

Human resources in the hotel industry of Serbia

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Abstract: Serbia is a country of significant but still insufficiently used tourist potential, uneven development of tourism, and a high concentration of tourist traffic. This implies a focus on a small number of tourist destinations that are commercially profiled. Serbia is characterized by a lack of a systematic approach to the development of tourism. This implies a lack of appropriate strategies that would adapt to specific areas, according to their attractiveness and specificities. It also implies inadequate human resources that should implement strategically set goals. It is necessary to define priorities, primarily in the area of profiling the material basis of tourism, i.e. the offer of accommodation facilities. It is necessary to provide adequate personnel, whose activity will be a key factor in the further development of tourism and hotel industry of Serbia. The aim of this paper is to look at and analyze the basic characteristics of employment in the hotel industry of Serbia, primarily the volume and dynamics of the employees in the hotel industry and their qualification structure, in order to identify the key weaknesses and to point out the ways for their overcoming. Secondary statistical data were used in this context and the analytical-synthetic method was applied. As shown in this paper, positive shifts in improving human resources in the hotel industry of Serbia are evident. A further improvement of human resources in the hotel industry of Serbia should be guided by global trends, in order to encourage a further improvement of the quality of the hotel industry in Serbia as a tourist destination.

Keywords: human resources, hotel industry, management, personnel, Serbia

JEL classification: L83

Ljudski resursi u u hotelijerstvu Srbije

Sažetak: Srbija je zemlja značajnih turističkih potencijala koji još uvek nisu u dovoljnoj meri iskorišćeni. Srbija je, takođe, zemlja neravnomernog razvoja turizma. Srbija je zemlja visokog stepena koncentracije turističkog prometa. To znači fokus na mali broj turističkih destinacija koje su se tržišno profilisale. Srbiju karakteriše još uvek nedovoljna sistematičnost u razvoju turizma. To znači nedostatak odgovarajuće strategije koja bi se prilagođavala konkretnim prostorima, shodno njihovoj atraktivnosti i specifičnostima. To takođe upućuje i na neadekvatne ljudske resurse koji treba da realizuju strateški postavljene ciljeve. Nužno je definisati prioritete, pre svega u domenu profilisanja materijalne osnove turizma, tj. ponude ugostiteljskih objekata za smeštaj. S tim u skladu, nužno je obezbediti odgovarajuće kadrove čija će aktivnost predstavljati ključni faktor daljeg razvoja turizma i hotelijerstva Srbije. Cilj ovog rada je da se sagledaju i analiziraju osnovne odlike zaposlenosti u hotelijerstvu Srbije, pre svega obim i dinamika zaposlenih u hotelijerstvu i njihova kvalifikaciona struktura, kako bi se uočile ključne slabosti i ukazalo na puteve i načine za njihovo prevazilaženje. U tom kontekstu korišćeni su sekundarni statistički podaci

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i primenjena je analitičko-sintetička metoda. Kao što je prikazano u radu, evidentni su pozitivni pomaci u domenu ljudskih resursa u hotelijerstvu Srbije. Dalje poboljšanje ljudskih resursa u hotelijerskoj industriji Srbije biće rukovođeno globalnim trendovima, kako bi se podstaklo dalje unapređenje kvaliteta hotelske industrije na nivou Srbije kao turističke destinacije.

Ključne reči: ljudski resursi, hotelijerstvo, upravljanje, kadrovi Srbija
JEL klasifikacija: L83

1. Introduction

The process of human resource management involves a series of activities that are necessary for employment in a particular organization and maintenance of high performance of its employees ([Robbins & Coutler, 2005](#)). Human resource management, as pointed out by [Atteya \(2012, p. 106\)](#), can provide the organization with competitive advantages in the local, international and global environments. In this regard, the connection between the application of instruments of human resource management and the quality offer in service organizations is emphasized ([Vučković, 2014](#)). [Nasurdin et al. \(2016, p. 29\)](#) point out the importance of the direct service provider's conduct for the perception of quality in the minds of users. Human resources, capable of learning, are the most important factor in the company's vitality and are the so-called "carriers" of human capital as cumulants of knowledge, skills, experience, inventiveness, energy, and enthusiasm, who are willing to invest in the work process ([Đuričin & Janošević, 2009](#)). In modern business organizations, career development is an important component of a successful business. Career development involves a series of activities that an individual performs in order to perfect their knowledge and skills and gain a better position in the workplace ([Jovanović-Božinov et al., 2004](#)). [Al-miman's research \(2017, 102\)](#) has shown that good practices of human resource management contribute to the belief of employees that the organization cares about them and supports them. Within considerations concerning the influence of human resource management in the employee turnover, the role of managers in understanding the behavior of employees is emphasized ([Sang Long et al., 2012](#)).

