STUDENTS AS WORKFORCE/INTERNS IN COMMUNITY-BASED TOURISM OF THE REPUBLIC OF ARMENIA

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The main purpose of the study has been to find out the willingness of students to get unpaid internship in tourism industry, specifically in community-based tourism (CBT), which will allow having workforce for the community-based tourism development in different departments and fields where there is need for such support. The study is also aimed to find out the awareness of young generation about CBT as such. A survey was conducted with the students of universities and colleges of the Republic of Armenia (all interviewed students were from the universities and colleges located in the capital city, Yerevan); random sampling method was applied. Surveys distributed in hard copies to universities and colleges with various specializations, since tourism is a bundle of goods and services, so there is a need to consider future employees of different disciplines. The findings revealed:

High willingness of the students to get internship in the tourism industry (339 students out of 436, or 78% (despite the fact that it would be unpaid);

High willingness to experience community-based tourism: 318 students out of 436, or 73%).

Involving students as workforce (interns) in CBT-related business will be able to support and develop those businesses in the most efficient way, while the students will gain too by getting hands on work experience. Since the students are potential tourists as well, the willingness to experience such type of activity shows that Armenian CBT has a potential of attracting more tourists into the country.

Keywords: Republic of Armenia; community-based tourism; internship.

Tourism Industry in the Republic of Armenia

In 2017, direct contribution of travel & tourism to GDP was AMD 231.71 bln (or USD 477.7 mln), this was 4.4% of the total GDP in that year. In 2018 it rose by 8.5%, and now a rise by 4.2% per year has been forecasted for the period from 2018 till 2028, up to AMD 380.4 bln (or USD 784.3 mln), or 4.5% of the total GDP forecasted for 2028.

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In 2017 travel & tourism sector directly supported 44,500 jobs (or 3.9% of the total employment in the country). It is expected to rise by 1.4% per annum, to the level of 52,000 jobs (or 4.2% of total employment) in 2028.

In 2017, the total contribution of travel & tourism to employment, including jobs indirectly supported by the industry was 14.1% of the total employment (or 162,000 jobs). This is expected to rise by 0.8% each year, up to 184,000 jobs as of 2028 (or 14.8% of the total).

In the same 2017, visitor exports generated AMD 529.8 bln (or USD 1092.4 mln), this is 29.2% of the total exports as of 2017. It is forecasted to grow by 3.9% per annum during 2018-2028, up to AMD 850.9 bln (or USD 1754.5 mln) in 2028, which is 27.5% of the total.

Travel & tourism investments in 2017 reached the amount of AMD 52.8 bln, or 4.6% of the total investment (or USD 108.9 mln). It is expected to rise by 4.3% per year over the next ten years, up to the level of AMD 85.3 bln (or USD 175.9 mln) in 2028, thus reaching 4.8% of the total (World Travel & Tourism Council, 2018).

Table 1 - Tourism Sector in Armenia, in the USD

(Sources: National Statistics Service: Yearbook 2017; Social Economic Situation in Armenia 2017 January-December, and the Central Bank of Armenia)

	2015	2016	2017	2018 (Estimated)
Tour Operators Services	28,183	25,038	31,364	35,364
Hotel Services	46,291	47,835	52,642	55,113
Travel Export	935,800	967,700	1,120,200	1,220,200
Travel Import	995,800	1,067,200	1,269,800	1,369,800
Exchange Rates	478	480	483	485

Our previous study on tourism industry in the Republic of Armenia (Davtyan, 2015) showed that Armenian tourism has all required factors, namely: rich history, topography with beautiful mountains, rivers, lakes, old churches with a unique style of construction which will be attractive not only to Christians but also to everyone interested in architecture. Although tourism has a small percentage of the total GDP as of today, it has been experiencing constant growth which will yield more and more profit and thus may have the capacity to impact economic development on the whole country. Besides, it should be taken into account that visitor export share in the total export is very high, which means double profit in case of Armenia (landlocked country with high transportation cost).

