PERCEPTIONS OF THE STUDENTS IN THE TOURISM SPECIALISATIONS REGARDING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE EDUCATIONAL PROCESS AND THEIR PREPARATION FOR THE TOURISM SECTOR

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Abstract
Education is a social phenomenon based on the transmission of life experiences and knowledge from adult generations to younger people, useful skills for their integration into society. In the field of tourism, education determines the formation of communication skills, behaviour, general knowledge, entrepreneurial skills, for the people involved in the tourism sector. This paper empirically tests the perception of students from two faculties of Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of Iaşi and two faculties from Ştefan cel Mare University of Suceava regarding the effectiveness of the educational process, as well as their confidence regarding the perception of their success in the tourism sector.

Keywords
Education, tourism, affective commitment, tourism education, intention to continue studying.

JEL Classification
I20, C51, C52.

Introduction
Education in general and tourism education in particular are vital for the tourism sector, as they provide the market with skilled labour and train human resources in order to support the development of the tourism sectors (Malihah and Setiyorini, 2014). Education in the field of tourism is the education area whichdevelops the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary for the successful management of tourism business (Vanevenhoven and Liguori, 2013). The economic development and the increasing needs of the society determine the increase of the demand for education in the field of tourism business management (Reddy,

2007). This study is intended to contribute to a better understanding of the concepts and relationships between the perception of effectiveness of the educational process and its effect on the perception of preparation for the tourism sector. The content of this paper is configured as follows: the first part is based on the scientific literature on tourism education, followed by the methodology and the presentation of the research methods, continuing with the section of discussions and conclusions which briefly present the main findings of the research and its limitations. The results obtained are of interest regarding the local problems of the community, especially because a study of this nature has not been conducted yet in the research area of Alexandru Ioan Cuza University in Iași (UAIC) and Ştefan cel Mare University in Suceava (USV).

Literature Review

Tourism education and its generated visions

The business sector with a high growth rate is the tourism sector (Holloway et al., 2009), which in turn attracts the need for specialised training by adequate education. The educational institution is expected to be an efficient space for study, creating a perception ofthe success of graduates who will be active in the tourism sector. Goodman and Sprague (1991) considered that the revision of the curriculum was necessary due to the increasing role of services in the world economy, and to the threat coming from the business schools focused on the tourism field. Later, Becton and Graetz (2001) analysed the accuracy with which the tour operators' needs were understood and satisfied by the specialized training programs. A survey of 46 tourism industry professionals in the United States showed an acceptable level of study programs for the tourism sector, and an acceptable correlation with employers' expectations (Lefever and Witham, 1998). Contrary to Lefever and Witham's research (1998) is the study conducted by Jauhari (2006), which evokes a gap between the competences offered by the education system in India and the needs of the tourism sector. Given the relevance of tourism education and the confidence of students in the educational process for the tourism sector, we formulated hypothesis **H1**: *There is a significant positive relationship between the students' perceived efficacity of the educational process and the perception of preparation for the tourism sector.*

The challenges of tourism education and the intention to continue studying

Tourism is a multidisciplinary academic field studying the emerging typologies and activities, proving to be a vibrant knowledge environment. Tourism is not only the largest industry, but also the most fascinating field of study (Hall, 2010). McNally and Irving (2010) argue that a decrease in students' motivation will lower their intention to continue studying, which may affect their level of success in the future. Based on the example given by the employees in a company, Ketchland and Strawser (1998) shows that "the more the employees are willing to continue to be members of the group, the higher the degree of identification of a person with the organisation and their willingness to contribute to achieving the goals of the organisation" and the intention to continue studying in the field of tourism can lead to success in this area. Therefore, we tested hypothesis **H2**: *The intention to continue studying has a positive influence on the perception regarding the education for tourism.*

The affective commitment, the perception of the effectiveness of the educational process and the intention to continue studying

According to Cownie (2019), universities should develop permanent relationships with students. The students' affective commitment towards the institution in which they study is useful in determining their loyalty or intention to continue studying (Ilban and Kaşlı, 2014). Affective commitment is defined by Meyer and Allen (1991) as "identifying with an

organisation, attachment and emotional involvement with it". It offers the highest benefits for an organization (Meyer and Maltin, 2010), it is associated with the highest performance in the workplace (Meyer et al., 2002), and demonstrated that employees could make additional efforts to identify with the company in which they are employed (Ambler and Barrow, 1996, Burmann et al., 2009). Commitment is a key factor involving loyalty and it is a broad and relevant concept in our studies, which determined us to propose the following hypotheses for our study: **H3:** *There is a significant positive impact of the affective commitment on the intention to continue studying;* **H4:** *There is a significant positive impact of the affective commitment on the perceived effectiveness of the educational process.*

