

Hospitality and tourism education in Romania – main features and patterns

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Abstract—The present study undertakes a detailed analysis of the characteristics of the current supply of tourism studies in the Romanian secondary education system. The purpose of the research is to identify the main features and patterns of the hospitality and tourism education in Romania assuming that training represents an essential factor in tourism development and in providing tourists with high quality services. Research has centred on detailed documentation regarding the entire Romanian tourism employment sector, and also the education system of tourism degrees, followed by a quantitative research based on intense online research and on processing in graphical representation the official statistics data available.

Keywords—Hospitality, Labour market, Romania, Secondary education, Tourism education.

I. INTRODUCTION

World Tourism Organization considers the “tourism education” subsystem as a crucial element in ensuring high tourism satisfaction and in increasing the competitiveness of tourism businesses and areas. Thus the past few years have seen an increase in the number of trainees and students, as well as the number of scientific studies on this topic [3], [39].

Trained staff for tourism activities is an essential factor in tourism development and in providing tourists with high quality services. Only a properly educated workforce could be able to sustain the high level of friendly, efficient and professional service. Consequently, the evolution of this sector is directly correlated with the dynamics and structure of qualified personnel [16], [41].

Training represents a crucial component of successful tourism and hospitality organisations, but it must be approached with caution: training objectives must be clearly articulated and action plans must be developed [35].

Romania is currently facing countless difficulties in developing and promoting tourism activities and services, and in this sense a decisive role is attributed to the structural issues triggered by the shortage of qualified personnel, the low level of service quality and the poor attitude to services and

customers in the hospitality industry. The National Tourism Development Master Plan for 2007-2026 emphasizes as priority the need to train the existing staff in hotels, boarding houses, restaurants, etc. in terms of practical skills, foodstuff and beverage preparation and serving skills. Consequently, reorganizing and improving tourism education also becomes a top priority, aimed at increasing competitiveness and productivity in tourism service provision [45].

At a national and, frequently, international level, tourism education has evolved in a heterogeneous and *ad hoc* manner, with limited linkages to the real or perceived needs of the tourism industry [6]. So far, in Romania, no public authority has ordered or conducted any thorough research concerning the demand of specialised personnel on the labour market. In Romania, whether it is about tourism or another economic sector, up until now there are no concrete studies showing the domains that are lacking qualified workforce. After the fall of the communism in 1989, there was no particular interest in monitoring the evolution of graduates number (higher and secondary education) in the field of tourism, in order to correlate the study programs offer with the labour market demand.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Tourism degree education came into being with the development of technical or vocational schools on the European continent. These mainly focused on developing specific skills in the areas of hospitality, accommodation and related businesses [28]. The need to train an ever-increasing number of tourism specialists has led to a quickly rising demand of educational programs [12]. Although literature review hasn't yielded precise information regarding the development of the first tourism degrees, a number of authors bring sufficient arguments in support of the fact that tourism education originated in Europe and subsequently spread to North America and Australia [22]. Its origins are uncertain, varying from one author to the next; thus, Gillespie and Baum (2001) place the first tourism degrees in the late 19th century; Jafari (1990) in 1930 and Majó (2004) in 1940. Tourism studies undergo a spectacular development in the second half of the 20th century, mainly related to the emergence of Fordist or mass tourism [15].

The literature of tourism related education focuses on a number of basic topics: *training needs* (Sheldon and Gee, 1987; McColl-Kennedy and White, 1997; Formica and

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McCleary, 2000; Aktas *et al.*, 2001; Beeton and Graetz, 2001; Agut and Grau, 2002); *training incidence* (Kelliher and Johson, 1997; International Labour Organisation, 2001; Ramos *et al.*, 2004); *curriculum planning and evaluation* (Formica, 1996; Airey and Johnson, 1999; Chung, 2000; Dale and Robinson, 2001; Churchward and Riley, 2002; Collins, 2002); *evaluation of education and training activities* (Hocutt and Stone, 1998; Pizam, 1999; Jameson, 2000; Davies *et al.*, 2001); *distance education in tourism* (Poon, 1988; Buhalis, 1998; Ozturba and Roney, 2004; Sahin and Balta, 2007; Afifi, 2010) [35].