As Armenia is not well known in the world, attention should be paid to wider advertisement, distribution of information in order to put the country on the world map of tourist attractions, to make tourism business more favorable and to attract not only tourists, but also new investors into the country.

Community-Based Tourism

Popularity of the alternative types of tourism (community-based tourism, homestay tourism, ecotourism, rural tourism) is rapidly growing, more and more tourists prefer to visit rural areas of the developing world, and this encourages the tourism industry to expand into

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more remote destinations. Such expansions are actively promoted by the World Tourism Organization (WTO; UNWTO), mostly because development of this subsector in tourism may contribute to poverty alleviation, economic growth, and sustainable development (UNWTO, 2005: 1). Rural areas of the developing world often have only a few alternative options to generate significant income for the local population (Brohman, 1996).

All successful projects of community-based, homestay etc. tourism, provide trainings to the community members for better understanding of their future duties, organization, and planning of such tourism inside the local community, for enhancing productive participation of local dwellers in the tourism industry activities. Such trainings are usually organized by the authorities responsible for the projects, basically NGOs, either on volunteering basis, or they pay to particular specialists (managers, marketing experts, English teachers, business planners etc.) to conduct such trainings for community members, involved in rural tourism activities. These trainings, to some extent, can assure that bankruptcy of such small tourism businesses managed by community members is less likely to happen. And trainings in English language for the community members assures better understanding between the host and their future guests.

CBT can be used as a tool for development of regions in developing countries, since the main actors are community members and all profit from such CBT businesses is remaining in the community itself.

In Armenia CBT tourism is gaining popularity and the number of businesses related to CBT is constantly growing.

Armenia has joined the One Village One Product (OVOP) movement, supported by the international cooperation project named “Development of local production and promotion of local brands in Armenia”. The project has been implemented since March 2013 by SME DNC (Small and Medium Entrepreneurship Development National Center) with the technical assistance of JICA (Japan International Cooperation Agency).

Internships

Internship is a type of hand-on training. As the first step in professional career, internship does not mean an advance in career. However, as a supplement to theoretical education, it helps students gain new skills and experiences in practice through reaching out to the relevant field of business (Bogdana, Mihaela, & Anca-Iona, 2012).

Internships are practical work-placement programs designed to provide professional experience in the areas related to field of study and/or the chosen career path. The aim of providing industry-specific opportunities is to develop the skills that will enhance prospects of gaining meaningful employment for building future career. Internships can be tailored as per individual needs by giving the intern a choice of industry, location, starting date and duration (Career DC). Many organizations recently began to serve as intermediaries between interns and industries connecting them with each other. One of those is Career DC, which coordinates internship programs by connecting students with host organizations all over Australia. They cover many industries including Information Technology, Business (Accounting, Finance, Marketing, HR, and Administration), and Engineering (Civil, Mechanical, Electrical, Electronic, Chemical, Software/Computer etc.), Architecture, and many more.

Previous researchers have suggested that in order to be successful in the hospitality industry, students need to obtain work experience in addition to completing their degrees. And several researchers have studied the perceptions of undergraduate tourism and hospitality management students, some of them given below.

Recent studies have asserted the growing importance of developing tourism curriculum to meet the needs of industry as well as employment of graduates. Meeting the needs of industry and preparing students for future employment have been two important challenges for tertiary institutions offering education and training, especially in the field of tourism and hospitality (Owusu-Mintah & Kissi, 2012).

The study “A coincidence of needs?: Employers and full-time students” conducted by Curtis & Luca s(2001) discussed that students’ employment provides them with advantages other than money: valuable *work experience*, the opportunity to meet people and to take on responsibility. Employers benefit from an easily recruited workforce of intelligent, articulate young people who are numerically and functionally flexible, conscientious, accepting relatively low pay, and who are easy to control. Potential conflict is also indicated as students do articulate dislikes about their work and employment conditions, yet they feel unable to challenge their employers about them.

