

## **EDUCATION AND TRAINING OF HUMAN RESOURCES IN THE GREEK TOURISM INDUSTRY: A CASE STUDY**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Living in the era of globalization, where competitiveness is imperative and essential for the success of tourism businesses, training and development of human resources are an integral part of the growth and success of the tourism sector. Consequently, trained human capital is essential for the development of any tourism business, while it is part of the assets of any business. The aim of this article is to explore the views of employers and employees in the Greek tourism industry regarding the necessity and contribution of education and training of human resources. To this end, a survey was conducted among employers and employees in hotels, food service and travel agency sector in Greece. The main findings show that both tourism employers and employees recognize the necessity and contribution of education and training at both individual and company level, while some variations were found between the three types of the participating sectors. However, there are tourism businesses that do not support lifelong education and training of their employees, mainly due to the costs involved. Therefore, education and training of human resources of the tourism industry in Greece should meet the needs of the sector, taking into account the broad range of activities and its different educational needs. Moreover, tourism education and training curricula need to be revised and adapted, both in terms of the knowledge and skills as well as the specialization they provide, considering the requirements of all tourism sectors, so that graduates are properly educated and trained to support the tourism industry and contribute to its overall development.

**Keywords:** tourism education and training, employers, employees, hospitality, travel agencies, food service

## **Introduction**

Human resources of tourism enterprises are the leading actors of the tourism experience through the provision of quality services, such as excellent customer service, communication, courtesy, and effective management and settlement of any problems that arise. These are key parameters which, among other things, shape the overall experience of tourists (Quan, & Wang, 2004; Zátori, 2016). In fact, human resources constitute the human capital of an enterprise, which is a stock of skills, knowledge and personality traits embodied in the ability to perform a job. This means that, there are characteristics that an employee acquires through training and experiences to produce economic value (Airey, & Tribe, 2005). Human capital is therefore an investment that hospitality and tourism can use to create a unique sustainable competitive advantage. Thus, it enhances the quality of production and product/service provision in tourism industry organizations. Human capital is therefore an investment element that hospitality and tourism can leverage to create a distinctive sustainable competitive advantage. Thus, it contributes to the quality of production and services in tourism industry (Elsharnouby, & Elbanna, 2021).

Considering the aforementioned issues, it seems that the necessity of education and training in the Greek tourism industry has not yet been explored on a large scale and in combination by both employees and employers. To this end, the purpose of this article is to explore tourism employers' and employees' perspectives on the necessity and contribution of education and training of human resources in tourism in the hospitality, food service and tourism agency sector. Specifically, based on the tourism employers' and employees' views this research addresses the following objectives:

1. Investigates the degree of necessity and the way lifelong education and training contribute to the development of enterprises in the constantly evolving tourism industry.
2. Examines the extent and the way in which tourism enterprises support the lifelong education and training of their staff.
3. Explores the contribution of lifelong education and training to the improvement of employees' professional skills.

For the aforementioned research questions, it was also investigated whether there is a differentiation in the responses across the three business types surveyed.

## **Literature Review**

### **Necessity and contribution of lifelong education and training**

Numerous research studies have been carried out on issues concerning the content of tourism education, its relationship with the labor market, as well as the views of the educational community and the tourism industry. Tribe (2002) in a literature review for the period 1974-2001 identified 302 articles on topics related to tourism education, which were categorized into 47 different subject areas, creating a total of 16 categories and subcategories. The category that attracted the largest number of articles (86%) was related to tourism curricula, while the remaining categories, with much smaller numbers of articles, were about progression and performance, quality management, teaching and assessment, and learning resources.

More recently, Hsu et al. (2017) researched tourism education during the period 2005-2014 by analysing the content of 644 related articles. Based on this research, they provided a detailed classification of the topics researched, into five groups and thirty subgroups, in which the most popular topic area, was teaching and learning, followed by curriculum and training programs in tourism. Furthermore, Qian et al. (2019) in another literature review conducted for the period 2008-2017, identified 77 articles about tourism education published in a specific journal, which they classified into three categories based on the theoretical framework, research methodology and the topics employed. They found that most of these articles lacked a theoretical background but identified an increasing trend by researchers in the second half of the decade to adopt theories from other disciplines to explore issues in tourism education and training. Furthermore, they reported that quantitative studies prevailed throughout the period, while in terms of topics to be investigated, these focused on teaching and learning methods, learning motivation and course evaluation.

Biagi et al. (2017) in a study involving 63 countries analysed the relationship between human development and tourism specialization and found a positive relationship between tourism and human development, with a particular focus on education. Another study suggested a framework for the effective collaboration between key stakeholders (tourism industry and educational institutions) for tourism education and training (Anderson, & Sanga, 2019).

Furthermore, Diplari and Dimou (2010) conducted a survey of tourism graduates and representatives of the tourism industry (departmental and Human Resource managers) to investigate the reform of tourism education in Greece. According to this survey, the level of tourism education in Greece is considered satisfactory, however, the need to enrich tourism education curricula with elements of practical application of knowledge (such as restructuring curricula with an emphasis on applied knowledge and increasing the duration of practical training in enterprises during the studies) is highlighted. In addition, the need for cooperation between educational institutions and public and private sector tourism bodies, such as tourism businesses, tourism associations, workers' unions, and national and local tourism organizations, is stressed, with the objective of enriching curricula and providing tourism expertise in line with

the needs of the tourism industry. Also, Stergiou & Airey (2017) in another survey conducted among tourism managers of different industries investigated tourism education in Greece and the expectations that managers had of tourism graduates and their views on them. This research revealed that there is a need to bridge the gap that exists between tourism education curricula and the needs of the industry, something to which tourism industry professionals seemed willing to contribute.

