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Development of Opinions of Tourism Students at the Prague University of Economics and Business on the COVID-19 Pandemic

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ABSTRACT

The main purpose of the research was to evaluate the development of opinions of students in the Tourism study programme at the Prague University of Economics and Business (hereinafter also “VŠE”) in relation to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. Since March 2020, COVID-19 has hit the life of tourism students on several levels: education - online teaching; private life – health, work, living standard; career prospects in tourism. Online questionnaire surveys were conducted among tourism students in April 2020 and in April 2021. The questionnaires comprised two parts: students’ opinions on online teaching during the corona crisis, opinions on the further development of tourism and their perception of the career prospects in the field of tourism. Data evaluation was performed by mathematical and statistical methods. The main outcomes of the survey: The COVID-19 pandemic had a negative impact on students’ lives, they lost their part-time jobs, cancelled student’s mobility plans at foreign universities and private trips. Despite that, students see their future in the field of tourism. Students expect an increase in domestic tourism and a decrease in outgoing and incoming tourism in the next few years as well. When comparing students’ answers obtained in 2020 and 2021, there was a significant difference in two issues: 80% of students disliked online teaching in 2020, while in 2021, only 50% of students expressed their negative attitude. In 2021, more students admitted that they might find a job outside the field of tourism. The results of the investigation are important for future planning of the higher education system (implementation of the online teaching method in relevant study situations). Students also pointed out the need to communicate the tourism development perspective with students and focus on promoting their belief in the prospect of working in the field of tourism.

Keywords: COVID-19, Online Teaching, Students of Tourism, Survey, Future Development of Tourism

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Introduction

On 31st December 2019, the People's Republic of China reported the first incidences of a so far unknown disease diagnosed in the town of Wu-chan – the capital of the Chinese province of Chu-Pej (ECDC experts, 2020). In mid-January 2020, new occurrences were reported from some other Asian countries (such as Thailand, Japan and Korea), the first casualties and community transfer of the disease, i.e. transfer from a man to a man, were confirmed. Due to the fast spread of the infection all over the world and the seriousness of the disease, the WHO classified the COVID-19 disease as a pandemic on 11th March 2020. COVID-19 affected the whole world and paralysed the whole of humankind.

In consequence of the adopted anti-COVID-19 measures, all unnecessary economic activities were strangled. Experts presumed that the COVID -19 pandemic would cause the worst worldwide crisis since WWII (Stalenis et al., 2020). Borders of countries were closed, and travelling was limited significantly; international as well as intrastate transport was cancelled or smothered greatly. Accommodation facilities were closed down, and catering services were restricted significantly. Cultural institutions were not open to the public, sports and cultural events, conferences and company events were cancelled. Almost all schools worldwide had to stop face-to-face education and started online teaching.

Tourism, which is based on mobility and social relations, ranks among the most affected sectors. The strictest restrictions were recorded on 27 April 2020 when all 217 destinations in the world introduced travelling restrictions. One hundred fifty-six destinations, i.e. 76% of all destinations in the world, closed their borders completely and banned international tourism. The sector faced great uncertainty for the following 12 months; travelling restrictions were released gradually and tightened again depending on the current situation. Anti-pandemic restrictions affected all components of the huge tourism value chain. Worldwide tourism export revenues dropped down by 910 billion dollars in 2020, i.e. to 1.2 trillion dollars. At the same time, this reduction endangered 100 to 120 million jobs in tourism.

Starting from March 2020, the consequences of the pandemic are apparent on the territory of the Czech Republic as well. The most recent statistics show a noticeable impact of the pandemic on the territory of the Czech Republic as well. The most recent statistics indicate an apparent decline in performance in the field of tourism. It is difficult to predict the future development of the field. Even though a revival of travelling is expected in 2021, the 2019-volume of services will be achieved in 2023 at the earliest (Kyte, 2020).

Anti-epidemic measures affect all groups of citizens. University students rank among specifically affected groups (ESU, 2020). Their personal life and studies have been impacted by travel restrictions, social distancing, isolation measures, quarantines, campus closures, loss of additional earnings and border closures (Vaniček et al., 2020). Many of them experienced deterioration of their economic situation in consequence of the reduction of family savings, and students themselves lost their part-time jobs (61 – 68 %) (Quacquarelli, 2020). University education has changed significantly as well due to the spread of COVID-19.

