EVALUATION OF HUMAN RESOURCES FOR THE SUSTAINABLE IMPLEMENTATION OF TOURISM IN THE SOUTH-WEST AND NORTH-WEST OF LOWER DANUBE

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Abstract

The main goal of the paper is the highest qualification of the labour force, indicating a level of education according to the training and also adapting the person involved on the labour market to new tourism technologies. The analysis of the status of the demographic resources specific to each of the two cross-border regions reflects part of the economic development potential of the target area and provides the opportunity to highlight the key points in remedying the tourism trends in a favourable and, above all, sustainable context.

One aims at both the quantitative aspects, but especially at the qualitative aspects of this particularly important variable in order to meet the needs and desires of tourists, providing quality services and thus participating to increasing the productivity of this economic sector.

Keywords: human resources, level of education, education institutions, sustainable tourism, S-W and N-W of Lower Danube

1. INTRODUCTION

The field of human resources has always been one of the major concerns of the economic players existing in each country. A well-trained workforce becomes more valuable and profitable when it conforms to the requirements of a more development economic market. There are several training programs generated by private players, as well as by the public educational environment, which proved to be inefficient when advancing to the applicability part and absorption onto the labour market (Popescu, 2001). More and more people tend to work in a field in which they are not competitive, a sector which they are were not thoroughly prepared for, but the lure of a better salary makes them choose inappropriate courses and programs.

With the accession of Romania and Bulgaria to the European Union, the two countrys had access to certain European funding programme by which the development and continous training of human resources are facilitated. The best-known such programme is SOP HRD – the Sectorial Operational Programme Human Resources Development – by means of which a number of specialised training and retraining courses for the existing workforce were done. This programme is a component of the National Development Plan 2007-2013 and is an extremely important aspect for the development of the current economic sector.

The European sector of hotels and restaurants faces a number of challenges related to the aging of the workforce, fluctuation of the labour force, shortcomings concerning the competences of those operating in this field, the lack of institutionalised or non-institutionalise qualifications and, at the same time, an increasing need for flexibility and ability of employees to perform several tasks at once. In this regard, addressing this problem related to the opportunitites for training and educating the labour force in tourism and to the adjacent skills becomes urgent in the context of
globalisation and its consequences: large-scale awareness of the need for a healthy lifestyle, the need for the individualised tourism packages, the environmental problems and information digitalisation (Comprehensive sectoral analysis of emerging competencies and economic activities in the European Union, 2009).

The general demographic balance reflects the term of latent demographic crisis of the demographic system, defining a break of the balance inputs and outputs (in a natural of migratory way) and the installation of a lasting imbalance, accompanied by the occurrence of new determinant factors and mechanisms (Ghețău, 2007). The demographic behaviour was strongly influenced by the sudden end of the demographic transition and socio-economic changes that have occurred during the post-socialist period.

The successful and sustainable development of tourism depends not only on the attractive scenery and tourism facilities, but also on the competitive and quality services. The sector of hospitality and tourism is one for people; people who provide services to people. Being one of the world's most competitive economic activities, tourism requires understanding, professionalism, commitment, organisation and, above all, an efficient strategy for development of human resources. The sector of hospitality and tourism also means facilities and services. The competitive services can be provided only by the well trained and specialise personnel, who has an appropriate attitude, proper mindset, proper behaviour and appropriate performance and creating a trained and qualified workforce requires training, basic education and courses of vocational training and ongoing practical training at work (The Master plan for the national tourism development in Romania, 2007-2026).

The current trend at European level in terms of providing courses for the employees tends to be quite restrictive for the chains with a tradition in the field, but small companies focus their attention on the training provided within the company, which can help even more those involved. Moreover, the education and training costs are lower, in the case where everything takes place internally, and the employers can better monitor the activity of all and can see the results faster (Carvalho, 2006). The process of training in an institution, at a workplace, begins upon the employment, and depending on the adopted policy, it is constant (Davidson & Cope, 2003). Most tourism employees benefit from a start training, for the beginning, and the labour protection one, the latter being required by law.

The other trainings are specific and intended for learning and developing employee's skills, these courses are available only to some individuals of a minority. Obviously all of these courses must be conducted in compliance with the employmen, with the position the employee has in the company, and the same time, they cannot modify or restrict the creativity an initiative of the personnel. For the units that provide travel services in the analysed area, trainings for employees are conducted internally, with speakers from the company, but there is also the variant of joining training programs conducted nationally, which can be obtained and subsidies such as the qualification in the balneary tourism – a chance for the future. This project was conducted over a period of 3 years (2010-2013), was coordinated by the representatives of the Employers' Organisation for Romanian Balneary Tourism (OPTBR) was co-financed from the European Social Fund and is part of the SOP HRD – 2007-2013.