### **Support of education and training by tourism enterprises**

However, while the role of tourism education is vital for the development of the tourism sector and society in general (Baum, 2007:1383; Lewis, 2005:5), sometimes it does not seem to receive the attention it deserves. For example, according to a study conducted in the Maldives, it was found that formal tourism education is not a priority for employers' staff selection, while the personality and talent of candidate employees are a priority (Shakeela et al. 2012:39-41). Another study in Australia identified significant differences in priorities regarding tourism education between tourism industry professionals and tourism education stakeholders pointing to the need for constructive collaboration between these two parties (Wang et al., 2010:10-13). From a different perspective, a survey in Australia explored employers' views on the skills and attributes that are both cultivated and developed during tourism studies and necessary for employees in the tourism industry and found that these are not the same. Furthermore, it emphasized the need to converge these - the needs of the tourism industry and the tourism education provided - for tourism education to adequately equip future tourism industry employees (Wang et al., 2009:65-69). Furthermore, Kršák et al. (2014) explored the need for additional training of tourism employees in order to improve the quality of the services they provide to their customers. According to this study, employers were willing to organize training programs for their employees, while there was a need for training on specific subjects such as foreign languages, marketing, finance, and tourism services.

### **Contribution of lifelong education and training to the improvement of human resource professional skills**

Tourism education and training is a prerequisite for those employed in the tourism sector to increase their productivity and gain a competitive advantage over other or future employees. In fact, when tourism education and training programmes are properly designed, they lead to the upgrading and development of human capital. Specifically, through these programmes, human resources are enhanced in terms of their ability to learn, to cope with and solve problems, to communicate, to integrate and to adapt to modern and constantly changing patterns of production and service organization, thereby increasing their productivity and initiative (Athanasiou, 2004:14). Lifelong learning is also essential to maintain the skills of tourism employees needed

to improve the quality of processes and customer satisfaction on a continuous basis, and it involves training to gain technical skills, as well as the acquisition of knowledge in the field of quality, problem solving, interpersonal communication and other soft skills. Education and training have an overall positive effect on the profit of the company, changing the behaviour of employees and increasing their enthusiasm, reducing absenteeism and staff turnover, and thus contributing to the growth of the tourism sector (Milovanović, 2017).

However, Christou (1999) explored higher education in hospitality through the views of a small number of graduates of tourism and hospitality schools in Greece. According to this research, it seems that graduates of these schools do not consider themselves to be adequately prepared to meet the demands of the tourism industry, and therefore the needs of the tourism industry for appropriately trained personnel are not met. Moira et al. (2004) carried out a survey/case study of 32 graduates of a Tourism Business department to assess their working status (first graduates of this department). According to this study, a degree in tourism does not guarantee the holders' employment in the tourism industry, as it was found that only 1/3 of the respondents were employed in tourism and even with salaries similar to those of non-graduate employees. Moreover, respondents consider that family network, knowledge of foreign languages and computer skills are more important than the degree itself when starting to work in the tourism industry. From another perspective, Christou & Chatzigeorgiou (2019) investigated the organization of an internship in an undergraduate program in tourism and hospitality management to evaluate its outcome through students who completed their internship. This research revealed that students recognise the benefits of participating in internship programmes, while at the same time they highlight the opportunity to learn about the variety of career options that are available to them in the different sectors of the tourism industry.

### **Tourism education: Past and present**

Tourism education is a subsystem of tourism, and it consists of study, teaching and other human interactions while it endeavors to keep, develop, enhance, and transfer tourism knowledge in society (Munar, 2007). Tourism has been studied in its earliest stage in higher education about 80 years ago but in its contemporary form as a distinct area of study, tourism education first appeared about 50 years ago (Airey, 2016). In fact, it emerged as a development of technical/vocational schools in Europe, where the focus was set on training in core competencies, such as hospitality, hotel management and related business skills (Inui et al., 2006) while - as the tourism activity evolved - it found its position as an undergraduate discipline and a research field as well (Fidgeon, 2010). It is worth noting that the development of tourism higher education was not an easy procedure. Initially, tourism degrees were not as acknowledged as the ones from known disciplines (such as business management). Another uncertainty was related to the origin of the scholarship as there were only few books, a journal

devoted to tourism, and only two international organizations and research associations. Hence, as the background was limited and poor, the knowledge had to come outside academia since there was no traditional literature, while scholars, to overcome the obstacles occurred, had to borrow from other scientific areas, notably economics (Airey, 2005).

