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IMPORTANCE OF GEOGRAPHICAL DISCIPLINES IN THE LEARNING PROCESS WITH THE FOCUS ON THE ISSUE OF TOURISM

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***Abstract:** The study deals with teaching the geographical disciplines in the study program focused on tourism management. Geography as a science has significantly shifted towards interdisciplinary approach in recent decades. There are three main geographic disciplines included in the study program Cultural Studies: Management of Culture and Tourism - it is the Landscape Theory, Cultural Geography and World Tourism Geography. The aim of this article is to present possibilities how to effectively use these study subjects in the educational process of future culture and tourism managers.*

Keywords: geography, tourism, study program, learning process, excursion

1. APPLICATION OF GEOGRAPHICAL DISCIPLINES IN THE LEARNING PROCESS AT THE DEPARTMENT OF CULTURE AND TOURISM MANAGEMENT, CONSTANTINE THE PHILOSOPHER UNIVERSITY IN NITRA

The study program *Cultural Studies: Management of Culture and Tourism* was established at the Department of Culture and Tourism Management in 1999 and its aim is to prepare well-educated managers for sectors of tourism and culture. The program consists of various study subjects sorted into five main sections: cultural, historical and geographical disciplines; disciplines related to tourism; economic and legal disciplines; foreign languages and optional subjects. Geography as a science is an essential and natural part of study programs focused on tourism.

There are three main thematic blocks of geographic disciplines included in this program: it is the **Landscape Theory, Cultural Geography and World Tourism Geography**. In the first year of bachelor studies, students learn the basics of physical-geographic characteristics of Slovakia in the discipline **Landscape Theory**. The study subject is aimed at acquiring general knowledge referring to geology, geomorphology, hydrology, climatology, flora and fauna and soil science. Knowledge of geographical aspects is necessary for proper understanding of related contexts of tourism management in a certain

area. Relatively large space of the course is devoted to the issue of the landscape structure. The landscape can be divided into two basic structures: the **primary landscape structure** (it was formed solely under the influence of natural processes) and the **secondary landscape structure** (also called *cultural landscape*). Furthermore, the cultural landscape also consists of two other segments: **historical and current landscape structures**. Historical landscape structures were created in the past and they are typical with greater synergies between natural and cultural processes. These structures significantly determine the primary tourism offer and thus create visitor's attention and tourism traffic. **Current landscape structure** is formed not only from the marks of the present, but it also bears (visible or not) footprints of historical landscape structures and the primary landscape structure. The last category is the **tertiary landscape structure**, which represents a certain development plan of the landscape in the future. There exist two main ways according to which the landscape can develop – in an environmentally positive way (protected areas are created, natural landscape or historical landscape structures are emphasized) or in an economic way (industrial areas are preferred and areas with a lower level of protection are created). It is well known that the tourism development in many countries significantly depends on protected natural and cultural areas. This issue in Slovakia is regulated by the **Act no. 543/2002 on Nature and Landscape Protection**. The Act defines five levels of protection of the territory of Slovakia. The first level covers the whole territory. Highest, the fifth level of protection, applies only on selected areas where all human interventions are prohibited. In Slovakia, there are 10 various types of declared protected areas:

- **National Park** (total number of 9);
- **Protected Landscape Areas** (14);
- **Protected Site** (170);
- **Nature Reserve** (384);
- **National Nature Reserve** (219);
- **Nature Monument** (228)
- **National Nature Monument** (60) – this category also includes caves and waterfalls;
- **Protected Landscape Element**;
- **Protected Bird Area**;
- **Other protected areas, which are not protected under the Act no. 543/2002 and other protected elements in the landscape** (e.g. Natura 2000 or Ramsar Convention sites).

Natural heritage is often associated with cultural heritage. Sometimes, they are so closely linked that they form so-called *combined heritage*. **Monuments Fund** represents an important part of the cultural heritage of Slovakia. This issue is governed by **Act no. 49/2002 on the Protection of Monuments and Historic Sites**. Protected cultural sites are declared by the Ministry of Culture after proposals initiated by the Monuments Board. There exist 4 different registers of protected monuments and sites:

- Register of movable cultural heritage monuments;
- Register of immovable cultural heritage monuments;
- Register of protected historic reserves;
- Register of protected historic zones.

Currently, there are more than 12 600 immovable cultural monuments and 14500 movable cultural monuments, 18 town reserves, 10 folk architecture reserves⁹ and 89 monument zones in Slovakia.¹⁰ Several sites even meet the strictest criteria to become the world heritage and therefore they are included in the pre-selection nomination under the UNESCO Convention.

Primary (natural) landscape structures and secondary (cultural) landscape structures are protected because of unique natural and cultural attractions. They form and influence the primary and secondary tourism offer. Knowledge focused on the identification and diversification of these attractions in space is necessary for further study of tourism.