2. BASIC DEMOGRAPHIC ASPECTS

In terms of the sector of human resources in the analysed area, a keen interest from the authorities for the continuous training of the workforce has always been noted, but its few and small-scale achievement reveal a more focused concern, which is inclined more to practice, to developing a critical thinking, by formulating concrete and viable solutions by the trainers.

The target area includes 7 administratives units (NUTS III level) within 2 regions (NUTS II level), as follows: in Romania (the counties) – Mehedinți, Dolj and Olt and in Bulgaria (the districts) – Vidin, Montana, Vratsa, Pleven (Fig.1). Thus, from a demographic point of view, we can observe that the southwest region of Romania, more precisely three (3) of the five (5) counties of
the South-West Oltenia Region Development concentrates a larger population, of 1,362,334 inhabitants (General Census of the Population and Settlements in Romania, October 2011), compared to the four (4) districts, most of which make up the Northwest Region (excluding the District of Lovech), totalling only 696,992 inhabitants (National Statistical Institute of Bulgaria), meaning 6.7% of Romania’s population and respectively 9.5% of that of Bulgaria (Tab.1, Fig.2).

Numerically, the most populated administrative-territorial unit is the Dolj County, with 660,544 inhabitants in 2011 and a demographic density of 89.08 inhab./sqm. Demographically, the Bulgarian districts are classified into the category of lower average population, compared to the remaining administrative-territorial units of Bulgaria (Fig.2).

The target area has a total surface of 32784 sqm, of which 54.43% belong to Romania, and 45.57% to Bulgaria, The Danube River being a significant natural barrier separating the two countries, also being the backbone of the target area. The Danube is a valuable resource for the transport with low energy consumption, but, at least in the Romanian sector, the waterway is not managed properly, having many points where the depth either drops frequently under the minimum permissible limit (2.5 m), or the navigable channel does not have the required width (180 m) (Romania’s General Transport Master Plan, Sept. 2014).

Figure 1. Location of study area within Romania and Bulgaria (South-West and North-West of Lower Danube a cross-border area)
Table 1. Basic demographic aspects in the target area

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Target area</th>
<th>Population (inhab.)</th>
<th>Surface (sqm)</th>
<th>Demographic density (inhab./sqm)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Romania</td>
<td>1,362,334</td>
<td>17,845</td>
<td>54.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mehedinți</td>
<td>265,390</td>
<td>4,933</td>
<td>53.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dolj</td>
<td>660,544</td>
<td>7,414</td>
<td>89.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Olt</td>
<td>436,400</td>
<td>5,498</td>
<td>79.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bulgaria</td>
<td>696,992</td>
<td>14,939</td>
<td>45.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vidin</td>
<td>99,481</td>
<td>3,032</td>
<td>32.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Montana</td>
<td>145,984</td>
<td>3,635</td>
<td>40.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vratsa</td>
<td>184,662</td>
<td>3,619</td>
<td>51.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pleven</td>
<td>266,865</td>
<td>4,653</td>
<td>57.35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: The National Institutes for Statistics in Romania and Bulgaria (2011)

3. POPULATION'S NATURAL MOVEMENT

The demographic trend is generally descendant, the demographic regime of the administrative units in the target area being characterised by demographic deficit (Tab.2) and negative migratory balance, which reinforces the idea of necessity to intervene by economic stimulation. Moreover, based on the increased demographic aging, one may observe very low values of the natural growth in the districts of Vidin and Montana, included between – 12 an 16%, which is the lower level of the national spread in terms of population's natural movement.