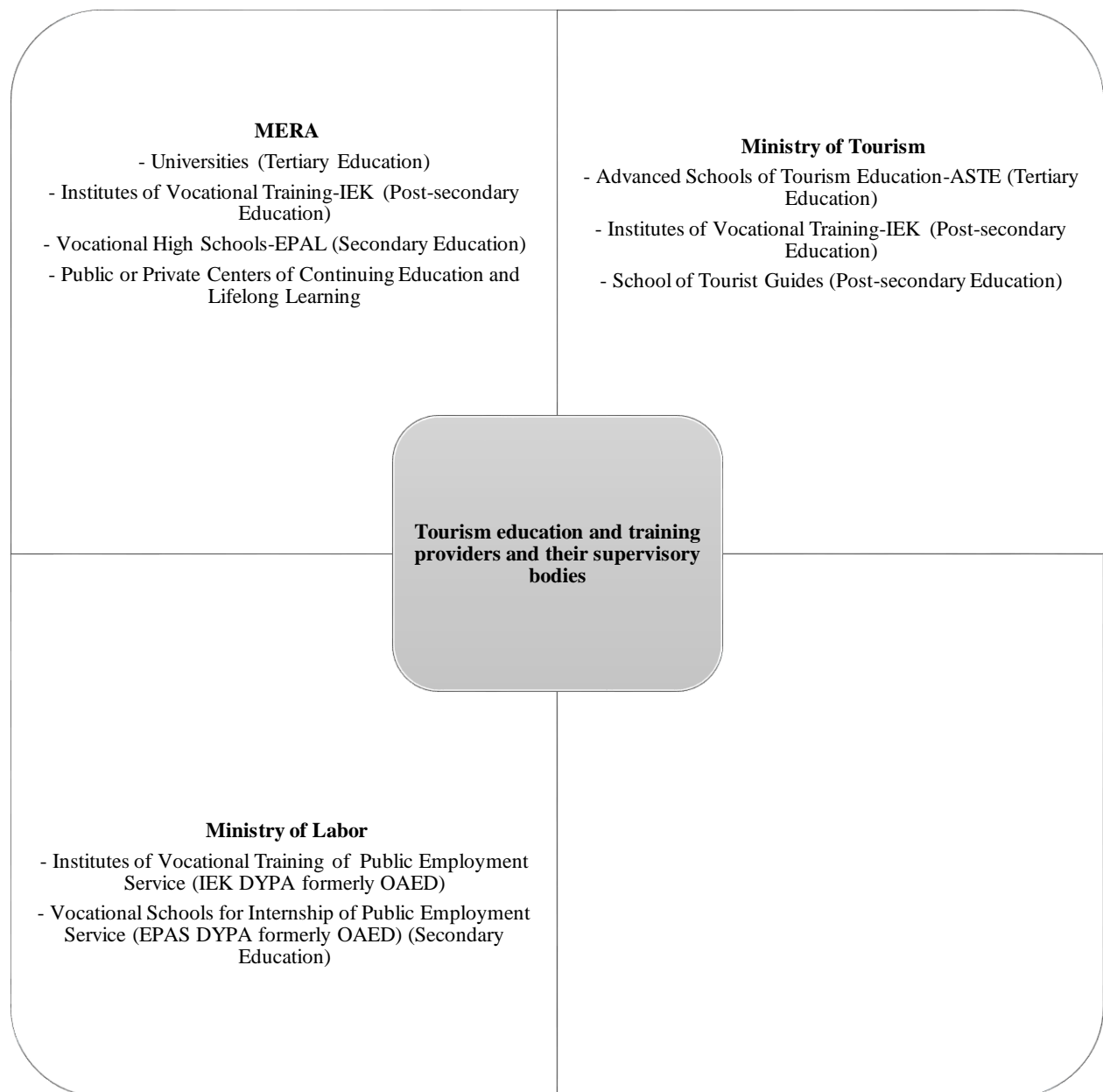
Nevertheless, it was from the early 1990s when tourism was acknowledged on a global level as a subject of serious academic endeavor, as this period was established a growth in the provision of tourism programs at all educational levels accompanied with remarkable development in knowledge and understanding of tourism that was manifested mostly through the great progression of tourism literature (Sharpley, 2011). Nowadays, tourism education and training has attained increasing momentum as it is indicated by the quantity and variety of educational and training programs which are available at various levels, since the socio-economic importance of the tourism industry is recognized by the policy stakeholders, such as governments, and public and private institutions as well. Thus, it is generally accepted that the provision of quality service in tourism industry – and in all sectors as well – is attained through professional and well-trained human resources (Mayaka, & Akama, 2007). However, still it seems that different viewpoints about the curricula development and training approaches within the tourism educational society exist (Amoah, & Baum, 1997; Koh, 1994; Morgan, 2004).

In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic situation influenced the education system and forced every part of it to adapt to the new educational procedures evolved (UNESCO, 2020; United Nations, 2020). To this end, distance learning has thrived and offers the opportunity for employees, potential employees, or students to benefit from it regardless of geographical and time constraints. At the same time, enterprises can now overcome objective barriers (e.g., geographical and/or time constraints) and exploit this opportunity for the development of their human resources. However, educational institutions are also in the process of redesigning the training programmes they offer, and the ways in which they are delivered, to provide modern training programmes and respond to emerging new needs (Kalbaska, & Cantoni, 2022).

### **Tourism Education and training in Greece**

Tourism education and training in Greece concern all levels of education, after compulsory education and is provided by public and private institutions. In particular, the bodies providing tourism education and training in Greece are supervised by the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs (MERA), the Ministry of Tourism, and the Ministry of Labor. The providers of tourism education and training and the bodies supervising them are illustrated in Figure 1.

**Figure 1: Tourism education and training providers in Greece and their supervisory bodies**



As regards the specializations provided, at secondary and post-secondary level, these relate to middle management positions, while the specializations at tertiary level of education relate to senior and top-level management positions. Figure 2 shows the tourism specializations provided by level of education.

**Figure 2: Tourism specializations provided by level of education**



Based on the above, it seems there are several options in Greece for those interested in studying tourism at any level after compulsory education. In addition, there is a link between secondary, post-secondary and tertiary education, subject to conditions. Therefore, graduates have the opportunity to continue their studies at a higher level of education, either through the national examinations for higher education, or through specific criteria and qualifying examinations.



In the context of vocational education and training, Apprenticeship provides the opportunity for all graduates of secondary and post-secondary National Vocational Education and Training Schools, to be trained and work (paid) in public or private sector workplaces, relevant to their specialization, to gain professional experience.

Considering the aforementioned issues, it seems that the tourism education and training system in Greece is a multi-level structure with the individual levels that constitute it being in constant change. On the one hand, in Secondary Vocational Education there is a continuous effort of improvement, which affects each time its structure and operation, so that the specializations offered are affected in turn and sometimes change, creating a vague and volatile situation. Moreover, entrenched prejudices in Greek society about secondary vocational education discourage students from continuing their studies in it. These conditions often prevent young people from choosing VET, which also affect the specializations offered in the tourism professions (Gousiou, 2021:182; Gousiou, & Lagos, 2021; Gousiou, & Lagos, 2018).

On the other hand, in higher education, there is a plethora of tourism departments offering a variety of opportunities for those interested in studying tourism. However, in addition to the existence of departments, social prejudices need to be overcome due to the nature of tourism professions, which are related to the perception that employment in tourism is temporary and unattractive for those who wish to have a stable career with opportunities for growth and high earnings (Moira et al., 2019).

### **Research methodology**

An empirical study was conducted in Greece between June 2020 and October 2020 to explore the views of employers and employees on human resources education and training in the tourism industry. The research questions focus on the necessity and contribution of human resource education and training in the tourism industry and the possible differentiation in the three participating types of businesses.