The hotel industry constitutes the material basis of tourism. The development of the hotel industry is a key point of the future of tourism in Serbia. The hotel industry engages a large scope of employed staff. Therefore, an analysis of human resources is of crucial importance for the development of not only the hotel industry, but also tourism in general. Numerous authors have analyzed the specifics of labor and employment in the hotel industry. One of the traditional problems refers to the gap between the demand and supply of skilled labor ([Wu, 2004](#)). However, this problem is often not perceived in the right manner, since the importance of adequate education is ignored. Some practitioners of the hotel industry believe that a lack of adequate qualifications can be replaced by experience ([Mohan & Arumugam, 2016](#)). Innovative approaches to the development of human resources in the hotel industry are based on the increasing expectations of potential employees, related to mastering the specific knowledge and skills and career prospects ([Walsh et al., 2007](#)). Innovative models for professional training of employees in the hotel industry rely on the interdisciplinary approach that, in addition to the economic aspect, increasingly recognizes the behavioral one ([Langer et al., 2001](#)).

The above mentioned problem of employee turnover is very present in the hotel industry. Therefore, it is essential for employees to be familiar with the basics of business strategies, accept and understand organizational culture in order to increase the level of commitment to the organization ([Laškarin Ažić, 2017](#)). Seasonal work, atypical working hours, the emotional dimension of contact between the service provider and hotel guests endanger the

successful balance between private life and work ([Mohanty & Mohanty, 2014](#)). The relationship of personnel to hotel guests is a common cause of their dissatisfaction ([Petrović & Bonacin, 2017](#)). In other words, dissatisfied employees cannot make their guests satisfied. Thus, the issue of employee satisfaction, their motivation and attachment to the organization is of particular importance in the hotel industry ([Dominguez-Falcon et al., 2016](#)). An aggravating circumstance for employees in the hotel industry is the fact that their earnings are traditionally among the lowest in the economy ([Nivethitha et al., 2014](#)). All these problems pose a major challenge for human resource management. In this regard, a complex approach is reflected by Garavan's strategic model of human resource development, which includes activities on four levels – global, organization, operational, and individual ([AbuKhalifeh et al., 2013](#)). This model promotes a number of actors in the development of human resources, due to the fact that the hotel industry is an industry that operates in the context of multiple links with various stakeholders.

2. Basic characteristics of personnel in Serbia

In accordance with the aim of this paper, which is to see and analyze the basic characteristics of employment in the hotel industry in Serbia, primarily the scope and dynamics of the employees in the hotel industry and their qualification structure, in order to identify the key weaknesses and point to the ways to overcome them, secondary statistical data are used and an analytical-synthetic method was applied.

Getting to know the basic characteristics of the hotel personnel in Serbia is preceded by a brief review of the key demographic characteristics of the workforce. The workforce offer in Serbia is high. However, there is a problem of insufficient compliance of the education system with the needs of the economy ([Blagojević & Redžić, 2009](#)). On the other hand, an unemployment problem has been present in Serbia for a long time, especially when it comes to women. According to the data for the last quarter of 2017, the overall unemployment rate was 14.7%, while the unemployment rate of the female population was 15.4%. High unemployment rates were observed in young people, aged between 15 and 24, which is understandable, given the broad scope of secondary and higher education. According to the data from the Labor Force Survey, about 17.6% of the total population aged between 15 and 24 were unemployed and were not covered by some kind of education or training, which is certainly not a negligible share ([Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, 2018](#)).

The educational structure of employees, according to March 2017 data, shows that the share of people with university education is 26.5%. If people with college education are added to them, a share of 34% is obtained. Nevertheless, it can be evaluated as satisfactory, because the representation of insufficiently qualified people (lower degrees of vocational education, semi-qualified or unqualified) is relatively high and is 14.4% ([Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, 2017](#)). The potential of the workforce in Serbia is not sufficiently utilized. A high unemployment rate, which is still present even among the highly educated, is a consequence of difficult economic conditions and long-standing negative trends in the economy. More intensive economic growth will contribute to reducing unemployment and to a better utilization of available employment potential. There is no doubt that the rapid development of tourism and the hotel industry, due to the complexity, heterogeneity and a great need for living labor, can contribute to the involvement of personnel of different professional backgrounds and education levels.

3. The volume and dynamics of employment in the hotel industry of Serbia

Human resources are seen as a key factor in the success of hotel activities, and, in this respect, of tourism in Serbia. A closer look at their condition in Serbia is provided by means of the following tabular data on the scope and dynamics of employment in the hotel sector, which is, in accordance with the methodology of the Republic Institute for Statistics, presented by a grouping called “Hotels and restaurants.”

