

Knowledge of Students of Tourism – Case Study: Sacral Monuments in Serbia

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ABSTRACT This paper presents the results of the knowledge of students about sacral monuments research based on surveys conducted on students at the College of Tourism and the Faculty of Geography (study program Tourism) in Belgrade. The subjects of the research were: students' interests in sacral monuments in Serbia, levels of information about them, curricula in which they studied about sacral monuments in Serbia, the influence of practice and travel on the knowledge of sacral monuments. Statistical analysis of the data using SPSS showed that students are interested in learning more about sacral monuments in Serbia, that curricula are predominantly focused on artistic values, while tourism and economic aspects of sacral monuments are relatively neglected. The results also revealed that sacral monuments of minority confessions are often neglected in the curricula. Students believe they can learn more about sacral monuments through travel and practice rather than through lectures.

INTRODUCTION

Ruback et al. (2008) opined that people differently experience places which they visit or intend to visit, indicating the following reasons: differences in the material, social and symbolic nature among places and different perceptions due to individuals' experience, beliefs, attitudes and motivation to travel, whereby education is a significant motivational factor.

A research conducted at the University of Split in Croatia, showed that students were not very familiar with religious tourism. This research was carried out to determine how tourism students perceived religious tourism as a specific socio-cultural phenomenon, whether they participated in religious tourism, whether they visited sacred sites. Nearly half of 300 surveyed students did not participate in religious tourism,

what was influenced by the curricula, attitudes toward religion, the importance of religion in life (Duvnjak et al. 2011). The research conducted by Beshai et al. (2016) showed that experience and religious motivation are significantly related.

The interpretations of reasons for travel only on the basis of concepts such as leisure and recreation may not be relevant to visit places that are part of the cultural heritage, such as sacral monuments. Prentice (1993) proposed six motives: the satisfaction of watching, education, information, rest, leisure and practice. Interpreting the heritage management Moscardo (1996) pointed out two main motives: educational and entertainment/social ones. Knowledge and attitudes of students of tourism about interpretation of various religions in Serbia as well as artistic and historical values of sacral monuments indicate that the awareness about sacral monuments exists as part of cultural heritage. Donmez and Yesilbursa (2014) researched the effects of education on cultural heritage in Social studies and they proved that education has a positive impact on cultural heritage.

The fact is that visitors of sacral monuments "are emotionally involved", they have a "sense of belonging", as it is part of their heritage, while

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others come to be educated (Poria et al. 2004). The question posed by Swarbrooke (1994) "Heritage – education or entertainment?" is incomplete and ignores those visitors who want to experience their heritage.

Tourism is a specific sector, so it requires specific knowledge that needs to be taken into account in training personnel for tourism. It is especially important to keep in mind that different forms of tourism require different knowledge that students of tourism should obtain through classical forms of instruction and in particular through studying different skills. It is evident that one of the reasons for the failure of students in school is inadequacy of studying skills, as well as their attitudes towards learning. That is why educational activities need to motivate students to show their skills (Önen 2011). In addition to motivational processes, the next important aspect is the learning experience (Keklik and Erdem-Keklik 2012). On the other hand, the research led by Roney and Öztin (2007) showed that one of the main problems of the Turkish higher education system is that students often don't have the opportunity to learn what they really want to.

Tourists visit historical sacral facilities because of the possibility of broadening their cultural and educational experience (Olsen 2006). They look for authentic experience that is related to a specific historical place, not only to a resort that could be anywhere (Macleod 2006). Masberg and Silverman (1996) examined the experiences of students about the legacy of the Holy Mountain in Greece. In Greece, travel for cognitive purposes is obviously to Mount Athos, where the visit with cathartic experiences is mixed with learning and education.

Religious educational practices in the Holy Mountain society generally remain within the spiritual sphere, within the relationships that are established between the abbot of the monastery and visitors, disseminating knowledge. Visitors can gain knowledge in a conversation with the monks. Group discussions initiated by monks, where students are able to ask all kinds of questions about the history of the place, theology, life on the Holy Mountain, offer an experience educational in its nature.