Students of the Tourism study programme at the Prague University of Economics and Business have experienced multiple effects of COVID-19 restrictions. In March 2020, regular lessons were cancelled, and the whole teaching process switched to distant forms. As regards their studies, they had to get used to online lessons and give up all kinds of study journeys. As regards their personal lives, they coped with the difficult social situation, health problems of their close ones and frequently the drop in their standard of living due to the loss of their part-

time jobs. As regards their future careers, they faced a significant slump in the field they have studied – Tourism. The main purpose of the research was to evaluate the development of opinions of students in the Tourism study programme at the Prague University of Economics and Business in relation to impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic after 12 months. Online questionnaire surveys were conducted among tourism students in April 2020 and in April 2021.

Literature Review

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on education has quickly become the subject of further research around the world. COVID-19 has dramatically reshaped education, which resulted in the largest online movement in the history of education (Ghada, 2021). A number of studies dealing with the impact of the COVID-19 on higher education have been written (Sumitra & Roshan, 2021). All the surveys focused on the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic on university education confirm that a large number of university students have been strongly affected by the situation: 40 – 60% have changed their study plans, most frequently, they extend their studies (Scull et al., 2020; Allen et al., 2020; König et al., 2020; Buitendijk et al., 2020). The largest number of papers focused on foreign students who have been affected by the pandemic most. 70 – 85% of them have cancelled or postponed their planned foreign journeys (Quacquarelli, 2020; Marinoni et al., 2020). Even though universities offer online lessons, a relatively low number of foreign students (61%) would be interested in such a form of teaching in future (Quacquarelli, 2020). Higher education institutions and universities need to plan post-pandemic education to ensure student learning outcomes and standards of educational quality (Shazia & Sunishtha, 2020).

The significant decline in tourism continued in 2021, both in the world and in the Czech Republic. In 2020, international tourism fell by almost three quarters as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. The decline continued at the beginning of 2021. In January 2021, it was 87% as a result of restrictions on travel in the world and the emergence of new outbreaks. The largest decline was in the Asia Pacific by 96%, as a result of the highest level of travel restrictions. Europe and Africa saw a decline of 85% in arrivals, the Middle East drop of 84%, the Americas decreased by 77% in January, following better results in the last quarter of the year. UNWTO has outlined two scenarios for 2021. The first scenario considers a potential rebound in September, leading to a 22% increase in arrivals compared to last year. Still, this would be two thirds below the levels of 2019. The second scenario points to a rebound in July, which would result in a two-thirds increase in international arrivals for the year 2021 compared to the historic lows of the year 2020. In this case, arrivals would still be 55% below the levels recorded in the year 2019 (UNWTO (2021) World Tourism Barometer 19, 2, March 2021).

In the first quarter of 2021, the total number of guests in accommodation establishments decreased by 91.1% year-on-year, and the number of overnight stays decreased by 88.2%. Restrictions on the provision of accommodation services due to the coronavirus pandemic have been going on for more than a year. The number of nights spent by tourists in hotels and boarding houses was 1.1 million nights in the 1st quarter of this year, which was 88% less than in the same period last year. Domestic clients decreased the number of overnight stays by 81%, and the number of overnight stays of foreign guests decreased by 96%. The hotel segment showed a year-on-year decrease in all overnight stays by 90% and boarding houses

by 89%. A significant decrease in the number of arrivals is still evident in all source's foreign markets. The most numerous Slovaks accommodated only 12,000 in the 1st quarter of this year, 88% less than last year. Only 2% of Germans and 4% of Poles last year visited in the 1st quarter. Also, the number of arrivals of other guests from abroad does not reach even a tenth of last year's results. The coronavirus crisis has also affected spa accommodation. The spa could only provide care paid for by insurance companies but not for self-payers. In the whole quarter, the number of overnight stays of residents decreased by 53%, and the number of domestic clients decreased by 68%. The spa stay lasted an average of 14 days (CSU, 2021).