Barron and Maxwell (1993) examined the perceptions of new and continuing students at Scottish higher education institutions. They found that, in general, new students had positive images of the industry; *whereas students with supervised work experience were much less positive in their views*. Purcell and Quinn (1995) surveyed 704 former tourism students and discovered that graduates complained of *having little opportunity to develop their managerial skills*.

Chellen, Nunkoo (2010) studied underlying factors influencing students’ commitment to employment in tourism and hospitality industry. These factors are nature of work, social status, career prospects, promotion opportunities, physical working conditions, pay and fringe benefits. The results of the research indicated that the social status associated with employment in the industry as well as career prospects in the industry were the two major factors influencing students’ commitment.

Owusu-Mintah, Kissi (2012) conducted a survey in 2011 to examine the effectiveness of internship in tourism education and training. 205 Tourism graduates from the Polytechnic in Ghana were selected and the snowball sampling method was used for the survey. A major challenge identified in the implementation of internship for students was how to find industrial placement for tourism and hospitality students to ensure that they acquired the appropriate on-the-job skills. The study argues that for polytechnic students to meet the needs of industry and be employed after graduation, internship should be given the priority in the curriculum design. The paper concludes that innovative ways should be found to ensure that sufficient periods of internship are undertaken by tourism students to give them hands-on training for being ready for employment within the industry after graduation.

Dickerson and Kline (2008) conducted a study to determine the benefits of cooperative experience for hospitality students by means of comparing three programs. A mail-based survey was sent to recent alumni from three hospitality programs having their own variation of cooperative experience among the students. The three programs showed differences in the amount of credit given and the inclusion of classroom components:

- Program A combined at least 600 hours of work experience with a minimum of six academic credits.

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- Program B required a minimum of 600 hours of work but did not include classroom components concurrently, though academic coursework was required separately and 17 credits were awarded for experience.
- Program C required a minimum of 600 hours of work experience, yet had no classroom components and did not offer academic credit for experience.

All three programs (A, B, and C) showed high percentages of graduates who entered the hospitality industry directly after graduation -- 93.5%, 87.0%, and 90.3%, respectively (Dickerson & Kline, 2008).

Jenkins (2001) has noted that undergraduate hospitality students' perceptions of the industry deteriorate as their degree course progresses. While many studies have focused on the impact of *internship/work* experience on students' attitudes towards hospitality employment intentions, the study seeks to find out the factors that influence students' perception towards working in the tourism industry (Chellen & Nunkoo, 2010).

Felicitin et al. (2014) study utilized the descriptive qualitative design using 50 percent of the interns in the second semester of the 2012-2013 academic year as participants in the field of food and beverage and travel agencies. Results of this study revealed that interns have satisfactory level in academic performance. In training performance they were rated as very good in terms of knowledge, skills, attitude and personality.

Regarding unpaid internships specifically, the United States based Intern Bridge Inc. conducted a survey with the purpose to contribute to the overall understanding of unpaid internships in the US. This survey was conducted by Intern Bridge among college and university students throughout the country and found that: women are more likely than men to participate in college internships; academic majors such as Engineering, Computer Science, Agriculture and Natural resources, Biological and Physical sciences, and Business majors cluster into separate groups in relation to internships. The total of 27,335 undergraduates at 234 colleges and universities throughout the United States completed Intern Bridge's online survey between September and December 2009. Their support was solicited through their institution's career services or internship offices. The survey was a modified version of the survey used in 2008, with the questions that measured career maturity, career self-efficacy, various aspects of the internship experience they expected or encountered, and details about various aspects of their internship experience, including unpaid positions, faculty involvement, and supervisor support.