For many travelers the knowledge gained through travel represents a type of cognition parallel to the formal or life-permanent education, mainly because this experience offers op-

portunities to apply the knowledge acquired during lectures (Kuh 1995). The statement can be applied to a group of 11 school children who arrived in Halkidiki, in the Holy Mountain together with their teachers. Mount Athos acted as a bridge between the classroom and the outside world in the revival of learning process (Cooper and Latham 1988).

A student of art from Serbia was motivated to visit the Holy Mountain after a lecture on Byzantine art. For a young German the objective of the trip was to write a report about monasticism. To the question of what they had learned from their stay, some students answered that they had learned a lot about themselves. Students' experience of Mount Athos is important for personal growth and development in a more general sense of education.

Barron (2004) explored the Confucian cultural heritage of Australia through the experiences of students of tourism. He identified differences in educational approaches and pointed out the problems and dilemmas regarding such experiences. He concluded that students received a high quality instruction.

The paper authored by Andriotis (2009) included a phenomenological approach to sacral monuments, through initiating conversations with visitors to the monastery at Mount Athos in Greece. The analysis included five key elements of authentic experience: spiritual, cultural, environmental, secular and educational. The research conducted by Egresi et al. (2012) in the province of Mardin, Turkey, showed that the final statements of the respondents were such that most of them had great cultural and spiritual experience. A smaller percentage of respondents reported that they had a great educational and religious experience.

Mattila et al. (2001) studied the relationships between students' behaviour on vacation and their religion. The research focused on students' religious beliefs, on the analysis of their behaviour before, during and after visiting tourist places, making the comparison between groups with different religious affiliations. Results indicated that gender and religion had a significant impact on students' behaviors during spring break as well as their choice of spring break destinations. The paper authored by Brayley (2010), referring to Palmyra, explored positive impacts of tourism on sacral monuments, including preservation and protection of places, education and interpretation, social characteristics and identifications.

Studying students' travel excursion movements/trends in Serbia, Štetić and Stanić (2012) emphasized the importance of religious monuments in the programmes of these travels, while in the paper on urban tourism (Štetić et al. 2011) they pointed out that the presentation of religious sites in the cities was the key factor in the successful operation of tourist guides and the method for high-quality offer of every tourist destination. The education on cultural heritage in schools is important as well as the knowledge that originates from families and society (Yazici 2014).

METHODOLOGY

The obtained data were analysed using SPSS software package designed for statistical analysis of data. The research involved 172 students from the College of tourism and the Faculty of Geography in Belgrade. Their numeric and gender structure is shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Characteristics of the participants

<i>Institution</i>	<i>Total number</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>
The College of Tourism	72	28	44
The Faculty of Geography	100	26	74

Random sampling was used as a method of selecting a sample unit, each unit of the basic set had an equal opportunity to be selected in the sample. Although the sample was random, gender structure of the students of both institutions was such that it was dominated by female students.

In a survey of students' attitudes about their level of information and interest in the sacral monuments in Serbia and about the curricula on sacral monuments, a prepared questionnaire with 9 attitudes evaluated by the students using a Likert scale of 1 to 5 was applied, with grade 1 denoting strong disagreement and grade 5 meaning complete agreement with the attitudes.

RESULTS

The aim of the survey of students at the College of Tourism and the Faculty of Geography, University of Belgrade (Study program: Tourism), was to determine whether students were satisfied with the knowledge and curricula on sacral monuments in Serbia. They were also asked

whether the curricula fostered awareness about the interpenetration of various religions, what the share of students' practice and travel was in gaining knowledge of sacral monuments. Therefore, this research evaluated the students' perceptions based on extracurricular experience (excursions and practice) and the knowledge acquired during their studies (curricula on sacral monuments).

Before presenting the results of the survey, it should be noted that the analysis of test of reliability on the obtained results was carried out by applying Cronbach's alpha coefficient. The internal consistency or average correlation of items within the research was determined in order to assess reliability. Alpha coefficient values range from 0 to 1 and the higher the obtained value, the more reliable the test is considered to be. Generally, the accepted boundary value of test reliability is ≥ 0.7 , but in some tests lower values of alpha coefficient (≥ 0.5 and ≥ 0.6) may also be accepted. In this paper Cronbach's alpha coefficient showed the value of 0.9, which indicated high test reliability.