Methods of Research

Neither teachers nor students had enough experience in online teaching of such a great extent in 2020. The first research implemented in April 2020 emerged to obtain quick feedback of online teaching and student's views on the perspective of tourism and their carrier (Vaníček et al., 2020). The same research was carried out in April 2021. The survey strove to find out the development of students' opinions. The questionnaires consisted of two parts: students' opinions on online teaching during the corona crisis, opinions on the further development of tourism and students' perception of the prospects of a career in the field of tourism.

The research was carried out at the Department of Tourism at the Prague University of Economics and Business by means of identical methods in both years (April 2020 and April 2021). Approximately 100 students from all years of bachelor and master studies participated in the research. Before the research started, a pilot research was carried out among ten students, and based on their answers and primarily their remarks, the questionnaire was finalised. Primary data was collected by a questionnaire distributed by means of the Office 365 Microsoft Forms application. Data evaluation was performed by mathematical and statistical methods. As there are more female than male students at the Department of Tourism, the proportion of gender was approximately 85:15.

Results

In March 2020, schools were closed down. The Prague University of Economics and Business was one of the first universities to swap to online teaching completely. As early as three days after the schools were closed down, distant teaching methods were introduced at the Faculty of International Relations (hereinafter also "FMV") at the VŠE. The MS Teams platform has been the preferred one. Students could virtually participate in lectures that were held in harmony with the pre-pandemic schedule. The faculty strove to substitute lessons by means of modern communication methods while retaining the quality standards. Such a situation has lasted three terms. The teaching mode for the next academic year, 2021/2022, has not been determined so far. Students of all years of the bachelor's and master's degree programme participated in the survey. In 2020, the number of respondents in the survey was 94, and in 2021 there were 92 students to participate. 15% male students and 85% female students participated in the survey, which corresponds with the structure of students in the tourism study programme. Data about respondents are summarised in Table 1. Since answers of students from various years did not differ much, we have listed consolidated data from all respondents.

Table 1: Which year of study are you at?

	Year of study	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	Extended his/her studies
Proportion of students from individual years of study	2020	39%	17%	10%	27%	6%	1 %
	2021	23%	27%	2%	26%	15%	7 %

Source: own results

a) Opinions of tourism students from the FMV VŠE on online teaching

The influence of the pandemic is specified in Figure 1. Students had to cancel their foreign journeys most frequently. More than half of the students cancelled approximately 2.5 foreign journeys. As regards domestic journeys, about one-quarter of students had to cancel such journeys. One-tenth of students participated in voluntary activities focused on assistance to senior citizens in old people’s homes, or care for sick people or in COVID testing. They most frequently sew facemasks or distributed facemasks and disinfection to seniors. Almost half of the students lost their part-time jobs due to the anti-pandemic measures. One-fifth of them were quarantined. Some resented the loss of social contacts, the inability to practise their hobbies, and some broke up with their partners. 2% and 7% of students had to cancel their lessons abroad.

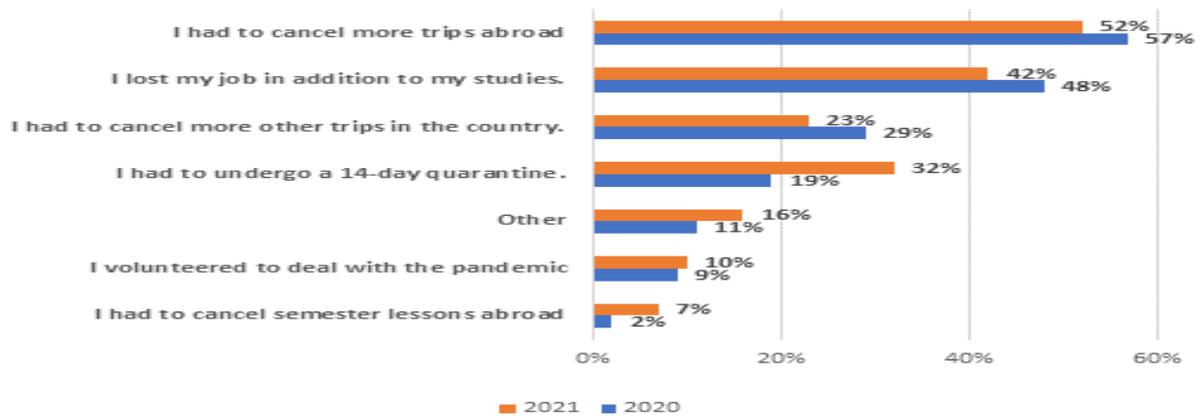


Figure 1: The influence of COVID-19 on travel in the summer semester of 2020 with the winter semester of 2021