III. METHODOLOGY

The present study undertakes a detailed analysis of the characteristics of the current supply of tourism studies in the Romanian secondary education system, with special emphasis on the distribution of high schools with “tourism and hospitality” degrees over the Romanian territory, correlated with the main areas of high tourism attraction, as well as on the level of training of tourism degree high school graduates (by calculating the graduation rate after the first baccalaureate sitting in 2011 in the case of tourism graduates¹). The main aim is to identify feasible, precise solutions to equally support public institutions in the Romanian secondary education system and the labour market in this field.

In the first part, research has centred on detailed documentation regarding the entire Romanian tourism employment sector, and also the education system of tourism degrees, with a review of specialized literature consisting of books, journals, newspapers, as well as a series of laws, government orders or reports. In the second part, the study was completed with quantitative research based on intense online research (websites, forums), on processing in graphical representation the official statistics data made available by the National Institute of Statistics (NIS) and the Ministry of Education, Research, Youth and Sports (MERYS). The incompleteness of statistical information and data, however, made impossible a thorough quantitative research; mainly because of the fact that no public authority studied the tourism graduates insertion on the labour market after the '90s ('H-R' employment data are available up until 2009). To conclude, detailed mapped representations have been used to summarize the data as efficiently as possible and to underline the state of facts in tourism secondary education.

IV. TOURISM EMPLOYMENT IN ROMANIA – GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS

According to the WTTC statistics, the number of individuals directly employed in tourism has been on a steady increase during the past decade. In 2001, the total active population in tourism was of around 207 million employees in

¹The baccalaureate represents the national secondary education diploma in Romania, along similar lines with (yet not identical to) the French "baccalauréat". A high school graduate who hasn't also passed the baccalaureate exam cannot apply for higher education studies and has considerable difficulty securing a suitable position in the field he has qualified for - or any other position requiring secondary education.

the world, which amounted to nearly 8% of the total active population. Despite the economic recession of the last years, this number has risen, insofar that the number of employees in tourism reached 259 million in 2011 (approx. 8.8% of the total employees), while according to the WTTC, the number of employees is likely to reach 313 million in 2021, which means that one out of 10.9 jobs will be generated by the tourism industry [42]. By contrast with this global statistics, the situation differs significantly from one country to another, with the top countries in terms of tourism flows leading in terms of the great number of employees (France, Spain, USA, etc.).

Statistic data regarding tourism employees in Romania are extremely limited; according to the NIS, approx. 125,000 people were employed in the “hotel and restaurants”(‘H-R’) sector in 2009, which is less than 5% of the total population able to work [44]. The number of hotel and restaurant employees has fluctuated since 1990, with a 63% decrease - from 213,000 in 1991 to approx. 79,000 employees in 2001 [27]. Ever since then, the numbers have been on the rise, reaching 133,000 in the hospitality industry in 2004-2005, and respectively 162,000 in 2008. A significant decrease of the number of employees in ‘H-R’ industry was registered in 2009 (about 125,000 employees), this decrease being mainly attributed to the critical economic situation of the country (see Fig 1).

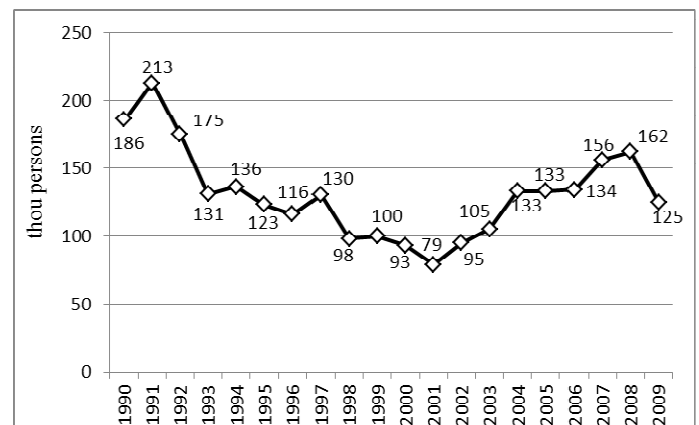


Fig. 1 Evolution of the ‘H-R’ employees number in Romania (1990-2009)

Data source: NIS, 2011

These figures refer to employees working in certified hotels and restaurants; yet the existence of a hitherto unquantifiable number of hotels or other non-certified accommodation structures suggests that official statistics significantly underestimate the real number of tourism employees. Moreover, there are countless other specialized tourism-related activities where the number of employees is difficult to pinpoint and whose figures seem to fall under other categories of economic activities in official statistics: tourism transport, personnel employed in attracting tourist visits, staff employed in sports tourism and recreation, travel agencies or guides.