In bachelor studies, which are more or less focused on tourism in relation to Slovakia¹¹, there is also a study subject called **Cultural Geography of Slovakia**. This course is also partially based on the issue of landscape structures and focuses on the following issues:

1. Space and time in relation to culture;
2. Local landscape and cultural region;
3. Cultural regions of Slovakia;
4. Cultural diffusion;
5. Religious structure of Slovakia;
6. Settlements in Slovakia, etc.

Master's degree is more focused on geography and tourism in a global context. The block of geographic disciplines consists of three study subjects: **Geography of Tourism in Europe, Geography of Tourism in America and Africa, Geography of Tourism in Asia, Australia and Oceania**. Syllabus of these subjects focuses on basic physical-geographic characteristics of the whole continent, as well as individual countries. Students acquire information about the places of the highest cultural or natural importance, also with an emphasis on UNESCO monuments and sites. These courses also teach students to be able to identify and to describe natural and cultural specificities of the countries (e.g. architecture, food, clothing, traditional music, etc.). The aim of the lectures is to provide

⁹ More about folk architecture in *Tradičná architektúra v kontexte cestovného ruchu v Liptove* (Kurpaľ, 2010, p. 3 – 7).

¹⁰ More about mutual relations between culture and tourism in Dubská, M. *Use of Cultural Heritage in Tourism, Geotourism and its implications*, p. 180-185.

¹¹ More general information about the status of tourism in Slovakia in MICHALÍK, B. - DUBSKÁ, M. *Current Situation in Management of Tourism in Slovakia*, Hotel and Tourism Management, p. 38-47.

a comprehensive picture of the continent, the particular country, crucial destinations and the whole geographical, historical and cultural potential which can be used for the needs of tourism. All the theoretical knowledge is practically verified through **excursions** or **field trips** which represent a very important part of the study program. Students must take part in one 1-day excursion and one 3-day excursion at both levels of study (bachelor's and master's degree). In bachelor studies, these excursions are mostly oriented to Slovakia. Students visit various destinations and places (monuments, historic towns, spa towns, winter resorts), cultural institutions and organizations (museums, theatres, galleries, folk architecture reserves, creative centers), tourism institutions, organizations and companies (spas, hotels, restaurants, congress centers) or events (festivals, exhibitions, fairs). They are also required to actively participate in the process of the organization of the trip (e.g. creation of the itinerary, the budget and the schedule of a tour). They also have the opportunity to practice their interpretation and communication skills – e.g. as tourist guides. Excursions can help students see the real state of primary and secondary tourism offer (not only in a theoretical way). They also gain a more comprehensive overview of the practical issues related to tourism industry and they can deeply uncover both positive and negative aspects of tourism.

Understanding of the worldwide cultural and natural diversity is one of the aims of – among students very popular - **excursions to foreign countries**. These excursions can last from 1 to 7 days depending on the distance of the final destination and they are usually organized for students in master studies. The main purpose is to highlight the similarities and the differences in tourism in Slovakia and abroad. Students can use the experience gained during these excursions even after finishing studies – in various managerial positions, both in culture and tourism sector. In recent years, there have been several excursions organized by the Department of Culture and Tourism Management. The aim was to visit not only traditional, but also unusual or less known tourist destinations within the whole Europe. We can mention trips to:

- Balkans (Serbia, Macedonia, Albania, Montenegro, Croatia);
- Carnival in Venice, Milan (Italy) and Graz (Austria);
- Paris, London, Amsterdam
- Hallstatt (Austria), Berchtesgaden (Germany), Ljubljana (Slovenia);
- Romania and Moldova;
- Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia;
- Ukraine and other places.

2. CONCLUSION – THE IMPORTANCE OF TEACHING GEOGRAPHY IN THE STUDY OF TOURISM

Study subjects focused on geography and landscape are an essential part of the study of tourism. Physical-geographical structure, natural and cultural heritage, landscape and its structure etc. form an important basis for a proper understanding of this issue. Students acquire the knowledge about the spatial organization in the tourism sector. They can better admire and use the natural and cultural diversity, they can better understand various aspects of primary and secondary tourism offer, but they also gain knowledge in terms of legislative protection of natural and cultural heritage. Excursions aimed at exploring the domestic and foreign tourism destinations help to improve the knowledge of spatial organization of tourism. Students achieve practical experience in organizing tours. They are also able to compare the level of tourism development in Slovakia and abroad. Thus, they have opportunity to import good practices from abroad to their home country. All this knowledge can be used in the work environment - in jobs such as a manager of the tourism institution, a tour operator, a tourist guide and others. Generally said, geographical knowledge provides the theoretical basis for comprehensive understanding and further study of tourism issues, but also brings such experience that can be used even after graduation.

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Figure 1: Excursion in Slovakia - National Park Muránska planina

Figure 2: Excursion in Slovakia – Chateau Betliar

Figure 3: Excursion in Slovakia – Museum of Slovak Village in Martin

Figure 4: Excursion to abroad – Carnival in Venice

Figure 5: Excursion to abroad – Lake of Koenig See (Germany)

Figure 6: Excursion to abroad – Hallstatt (Austria)