The profile of the respondents revealed that 70% of the interns were female, predominantly white (67%), with a grade point average above 3.0 (82%), and their average age was 23.8 (80% -- 25 or younger). The central part of the survey found that significant factors in internship participation are:

- Women were significantly more likely to be engaged in an unpaid internship (77%);
- Three clusters have been found in terms of majors. Engineering and Computer Science majors had the lowest level of unpaid internship (13%) among all the majors, at the same time, they were reporting 87% in paid internship positions. Clustered in the middle with more than 50% of their internships being paid were Agriculture and Natural Resources (66%), Biological and Physical Sciences (65%) and Business (70%) majors.
- Majors reporting more unpaid internships than paid ones included Education (34% paid), Social Sciences (35% paid), Health Sciences (39% paid), Communications (41% paid) and Arts and Humanities (43% paid).
- Family income was a significant factor but not in the direction assumed. Students

with family income below \$80,000 participated in unpaid internships at the level of 46%; and 40% of the students with family income above \$80,000 chose the same.

- Other factors have been found to have zero or very little influence on participation in unpaid internships. These were type of school the student was attending, with students from private colleges and smaller public colleges (fewer than 15,000 students) being more likely to be engaged in unpaid internships. Grade point average proved to be insignificant too, but, interestingly, students with GPAs between 3.3 and 3.7 tended to be more involved in unpaid internships than other students. Finally, ethnic affiliation and recipients of federal financial aid had no impact on participation in unpaid internships.

Significant factors in providing unpaid internships:

- Non-profit organizations proved to be the top providers of unpaid internships with 57% of the internships they offer being unpaid. Government made 48% of their internships available unpaid, and the for-profit sector offered 34% of their internships as unpaid.

- Smaller firms and establishments (fewer than 100 employees) held significantly higher levels of unpaid internships than larger companies, with over 55% of the unpaid internships falling on the former. The largest companies (over 5,000 employees) offered fewer than 20% of their internships as unpaid.

- Companies in the utilities, transportation, and manufacturing sectors were less likely to provide unpaid internships (less than 17% are unpaid) while government (54%), healthcare (62%), non-profit organizations (63%) and the arts, entertainment and broadcasting (68%) sectors offer the majority of their internships as unpaid.

Survey with the Students of Armenian Universities and Colleges

After analyzing previous studies on CBT and internships, we have moved to internships and their requirement in the universities of Armenia. According to the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Armenia, the total number of students in Armenia is 123.700 students, among the, 114.600 are Bachelor's degree students (RA Law on Higher and Post-Graduate Professional Educational System: Article 8.2). State education standards of higher and post-graduate professional education include: requirements of mandatory minimum terms of higher and postgraduate professional education programs, including educational, industrial and pre-graduation practices and final attestation types, for preparation of every profession.

In the process of discussion with the lecturer and Head of International Business Department, Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University, Bangkok, Thailand; Denis Ushakov, the author of this article has designed the questionnaire for this survey. The questionnaire was then provided to the students in two languages -- Armenian and English.

It was distributed in hard copies in universities and colleges with various specializations. Overall, 436 students were interviewed.

The questionnaire included information about the university, faculty, and degree. It contained demographic information, English language proficiency (since English is the commonly used language in the tourism industry and the satisfaction of tourists' often starts from understanding their needs and special requests). Finally, since the students are also potential tourists, our secondary objective was to find out their awareness about community-based tourism and their willingness to experience it.

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Conducting this survey has become possible thanks to help from the National Statistical Service of the Republic of Armenia, as some of their staff are also teaching in Armenian universities (the law of RA allows civil servants to work in parallel in the academic field). We are thankful for cooperation and contribution to Vladimir Oboyancev, Professor at the National Polytechnic University of Armenia, Anahit Avetisyan, Professor at Armenian State University of Economics, and also to Arevik Petrosyan and Svetlana Gevroyan for their connections in the universities.

Results and Discussion

University and Department Affiliation

Names of universities and departments of the interviewed students are provided in Tab.

2.