Tourism represents a labour intensive industry, characterized by low productivities, due to reduced possibilities of mechanization and automation. Also, due to the high seasonality of the tourism activity especially in the

seaside resorts and some cases in mountain tourism, some employees are part-time or seasonal workers or even do not figure as employees at all (black economy) [40].

Tourism labour market in Romania has gone through dramatic transformations in the post-communist era, mainly because of the changes occurred at the ownership level for the catering and accommodation units. In contrast with the period before 1989, when all the tourism sector personnel consisted of public employees, currently more than 97% of them are working in the private sector. Because most of the state owned units were transferred to private companies and also many new units have been created in the last decades, there has been an increasing demand for service quality improvement and, consequently, this led to superior qualification requirements for 'H-R' employees. Tourism employment structure by professional status reveals that 63% of the employees consist of remunerated personnel, 0.8% employers, 0.8% self-employed personnel and 0.2% contributing family workers.

According to Maxwell *et al.* (2001) cited by Rey *et al.* (2006) the labour conditions in this sector are very poor, with low salaries, high rates of turnover, high seasonality, anti-social working hours, a lack of a career path design, and comprising a significant proportion of the informal sector, that make the acquisition of skills and, therefore, the improvement of the final service, very difficult. Thus, the tourism industry is plagued with high levels of drop-out or movement to other career areas within relatively short periods after graduation [5]. This explains why the majority of the 'H-R' employees in Romania (about 50%) are aged between 18 and 35 years (see Fig. 2).

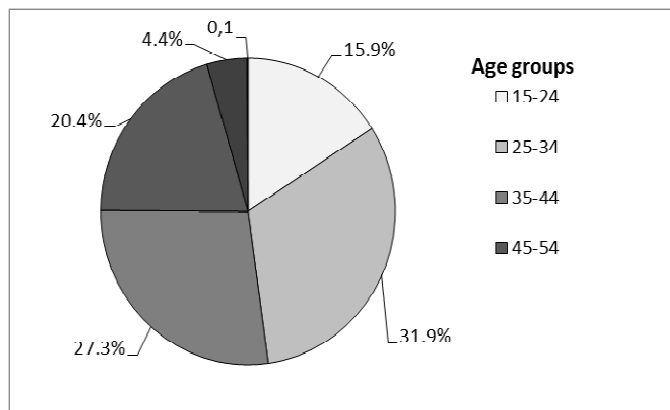


Fig. 2 Romanian 'H-R' employment structure by age group in 2009

Data source: NIS, 2011

At regional level there are significant differences from one county to another; in 2009, the highest number of 'H-R' employees was recorded in the Municipality of Bucharest (29.000 employees) followed by Constanța (7700), Brașov (6900) and Timiș (6400) counties. In most counties (e.g. Brăila, Gorj, Dâmbovița, Arad, Neamț, Tulcea etc.), the total number of 'H-R' workers is between 1000 and 3000. The distribution of the workforce at county level is influenced by the fact that a large part of tourist infrastructure is located in areas that encompass the most attractive destinations in terms

of tourism potential: Black Sea resorts (Constanța County); Prahova Valley (Prahova and Brașov County); Bucharest; Danube Delta (Tulcea County). However, since 2008, there has been a severe decrease in total number of employees of the tourism industry field, the only notable exception being the Capital region - Bucharest (6.5% increase in 2009) (see Table I).

