

THE VIEWS OF TOURISM STUDENTS ON THE SUBJECT OF THE CULTURAL AND ARTISTIC HERITAGE OF SERBIA

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Abstract: This work presents the research conducted among students of the Academy of Professional Studies Šumadija, Department of Arandelovac, enrolled in the Tourism and Hospitality Management program. Within the study, students expressed their attitudes regarding three groups of statements: 1) the mutual influence of the curriculum and knowledge that students acquire on one and trips and visits to places with cultural and artistic content on the other side; 2) the influence of curriculum on the understanding of cultural and artistic heritage; and 3) its influence on the understanding of contemporary cultural and artistic events and the development of tourism in Serbia. We used exploratory factor analysis for statement grouping and the Likert scale to present the attitudes. We found no significant difference in attitudes between the groups of students from different years. The results could be a starting point for all curriculum developers in higher education and for improving tourism education.

Key words: tourism, cultural and historical heritage, teaching, students, attitudes

1. INTRODUCTION

Planning adequate curricula and teaching at the level of the Academy of Professional Studies in the field of tourism is not a simple task. It is necessary that tourism students and teaching staff follow, at all times, current trends in the modern tourist market and social events [1]. Additionally, the teaching staff must understand the importance of education integration and inter-institutional cooperation with other areas of importance for tourism development [1]. That is particularly evident if we account for the fact that tourism as an economic activity is rapidly developing in practice, creating new emerging forms and shapes with attractive content, and only after a long time do tourism theorists begin to write about them.

Designing changes in higher education in tourism should account for current learning outcomes, new subject areas and student experiences, and the integration of education and the economy. In addition to theoretical knowledge, tourism graduates should also possess specific skills. Therefore, the reform of higher education in tourism should be in the context of improving the flexibility and efficiency of the educational process [2]. Since cultural heritage represents an essential segment of the entire cultural identity and an increasingly important motive for tourist travels, it is necessary to constantly monitor the level of knowledge and the effectiveness of the materials and literature offered in the curricula of tourism studies.

One needs to know cultural heritage, first local and then national, to develop an awareness of its importance [3]. To achieve that, tourism study programs, where students gain knowledge and expand their interests in cultural and artistic heritage, play an important role.

The majority of students who enroll in tourism studies state that their principal motivation for that decision is their love of travel [4]. At the same time, most want to get to know other cultures and countries. Besides, they also want to visit authentic cultural and artistic heritage.

In the conditions of globalization and new forms of regional connection, universities are positioning themselves as regional centers of scientific and research excellence, guardians and promoters of intellectual and scientific heritage, creators of sustainable development, and bridges to other cultures. At the same time, the offer of study programs should follow and harmonize global trends with local needs, bearing in mind the competencies required for work and life in the wider European and world environment. In this context, education for culture and tourism is a key

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interdisciplinary profile that trains experts for communication and business in a multicultural world [5].

Thanks to the cultural heritage, numerous European and world destinations are characterized by a very high degree of development of localities that promote cultural content and attractions. Cultural values and landmarks from different historical epochs attract an increasing number of tourists and interest in cultural tourism. This type of tourism, in addition to the basic, is frequently enriched with additional content, which significantly influences attendance to and promotion of the local environment and further tourism development and infrastructural improvement of the area [6].

A big challenge for the tourist offers in the modern world is the growing need for new tourist attractions and products at destinations. The tourism industry adapts to the requirements of the current tourist market, introducing innovations to existing destinations and activities. It is necessary to encourage the development of tourist cultural routes applicable to tourist practice to improve the presentation and consumption of cultural heritage goods [7]. The prerequisite for creating attractive cultural routes is the knowledge of the characteristics and content of the cultural heritage of tourist destinations. Therefore, it is necessary to include cultural heritage content in the plans and teaching programs at higher education institutions that deal with the study of tourism.

In this work, through a case study, the tourism students' attitudes on 13 statements regarding the impact of travel and practical experience on their knowledge of the cultural and artistic heritage of Serbia; the effect of the curriculum on more frequent visits to museums, galleries, monasteries, fortresses, archaeological sites, and castles outside of school obligations; whether there are enough subjects covering the cultural and artistic heritage of Serbia; whether the curriculum includes equal information about the heritage of Orthodox, Catholic, Muslim, and Jewish confessions; understanding of the presence and interaction of different nations that emerged and disappeared throughout Serbian history; the quality and scope of the content in the literature on the cultural and historical heritage of Serbia; as well as the role that the curriculum on the cultural and artistic heritage of Serbia plays in fostering interest in contemporary cultural and artistic events in Serbia; the positive impact on understanding contemporary cultural and artistic trends; and the contribution of the educational content of cultural and artistic heritage to understanding the overall significance of culture and art for the development of tourism in Serbia were explored in the form of Likert-type responses. The exploratory factor analysis of 13 statements inferred grouping them into three sets, each with Likert scales for measuring attitudes. In addition, we applied the Kruskal-Wallis H test to check whether the dependence of attitudes on the year of study exists.