Table 2 - Universities and Departments of Interviewed Students

Name of the University	Department	No.
Yerevan State University	Tourism	19
Yerevan State University	Economics	46
Yerevan State University	Theology	20
Yerevan State University	Informatics and Applied Mathematics	16
Yerevan State University	Mathematics and Mechanics	11
Yerevan State University	Sociology	1
Yerevan State University	Journalism	1
Yerevan State University	Radiophysics	10
Yerevan State University	International Relations	6
Yerevan State University	Philosophy and Psychology	15
Yerevan State University	Roman and Germanic Philology	12
Yerevan State University	History	16
Yerevan State University	Chemistry	3
Yerevan State University	Faculty of Law	11
Yerevan State University	Geography and Geology	1
Yerevan State University	Sociology	1
National Polytechnic University of Armenia	Computer Science	32
National Polytechnic University of Armenia	Economics	4
National Polytechnic University of Armenia	Mathematics	4
National Polytechnic University of Armenia	Tourism	1
National Polytechnic University of Armenia	Radio Engineering and Communications	13
National Polytechnic University of Armenia	Computer Systems and Informatics	30
National Polytechnic University of Armenia	Information security	1
National Polytechnic University of Armenia	Environment	1
National Polytechnic University of Armenia	Informatics	1
National Polytechnic University of Armenia	Energy	1
National Polytechnic University of Armenia	Cybernetics	2
Qvant College	Economics	7
Qvant College	Physics and Mathematics	9
American University	Business	4
Pharmacy and Chemistry University	Pharmacy	1
Yerevan BRUSOV State University of Languages and Social Sciences	Foreign Languages	4
Russian State Humanitarian University	Philology	1
Haybusak University	Stomatology	1
Armenian State University of Economics	Economics	4
Slavonic University	International Relations	1

Mehrabyan Medical College	Nursing	29
Mehrabyan Medical College	Dental Technician	6
Armenian State Pedagogical University	Mathematics	1
Armenian State Pedagogical University	Foreign Languages	1
Armenian State Pedagogical University	Methodist	1
Armenian State Pedagogical University	History	1
Armenian State Pedagogical University	Physics	1
Armenian State Pedagogical University	Russian Language and Literature	1
Armenian State Pedagogical University	Informatics	3
Yerevan State Medical University	General Medicine	8
Yerevan State Medical University	Stomatology	1
Yerevan State Medical University	Military	1
National Agrarian University of Armenia	Plant Protection	1
National Agrarian University of Armenia	Agricultural	2
National Agrarian University of Armenia	Security	17
National Agrarian University of Armenia	Accounting	5
National Agrarian University of Armenia	Economics	11
MesropMashtots University	Latin and Germanic Philology	2
MesropMashtots University	Pedagogy and Methodology	5
MesropMashtots University	Economics	5
MesropMashtots University	Armenian Language and Literature	1
MesropMashtots University	Design	10
MesropMashtots University	Philosophy and Psychology	2
MesropMashtots University	Journalism	1
MesropMashtots University	Armenian Philology	1
MesropMashtots University	Linguistics	6
MesropMashtots University	Faculty of Law	2

Year of studies

42% out of 436 interviewed students were first-year students, 17% were second-year, 22% were third-year, and 17% were fourth-year students.

Table 3 - University year of the Interviewed Students (N = 436)
(Source: results of the authors survey)

	1st year	2nd	3rd	4th
Number	182	74	98	75
Percentage	42%	17%	22%	17%

Table 4. Age and Gender of the Respondents
(Source: results of the authors survey)

Age groups	Number	Percentage
~20	297	68%
20-30	128	29%
30~	4	1%
Male	142	33%
Female	284	65%

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Age and Gender

Sociodemographic characteristics presented here include the age of students with the three group choices: under 20, 20-30, above 30, and gender.

The age of the interviewed students were primarily under 20, 68% of the overall interviewees. As 81% of the interviewed students were first-, second-, third-year students, their age varied from 17 to 19 (which is quite typical for Armenia). 29% of the overall interviewees were from 20 to 30 years old and just 1% was above 30. From the interviewed 436 students, 7 skipped the question about the age and 10 skipped the question about gender but this missing data is insignificant for the core part of our results.