Figure 2. Inequalities on the population density and distribution of the cities by rank within the study area (2012)
Table 2. The natural movement of the population in the target area in 2011

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Target area</th>
<th>Birth rate</th>
<th>Mortality rate</th>
<th>Natural balance rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Romania</td>
<td>8.7‰</td>
<td>13.7‰</td>
<td>-5‰</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mehedinți</td>
<td>8.6‰</td>
<td>13.9‰</td>
<td>-5.3‰</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dolj</td>
<td>7.2‰</td>
<td>13.5‰</td>
<td>-6.2‰</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Olt</td>
<td>7.5‰</td>
<td>22.7‰</td>
<td>-15.2‰</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bulgaria</td>
<td>8.6‰</td>
<td>20.9‰</td>
<td>-12.3‰</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vidin</td>
<td>8.6‰</td>
<td>18.5‰</td>
<td>-9.9‰</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Montana</td>
<td>8.9‰</td>
<td>18.5‰</td>
<td>-9.6‰</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vratsa</td>
<td>8.6‰</td>
<td>18.5‰</td>
<td>-9.9‰</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pleven</td>
<td>8.9‰</td>
<td>18.5‰</td>
<td>-9.6‰</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: The National Institutes for Statistics, Romania and Bulgaria

Among the very low birth rates in recent years, we also observe the counties of Mehedinți and Olt, along with the already specified districts, the explanation also having to do with the population's structure by age groups of these administrative units characterised by an increase demographic aging, by a Romanian/orthodox majority ethnic structure, by the influence of the typically rural family model and by their least diversified economic profile.

3. POPULATION'S STRUCTURE BY AGE GROUPS

Much of the tourism workforce efficiency also has to do with the structure by the population's age groups, as well as with its training and skills training in this economic field, thus marking the dynamism and long-term results.

With a recognised demographic diagnosis, we emphasized the population's structure by age groups by means of the age pyramid, this type of structure reflecting the deterioration of the structure by ages and the footprint it leaves on the evolution of birth rate, on the process of demographic aging and implicitly, on the resources of workforce required for tourism or of any changes imposed to the tourism packages in terms of changes in the main age groups.

The population's structure by age groups in the studied area shows a trend of decrease in the share of the young population and of increase in the elderly one, demographic aging essentially being the result of a drop in fertility (Surd et al, 2007); this determines particularity serious social and economic consequences on the hand for the public system of pensions or the entire system social securities, on the other hand it also influences the tourism development opportunities by changing the preferences and consumption models over time, as a result of an increasingly greater number of the elderly. The long term implications can be of the most diverse:

- the new types of tourists will have different needs preferences, therefore changes in the tourism offer are required;
- the workforce, which is quite young nowadays, will suffer changes over the coming years, which will involve an increasingly larger competition of the employers in favour of winning the lower age ceiling;
- changes may also occur in the image of the tourism sector and in the need to change the working conditions, since older employees are much less flexible than the young ones;
- tourist's aging may result in an increase in the service quality expectations in tourism;
- another demographic and cultural aspect that will influence the tourism offer is also the increase in the population's level of education and, at the same time, increasing the identification of the job as an important factor generating personal identity.
The effects of demographic aging in Romania and Bulgaria are the result of combining the sudden transition, but still ongoing from Soviet satellites into independent nations and all the consequences it involves (Puwak, 1994). At the same time, even if the fertility decrease was slowed down, aging continuous due to the demographic inertia, mening because of the entry into the upper age group, of some large contingents born before the massive decline in fertility (Surd et al., 2007).

At the same time, we can observe significant differences by residence, the pyramids in the rural environment being much wider at the top compared to the base.

Demographic aging in the rural environment cannot be attributable only to the maturity of the demographic structures, but also to the massive emigration of the young population, particularity in the early 1990. Although it is characteristic of all administrative units, demographic aging is much more advanced in Bulgaria, particularity in Montana and Vidin (Fig.3).

Regarding the recent dynamics and the configuration of the age pyramids in the target area, an obvious narrowing of the age pyramid base and a more obvious widening on upper part can be signalled at all administrative units, with a net asymetry between the two axes, due to the increase in the average life expectancy, on the one hand and to the male over-mortality, particularity in the upper sector of the age pyramid. The main trend from one census to another is primarily the increase in the degree of the age pyramid thinning out, but also of increasing the allure of "flag" in the upper sector, the more obvious dissonances being recorded in the case of the units manifesting a greater degree of demographic aging.

Vratsa and Montana detach in the target area, by the "inverted" pyramids, with a visibly narrower base (due to the birth rate recoil generalised after 1992, whereto the phenomenon of external migration adds, which particularity entrained the young population looking for a job), a broken trunk and a considerable extension towards the apex, with a significant share of the elderly population reflected by the flatter tip.