### **Participants**

The population under investigation consisted of employers and employees in hotels, food service companies and travel agencies who were accessed through the representatives of their professional associations and unions, as there was no direct access to their contact details due to privacy issues. In particular, the representatives were asked to forward the questionnaires to members of their associations and unions. The total population size could not be estimated, as it was not possible to know whether the associations and unions that received the questionnaires forwarded them to all their members and how many of their members were active, since the study was conducted during the first COVID-lockdown. Overall, the sample of the study

consisted of 457 employers and 455 employees of the tourism industry who answered the corresponding questionnaires.

### **Research tool**

For the development of the two questionnaires used, the methodology of Sellitz, Wrightsman & Cook (Sellitz et al., 1976, as cited in Cohen et al., 2007:318- 320), as well as the studies of Spivack (1997), Ventouratou (2006), and Petrova (2008), which are related to the broader scope of the present research, were taken into account.

Specifically, the questionnaires used were divided into thematic sections, each with a specific title, while in terms of the type of questions, closed-ended questions were used, i.e., multiple choice, dichotomous, and Likert scale. The questionnaires were also accompanied by an information note explaining the context and purpose of the survey in which the participants were invited to take part.

### **Analysis**

In terms of methodological context, the study was based on quantitative research (Cohen et al., 2007). As regards the statistical analysis conducted, data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical analysis to investigate participants' views about education and training, and whether the participants' responses are influenced by the type of business in which they are employed. To this end, the relationship between the variables under investigation, an independent variable and a dependent one, was tested. In the inferential statistical analysis, first, a normality test of the set of values was carried out using the Shapiro-Wilk criterion, to determine whether the values of these variables follow a normal or not distribution, so that the corresponding parametric or non-parametric statistical criterion could be used. Taking into account the fact that the values do not follow normal distribution, the Kruskal-Wallis H test was next used, to explore whether there were statistically significant differences between the variables under investigation. Where a statistically significant difference was found, the Dwass-Steel-Critchlow-Fligner (DSCF) pairwise comparison test was used to determine between which types of business there were statistically significant differences. For the statistical analysis of the research data was used the free and open-source statistical software Jamovi v.2.3.18.

### **Findings of the research**

The demographic characteristics of the participants of the study are illustrated in Table 1. It is apparent that the distribution across the three different business types was almost equal for both employers and employees.

**Table 1. Demographic characteristics of participants**

Employers				Employees			
n=457	Male (75.3%) Female (24.7%)	Age: between 41-60 (71.5%)		n=455	Male (52.3%) Female (47.7%)	Age: between 26-45 (71.2%)	
<b>Business type:</b>	<b>Administrative</b>	<b>region:</b>		<b>Business type:</b>	<b>Administrative</b>	<b>region:</b>	
Hotel (34.1%)	Attica	(17.2%)		Hotel (33.41%)	Attica	(22.64%)	
Food Service (33%)	Crete	(14.22%)		Food Service (32.75%)	Crete	(14.29%)	
Travel Agency (32.8%)	South Aegean	(13.79%)		Travel Agency (33.85%)	South Aegean	(12.31%)	
	Ionian Islands	(9.85%)			Central Macedonia	(8.13%)	
	Central Macedonia	(8.53%)			Ionian Islands	(7.25%)	
	Peloponnese	(7.66%)			Epirus	(6.59%)	
	Thessaly	(5.69%)			West Greece	(6.15%)	
	West Greece	(5.03%)			Thessaly	(5.93%)	
					Peloponnese	(5.05%)	
<b>Operation Period of Business:</b>	<b>Number of employees of the business:</b>			<b>Operation Period of Business:</b>	<b>Education level:</b>		
All year (74%)	11-20	(30%)		All year (76.9%)	Post-secondary	(33.20%)	
Season (26%)	Up to 5	(21%)		Season (23.1%)	Secondary	(29.70%)	
	5-10	(20.1%)			Bachelor	(27%)	
	31 or more	(15.8%)					
	21-30	(13.1%)					

The employers' and employees' answers are presented next. For each of them, first a descriptive statistical analysis is performed and then an inferential one. The descriptive statistical analysis presents the frequencies of the responses in order to capture the employers' and employees' views on the necessity, support, and benefits of lifelong education and training of human resources in the tourism industry. Conclusions concerning the differences in participants' choices depending on the type of business are drawn based on the results of the inferential statistics.

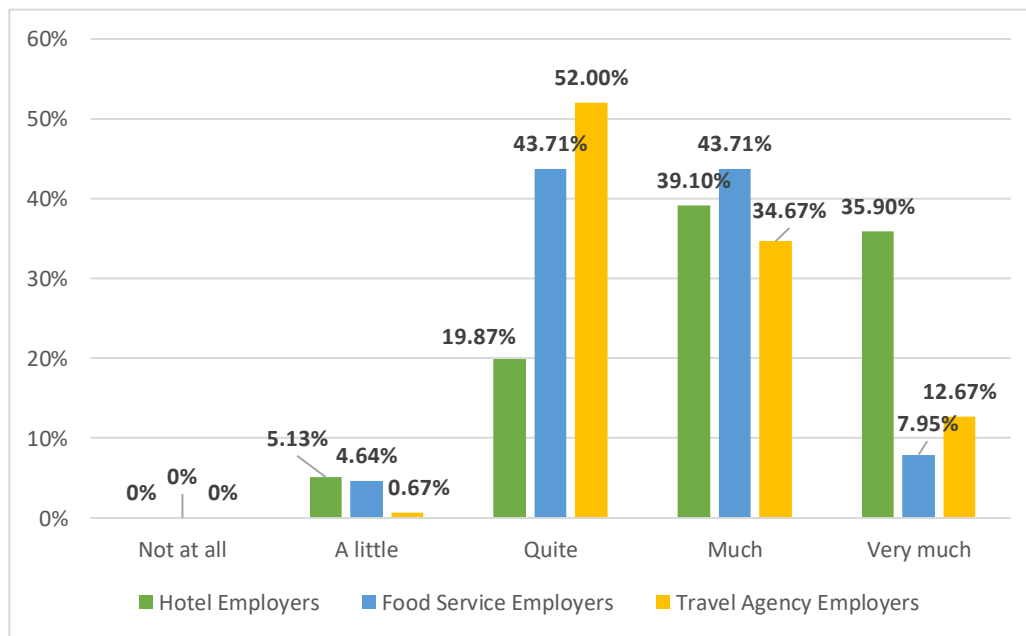
### Employers' views

#### *Descriptive statistical analysis*

Regarding the employers' views, the extent to which lifelong education and training of human resources is necessary for them to meet the ever-changing needs and requirements of the tourism industry was initially explored. The responses of the participants show that overall, employers recognize the necessity of education and training (Mean=3.74, S.D.=0.804). Specifically, most employers consider lifelong education and training of human resources to be "very" necessary (39.20%), "quite" necessary (38.30%) or "very much" necessary (19%). It is worth noting that very few employers consider it "a little" necessary (3.50%), while none of them consider it "not at all" necessary. The breakdown of the above-mentioned options for each type of business is