Methodology

The research model proposed

The main objective of this study is to analyse the perception of the effectiveness of the educational process and its impact on the confidence of students in the tourism sector. Moreover, the specialised studies show that the affective commitment can have a positive effect on the perceived effectiveness of the educational process and of the intention to continue studying. Therefore, the proposed research model is based on the study conducted by Ilban and Kaşlı (2014):
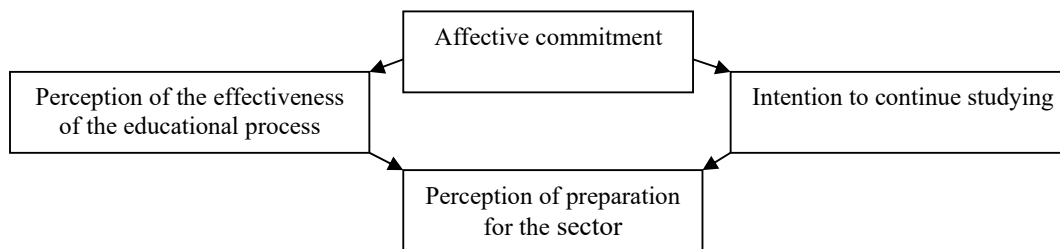

Fig. no. 1 The proposed research model
Source:the authors' elaborationafter Ilban and Kaşlı, 2014

The selection and description of the variables

This model proposes to analysefour variables. The variable "affective commitment" is adapted according to Meyer and Allen (1991), and the variables "perception of the effectiveness of the educational environment, intention to continue studying, and perception of preparation for the tourism sector" have items adapted after Hacioğlu et al. (2008) (cited by Ilban and Kaşlı, 2014):

a) The variable **affective commitment (AFFC)** is a latent variable measured on the basis of six items, as follows: **1.** I would be very happy to spend the rest of my student career in this faculty; **2.** I feel like 'part of the family' at my faculty; **3.** I feel 'emotionally attached' to this faculty; **4.** I really feel as if the problems of the faculty are my own; **5.** I feel a strong sense of belonging to my faculty; **6.** This faculty has a great deal of personal meaning for me.

b) The variable **perception of the effectiveness of the educational process (PEEP)** was measured using the next six items: **1.** I think there are sufficient areas for practice in the faculty; **2.** Modern educational tools are used in the faculty; **3.** Library services and access to scientific resources are sufficient and convenient; **4.** I think there is sufficient collaboration between the faculty and the tourism sector in order that graduates can be employed; **5.** The syllabus is suitable to meet the demand of tourism enterprises; **6.** There are sufficient tourism enterprises located nearby.

c) The variable **intention to continue studying (ICS)** was measured on the basis of four items: **1.** I am going to faculty voluntarily and willingly; **2.** I felt bad when I couldn't go

to faculty; **3.** I am always thinking to continue studying and attending the lessons; **4.** The practical training offered at our faculty will enable us to find employment in tourism enterprises.

d) The variable **perception of preparation for tourism sector (POP)** was measured on the basis of four items: **1.** I think I will be qualified to meet business demands after graduation; **2.** I think the education given at faculty improves my communication skills; **3.** I think I receive sufficient education on concepts related to tourism; **4.** The practical training offered at our faculty will enable us to find employment in tourism enterprises.

We measured all the research constructions using Likert scale with five-point items, from "total disagreement = 1" to "total agreement = 5".

The sample

We used the quantitative method as research method, using as a data collection tool a questionnaire applied to students from the following specialisations: Economics of Commerce, Tourism and Services (ECTS) from the Faculty of Economics and Business Administration (FEBA) of Iași and from Bălți Extension of UAIC; Tourism Geography (TG) from the Faculty of Geography and Geology of Iasi, ECTS and TG from USV, as well as Tourism and Hotel Management (THM) masters programs from FEBA of Iași and Tourism Management (TM) from FEBA of Bălți extension of the UAIC. We collected the data online through Google Drive between November 2019 and March 2020, we analysed them and statistically processed them using STATA version 13.0. The sample consists of 544 respondents, of which 423 (77.75%) were women, and the remaining 121 (22.25%) were men. Considering that the respondents are students, 499 (91.72%) are under 25 years old, the other 45 (8.28%) are between 25 and 40 years old, 46.69% of them are students in ECTS specialisation, 34.74% are students in the TG specialization, and the remaining 18.57% are students in the THM and TM specialisations.