The number of employees, both at the level of Serbia as a whole and in hotels and restaurants, varied in the observed period. There was an evident decline in the number of employees between 2010 and 2014. After this period, there was an increase that, in the last year of research, 2016, was higher by 13.5% compared to 2010. This trend is also visible in the hotel industry field. After a sharp decline in the number of employees, which, in 2013, amounted to nearly 18%, compared to 2010, there was a gradual increase, especially in 2015 and 2016, when there was 22% more employees than in 2010.

The decline in the number of employees in the hotel industry of Serbia is a consequence of capacity reductions, which is a result of the restructuring of the existing offer, in terms of overcoming not only technological, but also personnel outdatedness. An increase in the number of employees in recent years shows the revival of Serbian hotel industry, which is accompanied by hiring adequate personnel.

Table 1: Number of employees in hotels and restaurants in Serbia

Year	Number of employees		% of employees in accommodation and food services in the total number of employees	Index 2010 = 100	
	Total	Accommodation and food services		Total	Accommodation and food services
2010	2396244	71610	2,99	100	100
2011	2253209	62081	2,76	94,03	86,69
2012	2228343	61528	2,77	92,99	85,92
2013	2310718	58855	2,55	96,43	82,19
2014	2559441	67180	2,62	106,81	93,81
2015	2574200	87800	3,41	107,43	122,61
2016	2719400	87400	3,21	113,49	122,05

Source: [Statistical Yearbooks of Serbia: 2011 \(p. 56\)](#), [2012 \(p. 55\)](#), [2013 \(p. 59\)](#), [2014 \(p. 65\)](#), [2015 \(p. 65\)](#), [2016 \(p. 66\)](#), [2017 \(p. 68\)](#)

Hotels, as representative accommodation facilities, are characterized by the highest scope of employment ([Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, 2010](#)), which is understandable, considering that they create the most complex service, i.e. the integral product composed of catering, but also non-catering services that are in association with them ([Kosar, 2013](#)). The capacity and personnel commission should depict the potential possibilities of improving the hotel offer quality in Serbia. For this reason, it is necessary to direct the further analysis towards reviewing the educational structure of employees.

4. The educational structure of employees in the hotel industry of Serbia

The hotel industry is living-labor intensive. This means that a relatively large scope of employed staff is engaged, especially in jobs that involve direct contact with service users.

This is imposed by the technology of performing work tasks. A service in the hotel industry is the result of activities between its providers and users, with the aim to meet the needs of users (Kosar, 2015). What the user perception of the service quality will be depends largely on the quality of relationships with employees. Therefore, levels of education, expertise and awareness of the importance of one's own work for the service quality in the perception of consumers are of utmost importance.

Contemporary personnel trends in the hotel industry are setting innovative organizational and personnel models, where the educational and professional structures of employees are brought into focus. It is believed that, even for the simplest tasks, the required minimum education level is three or four years of schooling. These are typical hotel industry professions such as doormen, baggage porters, maids. Therefore, all these jobs require direct contact with guests.

The criteria for hotel industry employment are becoming increasingly higher, not only when it comes to the level of education. Specific requirements are set in terms of general knowledge and information, and communication skills, both with guests and with business partners. It is believed that general knowledge, information and communication skills are proportionate to the level of vocational education. For this reason, the educational structure of employees is considered to be one of the key factors of service quality in the hotel industry.

The tabular presentation that follows shows to what extent the educational structure of employees in the hotel industry of Serbia is expressed as a factor of previous development.

Table 2: The employees in Serbia by the level of education –structure in %
 (March 2017 state)

