

TRAVEL PRACTICE OF THE NEW GENERATION OF TOURIST MANAGERS IN THE UNIVERSITY OF DEBRECEN

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ABSTRACT

Changes of the travel habits of our students have been experienced in the University of Debrecen characterized by decreasing knowledge concerning Hungary and infrequent travels. To confirm or reject our hypotheses based on our experiences and to work out proposals for the necessary changes in the education, an investigation was initiated which focuses on the travel habits of university students.

The online questionnaire was completed by current and former students. These have been sorted according to the university, the first university year and qualifications. Thus, the analysed group includes students who begun their university studies in the last 15 years as geographers, or specialized in geography (including tourism), environmental sciences or tourism-hospitality.

The hypothesis that the number of the national travels is decreasing due to the increasing international travels can be rejected, based on the national and international mobility values. On the other hand our results prove that in terms of the acquisition of the necessary knowledge and the elaboration of the successful professional work in the chosen special fields (earth and environmental sciences, tourism), these travels are less valuable in both qualitative and quantitative aspects. Among the factors influencing the choice of destination, the effect of university education is more considerable than it was expected.

KEYWORDS

Mobility, Student Travels, Travel Habit, Tourism Education, Tourism Management.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the education in the University of Debrecen, we experienced that most of our students barely know their country, Hungary; additionally, they rarely travel. These experiences are especially observable in the lessons 'physical geography of Hungary' and 'tourism geography' and they are important since these students are the future geography teachers, travel agents and other participants of tourism. Their knowledge, approach and attitude have effects on the travels of the next generations, and the future civilized tourists.

2. OBJECTIVES

In the summer of 2010, we began to survey the travel habits of the university students in order to examine the conditions and to work out proposals for the necessary changes, based on the results. Until 2012, this research will be extended to all Hungarian institutions of higher education.

We ask questions in order to examine the correctness of the hypotheses based on our experiences; we can sort these questions into the following groups (the ones written in italic will be demonstrated here):

- Characteristics of the travels:
 - General characteristics: change of mobility in the last 15 years, motivation, factors affecting the choice of destination, financing, spending.
 - The characteristics of national travels: visited destination, life stage, activities, characteristics of organization, duration, means of transport, type of accommodation
 - The characteristics of international travels: destination, date, duration, activities, future scholarships.
- The reasons of low mobility (rare travels)
- Characteristics regarding the collection of information, applied tools during the preparation, use of internet, in-situ collection of information
- The characteristics of the in-situ attitude: knowledge, acceptance and observance of behavioural norms; attitude in the nature; the level of the acceptance of limitations.

3. METHODOLOGY

The online questionnaire (BENKHARD, 2010) was completed by current and former students. The base of this analysis is 187 completed questionnaires. These have been sorted according to the university, the first university year and qualifications. Thus, the analysed group includes students who begun their university studies in the last 15 years as geographers, or specialized in geography (including tourism), environmental sciences or tourism-hospitality.

4. RESULTS

Regarding the students of the past 15 years, there is no significant change in the number of travels. It is true for both national and international travels. The respondents were asked to evaluate motivation in a 3-degree scale and the most frequent motivation was the discovery of new landscapes (91%). Regarding the information sources that affect the choice of destination, the most important factors are former experiences and the suggestions of acquaintances (similar to the result of the national survey in 2008; M.Á.S.T., 2009). According to the respondents, the effect of university education (in a scale from 0 to 9; values 5, 6 and 7: 38%) is similar to the influence of the internet sources (5-6-7: 40%).

Spending was examined only in the case of current students, regarding the costs of their last, 3-day-long travel. The costs of accommodation reflect the two extremities: 20% of the respondents marked the most expensive category (10001-15000 HUF), but 38.6% of them marked the cheapest one (0-1000 HUF). 68% spent 1000-5000 HUF on travel expenses.

29% of the respondents did not answer the question about low mobility, although the total (national + international) mobility value¹ of 20% of them did not exceed 50 (the maximum value is 228). The respondents first marked financial difficulties (80%), lack of time (24,6%), university (34,2%) and workplace activities (15,9%). 1.4% of them do not like travelling.

¹ Mobility value = the number of travels weighted by the duration of travel (1: 1 day; 2: 1 weekend; 3: 3-4 days; 4: 1 week; 5: more than a week).

During the preparation, the respondents use maps and internet in most cases (76,6%). Since internet is used for booking instead, the other options (travel guides 37,8%, educational books 25,5%) that help the collection of information about the destination are not sufficient for the proper preparation. Only 50% of the respondents look for educational possibilities.

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Based on the national and international mobility values, it is not relevant that the number of the national travels is decreasing due to the increasing international travels. It was supposed that mobility is decreasing in all respects, i.e. the catchment area of the University of Debrecen is also decreasing, but this is not proven by recent publications (KURUCZ, 2010; DOBÁNY, 2010).

However, in terms of the acquisition of the necessary knowledge and the elaboration of the successful professional work in the chosen special fields (earth and environmental sciences, tourism) these travels are less valuable in both qualitative and quantitative aspects. The preparation before the travel and the in-situ collection of information is also alarming.

Among the factors influencing the choice of destination, the effect of university education is more considerable than it was expected; the significance of the field trips organized by the university is emphasized.

The low travel demand is hidden in the answers; the following signs can indicate it:

- Most of the respondents do not realize that they actually travel very rarely (they did not answer the question ‘If you rarely travel... why?’).
- They explained the rare travels mainly with financial reasons. However, the spending, the accommodation, the chosen means of transport confirm that they do not look for cheaper possibilities (e. g. hitchhike, InterRail tickets, travel with full car, vacation rental, youth hostels, wild camping – where it is allowed -, CouchSurfing). Additionally, they do not take the opportunities provided by the international scholarships.

The foregoing results also suggest that if we continue this research, we can find solutions to encourage students’ travels and make them become explorers again.

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