Source: own results

While in 2020, there were 55% of students who thought that online teaching is more demanding in terms of homework, in 2021, the number increased to 87% (Figure 2). In both surveys, students complained about increased effort during online lessons. Online teaching requires more time, and the number of those who shared this opinion increased from 28% to 47%. Preparation for lessons requires more time as well. The group of students who think that preparation for online lessons is more time demanding increased from 30% in 2020 to 52% in 2021. Students think that they learn less during online lessons (31% and 55%). Nine out of ten students stated that online lessons require more individual work.

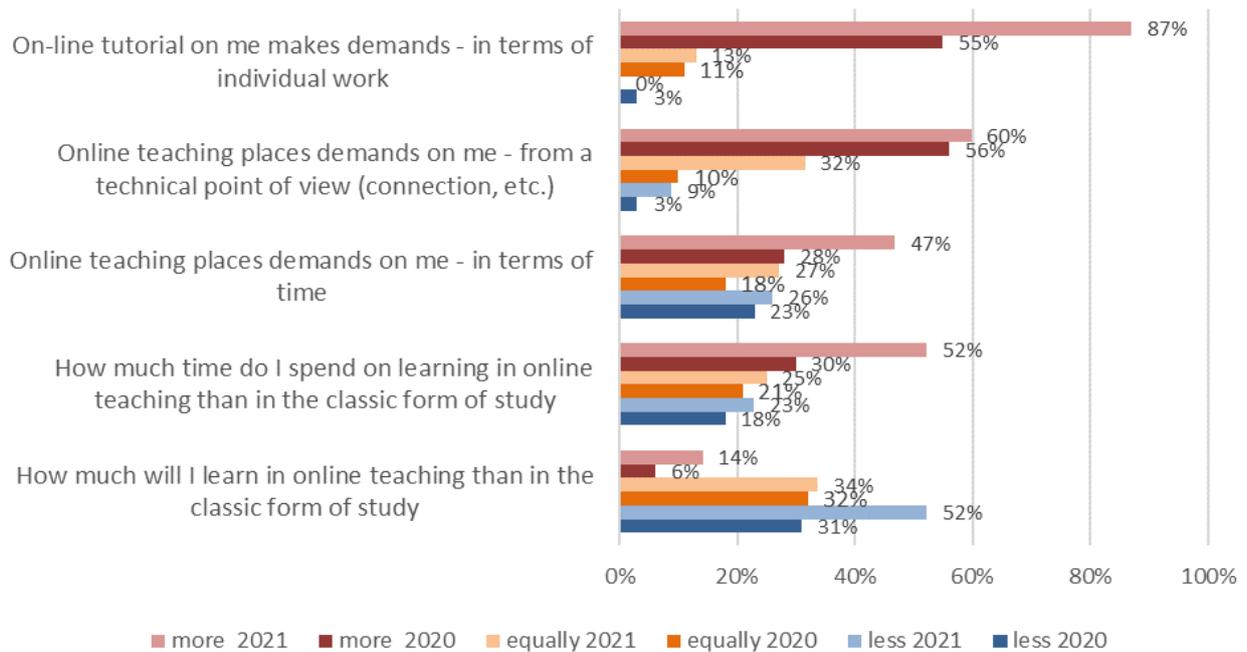


Figure 2: What is your experience with online learning?

Source: own results

As apparent from Figure 3, in 2020, 80% of students resented online lessons, while in 2021, their number decreased to 51% and students got used to this mode of teaching.