Table I. Total number of 'H-R' employees by county (2008-2009)

| County | 'H-R' employees | | County | 'H-R' employees | |
|-----------|-----------------|-------|-----------------|-----------------|------|
| | 2008 | 2009 | | 2008 | 2009 |
| Bucharest | 27100 | 29000 | Dâmbovița | 2800 | 1400 |
| Constanța | 10500 | 7700 | Vrancea | 2500 | 900 |
| Brașov | 8600 | 6900 | Harghita | 2400 | 2300 |
| Prahova | 7400 | 4700 | Caras-Severin | 2400 | 2000 |
| Timiș | 7100 | 6400 | Bacău | 2300 | / |
| Cluj | 6800 | 4800 | Brăila | 2100 | 1900 |
| Sibiu | 5300 | 3900 | Gorj | 2100 | 2000 |
| Bihor | 5100 | 4800 | Bistrița-Năsăud | 1900 | 1500 |
| Mureș | 4900 | / | Buzău | 1900 | 1600 |
| Suceava | 4800 | 3600 | Covasna | 1800 | 1500 |
| Iași | 4700 | 3600 | Satu Mare | 1600 | 1600 |
| Argeș | 4500 | 2600 | Botoșani | 1500 | 1200 |
| Ilfov | 4000 | / | Tulcea | 1400 | 1300 |
| Dolj | 3900 | 2100 | Vaslui | 1200 | / |
| Neamț | 3800 | 2100 | Olt | 1200 | 1000 |
| Alba | 3300 | 1900 | Mehedinți | 1100 | 900 |
| Galați | 3300 | / | Sălaj | 1000 | 900 |
| Hunedoara | 3300 | 2900 | Ialomița | 1000 | 1000 |
| Vâlcea | 3100 | 2900 | Călărași | 800 | 700 |
| Arad | 3100 | 3000 | Teleorman | 700 | 700 |
| Maramureș | 3000 | 1800 | Giurgiu | 500 | 400 |

*/ no data available

Data source: NIS, 2011

An assessment of tourism work indicates a low technical level and, consequently, a professional training structure dominated by poorly or unqualified labour. Some studies on human resources in tourism underline the fact that the structure of tourism employees is dominated by basic staff, with average specialized training, making up 42% of the total number of employees [24], [33]. Hence the demand for basic, average training degrees knows a significant increase lately.

The low level of qualification that working in tourism entails has a positive influence on the one hand, in the sense that it makes for an appropriate solution for untrained personnel, yet on the other hand it is a significant hurdle to overcome in providing high quality services or in increasing labour productivity, thus turning into an obstacle in the overall development of the sector [27]. Constantly organizing and improving basic tourism education is mandatory in order to mitigate the negative effects that such poorly qualified labour force can have on the future evolution of tourism [37].

In 2007, the low level qualified personnel accounted for 65% of the total 'H-R' employees in Romania, this being quite

a low figure when compared with other European states, but with a descending evolution after the '90s (see Fig. 3).

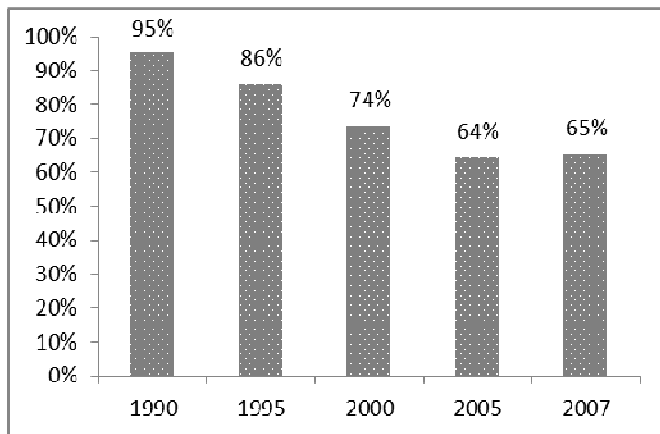


Fig. 3 Low level qualified employees in Romanian 'H-R' sector (1990-2007)
Data source: NIS, 2011

V. TOURISM DEGREES IN ROMANIAN SECONDARY EDUCATION

Romanian hospitality and tourism are currently facing a severe shortage of qualified, trained staff, and this affects the overall performance of the entire system. This shortage is strongly influenced by the phenomenon of labour migration and lack of constant on-the-job training but above all, it is due to a poor training system. Migration has a considerable negative impact on Romanian tourism, mainly in the sense that a growing number of young people choose to work in more developed countries, where wages are higher; a significant percentage of them are involved as untrained staff in tourism and hospitality activities, in countries such as Spain, Italy, France, England, Germany, etc. In addition, the gaps in lifelong on-the-job training bring about negative effects on the staff's adaptability to the dynamic system of tourist demands, while the rigidity and lack of coherence manifest in tourism education are the greatest enemies to the growth of the sector [32].