2. THE CASE STUDY

A total of 45 (38 female and seven male) students from all three years of the Tourism and Hospitality Management study program of basic professional studies at the Academy of Professional Studies Šumadija, Department in Arandelovac, participated in the case study. They expressed their views regarding the relations between teaching, curriculum, and practice (travels) on cultural and artistic heritage. The questionnaire contained 13 5-point Likert-type items (statements) with five attitudes: complete disagreement (CD), partial disagreement (PD), neutral attitude (NA), partial agreement (PA), and complete agreement (CA). The questions are:

- S1. Student travel and practice positively impact my knowledge of Serbian cultural and artistic heritage.
- S2. Materials on cultural and artistic heritage within the curriculum positively contribute to my frequent visits to museums and galleries beyond school practice.
- S3. Materials on cultural and artistic heritage within the curriculum positively influence my frequent visits to monasteries beyond school practice.
- S4. Materials on cultural and artistic heritage within the curriculum positively impact my frequent visits to fortresses beyond school practice.

- S5. Materials on cultural and artistic heritage within the curriculum positively affect my frequent visits to archaeological sites beyond school practice.
- S6. Materials on cultural and artistic heritage within the curriculum positively influence my frequent visits to castles beyond school practice.
- S7. During my studies, I have enough courses that deal with cultural and artistic heritage in Serbia.
- S8. The Academy's curricula and programs include equal information about the cultural heritage and heritage of the Orthodox, Catholic, Muslim, and Jewish confessions.
- S9. My knowledge of cultural heritage in Serbia allows me to understand the presence and interpenetration of different peoples who have emerged and disappeared throughout history.
- S10. Literature on cultural and artistic heritage in Serbia has enough content about their cultural, artistic, and historical values.
- S11. The material on cultural, historical, and artistic heritage within the curriculum broadens my interests in Serbian contemporary cultural and artistic developments.
- S12. Materials on cultural, historical, and artistic heritage within the curriculum positively affect my understanding of contemporary cultural and artistic trends.
- S13. The teaching content on cultural and artistic heritage helped me understand the importance of culture and art for tourism development in Serbia.

Since responses represent ordinal data, we first used nonparametric descriptive statistics to analyze the attitudes toward individual statements (see Table 1) [8]. Next, we applied the Kruskal-Wallis H test [8] to the data on the attitudes of three individual sample groups of students sorted by the year of study: 19, 11, and 15 students in the first, second, and third year, respectively. The null hypothesis is that the students' attitudes do not depend on their year of study. The number of scores in a sample group is five, i.e., the number of possible attitudes. The scores count the number of students who have the same attitude. We applied the two-tailed test with alpha level of 0.05. The test failed to reject the null hypothesis and showed that students' attitudes do not depend on the year of study in which they are enrolled.

Then, we performed the Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA), implemented in Python, a method for detecting underlying relationships in data, to group the related statements into the Likert scales to apply parametric statistics [9]. While the dataset is too small for firm conclusions from EFA [9], we still conducted that procedure.

Before conducting EFA, it is essential to check for correlations between the variables using Bartlett's sphericity test. We obtained a *chi-square value* of 273 with a *p-value* of zero, indicating a low probability that the variables are not correlated. Additionally, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) test assesses the adequacy of the data for EFA by evaluating the partial correlations between the variables. The KMO value we obtained was 0.76, which falls within the range of acceptable values. EFA revealed three latent variables (factors): the first corresponds to statements S1 through S6, the second relates to statements S7 - S10, and the third the rest of the statements, S11 - S13. The factor loadings are 0.46, 0.82, 0.81, 0.65, 0.69, and 0.85 for the first, 0.55, 1.13, 0.54, and 0.54 for the second, and 0.56, 0.62, and 0.80 for the third factor.

Next, we construct three Likert scales as sums of attitudes from related Likert-type questions [9]. To sum the attitudes of one student on the statements within one group, we assigned a numerical value to each attitude (CD - 1, PD - 2, NA - 3, PA - 4, and CA - 5). For example, a student had six attitudes in the first group, whose values we sum to a single number. Then, we divide that sum by the number (6 in this example) of statements in a group to effectively compare the results with other groups. Finally, we apply parametric statistical methods to three scales (groups of statements), whose results are also presented in Table 1.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The attitude counts on statements S1 - S13 are given in Table 1 (columns CD to CA) and visualized in Figure 1. According to the data, students tend to agree or have a neutral attitude (low counts for CD and PD), reflected in large associated numerical mode and median values, the measures of central tendency. The mode *MO* and median *Mdn* values are greater than or equal to three. The neutral (NA or value 3) is the most frequent attitude, i.e., the mode for statements S2 and S6; otherwise, the *MO* is either 4 (PA) or 5 (CA). The median *Mdn*, a middle point of a distribution (half the scores are above and half below this middle point), is equal to 3 (NA) only for statement S6; otherwise, the *Mdn* is either 4 (PA) or 5 (CA).