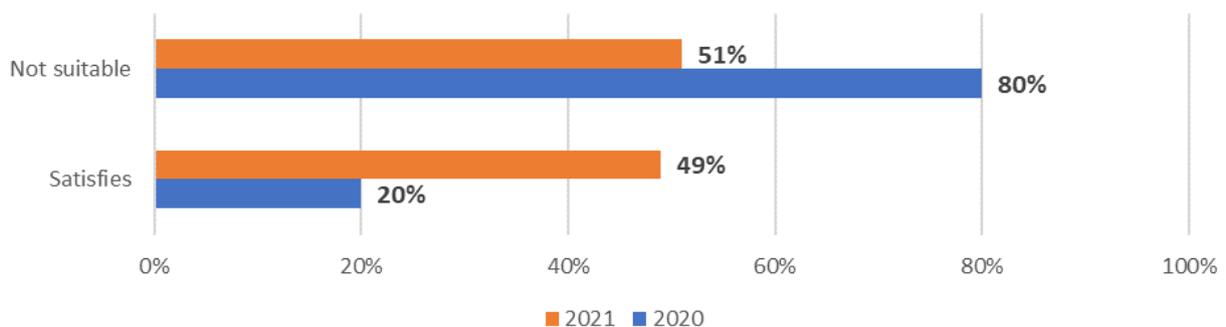


Figure 3: Change of opinions on online teaching between 2020 and 2021.

Source: own results

The below list summarises the most frequent answers regarding students' resentment towards online lessons:

- During online lessons, teachers do not explain the subject matter as much in detail as during lessons held at school. Online lessons are not fully-fledged.
- Online lessons are absolutely inappropriate for language teaching. Language teaching is much more efficient at school.
- Most teachers are unable to take advantage of opportunities of online teaching.
- I am not sufficiently motivated. It is a problem to make myself study at home.
- The online form is fine for lectures. In seminars, the quality depends on the teacher's attitude.
- I miss lectures of external teachers and field trips.

- I cannot concentrate during online lessons; I would need direct interaction, and I feel uneasy when talking to the camera.
- There are both advantages and disadvantages. It is good that I save time by not having to commute to school.
- I miss my schoolmates. Students spend lots of time by the computer during online teaching – tiredness, pain in the eyes, headaches.
- I miss teamwork.
- Teachers are more demanding.
- It is difficult to concentrate; there are many distracting factors.

While 56–62% of respondents would welcome a higher proportion of online lessons, 38–44% would not want online lessons during non-pandemic times. (Figure 4). Below is a list of pros and cons of retention of online lessons even after the pandemic:

- Online courses on history and economic or political development.
- Online lessons are no good for micro- and macroeconomics since these subjects require an explanation of the subject matter.
- It would be good to record lectures so that students can listen to them repeatedly or to follow them later if they are absent from the lesson.
- Another advantage of online lectures is the fact that students can participate without the need to commute.
- Online mode cannot be applied in courses where direct participation of students is important.
- Lots of Math exercises are available online, which is very helpful when students have to study individually.
- Online mode is no good for seminars.
- Online lectures would be good for general subject’s compulsory for all students at the university.
- Online lectures are advantageous in subjects that comprise only lectures.
- Most teachers have managed online teaching by 2021, and all lectures could be online.
- It would be possible to attend some courses while a student is abroad due to an Erasmus programme.
- It would be good to be able to pick whether I want to attend a lesson in the class or to participate online.

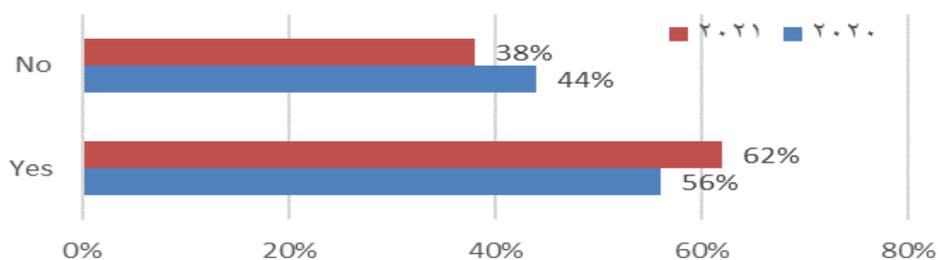


Figure 4: Opinions on the use of online teaching after the pandemic, comparison of 2020 and 2021

Source: own results

The last question of the first part of the survey attempted to find out whether the pandemic experience and the decline in tourism would affect students’ study programme and their future plans. Responses are available from Figure no. 5. Answers did not differ much in both

surveys. It is good that the pandemic will not influence future studies of more than half of tourism students. The number of students who expect to extend their studies increased a bit, on average, one-quarter of students expect the extension of their studies.