presented in Figure 3, which shows that hotel employers are the ones who most recognize the necessity of lifelong education and training of their employees (Mean=4.06. S.D.=0.874), while employers of the other two types of business are not that positive (food service employers: Mean=3.55, S.D.=0.709, and travel agency employers: Mean=3.59, S.D.=0.715).

**Figure 3: Necessity of lifelong education and training for each business type**



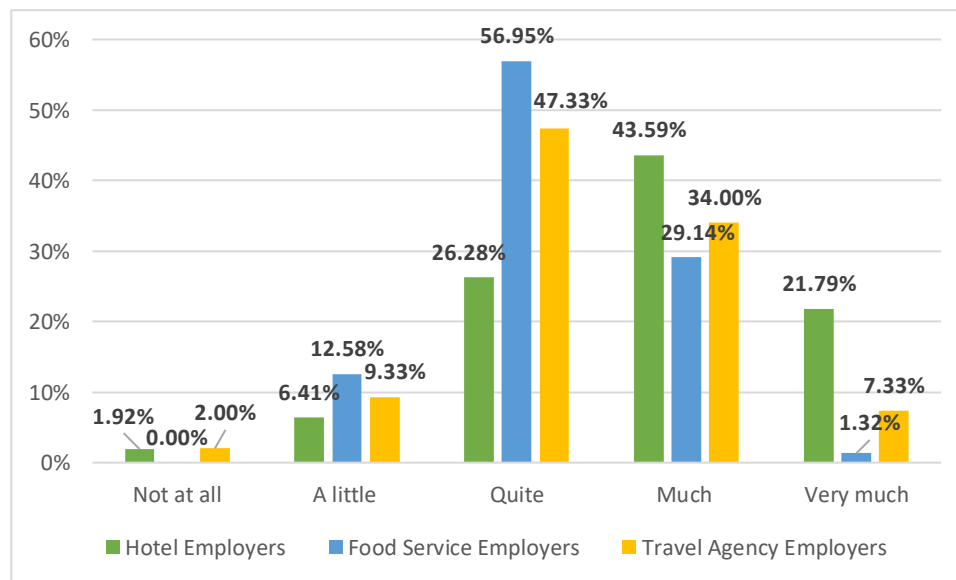
Next, the reasons for which tourism industry considers lifelong education and training to be necessary were explored. According to the analysis, the emergence of new requirements and needs of the customers/tourists is the main reason for the majority (92.30%) of the sample employers, followed by the technological developments that arise (57.80%) and the possible existence of emergency situations (e.g., pandemic) and/or natural disasters (55.60%), while the redesign of the company's operations was chosen by one third (31.30%) of the participants. Only 1% of the sampled employers mentioned other reasons, including creating a professional mindset, human resource support, and global trends. Finally, it is worth noting that only 2.20% of the sample employers consider that lifelong education and training is not necessary.

In addition, the benefits the employers consider that will occur to the company due to education and training of the human resources they employ were investigated. Most employers consider that lifelong education and training contributes mainly to providing quality services to the company's customers (85.12%) and to improving the company's image (71.12%). In addition, many of them consider that it contributes to the increase of labor productivity (48.58%) and to improving the profitability of the business (47.92%), while a very small percentage of employers

(0.66%) selected the “other” option, in which they mentioned the mobility of human resources, their satisfaction, as well as the improvement of the image of the country.

Next, it was explored the extent to which employers consider that tourism education and training has contributed to the effective operation of their business. The responses of the participants show that overall employers acknowledge the contribution of tourism education and training (Mean=3.44, S.D.=0.849). Most of the employers (43.3%) reported that tourism education and training has contributed “quite a lot” to the effective operation of their business. In addition, many of them said that it contributes “much” (35.7%) and “very much” (10.3%), while far fewer reported that it has “a little” (9.4%) or no contribution at all (1.3%). The analysis of the choices for each business type is shown in Figure 4, where it seems that hotel employers (Mean=3.77, S.D.=0.929) acknowledge most the contribution of tourism education and training of their employees to the effective operation of their business, while the other employers are relatively less positive (food service: Mean=3.19, S.D.=0.660, and travel agency: Mean=3.35, S.D.=0.828).

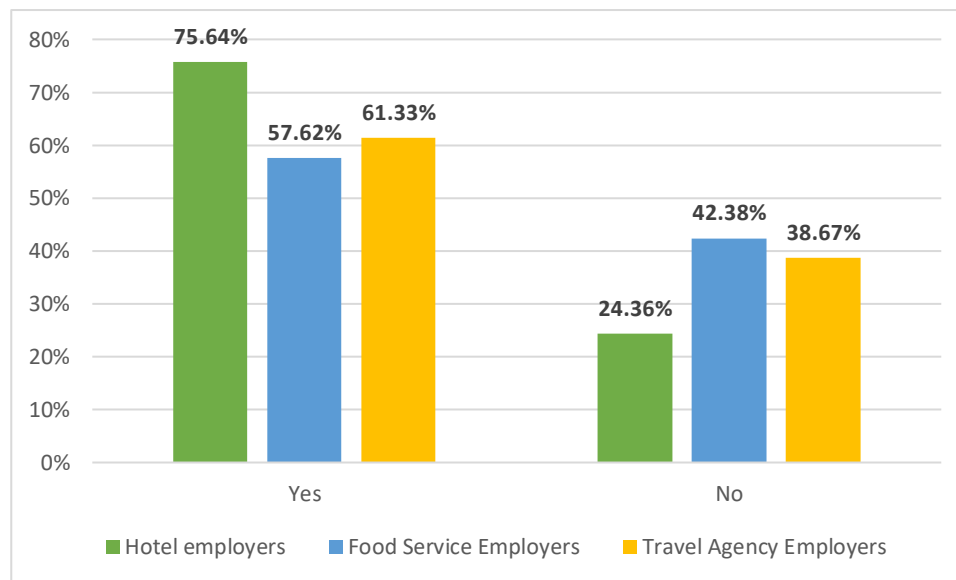
**Figure 4: The extent to which tourism education and training has contributed to the effective operation of tourism business for each business type**