The existence of a straight-type pyramid, which means that the main three age groups (young, adults, elderly) have relatively equal shares (some significant difference can be observed only towards the apex), is representative for the administrative units in the Southwest of Romania, which certifies a general demographic potential which more balanced and more stable in the future (Fig. 3).

The imbalances recorded in the structure by age groups is also reflected in the current European status on the activity rate of the people with ages ranging between 20 and 64. According to Eurostat, this is lower than the value of 60% in the Northwest Bulgaria Development Region (among the lowest values in Europe) and is included between 65-70% in the Southwest Oltenia Development Region (average values in Europe- Eurostat, Statistical Atlas).

The economic importance of tourism derives from the increasingly larger number of the entrepreneurial initiatives in tourism and that of the individuals employed in this sector.

Thus, the distribution by age groups is an important indicator for the occupational structure of the individuals employed in the accommodation units in the tourism sector (Tab.3). First of all, we can observe that nationally, the less numerous of people who are employed in tourism in general and in hotels and restaurants in particular, which is about 3 times lower than in Romania. In percentage, the people aged between 15 and 24 occupy a place much lower than the percentages recorded at Europen level, which certifies, on the one hand, the few oppotunities for employment during or immediately after graduation and on the other hand, the lack of their skills or trust in them from the employers. At the same, in Romania and in Bulgaria, the share of the people aged over 54 employed in tourism is quite low compared to the other age groups, but much higher than the European average, mainly base on the professional retraining required by the collapse of the secondary sector of economy.
Figure 3. Age pyramids of the population’s structure age groups within the study area: a, b, c, d, e, f, g (counties Dolj, Mehedinți and Olt in Romania; districts Pleven, Vidin, Vratsa and Montana in Bulgaria)

Source: The National Institutes for Statistics, Romania and Bulgaria
Regarding the gender structure, at European level, as well as at Romanian and Bulgarian level, which is characteristic to the sector of hotels and restaurants, it is the predominance of the female staff: for example, in 2007, in Bulgaria, only 59,000 men were working in this field, compared to the 98,000 women, while in Romania, in the same year, 90,000 women compared to 47,000 men. It is worthy to note that most of them had full-time jobs.

4. LEVEL OF EDUCATION

Regarding the level of education of the individuals, operating in tourism, both in Bulgaria and in Romania at national level, the largest share is occupied by the people who have completed the secondary education level, followed by people with university and post-university studies, however the quite big share of people with primary education drawing the attention, which reveals a complete lack of skills obtained, in this case, within institutionalised education. The significant share of managers who do not have higher education is also of importance. At the same time, the large share of those with secondary level education is given by young people of up to 24 years of age, who have not yet completed their studies and are also most often those who particularly have temporary jobs in tourism in their semester. However, their significant participation can only attract a higher level of skills in this sector (especially in terms of world languages and computer skills). This becomes even more important as in the sector of hotels and restaurants a significant share of people with low educational level can be observed.

Unfortunately, in counterbalance, one of the reasons why there may be a significant fluctuation of the workforce, especially in the sector of hotels and restaurants is the unfavourable image it has: quite low possibilities for personal development and progress in the career, low salaries and repetitive and, at the same time, physically demanding activity.

This instability and fluctuation of the workforce in tourism has become a vicious circle, given that not even the possibilities for training and educating the workforce in tourism are neither numerous nor very competitive. In the target area, there are a few educational institutions that deal with preparing the personal future in tourism. In Bulgaria, there are: a branch of Sofia University "St. Kl. Ohridski" in Montana (BA studies) and the University of Craiova, Department of Geography (BA degree) and The Economic College "Ghe. Chițu" Craiova (vocational, secondary education).

The level of competence in the sector of hospitality and tourism is low, due to the lack of performance standards, updated and appropriate labour standards and appropriate educational and training standards in the two countries. With a few exceptions, the non-institutionalise, continuous training at the workplace and in the services is almost nonexistent, and where we can discuss of internal training programs, unfortunately their efficiency is low due to the high migration of the staff. If the tourism importance of the target area will be increasingly greater, it may be appropriate to create a local institute for tourism or a tourism majors or vocational school. Meanwhile staff's participation in trainings or meetings, specialised conferences on topics aiming at the most efficient marketing and promoting methods, to welcome customers' expectations, improve the relationships with the local partners, to communicate and consult the civil population can be

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Table 3. The occupational structure of the population in tourism by age groups (%)

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<tr>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>15-24 years</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>6.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-34 years</td>
<td>21.8</td>
<td>25.2</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>21.9</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35-44 years</td>
<td>26.8</td>
<td>24.1</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>27.9</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45-54 years</td>
<td>25.09</td>
<td>21.3</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>24.2</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 54 years</td>
<td>19.03</td>
<td>21.4</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>20.6</td>
<td>18.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

efficient measures of integrated approach of the connection channels between the problems and the opportunities on the labour force.