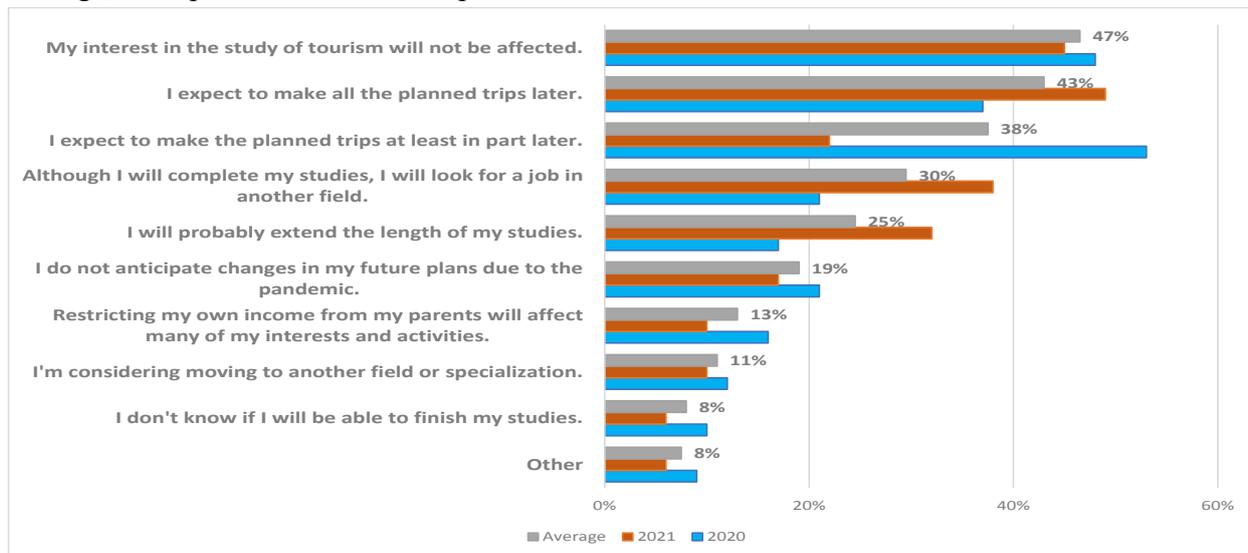


Figure 5: What are the consequences of the current pandemic for your future studies and plans in your personal life?

Source: own results

Figure 6 shows how students see their future career in tourism. An average for both the years is presented since students' opinions did not change between 2020 and 2021. 56% of respondents are optimistic and believe that they can find a job in the field of tourism which they have been studying. Those who do not think there is a chance to find a job in this field expect to start their own business in another field or to find a job in IT or a school. Some students think that they can find a job in a bank, an insurance company, state administration, auditing, marketing or finance companies, social services, event management, logistics, HR or even translating. It proves that VŠE is a good school that provides high-quality education in economics in general.

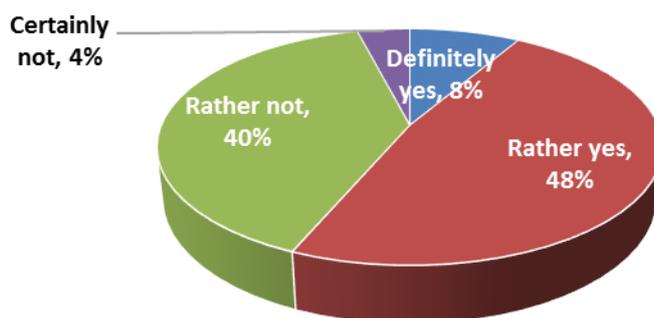


Figure 6: Do you see your future career prospects in the field of tourism?

Source: own results

b) Opinions of students on the further development of tourism in the Czech Republic
We wanted to know the opinions of respondents regarding employment in tourism during the coming years (Figure 7). The structure of answers was practically the same in both years. More than half of the students thought that the dropdown in employment rates was temporary and it would soon rise to the pre-pandemic levels. Two-fifths were afraid that an increased unemployment rate in tourism would last longer.