It was then investigated whether the participating employers' companies support lifelong education and training of their employees. From the employers' responses it appears that most of them support lifelong education and training. Specifically, most of them (65%) said that their companies support lifelong education and training of their employees, while the rest (35%) gave a negative answer. The breakdown of these responses for each type of business is illustrated in

Figure 5, in which it is evident that hotel businesses are more supportive of lifelong education and training for their employees, while the other two sectors are more reluctant to do so.

**Figure 5: Support of employees' lifelong education and training for each business type**



As for the companies that support lifelong education and training of their employees, employers were further asked about the number of training programmes organized, the training methods used and the subjects in which their employees were trained. More specifically, in terms of the frequency of lifelong education and training programmes, it was found that most companies organize such programmes “every year” (60.27%), while the remaining organize “every two years” (21.21%), “every six months” (12.46%), and very few organize no education and training programmes at all (3.03%). Finally, a small percentage of employers (3.03%) chose the “other” option, in which they indicated various choices, such as that employees are trained every day in practice, or every five years, or every month, or whenever new needs arise, or depending on the situation and the time period.

Next, the training methods used by tourism businesses for the lifelong education and training of their human resources were explored. Most of them reported that they use “on-the-job training” (73.06%), many of them mentioned that they organize “in-company seminars” (45.45%), or “distance learning programmes” (30.98%), while “face-to-face training programmes provided outside the company” are used by fewer businesses (21.89%).

Regarding the subjects in which lifelong education and training programmes are provided by tourism enterprises, the most popular are “Customer Service” (84.12%) and “Health and Safety at work” (63.97%), followed by “Sales” (38.38%), “Specialized Tourism Business Application

Systems" (38.05%) and "ICT" (35.35%). Whereas Marketing (20.88%), Personal Data Protection (20.54%), Human Resource Management (14.14%), Specialized Financial Issues (7.74%), and Foreign Languages (6.73%) follow with smaller percentages.

Finally, it was investigated why tourism enterprises do not support lifelong education and training of their employees. The responses provided revealed that the most common reason was "the increased cost of training" (71.88%), followed by the fact that "the nature of the job does not allow it" (39.38%). In addition, a few employers stated that "it is not necessary" (5%) or "there is a lack of time" (2.50%).

### ***Inferential statistical analysis***

Within this section, it was explored whether the factor "type of business" influences the employers' views as regards the:

1. Contribution of tourism education and training to the effective operation of business (Variable 1: Mean=3.44, S.D.=0.849),
2. Necessity of lifelong education and training of human resources to meet the ever-changing needs and demands of the tourism industry (Variable 2: Mean 3.74, S.D.=0.804), and
3. Support of lifelong education and training of tourism business employees (Variable 3).

To statistically confirm the differentiations of the above between the participants of the three business types, it was investigated whether there were statistically significant differences between the participants' responses by type of business.

A normality test of the data distribution was performed using the Shapiro-Wilk statistical criterion, where it was found that the values of these variables (variable 1:  $W=0.877$ ,  $p<.001$ , variable 2:  $W=0.848$ ,  $p<.001$ , variable 3:  $W=0.603$ ,  $p<.001$ ) do not follow the normal distribution (given that  $p\text{-value}<0.05$ ) and therefore, a non-parametric test was performed.

By applying the non-parametric Kruskal-Wallis H test with a significance level of  $\alpha=0.05$  and  $df=2$ , it was found that there are statistically significant differences between the three business types (variable 1:  $\chi^2=42.2$ ,  $p\text{-value}<.001$ ; variable 2:  $\chi^2=39.7$ ,  $p\text{-value}<.001$ ; variable 3:  $\chi^2=12.2$ ,  $p\text{-value}=0.002$ ) (given that  $p\text{-value}<0.05$ ). Specifically, it seems that the employers' views on: (a) the contribution of tourism education and training to the effective operation of business, (b) the necessity of lifelong education and training of human resources, and (c) the support of lifelong education and training, differ, depending on the business type.

For each variable, it was then investigated between which type of businesses statistically significant differences were found, by conducting Dwass-Steel-Critchlow-Fligner (DSCF) pairwise comparisons (see Table 2).

**Table 2. DSCF Pairwise comparison for variables 1, 2 and 3 depending on the business type**

<b>Variable 1: Contribution of tourism education and training to the effective operation of the business</b>			
<b>Business Type</b>		<b>W</b>	<b>p</b>
Hotel Employers	Food Service Employers	-8.92	< .001
Hotel Employers	Travel Agency Employers	-6.18	< .001
Food Service Employers	Travel Agency Employers	2.76	0.125
<b>Variable 2: Necessity of lifelong education and training of human resources</b>			
<b>Business Type</b>		<b>W</b>	<b>p</b>
Hotel Employers	Food Service Employers	-7.873	< .001
Hotel Employers	Travel Agency Employers	-7.397	< .001
Food Service Employers	Travel Agency Employers	0.135	0.995
<b>Variable 3: Support of lifelong education and training for tourism business employees</b>			
<b>Business Type</b>		<b>W</b>	<b>p</b>
Hotel Employers	Food Service Employers	4.733	0.002
Hotel Employers	Travel Agency Employers	3.807	0.019
Food Service Employers	Travel Agency Employers	-0.927	0.789



The above tests showed that there is a statistically significant difference between the employers of hotels (Mean=3.77, S.D.=0.929) and the employers of the other two types of businesses (food service: Mean=3.19, S.D.=0.660, and travel agency: Mean=3.35, S.D.=0.828) regarding the acknowledgement of the contribution of tourism education and training to the effective operation of the business (variable 1) (since  $p\text{-value} < 0.05$ ).