Statistical analysis in SPSS programme included the arithmetic mean as the most commonly used measure of central tendency and standard deviation as a measure of deviation. The higher the arithmetic mean value for a particular attitude, the higher is the students' agreement with that attitude (Table 2). Presents an overview of the arithmetic means and standard deviations for all nine attitudes included in the survey.

The obtained data showed that students were interested in the sacral monuments in Serbia (average score 3.5), but they were not adequately informed about them (2.4), correlated with the notion that their subjects did not deal with Serbian sacral monuments adequately (3.1) and that their subjects did not sufficiently cover the sacred monuments belonging to the Catholic, Muslim and Jewish confessions (2.7). Students believed that travel and students' practice have a positive impact on their cognition of the sacred monuments (3.7). It was evident that the program contents are more directed towards the artistic, cultural and historical values of religious monuments (3.8), while the tourist and economic aspect of the study was relatively neglected (2.9).

The students were least satisfied with the level of information about sacred objects in Serbia but they were most satisfied with the influence of traveling and practice on the knowledge

Table 2: Arithmetic means and standard deviations for students' attitudes

<i>Attitudes</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Standard deviation</i>	<i>N</i>
1. My interest in sacral monuments in Serbia is significant.	3.5	0.9	172
2. I am adequately and sufficiently informed about on the sacred monuments in Serbia.	2.4	1.0	172
3. During our studies, we had sufficient subjects that dealt with sacral monuments in Serbia.	3.1	1.4	172
4. The curricula included information about sacral buildings of Catholic, Muslim and Jewish confessions.	2.7	1.3	172
5. My knowledge of sacred monuments enables me to understand the presence and permeation of various religions in Serbia.	3.4	1.1	172
6. In the curricula on sacral monuments, contents about their cultural, artistic and historical value are mostly present.	3.8	1.1	172
7. In the curricula on sacral monuments, tourism and economic aspects of studying sacral monuments are mainly present.	2.9	1.1	172
8. I have adequate experience and knowledge of the tourism contents affecting the value of sacral monuments.	3.1	1.1	172
9. Travel and students' practice have a positive impact on my knowledge of sacral monuments.	3.7	1.4	172

about these objects. It can be noted that a larger share of the overall findings belongs to those that come from the experiential or practical experience and extracurricular activities, than from the knowledge acquired during the teaching process. Thus, a relatively good synthesis of both ways was achieved in the claim 8 in Table 2 (3.1).

As part of the research a cross analysis between groups was also carried out within the total sample of students who were surveyed. Comparative analysis of the obtained results was based on a higher education institution which students attended. It was found that there were differences between the attitudes of students at the College of Tourism and students of tourism at the Faculty of Geography, University of Belgrade. Since the curricula and their content overlap in these two higher education institutions to some extent, it can be assumed that the obtained results are approximate in both observed groups.

A comparative analysis of the results by gender of respondents was performed. In comparing these results, a t-test for independent samples with a confidence level of 95 percent was used in order to determine whether there are differences in the average scores within the above mentioned segments. Table 3 presents the average scores and standard deviation for the students of the College of Tourism and the Faculty of Geography, as well as possible deviations in their attitudes.

In an educational context, schools do not only differ from other types of organizations, but they also differ from one another (Silman et al. 2012).

Table 3: t-test for independent samples by the institutions of higher education

<i>Students</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Standard deviation</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
The College of Tourism	3.3	0.5	1.9	0.2
The Faculty of Geography	3.3	0.6		

Based on the data in Table 3 it can be concluded that there are no significant differences between the attitudes of the students of the two institutions of higher education on religious monuments, personal knowledge and experience of them. There are differences between the average scores, but not to the extent that indicates significant deviations. A comparative analysis of the obtained scores by attitudes was carried out based on gender of the respondents and the results are presented in Table 4. This analysis was also performed at a reliability level of 95 percent.