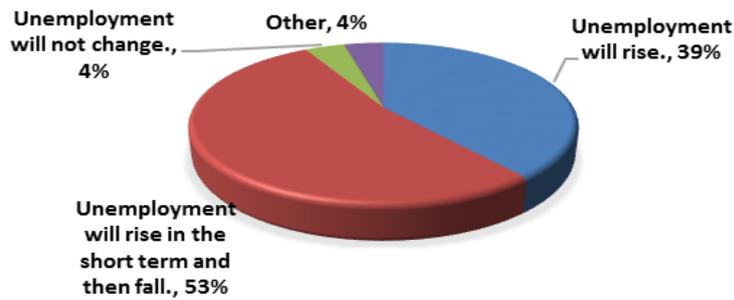


Figure 7: In your opinion, what effect will the current situation have on employment in tourism in the Czech Republic in the next few years?

Source: own results.

Students’ opinions regarding the development of tourism in the Czech Republic are presented in Figure 8. Since opinions were very different in both the years, data are presented separately for each of the years. 9 out of 10 students thought that domestic tourism would grow, a year later, only 8 out of 10 students thought so. Students were more optimistic as regards the decline of incoming and outgoing tourism in 2021. The decline in incoming tourism was expected by 77% of students in 2020 and by 64% of students in 2021. By contract, one-fifth of students thought that domestic tourism would drop.

In 2020, students thought that domestic tourism would increase by 43% and in 2021 by 29%. According to the Czech Statistical Authority, there was a decrease in the number of longer inland trips by 9% and the number of oversleeps by 5.5%. As regards shorter journeys, the dropdown was 30%, and the number of oversleeps went down by 30%. Only one-fifth of students were right – these students estimated that domestic tourism would decline by 20% in 2020, on average, students estimated that outgoing tourism would decline by 52% (2020) and 40% (2021). The real situation was much worse, however. According to the Czech Statistical Authority, the number of journeys of Czech residents to foreign countries decreased by 68% - longer journeys and by 65% - shorter journeys.

Students thought that the decrease in incoming tourism (arrivals of foreign tourists) would be 58% (2020) and 52% (2021). However, the real situation was even worse. The decrease in incoming tourism was 73%.

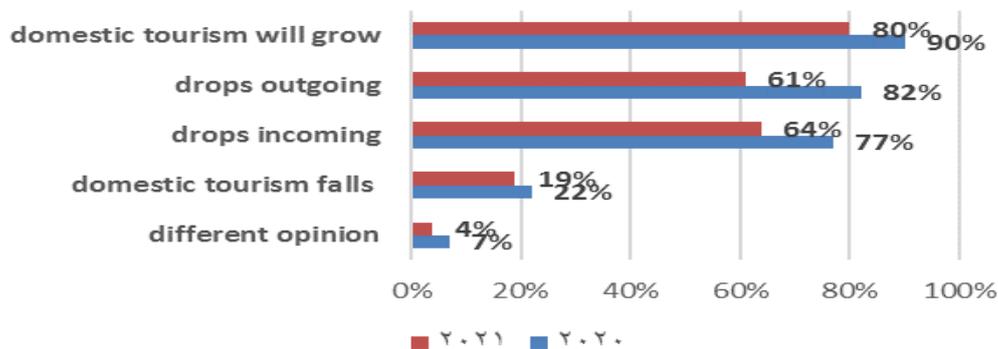


Figure 8: What is the estimated development of tourism in the Czech Republic this year?

Source: own results

Figure 9 presents answers to a similar, but rather different, question – what changes in tourism in the Czech Republic can be expected during several future years. In 2020 seven students out of ten thought that domestic tourism would grow, in 2021, only 55% of

respondents thought so. An average estimate of the domestic tourism increase is about 20%. On the other hand, one-quarter of students thought in 2020 that domestic tourism would decline; in 2021, one-third of them thought so. The estimated decline is 25%. Students are not optimistic regarding the development of both outgoing and incoming tourism. In 2020, three-fifths thought that outgoing tourism would drop by 33%, in 2021 one third of them thought so. One-half of students (2020) and two-fifths (2021) thought that incoming tourism would decline as well, by 26% on average. Actual data will only be available at the end of 2021.