Brain drain phenomenon in the tourism sector causes a significant loss for the local economy, because of the intellectual, scientific and economic potential of the specialists. Financially, for each emigrant who graduated a high education program, Romania losses approximately 40.000 euro/person. This amount represents the cost of 16 to 20 years of training in public schools, amounts that cannot be recuperated by the Romanian society [14].

Romanian education degrees in hospitality and tourism were established as far back as the communist period, when the first secondary education classes of "public catering" were set up mainly in economic and service education high schools. A significant increase in the number of tourism classes in secondary education occurred since 1990; Romanian secondary education in the field currently provides regulated education and training in a number of 253 high schools and vocational schools. Moreover, this training coordinated by the MERYS is complemented by a series of adult professional training courses (for tourism guides, hotel technicians or

receptionists, B&B managers, garcons/waiters, matrons, sommeliers, etc.), largely organized by private companies and paid for by every trainee. Again as part of secondary education, public institutions organize post-graduate degrees of 1.5-2 years, some of them geared towards degrees in hospitality and tourism: travel agent – guide; management assistant in accommodation and catering units; mountain agrotourism clerks; management assistant in hotels or event organizer (conferences, meetings, fairs and exhibits).

Secondary education in Romania comprises "catering and tourism" high school classes spread over several degrees: tourism clerk, hospitality clerk, and agrotourism clerk and event organizer. All degrees offer a common trunk of general subjects during the first 2 years (9th and 10th grades), which later fan out into separate syllabi for very degree (see Fig. 4).

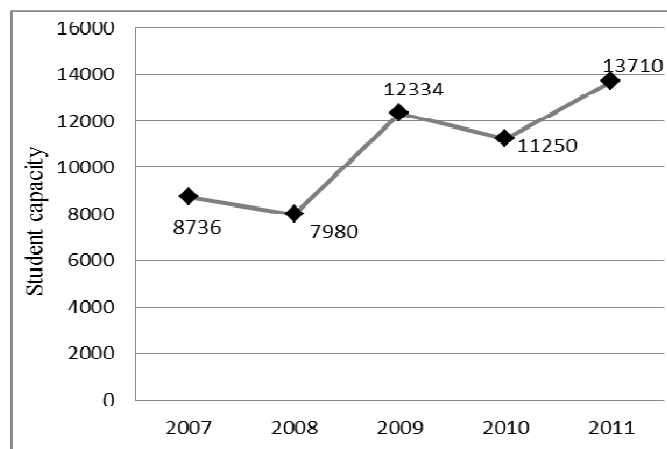


Fig. 4 Evolution of "tourism and catering" total student capacity in secondary education units in Romania (2007-2011)
Data source: NIS, 2011

The distribution of tourism classes in high schools is largely uniform across Romania, with at least one degree on offer in every district. The majority of the 253 public high schools offering tourism degrees are concentrated in urban areas, with only a modest 12% in rural areas.

The student capacity of "tourism and catering" high schools in the rural area peaked at 1,260 in 2008, followed by a sudden drop in 2009 and 2010 (see Fig. 5). The low student capacity in "tourism and catering" in rural area is caused by a decreasing number of high schools, which in turn was influenced by school dropout phenomenon on one hand, and insufficient funding of education units on the other. In past years, some tourist areas with high rural and agrotourism potential face a significant decrease in terms of tourism secondary education graduate. For example, in Bran-Moieciu area (Braşov County), an important destination for rural and agrotourism, none of the high schools prepares students for tourist activities.