Method of data analysis

We analysed the relationships between the affective commitment, the perception of the effectiveness of the educational process, the intention to continue studying, and the perception of the preparation for the tourism field, by modelling the structural equation (SEM):
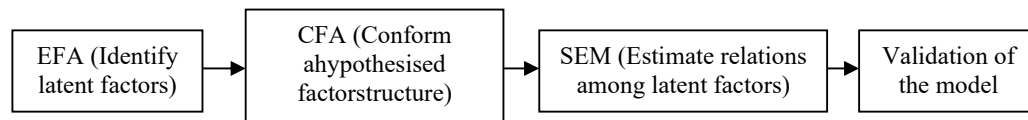
EFA (Identify latent factors)	→	CFA (Conform ahypothesised factorstructure)	→	SEM (Estimate relations among latent factors)	→	Validation of the model

Fig. no. 2 SEM modelling design
Source: Dragan and *Topolšek, 2014*

Results and discussions
Measurement model

For the measurement scale, we performed first an exploratory factor analysis. We omitted some questions from the analysis on the grounds that they did not match the research hypotheses. In addition, we divided the questions belonging to the latent variable "perception of effectiveness of the educational process" into two dimensions: the facilities of the educational institution **(factor 1),** and the collaboration with the tourism companies **(factor 2)**. Thus, **H1** becomes: **H1a:** *There is a significant positive relationship between the facilities* of *the higher education institution and the perception of preparation for the tourism sector;* **H2b:** *There is a significant positive relationship between collaboration with companies in the tourism sector and the perception of preparing students for the tourism*

sector. **H4** becomes: **H4a:** *There is a significant positive impact of the affective commitment on the perception of the facilities offered by the university;* **H4b:** *There is a significant positive impact of the affective commitment on the perception of collaboration with companies in the tourism sector.* The measurement model was estimated using Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA). We used goodness of fit measures to evaluate the overall model. As indicated in the study results, the general fit indices for the proposed model were acceptable, with Chi^2 / df equal to 3.13, RMSEA of 0.063, comparative fit index of 0.930 and Tucker-Lewis index of 0.916. To measure the internal consistency of the indicators, we used Cronbach's Alpha score, whose range of variation is between 0 and 1. A scale is considered consistent if it has an index value above the minimum threshold of 0.7 and as close as possible to 1. For the sample analysed, Cronbach's Alpha records the following values: Affective commitment = 0.8758, Effectiveness perception of the educational process = 0.7888, Factor 1 = 0.7818, Collaboration with tourism companies = 0.7402, Intention to continue studying = 0.7741, Perception of preparation for the tourism sector = 0.7869. Therefore, latent variables have the minimum required consistency. Moreover, Average Variance Extracted (AVE), Construct Reliability (CR), Maximum Shared Variance (MSV), and Average Shared Variance (ASV) confirm the fit of the model (**Table no. 1**). AVE can be calculated according to the formula given by (Eq.1) (Hair et al., 2010).

$$AVE = \frac{1}{n} \times \sum_{i=1}^{n} L_{i^2} (Eq.1)$$

where $\mathbf{L_i}$ is the standardised factor loading, and $\mathbf{n}$ is the number of items. The value of CR is calculated as the square sum of the standardised loading factors $\mathbf{L_i}$ for each construct and the sum of the error variation terms for a construct as shown in (*Eq.2*):

$$CR = \frac{\left(\sum_{i=1}^{n} L_i\right)^2}{\left(\sum_{i=1}^{n} L_i\right)^2 + \left(\sum_{i=1}^{n} e_i\right)} (Eq.2)$$

Table no. 1 Testing and validation of the variables

Dimensions	Variable	Std. loading	Cronbach Alpha	AVE	CR	MSV	ASV
Affective commitment (AFFC)	AC1	0.65	0.8758	0.55	0.89	0.38	0.27
	AC2	0.71					
	AC3	0.81					
	AC4	0.65					
	AC5	0.83					
	AC6	0.78					
Perception of the effectiveness of the educational process (PEEP)			0.7888	0.53	0.86	0.33	0.20
F1: Modern facilities	MF1	0.78	0.7818	0.55	0.86	0.15	0.07
	MF2	0.67					
	MF3	0.77					
F2: Collaboration with tourism companies	COL1	0.82	0.7402	0.51	0.82	0.33	0.32
	COL2	0.65					
	COL3	0.68					
Intention to continue studying (ICS)	ICS1	0.73	0.7741	0.55	0.78	0.38	0.22
	ICS2	0.68					

	ICS3	0.81					
Perception of preparation for the tourism sector (POP)	EPT1	0.68	0.7869	0.50	0.79	0.33	0.14
	EPT2	0.74					
	EPT3	0.70					
	EPT4	0.70					

Source: the authors' own elaboration using the statistical analysis program STATA

Structural equation model: In the research model, we estimated that the affective commitment would influence the perception of the effectiveness of education and the intention to continue studying. Also, we stipulated that the perception of the preparation in the tourism sector is influenced by the intention to continue studyingand by the perception ofeffectiveness of the educational process. The goodness-of-fit measures used to evaluate the overall structural model fit shown in **Table 2** are acceptable according to Schermelleh-Engel et al. (2003) and Vandenberg (2006).