Table 4: t-test for independent samples by the gender of respondents

<i>Gender of the respondents</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Standard deviation</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
Male	3.4	0.5	0.1	0.7
Female	3.3	0.5		

Comparative analysis of averages per attitudes depending on the gender of respondents indicated that there were significant similarities in attitudes and that their responses varied with-

in minimal deviations. Thus, it was proven that there were no significant differences in students' attitudes in relation to their knowledge of sacral monuments in Serbia, depending on the respondents' gender. Gender should not be the basis for differences among students as they move in similar social circles and get acquainted with the same facts that are part of the curricula through the instruction. On the other side, the research that was carried out by Karatas et al. (2016) showed that age as an important variable that affects the perception of students about the dimensions of service quality. Research quality would be greater if it analyzed the impact of the level of students' success on their attitudes towards cultural heritage (Arikan and Dogan 2013).

DISCUSSION

Understanding the differences between religions cannot be achieved through familiarization with only one religion, hence it is necessary to provide knowledge of world religions in institutional education (Trifunović 2010). This is especially important in order to realize changes in communities and pay more attention to the difference in religious identities, beliefs and practice (Fenggang 2016).

In the Balkan Peninsula three civilizational circle touch, intersect and mix: Byzantine-Orthodox, Western-European (Catholic-Protestant) and Ottoman-Islamic (Radisavljević-Ciparizović 2011). Serbia is a multi-ethnic and multi-confessional state. In the north of the country Orthodoxy is permeated with Catholicism, in the south with Islam (Kuburić 2010).

Reactualization of religious beliefs has manifested itself differently in social and cultural contexts. In academic research in Serbia there are two interpretations relating to this phenomenon that indicate contextual distinction of this process: the return to religions and the return of religion. The first interpretation relates to the increase of individual interests in different religious traditions, beliefs and sacral monuments. The second interpretation implies the increase in social importance of religion, religious institutions and sacral monuments (Pavićević 2012). In this context, religious monuments in the curricula should be analyzed so that they develop students' knowledge.

Education of the students of tourism is implemented in a variety of areas: education for

work, education for management and administration, economic education, education in the field of marketing, education in the field of corporate culture and culture of behaviour (Rakićević 2000). Students of tourism need to have different skills, affinities and knowledge, which means that the educational system should be changed to meet these needs (Wallis and Steptoe 2006). Educational syllabi in the tourism industry need to be fundamentally reformed and redesigned by gradual addition of new subjects or changing what is taught and how it is taught (Sheldon et al. 2008). The reports of this paper are also presented in this context.

CONCLUSION

To plan the needs of education in tourism is neither easy nor simple. The suitable and adequate education for the needs of tourism may be exactly the one that presumes tourists' desires, coordinates them and monitors their implementation. A greater need for responsible tourism management causes a new paradigm of education for tourism.

Education policy and policy of personnel formation, is part of the development policy of a country as a whole. Therefore, the reform of education in Serbia has similar characteristics as in other countries in transition. Education policy in tourism is part of a tourism policy. Survey results presented in this paper showed that education of students is not represented by an equal volume in various fields of tourism as regards sacral monuments as an important segment of the tourism offer in Serbia. In order to work successfully in tourism services, the students should develop their communication and teamwork skills and working with people from different cultures, which includes working with people of different religious affiliation. In this context, students of tourism need to learn the characteristics of religions of the world and religious monuments.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The process of permanent education enables students of tourism to keep pace with changes in the environment. The curricula should be consistent with current social developments, taking into account the equitable representation of different aspects in tourism research and their presentation to students.

This paper shows that higher education in tourism bring about complex relationships that originate from different sources, with wide implications. It is necessary in higher education in tourism, in Serbia, to promote new dimension to emphasize inter-institutional cooperation, integrated programs of study and various trainings and research. In designing the changes higher education in tourism should be taken into consideration, including the integration of education and economics, current learning outcomes, providing new subject areas and student experience. Graduates of tourism besides theoretical knowledge should possess certain skills. Therefore, the reform of higher education in tourism should be in the context of improving the flexibility and efficiency of the educational process.

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