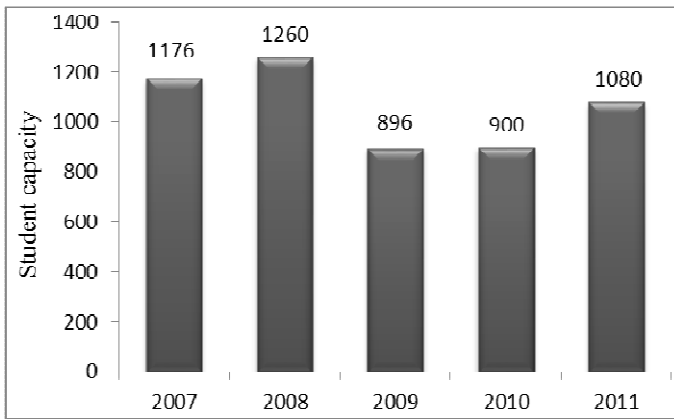


Fig. 5 Evolution of “tourism and catering” student capacity in rural area high schools (2007-2011)
 Data source: NIS, 2011

Moreover, it is noteworthy that public tourism secondary education is organized in Romanian, as well as a number of minority languages, 10% of them in Hungarian (Covasna, Harghita, Mureş, Bihor, Satu Mare, Cluj counties) with a capacity of 810 students in 2011 (see Fig. 6); German (Maramureş county) or Polish (Suceava county).

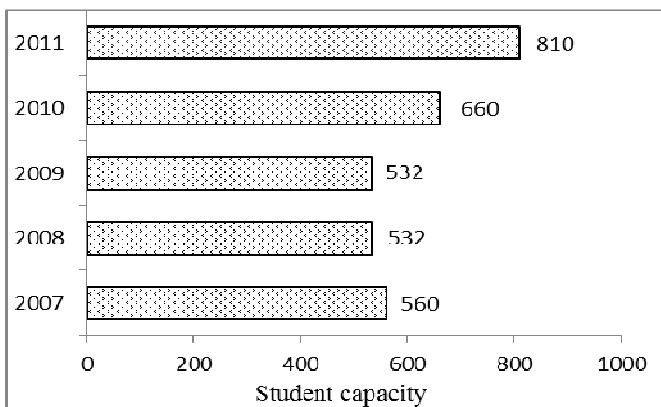


Fig. 6 Evolution of “tourism and catering” student capacity for Hungarian speakers
 Data source: NIS, 2011

Despite the fact that existing official statistics don't comprise information regarding the number and structure of private education units providing secondary training in tourism, online research has yielded some general information in this sense. There are several networks of private institution providing a degree in “tourism clerk” spread over the whole country, such as Concord and Ucecom-Spiru Haret high schools or “Ştefan cel Mare și Sfânt” Study Centre in Bucovina; the majority of these private education units are located in large cities such as: Bucureşti, Galaţi, Iaşi, Cluj-Napoca, Timișoara, Piatra Neamţ, Târgu Mureş, Constanța, Suceava, etc. [48], [49].

In terms of the distribution of tourism degrees per districts, the following have high values (over 10 tourism degrees): Suceava, Bucureşti, Constanța, Bihor, Prahova, and Maramureş (see Fig. 7). The high number of degrees and, consequently, the high number of graduates they turn in can also be correlated with the fact that the above-mentioned districts encompass the most attractive destinations in terms of tourism potential, and are noted through the significant number of accommodation and catering units (Bucovina, the Romanian Black Sea strip, Prahova Valley, the Western Carpathians, Maramureş). However, it is easily remarked that degrees are geared on the same well-known tourism areas, missing out on the importance of training qualified staff for other areas with a high potential for tourism and willing to be promoted in this sense. Obvious examples in this respect include: the Danube Delta area (Tulcea county), the Danube Valley area (Caraş Severin county) or Northern Oltenia (Gorj and Vâlcea counties), all of these sporting modest numbers of secondary education degrees and graduates. The student capacity of tourism classes for every district highlights approximately the same ranking, with the notable exception of Bacău county, where a number of 9 units have a student capacity of 600, an unjustifiably high value compared with the needs of the local tourism labour market (about 2300 employees).

In order to give as precise a picture as possible of the state of facts in tourism education in our country, we have added a detailed analysis of the number of high school graduates of tourism degrees to the analysis of its structure. The official data in this sense are modest and various gaps, which is why we have identified the number of tourism graduates among the number of graduates in every Romanian high school (data provided online by MERYS) [43]. We subsequently proceeded to calculate the graduation rate after the first baccalaureate sitting in 2011 in the case of these graduates, since we believe this to be a significant indicator in assessing the quality of the training of these potential employees in Romanian tourism.