Similarly, it seems that there is a statistically significant difference between the employers of hotels (Mean=4.06, S.D.=0.874) and the employers of the other two types of businesses (food service: Mean=3.55, S.D.=0.709 and travel agency: Mean=3.59, S.D.=0.715) regarding their perceptions on the necessity of lifelong education and training of human resources (variable2) (since  $p\text{-value} < 0.05$ ).

Accordingly, in terms of the support of lifelong education and training of employees (variable 3) for each type of business, it seems that there is a statistically significant difference between the employers of hotels (74.64% support lifelong education and training of employees) and the employers of the other two types of businesses (food service: 57.62% support lifelong education and training of employees and travel agency: 61.23% lifelong education and training of employees) (since  $p\text{-value} < 0.05$ ).

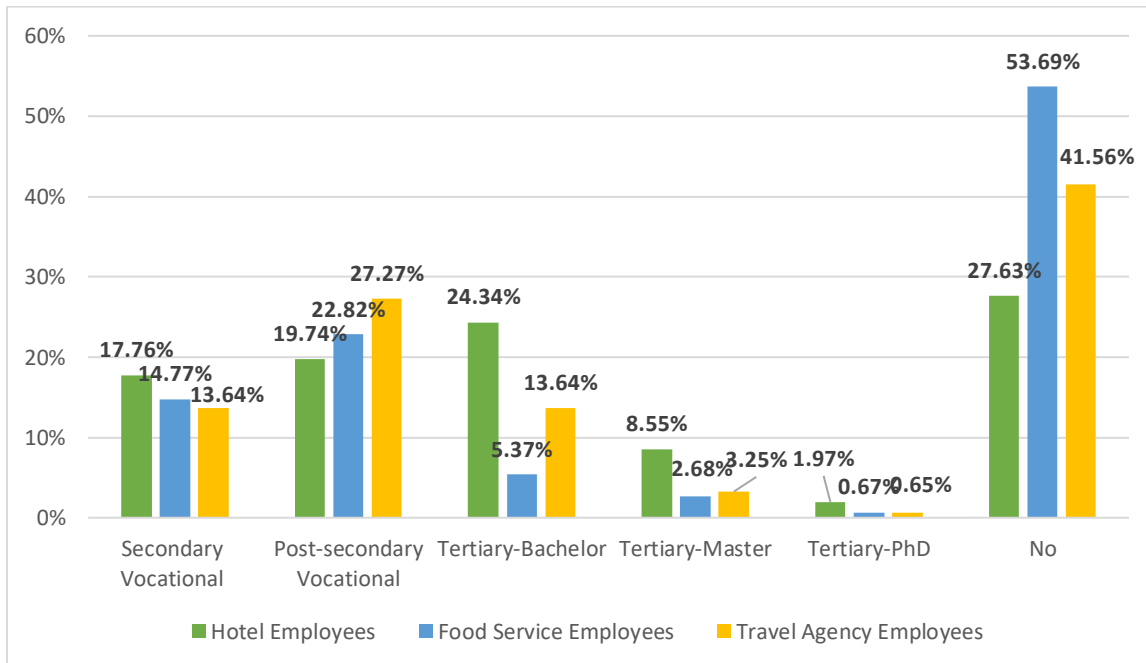
Based on the above, it seems that hotel employers adopt a more favorable attitude towards lifelong education and training than the food service and travel agency employers, since they acknowledge more the contribution it makes to the effective operation of tourism businesses, its necessity, while they support it more.

## **Employees' views**

### ***Descriptive statistical analysis***

As far as employees are concerned, the level of their specialization in tourism was initially explored. It was found that a significant percentage of employees (40.90%) have not studied tourism. As regards employees who have studied tourism, most of them are either graduates of secondary (15.40%) or post-secondary vocational (23.30%) education or hold a bachelor's degree in tourism (14.50%), while a very small percentage of employees hold postgraduate degrees in tourism (MSc: 4.80% and PhD: 1.1%). The distribution of employees in terms of their studies in tourism for each business type is illustrated in Figure 6.