Total	Total	1*	2*	3*	4*	5*	6*	7*	8*
	100.00	26.50	7.50	36.20	4.40	3.70	11.70	3.60	6.40
Agriculture, forestry and fishing	100.00	13.40	3.00	32.00	6.90	3.90	20.80	5.70	14.30
Mining	100.00	10.00	3.00	27.10	0.80	18.70	29.90	5.50	5.10
Manufacturing industry	100.00	9.70	4.40	39.70	6.90	3.60	19.30	6.10	10.40
Electricity, gas and steam supply	100.00	20.60	7.80	35.70	0.30	12.80	19.10	1.40	2.30
Water supply and waste water management	100.00	10.90	5.40	32.30	5.80	3.60	19.60	5.50	16.70
Construction	100.00	14.40	5.00	31.70	4.10	4.10	24.70	6.20	9.60
Wholesale and retail trade; repair of motor vehicles	100.00	13.20	5.30	56.90	5.20	1.60	13.50	1.90	2.40
Transportation and storage	100.00	14.10	4.90	42.30	3.50	14.10	15.50	2.80	2.80
Accommodation and food services	100.00	11.20	5.00	44.40	3.90	3.20	18.10	8.70	5.50
Information and communication	100.00	38.50	9.40	39.50	1.40	5.20	5.00	0.40	0.50
Financial and insurance activities	100.00	41.50	12.30	39.70	1.10	1.60	2.00	0.10	1.60
Real estate activities	100.00	27.00	8.90	40.30	6.20	1.20	9.70	0.30	6.40
Scientific expertise, information and technology industry	100.00	49.20	5.50	33.10	1.30	1.20	4.30	0.80	4.60
Administrative and support service activities	100.00	10.60	4.20	46.90	9.60	7.30	8.40	2.60	10.40

Public administration and compulsory social security	100.00	45.80	9.70	35.90	2.00	0.50	3.50	0.80	1.90
Education	100.00	69.40	9.10	6.40	4.90	0.80	1.70	1.00	6.70
Health care and social protection	100.00	23.00	14.50	43.30	2.70	1.10	5.10	5.40	4.80
Art, entertainment and recreation	100.00	28.50	6.80	48.00	2.80	1.50	6.30	2.40	3.60
Other service activities	100.00	27.00	6.50	31.70	2.30	1.00	18.10	2.20	11.20

Source: [Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, Statement No. 188, 2017, p.10](#)

*1 – University diploma, 2 – College diploma, 3 – Secondary school diploma, 4 – At least a primary school diploma, 5 – Highly-qualified worker, 6 – Qualified worker, 7 – Semi-qualified worker, 8 – Unqualified worker

The hotel industry in Serbia, partly due to the basic features of the work process technology, and partly due to a number of other factors, primarily of socio-economic nature (inadequate treatment in the context of global economic development policy), is characterized by a qualification structure that has a relatively small proportion of the highly educated. The same applies to employees who have completed college education. At the same time, accommodation and food services are characterized by the highest proportion of semi-skilled workers. If we add the employees with lower levels of education and unqualified employees to this, we obtain a share of 18.10%. Therefore, nearly 1/5 of the employees in the hotel industry sector are composed of insufficiently qualified workforce. Furthermore, according to 2011 data, there was only 5.3% of employees with university education in the total scope of employment in the hotel industry, which was also the lowest share, compared to both the Serbian average and to other industries. At the same time, there was a total of 17.6% of employees with lower levels of education and unqualified employees. If we add the semi-skilled personnel to this, then nearly 1/4 of the employees were insufficiently qualified ([Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, 2011](#)). Therefore, over a period of 6 years, there has been a visible improvement of the qualification structure of employees in the hotel industry of Serbia. This is a result of prominent strategic orientations for the development of tourism in Serbia, which is accompanied by positive changes in the structure of the accommodation offer. In 2012, Serbia had about 46,020 rooms in accommodation facilities, and 46,362 rooms in 2016, representing an increase by only 0.74% ([Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, 2017a](#)). However, there was a noticeable increase in the hotel capacity, represented by the number of rooms. Thus, in 2012, Serbia had 15,348 rooms in hotels ([Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, 2013](#)), and in 2016, the hotel capacity was 16,489 rooms, which was an increase by 7.43% ([Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, 2017b](#)). The share of nights spent in hotels in 2016 amounted to 47.71% of the total number of overnight stays in Serbia, and even 67.67% of overnight stays of foreign tourists. This confirms the fact that hotels are representative accommodation facilities and that market profiling of the accommodation offer in Serbia is moving in the direction of quality improvement through an increased hotel offer, which is particularly important, since the orientation towards the hotel accommodation is very high among foreign tourists, the number of whom shows an upward trend. The total number of overnight stays in 2017 increased by 10.5% compared to 2016. The number of overnight stays of domestic tourists in 2017 was increased by 7.4%, while the number of overnight stays of foreign tourists increased by as much as 15.9%, compared to the previous year. Compared to the first two months of 2017, the total number of overnight stays in the period January-February 2018 increased by 12.7%, and the number of overnight stays of domestic tourists increased by 9.9%, while the number of overnight stays of foreign tourists increased by as much as 18.0% ([Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, 2018a](#)).