Table 1. Results of the questionnaire are given in the following columns: statements (S1 - S13), count of students' attitudes (CD (1), PD (2), NA (3), PA (4), and CA (5), the number in parenthesis is attitude numerical value for Likert scale construction), mode MO, median Mdn, groups of statements (determined by factors extracted by exploratory factor analysis) that build Likert scales and their means (μ) and standard deviations (σ).

statement	CD (1)	PD (2)	NA (3)	PA (4)	CA (5)	mode <i>MO</i>	median <i>Mdn</i>	group (factor)	mean μ	standard deviation σ
S1	2	1	5	7	30	CA (5)	CA (5)	G1	3.9	0.9
S2	4	0	14	14	13	NA (3)	PA (4)			
S3	2	1	8	13	21	CA (5)	PA (4)			
S4	3	2	10	14	16	CA (5)	PA (4)			
S5	2	2	13	11	17	CA (5)	PA (4)			
S6	3	7	15	12	8	NA (3)	NA (3)			
S7	2	4	11	13	15	CA (5)	PA (4)	G2	4.0	0.8
S8	0	4	13	17	11	PA (4)	PA (4)			
S9	1	3	8	10	23	CA (5)	CA (5)			
S10	0	1	10	13	21	CA (5)	PA (4)			
S11	0	0	5	16	24	CA (5)	CA (5)	G3	4.5	0.6
S12	0	0	4	21	20	PA (4)	PA (4)			
S13	0	0	6	6	33	CA (5)	CA (5)			

Likert-type responses are classified as ordinal data rather than interval data. This distinction makes the use of parametric statistical techniques inappropriate for analyzing such data. Since one can apply such methods to Likert scales (constructed from a set of Likert-type items), we performed EFA to separate 13 statements into groups for which the Likert scales could be defined. The EFA produced three factors, i.e., groups of statements labeled G1, G2, and G3 (see Table 1).

The first G1 group of statements (S1 - S6) examines the relationship and mutual influence of the materials and knowledge students acquire and trips and visits to places with cultural and artistic content. The second G2 group (S7 - S10) concerns the influence of teaching on the understanding of cultural and artistic heritage. The third G3 group (S11 - S13) should examine how heritage influences the insight of contemporary cultural and artistic events and tourism development in Serbia.

The mean values (standard deviations) for these three groups of statements are 3.9 (0.9), 4.0 (0.8), and 4.5 (0.6) (see Table 1 and Figures 1 and 2). Values around three represent a neutral attitude (NA), while values greater than or less than three represent agreement or disagreement with the statements in the group. That means that students mostly agree with the statements from the third group (the variation of answers is the smallest, but the set of statements is also the narrowest, Figures 1 and 2). They partially agree with the statements from the first and second groups, but the variation in the

agreement is somewhat higher (Figures 1 and 2). These findings agree well with the presented nonparametric statistics (Table 1 and Figure 1).

The fact that the students agree to some extent with the first group of statements indicates that the teaching (material) partially affects their visits to places of cultural-artistic-heritage importance, and these visits improve their knowledge to some extent. Would improving teaching lead to greater interest in visiting such places? That might be a question for the future survey.