English Proficiency

Table 5 - English Proficiency among the Interviewed Students

(Source: results of the authors survey)

English Proficiency (1 = poor, 5 = excellent)	1	2	3	4	5
Number	58	80	115	118	57
Percentage	13%	18%	26%	27%	13%

Majority of them had higher than average level of English proficiency, 13% of them have poor level, 18% higher than poor, 26% had the average level of English, 27% ranked it as good and 13% answered they have excellent level of English proficiency. This means that in a period of getting internship these students can not only get specific field knowledge but also be useful while interacting with foreign tourists. From the interviewed students, 8 skipped this question but considering the total number of the surveyed this fact can be disregarded.

Willingness to get internship

The most noticeable finding of the survey is that out of 436 students 339 (or 78%) were willing to get internships in the tourism industry, even if it is unpaid, even if it is out of the curriculum. 8 students skipped this question as such. In case of curriculum requirements, they would be happier to get internship/work experience and also credits required by their universities.

Table 6 - Willingness to get Internship in Tourism Industry

(Source: results of the authors survey)

Willingness to get unpaid internship in the tourism industry/service sector, if opportunity arises			
Yes	339	No	89
Yes in percent from the total	78%	No in percent	20%

Regarding preferable fields of getting internship, the questionnaire got several choices.

As it can be seen in Table 6 the choices were 4: English Teacher (or other language), which was chosen 57 people (or 13% of the surveyed), Business Administration/Planning, chosen by as many as 219 (or 50%) students, Marketing which was the choice of 91 (21%) students.

Table 6 - Preferably Fields of Work as Intern
(Source: results of the authors survey)

Field	Number	Percentage
English Teacher (or other language)	57	13%
Business Administration/Planning	219	50%
Marketing	91	21%
Other	36	8%

The option “Other” was chosen by 36 (8%) students. From these 36 students, 27 mentioned the exact preferred field/disciplines to work in, 7 students didn’t mention the preferred field to expertise, and 33 students skipped this question as such. The “Other” choices were as follows (see Tab. 7).

Table 7 - Field of Work as an Intern, if “Other” selected
(Source: results of the authors survey)

Information Technologies: programmer	8
Information Technologies: network specialist	5
Guide	4
Introducing culture (interpreter)	3
Nurse	7
Innovations	2

As many previous studies have shown, many CBT are actually lacking qualified guides or trainings for becoming such qualified guides.

Awareness about CBT

Another purpose of our study has been to find out the state awareness among Armenian students about community-based tourism and their willingness to experience it, with the consideration of the fact that students are also potential tourists.

From 436 interviewed students 61% (or 266 students) were aware of community-based tourism and 37% (163 students) did not have an exact image/information about this particular type of tourism. Noteworthy here, although 266 students were aware of community-based tourism, but 318 students expressed their willingness to experience it. Thus, we can conclude that CBT as a new concept is not very well advertised in the country/region. 7 students skipped the question about the awareness of community-based tourism as such.

Although the interviewed students were not well informed or aware about community-based tourism, they still showed positive attitude towards the idea of being involved in community-based tourism activities.

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Table 8 - Students Awareness of Community-Based Tourism and Willingness to Experience It

(Source: results of the authors survey)

Have you ever heard of Homestay/Community-Based (tourists are hosted in local houses) Tourism?	
Yes	
Number	Percentage
266	61%
No	
Number	Percentage
163	37%
Would you like to experience Homestay/Community-Based Tourism, if such an opportunity arises?	
Yes	
Number	Percentage
318	73%
No	
Number	Percentage
111	25%

Conclusions:

Two important takeaways can be singled out here:

- There is high rate of willingness among Armenian students to get internship in tourism industry, 339 students out of 436 confirmed this. 78% is high rate, especially considering the fact that this would have been unpaid internships;
- High rate of willingness is also observed in relation to the experience of community-based tourism, 318 students out of 436, or 73%.

By involving students as workforce (interns) in CBT-related business will be possible to support and develop those businesses in the most efficient way, while students themselves will gain too by getting hands on work experience.

Since the students are potential tourists too, their willingness to experience CBT shows that Armenian has a potential of attracting more tourists into this type of rural activities.

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