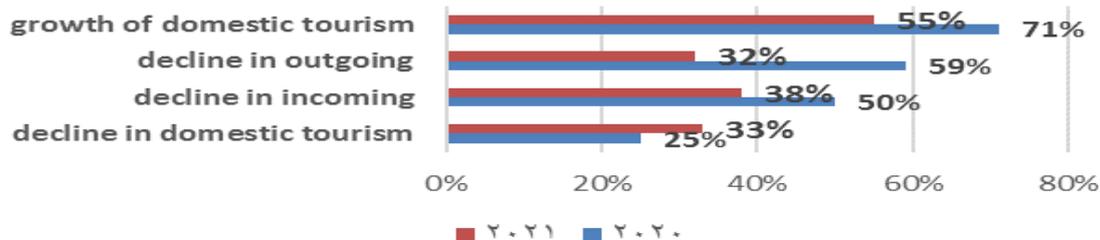


Figure 9: What is the estimated development of tourism in the Czech Republic in the coming years?

Source: own results

Discussion

The transition to online teaching meant a major intervention in the forms of student's study. In no other field of study is travelling as important for future practice as it is in tourism. Students could not realise their planned trips abroad. The research shows that the frequency of foreign trips, in particular, is high in comparison with other fields of study. The situation was similar with longer trips within the Czech Republic. Travel restrictions were comparable in 2020 and 2021. Most full-time students in the Czech Republic work part-time while studying. They mostly work in hotels, restaurants, travel agencies or as guides. This is a great benefit for their future career. Due to the pandemic, most students lost their jobs because such facilities reduced their activities during the pandemic, some even stopped completely. The lack of practice during the study will affect their future employment in the tourism industry. Another problem for the restart of the tourism industry in the Czech Republic will result from the fact that during the pandemic period, a number of workers moved to work in other fields and now they do not want to return to their original profession. This is currently reflected in the lack of chefs, waiters, hotel receptionists and guides.

The results of the questionnaire survey also show how important a teacher is for education. Surprisingly, in online teaching, students need more time to prepare, and the time spent in distance learning is used less efficiently. Students stated that online lessons required more individual work. The majority of students are not satisfied with the distance form of study, although, in 2021, more students became accustomed to it. One of the reasons why students do not prefer distance education is that during online lessons, teachers do not explain the subject matter as much in detail as during lessons held at school. Online lessons are not fully-fledged. The presence of a teacher is especially important in language teaching. Students also lack lectures from experts from practice, excursions and teamwork. In general, it can be stated that students lack social contacts in distance learning. This is also why online conferencing can never replace face to face forms of conferences and congresses. We expected that the crisis in tourism would influence students' decisions about their further study. It is good that the pandemic will not influence future studies of more than half of tourism students, and most of

them are optimistic and believe that they will be able to find a job in the field of tourism which they have been studying.

Students are optimistic about future prospects of tourism, and more than half of them thought that the dropdown in employment rates was temporary and it would soon rise to the pre-pandemic levels. Like the students, the government expected growth in domestic tourism in 2020. According to the Czech Statistical Authority, there was a decrease in the number of inland trips. The decline in short journeys was particularly significant, as the government restricted the movement of the population and the state within a certain period. The students correctly estimated that the pandemic would cause a significant decrease in incoming and outgoing tourism because, in a certain period, it was practically impossible to go abroad. The students expected a fifty per cent drop; in fact, there was a drop of two thirds. Students expected a decline in international tourism in the Czech Republic in 2021. Preliminary results from the Czech Statistical Office have confirmed this.

Conclusion

The accomplished research brought interesting findings of the perception of online teaching by students and their opinions of the future development of tourism in the Czech Republic. The pandemic confirmed the more pessimistic versions of prognoses, and the whole society, education and the field of tourism will be affected in the long term and significantly (UNWTO,2020). Therefore, it is necessary to get ready for the possibility of introduction of stricter measures and re-introduction of online teaching in future years. The provided feedback regarding online teaching makes it apparent that it will be necessary to prepare a very specific methodology for online lessons so that students find it motivating and efficient enough. Another task for schools is to help students to get oriented in changes in the field of tourism resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic and to encourage them that there will be jobs for economists and managers in the field of tourism.

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