There are a number of 7878 tourism secondary education graduates in Romanian in 2011, figure 8 outlines the distribution per districts of the number of 2011 graduates of the four above-mentioned tourism-related degrees. We note that the top ranking per number of graduates features approximately the same districts to be found in the ranking of high school degrees: Suceava (692), Constanța (680), Bucureşti (569), Prahova (443); an exception is the district of Galaţi with 620 graduates but with an extremely poor baccalaureate graduation rate (below 20%). It is also worth highlighting the situation of Bacău district, which only has a number of 255 graduates in 2011, despite a student capacity of 600 in tourism secondary education. The districts of Brăila, Teleorman, Giurgiu and Olt have extremely low number of graduates, a circumstance partly explained by the modest infrastructure and tourist flow. Sadly, Tulcea district has only 29 tourism graduates, despite the huge tourist potential and the necessity for infrastructure development.

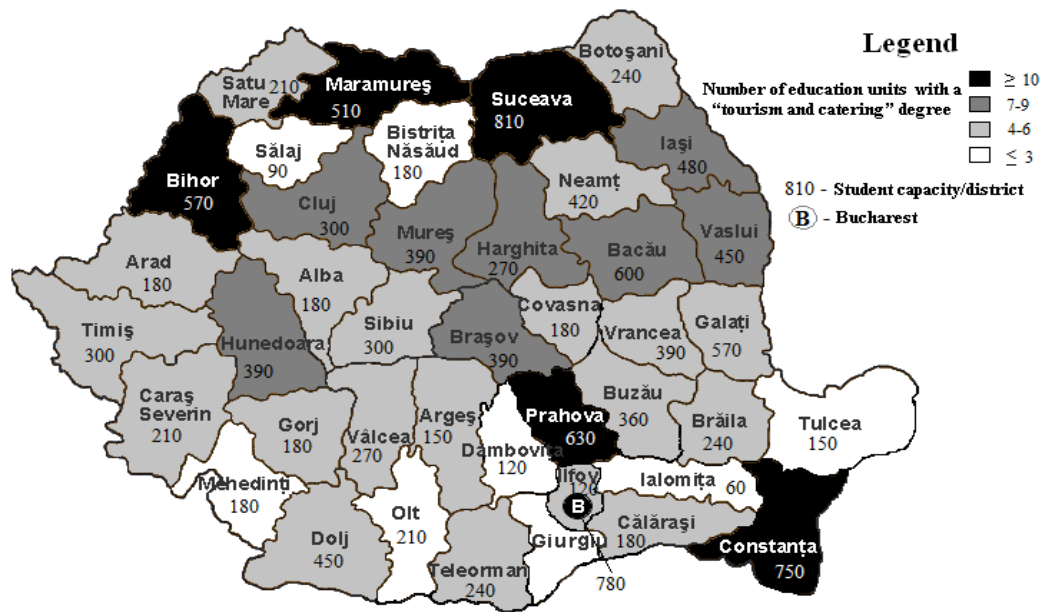


Fig. 7 Distribution of "tourism and catering" secondary education units in Romania – 2011;
 Information source: <http://admitere.edu.ro/2011/>, 2011

The graduation rate of the first Romanian baccalaureate sitting in 2011 has been extremely low, with an average of only 44.72% of high school graduates. This situation carries on to tourism degree graduates, only 35% of whom managed to pass this exam, a clearly lower percentage than the overall national average. This indicator certainly highlights the overall poor degree of training of tourism graduates. There are

naturally variations of the graduation rate from one district to another; thus the following districts are notable through their baccalaureate graduation rates of over 60% in the case of tourism graduates: Botoșani, Brăila, Sibiu, Suceava, with districts such as Caraș-Severin, Mehedinți, Galați, Timiș, Covasna, Dolj, Alba, Maramureș, and Teleorman at the other end of the ladder (see Fig. 8).

