.08902
PWC4	208	1.00	5.00	3.1683	1.05663
PWC5	208	1.00	5.00	3.0000	1.04489
PWC6	208	1.00	5.00	3.0288	1.20351
PB1	208	1.00	5.00	<b>3.8894</b>	1.05971
PB2	208	1.00	5.00	3.8750	1.09180
PB3	208	1.00	5.00	3.9760	1.06522
PB4	208	1.00	5.00	<b>4.0337</b>	1.01858
PO1	208	1.00	5.00	<b>3.7260</b>	1.02947
PO2	208	1.00	5.00	<b>3.4183</b>	.98934
PO3	208	1.00	5.00	3.7212	.97264
PO4	208	1.00	5.00	3.6154	1.25346
PO5	208	1.00	5.00	3.6875	1.01364
C1	208	1.00	5.00	2.9279	1.19159
C2	208	1.00	5.00	3.6779	.95659
C3	208	1.00	5.00	2.6202	1.18972
C4	208	1.00	5.00	<b>4.1202</b>	.93766

C5	208	1.00	5.00	<b>2.6058</b>	1.19110
C6	208	1.00	5.00	3.0817	1.07139
C7	208	1.00	5.00	3.2452	1.39443
M1	208	1.00	5.00	3.2933	1.10578
M2	208	1.00	5.00	3.4038	.92751
M3	208	1.00	5.00	<b>3.5481</b>	1.15787
M4	208	1.00	5.00	3.0625	1.08166
M5	208	1.00	5.00	3.2837	1.13415
M6	208	1.00	5.00	3.2740	1.10200
M7	208	1.00	5.00	3.0721	1.07658
M8	208	1.00	5.00	<b>2.7933</b>	1.16327
M9	208	1.00	5.00	3.2404	1.06771
M10	208	1.00	5.00	3.3413	1.03271
M11	208	1.00	5.00	3.1971	1.03307
CTI1	208	1.00	5.00	3.0577	1.03864
CTI2	208	1.00	5.00	4.0048	1.11424
CTI3	208	1.00	5.00	<b>4.3221</b>	1.00101
CTI4	208	1.00	5.00	3.2500	1.30957
CTI5	208	1.00	5.00	<b>1.9279</b>	1.19967
CTI6	208	1.00	5.00	2.6058	1.31081
CTI7	208	1.00	5.00	3.6442	1.31081
CTI8	208	1.00	5.00	1.9423	1.27273
CTI9	208	1.00	5.00	3.8942	1.05792
CTI10	208	1.00	5.00	3.0962	1.15904
CTI11	208	1.00	5.00	4.0096	1.07672
CTI12	208	1.00	5.00	2.3606	1.37253
Valid (listwise)	N 208				

Source: *Author's own elaboration*

Extensive Table 5 shows the attitudes of tourism students towards the dimensions of working in the tourism industry through several dimensions. In this table, bold and gray parameters are the highest ranked (highest mean) and red and bold are the lowest ranked parameters.

Regarding the first dimension *Nature of Work*, students gave the highest grade to the parameter *NW13 – There is always something new to learn each day in tourism jobs*, which was rated 5 by 143 students (68,8%). The lowest rating was obtained by the parameter *NW4 - Jobs in tourism are generally boring* (96 students rated 1 or 46,2% of sample).

The second dimension is the *Social status* which shows medium scores. The most important factor identified in terms of social status is S6 - *I talk to my relatives and friends with pride about my vocation in the tourism industry* (112 students or 53,8% rated it 5). The lowest ranked answer is S2 - *Working in tourism is a respected (prestigious) vocation in the Serbian Society* (the most -74 students or 35,6% gave a rate 3).

When we talk about the next dimension *Industry-person congeniality*, the lowest ranked statement is PC1. *I find serving foreign tourists degrading* (146 students or 70.2% of sample rated it 1). The best ranked statement by students is PC8. *I like to see satisfied customers when I serve them* (150 students or 72.1% rated it 1).

As for table 5 again, the fourth dimension *Physical working conditions*, the estimates are somewhat lower. Therefore, the question of PWC1. *Physical working conditions are generally good in the tourism industry* got the best rate, and 94 students or 45.2% of sample rated it 3. The lowest score was obtained by the parameter PWC2. *Working environment is not very clean in tourism*, where 37 students or 17.8% of sample rated it 1 and 85 students or 40.9% rated it 3.

In the next dimension *Pay and Benefits*, which most often motivates future workers/students to work, grades are high, and for them is the most important dimension PV4. *The level of fringe benefits (bonuses, leisure, holidays, meals, etc.)* where 85 students or 40.9% of sample rated it 5.