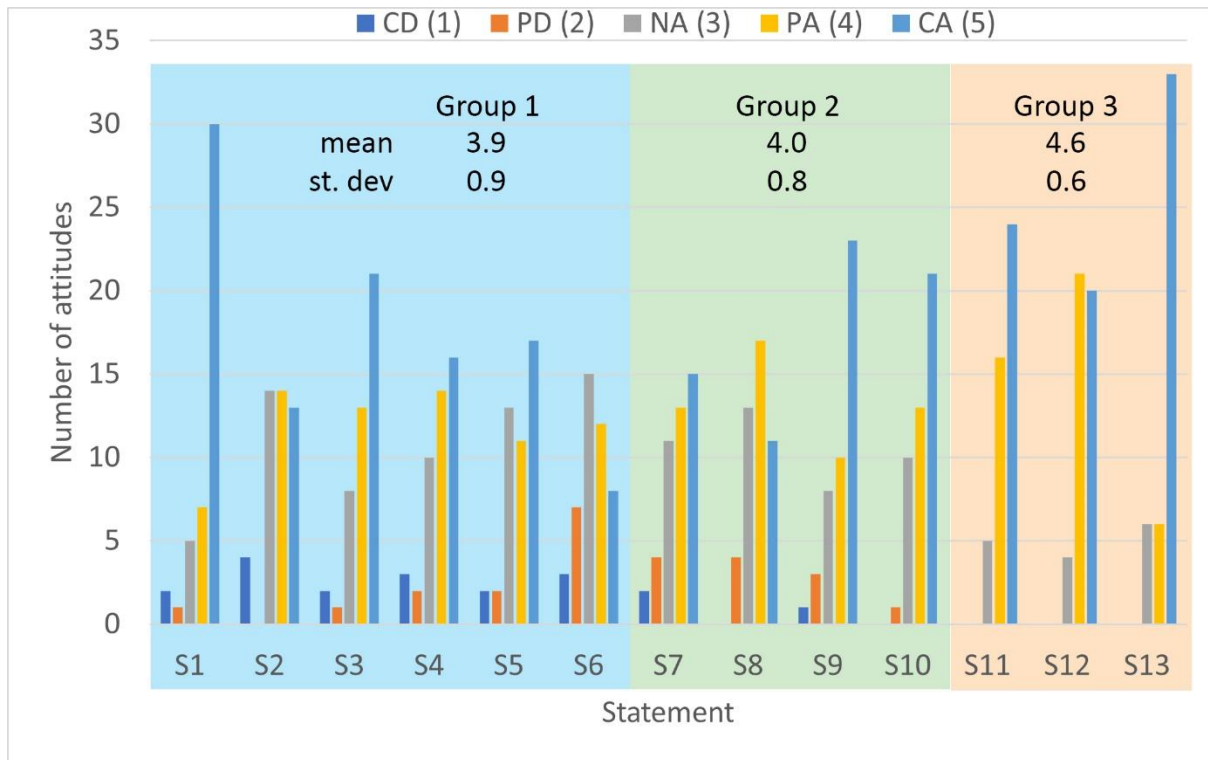


Figure 1 – Graphical representation of data from Table 1.

A bit greater partial agreement (with a slightly smaller variation) with the statements from the second group indicates that education positively affects knowledge and understanding of heritage. That possibly implies that the teaching should be improved in that segment.

Based on the highest degree of agreement (along with the smallest variation in the answers) with the statements from the third group, teaching broadens students' interest in contemporary events in culture and art and enables their understanding. Therefore, it seems that teaching achieves its goal in that segment.

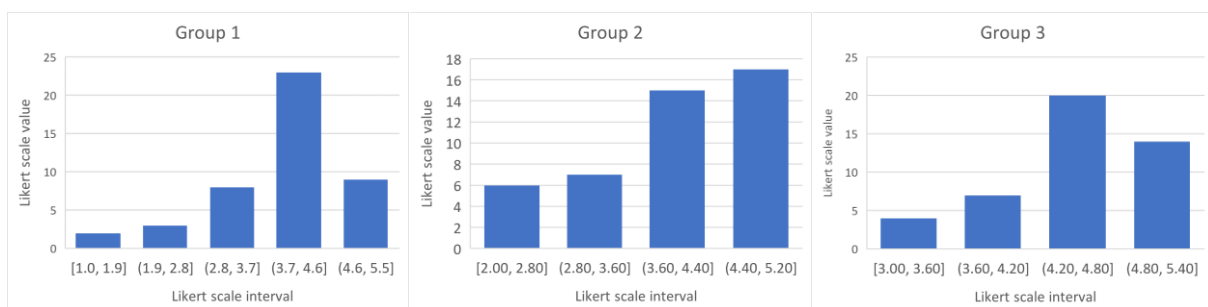


Figure 2 – Histograms of Likert scales for groups G1, G2, and G3.

4. CONCLUSION

Students enrolled in Tourism and Hospitality Management study program at the Academy of Professional Studies Šumadija, Department in Aranđelovac, participated in the survey that explores their attitudes regarding three categories of statements:

- The mutual influence of the curriculum and knowledge acquired by students and their trips and visits to places with cultural and artistic significance.
- The impact of the curriculum on their understanding of cultural and artistic heritage.
- The role curriculum has in shaping the understanding of contemporary cultural and artistic events and its influence on the development of tourism in Serbia.

Students partially agree with the first category, suggesting that teaching materials somewhat influence their visits to important cultural and artistic heritage sites, enhancing their knowledge. That raises the question of whether improving teaching could increase their interest in such visits—a potential topic for future surveys. The higher agreement with the second category indicates that education positively impacts their knowledge and understanding of heritage, suggesting a need for teaching improvement in this area. Finally, strong agreement with the third category shows that teaching broadens students' interest in contemporary cultural and artistic events while deepening their understanding. Therefore, teaching seems to fulfill its objectives in this regard. According to our findings, students' opinions on the given categories do not depend on the enrollment year. The results may serve as a valuable starting point for tourism curriculum developers.

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