Today, the contemporary hotel industry cannot be imagined without the use of high technology, which includes cooperation with online travel agencies - OTAs, attractive websites, and presence on social networks. This applies, above all, to small independent hotels that operate outside megabrands, because this is the only way for them to stay on the market (Maksimović et al., 2017). Also, the contemporary hotel industry is increasingly insisting on environmental sustainability, i.e. a rational use of resources and the orientation towards environmental protection (Miličević et al., 2017). In order to keep up with the competition, Serbia has to follow modern trends in the hotel industry development. This implies adequate investments in intellectual capital, in other words, in human resources and their specific knowledge and skills.

The basic prerequisite for activities to increase the intellectual capital of hotel companies is formal education, whose initial stage consists of secondary schools for tourism and hotel management. Serbia has a widespread network of secondary, vocational schools of this type, which is a solid starting point for further education and training in this profession (Kosar, 2016).

However, the hotel industry is still lagging behind the national average, as well as behind other activities, as is evident, despite the improvement of the employee qualification structure. The causes of this are still slow changes in the inherited adverse state. Reforming the education system, in accordance with modern global trends, however, has already begun to yield results, and should contribute to further positive changes in this area, primarily in terms of reducing the share of under-qualified personnel. In this context, it is very important to insist on the education of employees, primarily on obtaining adequate qualifications. Mastering knowledge and skills, formally verified by the completion of appropriate secondary schools, college and university programs, will significantly contribute to changing the current unfavorable qualification structure of employees in the hotel industry of Serbia. However, it is necessary to develop constantly the existing skills, i.e. to obtain additional specializations that do not affect the change in the qualification structure, but contribute significantly to the acquisition of new knowledge and its application in business.

5. Salaries of employees in the hotel industry in Serbia

Working in the tourism and hotel industries is a serious and professional job that requires educated people. Competent personnel, with their knowledge and expertise, confirm the importance of the human factor for the service quality and tourist satisfaction. The fact is that, as already pointed out, satisfied employees make the guests satisfied. In this context, the question of motivation of employees in the hotel industry of Serbia is raised. This issue is directly related to salaries.

Table 3: Average salaries per employee in the hotel industry of Serbia (in RSD)

Month and year	Total	Base index	Accommodation and food services	Base index
September 2015	63,974	100	46,503	100
September 2016	67,871	106.09	50,009	107.54
March 2017	70,126	109.62	53,632	115.33

Source: [Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, Statements: No. 9 - year LXVI, 15 Jan 2016, No. 8 - year LXVII, 16 Jan 2017, No. 188 - year LXVII, 14 July 2017](#)

The subject of this paper is not discussing the methodology of average salary calculation, nor is explaining traditionally low salaries in the hotel industry of Serbia, in the context of the specificities of the work that involves being in direct contact with guests, which often brings tips. The existence of tips leads to the assumption that the salaries of employees in the hotel

industry are, in reality, considerably higher than the amounts presented in statistical publications. However, by no means does this justify the fact that they are, in fact, among the lowest in the country. Low salaries adversely affect the quality of service delivery and communication with guests. They have resulted in a high level of employee turnover. However, as shown by the data in Table 3, the salaries of employees in the hotel industry are increasing at a faster rate than the Serbian average. This is a positive trend that gives grounds for an optimistic view of the future development. The future development implies creating a favorable business climate in hotel industry organizations that is initiated by higher salaries, which results in reducing employee turnover, increasing work motivation and employee loyalty.

6. Conclusion

Serbia is on the path of rapid economic development, in which tourism and the hotel industry have a special place. In recent years, there have been positive indicators in the field of tourist traffic growth, especially the number of foreign tourists and their overnight stays. It is inevitable that the accommodation sector, as the material basis of tourism, follows these trends by restructuring the existing offer and adapts to the needs of primarily foreign tourists. This implies hotels, which, as facilities that provide complex services, engage the appropriate scope and structure of employees.

Until recently, human resources in the hotel industry of Serbia represented the key limiting factor for development. A small number of employees and an inadequate educational structure, with a high proportion of underqualified employees, were slowing down the modernization of the hotel industry, both in technological and in organizational and personnel terms. This was reflected in the underexpressed awareness of the importance of the human factor for the quality of hotel services. Low salaries have an adverse effect on the motivation of employees and increase the degree of turnover. This leads ultimately to inconsistencies in the quality of hotel services, and adversely affects customer loyalty.

However, as shown in this paper, positive shifts in improving human resources in the hotel industry of Serbia are evident. The number of employees is growing, the qualification structure is visibly improved, and the salaries are increasing at a faster rate than the country average. The above-mentioned positive changes are in line with the rapid development of tourism in this region. A further improvement of human resources in the hotel industry of Serbia should be guided by global trends, in order to, in the nature of intellectual capital, encourage the further improvement of the quality of the hotel industry at the level of Serbia as a tourist destination.

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