If we consider *Promotion opportunities* students are moderately satisfied, which is also indicated by the fact that most of the students rated it 4 (71 or 34.1% of sample) on the basis of PO1- *Promotion is based on merit in the tourism industry*. Being moderately satisfied with the expected labor market, confirms the most common grade 3 of the PO2 statement - *Promotion opportunities are satisfactory in the tourism industry* where even 89 (42.8%) students gave a rate 3.

When it comes to the dimensions of collegiality and management, *Coworkers and Managers*, 92 students (44,2%) gave the best mark to the answer C4. *I can make friends easily with people working in the tourism industry*, and 51 students (24,5%) gave the answer C5. *It is not easy to get along with people working in the tourism industry* the lowest rate 1. The most students gave grade 3 for questions related to managers M3. *Most managers do not have an educational background in tourism in the*

*tourism industry* (75 students or 36,1%) and *M8*. *There is no good relationship between managers and employees in the tourism industry* (90 students or 43,3%).

The final statement in this part, *Commitment to the tourism industry* points to important conclusions that 123 students or 59,1% of the sample *would like to work in the tourism industry after graduation* and that 113 student or 54,3% *will not work in the tourism industry after graduation*. These result can be analyzed more in future because of these confronting statements.

Table 6: *Results of descriptive statistics- attitudes of students towards practice in tourism*

Statements	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
PIT1	208	<b>3.0769</b>	1.39490
PIT2	208	3.1298	1.29565
PIT3	208	3.7933	1.21606
PIT4	208	3.6731	1.27739
PIT5	208	3.4712	1.31844
PIT6	208	3.7788	1.28128
PIT7	208	3.4519	1.32883
PIT8	208	<b>3.9808</b>	1.06304
PIT9	208	3.7837	1.17392
PIT10	208	3.1875	1.28854
PIT11	208	3.75	1.252
Valid N (listwise)	208		

Source: *Author's own elaboration*

Last, but not the least important part of this research relates to the attitudes of students towards practice in tourism. In this questionnaire session, there were 11 statements ranked by respondents on a scale from 1 to 5. In that sense, the views and opinions of FHT students showed that only 22% of the sample or 46 students *had the opportunity to practice the theoretical knowledge they learned at school and advanced their knowledge (PIT1)* and this is the lowest-rated statement.

However, 40.4% of the sample or 84 students think they have gained a general experience in human relations, and specifically in client-employee relationships (PIT8).

Table 7: *Frequencies for most important factor towards practice in tourism*

Statements	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
1.00	8	3.8	3.8	3.8
2.00	7	3.4	3.4	7.2
3.00	50	24.0	24.0	31.3
4.00	59	28.4	28.4	59.6
5.00	84	40.4	40.4	100.0
Total	208	100.0	100.0	

Source: *Author's own elaboration*

### Conclusions

The progressive development of tourism has contributed to the importance of the role of this economic activity in the world economy. It is important to point out that tourism opens up the opportunity for employment of high- and low-skilled labor.

This study differs from the above in the investigation of the attitudes of students in that it examines the students during their studies, rather than after graduation. Namely, previous studies were conducted on postgraduate students, and in this research authors are particularly interested in the attitudes and behavior of students during the studies. Such research is a great step forward for acquiring theoretical knowledge, but also a practical indicator of the satisfaction and attitudes of students of the individual faculty.

The results are practically a benchmark and a sign to the faculty for further development and improvement of quality in order to satisfy students in different dimensions of study.

Generally, it is possible to draw conclusions about students' opinions regarding employment in the tourism industry:

- Students believe that something new can always be learned in the tourism industry;
- Most of them are proud of their future interest;
- Students are satisfied with the tourist service;
- Physical working conditions are generally good in the tourism industry;
- Students are motivated to work for benefits above basic salary

- They easily establish friendly relationships but;
- They think that managers do not have adequate education for the position they perform and
- More than half of the students would like to work in the tourism industry after graduation.

When considering the factors for choosing a career, it is less expected that numerous students would give the highest grade to a "safe job" statement, bearing in mind that this is a fairly safe labor market in the republic of Serbia. However, it was expected that students would like to work most at a job with high income and that they find enjoyable. This result also partly coincides with the result of the author El-Houshy (2014).

In general, it can be concluded that student satisfaction with practice is at a high-level although it can still be done to improve the quality of student practice.

The limitations of this research are reflected in a small number of respondents comparing to total student population. Secondly, the questionnaire included a number of questions based on five-point Likert scale, which has discouraged students to fill in. Due to the lack of answers through printed questionnaires, the questionnaire was also distributed through a Google questionnaire, which also did not show a large response rate, since it is anonymous and optional research.

Of course, this paper has good prospects for further development of research on this basis, both for improving the overall quality of the offer of the Faculty, as well as for the scientific basis in the form of comparative analysis of several faculties in the Republic of Serbia, and perhaps even more widely.

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