The overall performance in services are primarily affected by the acute crisis of qualified and trained personnel, especially based on the departure of high school or university graduates to foreign countries. In this regard, the current training programs should be more focused on training competencies and skills and less on theoretical training of graduates. In addition, there should be continuous training at the workplace in order to keep up with the demand of skills and knowledge of the staff. The curricula are also inadequate and the teaching staff does not have the necessary practical qualifications and experience in compliance with the training standards in force.

The main shortcoming is given by the quite outdated educational system focused rather on theory and less on practice. Financial aspects should not be neglected either, which may become motivating for the staff in the educational system who deals with training the younger generation. At the same time, the bad image of a job in the sector of services must be adjusted and improved by motivating financial investments in the employees’ salaries and continuous practical training also after graduating.

5. UNEMPLOYMENT RATE

The imbalances recorded in the structure by age groups, as well as those regarding the sustainable economic development are proven by the high unemployment rates recorded at the level of the analysed administrative-territorial units. Thus, the lower demographic densities, the negative natural growth and the relative economic isolation recorded based on restructuring the secondary sector of the economy is reflected in the high level of unemployment in 2011: 19.8% in the District of Vidin, Montana – 14.1%, in Pleven – 12% and in Vratsa – 9.3%. Although they do not have low levels of unemployment, the Romanian counties in the cross-border area however record values below 10%, in the same year. Once more, an infusion of financial and qualified human resources is required in the tourism sector for an economic revitalisation, which is fundamental, absolutely necessary under the given conditions, especially as the pyramid of ages does not announce a more optimistic situation in the future.

The international statistics place Romania and Bulgaria on a leading position in terms of the development of tourism, as well as a growing participation to the cumulated contribution to GDP. Currently, Romania has about 485,000 jobs in tourism, people directly involved and other attracted following that their number will exceed 570,000 by the end of 2022.

There is a certain interest in the evolution of the hotel industry and implicitly a justified effect in the qualification and specialisation of the personnel in the field, whether we speak of personnel qualified in various specialised trades or of management personnel with higher education. Currently, however, the number of people registered as active in sector of hotels and restaurants is very modest and directly proportionate to the demographic and economic potential of the administrative units, and not of the natural one, which is friendly for the activities in tourism: in 2008, for example, Mehedinți and Olt counties officially recorded only 1.1 thousands and respectively 1.2 thousands people involved in this economic sector, while Dolj county had over 3.9 people working in hotels and restaurants.

If reference is made to the field of tourism and its related workforce, it can be said that the sector clearly contributes to the economic development of a country, in this case, the development of the Romanian-Bulgarian cross-border area (Lagiewski & Revelas, 2004). The tourism sector is undoubtedly a field dedicated to people, where they provide services on the one hand and receive benefits on the other hand. Tourism products are also generated by people who become integral part thereof, putting their mark thereon in terms of the quality of the services.
6. CONCLUSIONS

The development, modernisation of guesthouses and hotel-type accommodation facilities experienced a clear ascending trend especially after 1990. Although it is difficult to estimate it in number, this reality will also require a numerous highly qualified and well trained staff to work therein in the near future.

In this regard, we consider it is first very important to be aware of the benefits and consequences for the economy and social prosperity through appropriately educated and developing the human capital needed. In fact, this should aim at a vertical development from the ministerial level to the basic personnel in the operation of reception and accommodation units, or even aiming at the tourism education since the earliest ages. The most significant investment must be done in the younger generation, who should be attracted by the education and opportunity of employment in tourism, in the country of origin after completing the profile studies.

Taking into account that the tourism market is a dynamic one, where all elements are interrelated, dependent on each other's actions, the programs for training and retraining the workforce must be performed constantly and must comply with the European trends. The tourism sector employs a wide range of employees, from those who deal with practical matters – reception, cleaning, food and beverage, bellstand, security, to those dealing with marketing and the brand of that product.

Thus, it becomes imperative that, in an nature offering space, there should also be the workforce trained according to local standards, thus creating an interdependence relationship.

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