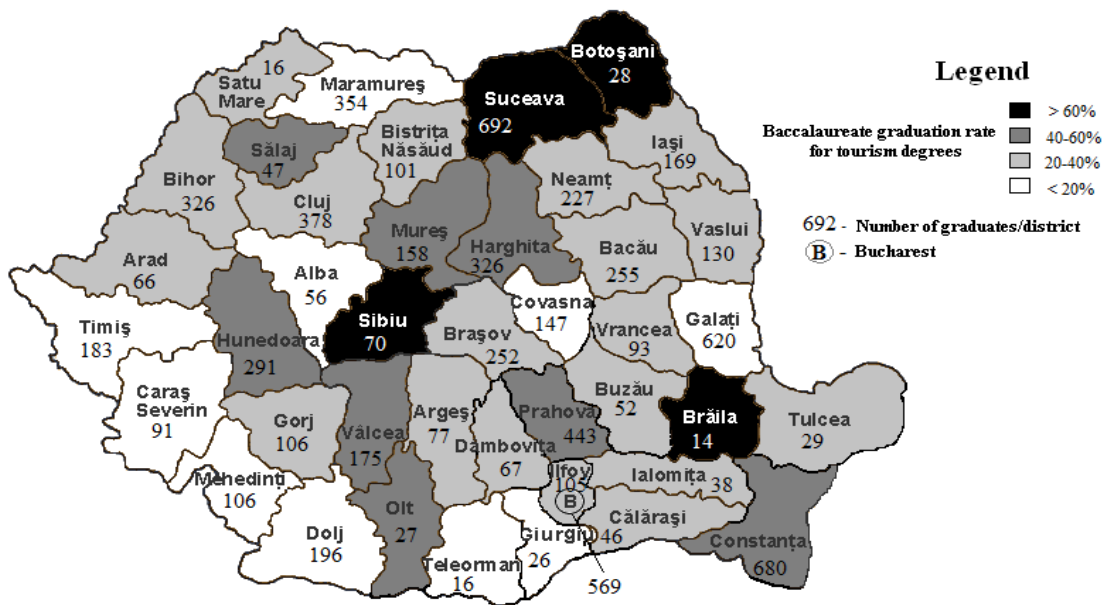


Fig. 8 Distribution of tourism high school graduates and the baccalaureate graduation rate in Romania – 2011;
 Information source: <http://bacalaureat.edu.ro/2011/>, 2011

VI. CONCLUSION

Romania currently faces a dramatic decrease in terms of tourism employees; in only one year, from 2008 to 2009 'H-R' total employment declined by 22%. This situation is mainly due to the world financial and economic crisis which also affected Romania, but also because of the aggravating workforce migration phenomenon. It is also important to note that analysed data in the present study are only of official statistic source, and therefore illegal employment was impossible to be evaluated.

Romanian tourism education system has undergone significant development during the last decade; yet this development has proceeded with a total lack of organization, rather randomly and haphazardly, without taking into account the actual staff needs of the tourism labour market. Some modest attempts at correlating organized tourism staff training with the demands of the market or with the models of other, much more developed states in this sense. These have been released as strategies, at a purely theoretical level, and they haven't managed to carry over into practice. A good example in this sense is the development, in the early '90s, of a strategic plan for the reorganization of national tourism education, under the umbrella of the Ministry of Tourism. Part of this strategy was the establishment of the National Institute for Tourism Management and Education (Rom. INFMT), as management body for professional training in the field of hotels and restaurants; it sadly only operated for a very short while and brought no significant changes in the field.

In order to help give a focus and direction to present and future tourism education, government strategies and policies are the crucial elements. Because it is clear that a tourism education implemented with little policy guidance, it will become a constant tug-of-war between education providers and the tourism industry and environment, as each seek to satisfy their own aims.

Tourism education in Romania is often purely theoretical, most tourism training courses don't rely on shaping practical skills, while quality depend on the curricula, syllabi and the qualification of the teaching staff. Syllabi underlying tourism degree curricula often comprise a very low amount of practical training classes and these are more often than not poorly organized. The causes of all these institutional issues are manifold and mainly point at the poor training of the teaching staff, triggered in its turn by the extremely low wages in this field, with most of the well-trained teachers leaving for other fields or economic activity or migrating to more developed countries.

In conclusion, this research obviously highlights an unjustifiably high student capacity for tourism secondary education in comparison with the need for qualified labour in this sense. High school graduates are poorly trained, testified by the catastrophic results of their baccalaureate exam. Moreover, there is a clear concentration of tourism degrees in areas that have been already over-exploited as tourist destinations, thus ignoring the need for qualified staff in other areas with a high potential for tourism, while the improvement

in quality of tourism services and, consequently, an increase in the number of tourists attracted obviously depend on the appropriate training of qualified personnel.

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