Table no. 2 Goodness of fit results for the structural model

Fit statistics	Value	Fit statistics	Value
Chisquare/df	3.56	Comparative fit index (CFI)	0.915
$p > chi^2$	0.000	Tucker-Lewis (TLI)	0.900
RMSEA	0.69	Standardised root mean squared residual (SRMR)	0.063
		Coefficient of determination (CD)	0.904

Source: the authors' own elaboration using the statistical analysis program STATA

The findings related to **H1a** and **H1b** confirm that there is a significant positive relationship between the students' perceived effectiveness of the educational process and the perception of preparation for the tourism sector. These results also indicate that for the students the collaboration of the faculties with the tourism companies is more important than the facilities offered by these faculties (access to the library, modern means of teaching, etc.). **H2** confirms that the intention to continue studyingand the perceived educational performance has a significant positive effect on the perception of the preparation for the tourism field. **H3** confirms that the affective commitment is positively associated with the intention to continue studying, the connection being also significant. **H4a** and **H4b** are also confirmed. These results are illustrated in **Table 3**, and the relationship between latent variables is shown in the final model presented in **Figure 3.**
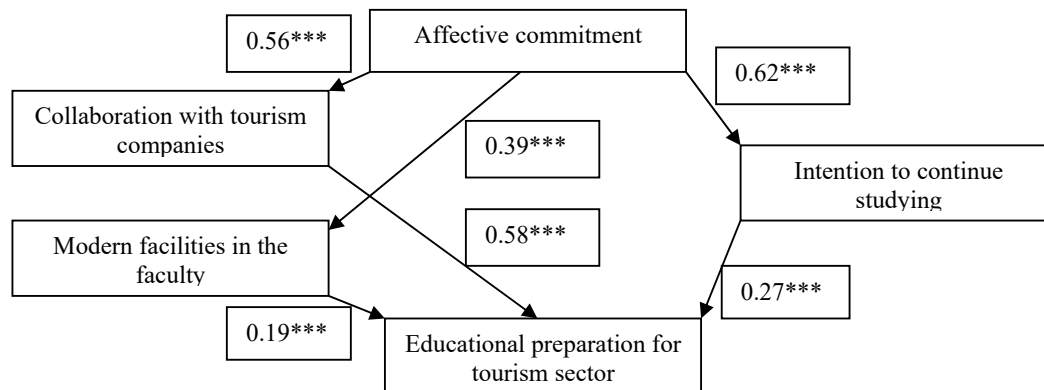

Fig. no. 3 Final model and results
Source: the authors' own elaboration using the statistical analysis program STATA

Table no. 3 Standardised path coefficients results

	Parameter estimates	
	Standardised path coefficients	Hypothesis supported
H1$_a$ (F1 → (+) POP)	0.19 (0.001)***	YES
H1$_b$(F2 → (+) POP)	0.58 (0.000)***	YES
H2 (ICS → (+) POP)	0.27 (0.000)***	YES
H3 (AFFC → (+) ICS)	0.62 (0.000)***	YES
H4$_a$ (AFFC→ (+) F1)	0.39 (0.000)***	YES
H4$_b$ (AFFC→ (+) F2)	0.56 (0.000)***	YES

***p<0.01; Source: the authors'own elaboration using the statistical analysis program STATA

Conclusions

Tourism education can develop communication skills, behaviour, general knowledge, entrepreneurial skills for the people involved in this sector of activity. Tourism is perceived in Romania as being related to education, due to the fact that trips and camps are organised in schools, and international projects are developed through European funds, by which tourism information and knowledge is implemented involuntarily.

The present study is useful due to both theoretical and practical results, and because it offers a better understanding on how students in tourism programs (ECTS, TG, THM, and TM) from UAIC and USV perceive the effectiveness of the educational process and its impact on the perception of preparation to successfully operate in the tourism sector. The results of the study also show that for the students from these universities it is more important to collaborate with the tourism companies than the facilities offered by these faculties (access to the library, modern means of teaching, etc.). These results confirm the importance of public-private partnerships. Therefore, it can be concluded that the lack of collaboration between universities and tourism entreprises can lead to a lower level of perceived self-efficacy of students in the tourism specialisations.

In addition, the hypothesis that the affective commitment will increase the intention to continue studyingis supported and the results are consistent with Ilban and Kaşlı (2014). The affective commitment also has an impact on the students' perception of the effectiveness of the educational process, in this case indirectly, through the perception of preparation for the tourism sector.

All in all, this research offers an additional novelty and originality by studying the perceptions of young people studying in educational institutions in Romania. The variables mentioned above are the basis for a contribution to the field. Basically, the study objectively underlines the Romanian educational reality at the level of Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of Iași and Ştefan cel Mare University of Suceava.

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