**Figure 6: Employees' specialization in Tourism for each business type**

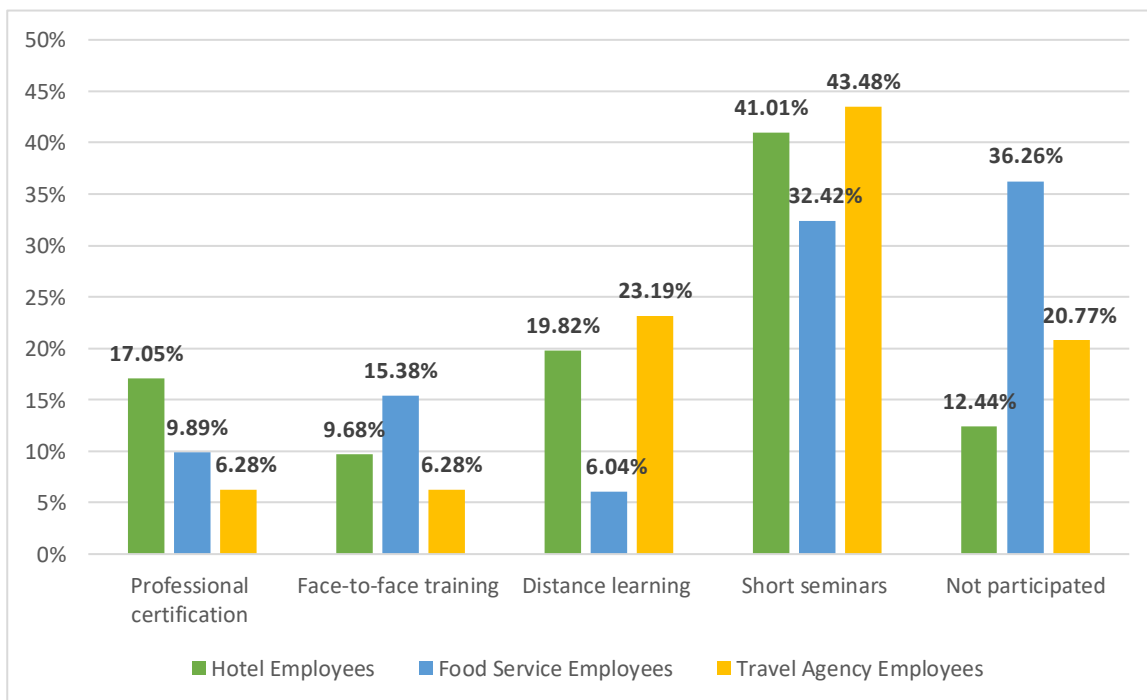


It seems that regarding the specialization in tourism of the participating hotel employees, the largest percentage of them are higher education graduates (24.34%), while a smaller percentage of them hold postgraduate degrees (MSc: 8.55% and PhD: 1.97%). Also, quite high percentages are vocational education graduates (17.76% for secondary and 19.74% for post-secondary vocational education, respectively). Finally, it appears that hotels employ the smallest share of employees (27.63%) without tourism specialization among the other two sectors. Food service sector, on the other hand, employs a very small percentage of university graduates (5.37%) and an even smaller percentage of postgraduates in tourism (MSc: 2.68% and PhD: 0.67%), while it employs a relatively high percentage of vocational education graduates (secondary: 14.77% and post-secondary: 22.82%, respectively). However, it is worth noting that food service enterprises employ the largest share (53.69%) of employees without tourism specialization. Similarly, as far as travel agencies are concerned, it appears that a very large proportion (41.56%) of their employees have no tourism specialization. However, a quite large percentage (27.27%) of employees with post-secondary studies in tourism are employed and, to a lesser extent, vocational secondary (13.64%) and tertiary (13.64%) education graduates in tourism. This sector also employs a very small percentage of postgraduate holders in tourism (MSc: 3.25% and PhD: 0.65%).

Next, the participation of employees in lifelong education and training programmes in tourism was investigated. Most sample employees (52.30%) reported that they have attended short

seminars on tourism-related topics, while several employees (22.60%) reported that they have participated in distance learning programmes in tourism. To a lesser extent, employees have attended professional certification programmes (14.90%) and face-to-face training programmes (13.80%) on tourism issues. Finally, about one third of the respondents (29.90%) said that they had not participated in lifelong education and training programmes in tourism. The analysis of these employee responses by business type is illustrated in Figure 7. It appears that the choices by business type are similar to the overall, however there are several differences as regards the type of educational programmes attended by employees. Specifically, hotel employees have attended the highest percentage of training programmes in tourism, while the highest percentage of employees who have not attended any such programme concerns employees in the food service sector. In any case, short tourism seminars are the most popular choice for all types of tourism businesses.

**Figure 7: Employees’ participation in lifelong education and training programmes in tourism-related subjects by type of business**



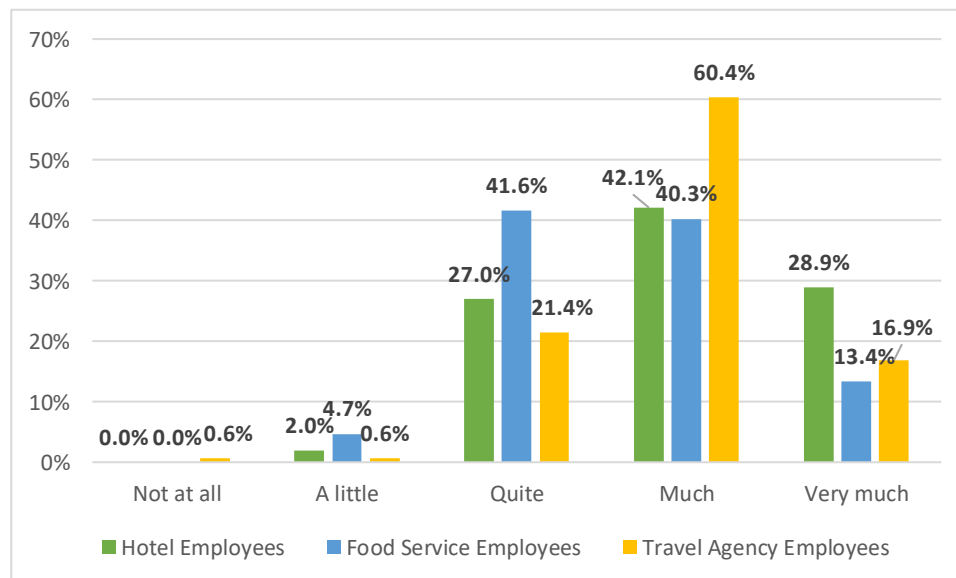
Regarding the way employees participated in training programmes, most of them (37.80%) mentioned that they have participated in lifelong learning programmes, both in the company where they work (in-company education and training) and on their own initiative. A smaller percentage of them (20%) said that they participated in education and training programmes only

on their own initiative, while an even smaller percentage (15.40%) mentioned that they participated only in programmes organized by their company.

The subjects on which the sample employees have been trained -in any way- were then explored. It seems that “Customer Service” (42.20%), “Sales” (30.33%), “Health and Safety at Work” (22.86%), “Foreign Languages” (21.76%) and “Specialized Tourism Business Application Systems” (19.12%) are the most popular subjects in which employees have been trained. “ICT” (16.26%), “Marketing” (13.85%), “Human Resource Management” (6.81%), “Personal Data Protection” (5.27%) and “Specialized Financial Issues” (4.62%) follow with smaller percentages.

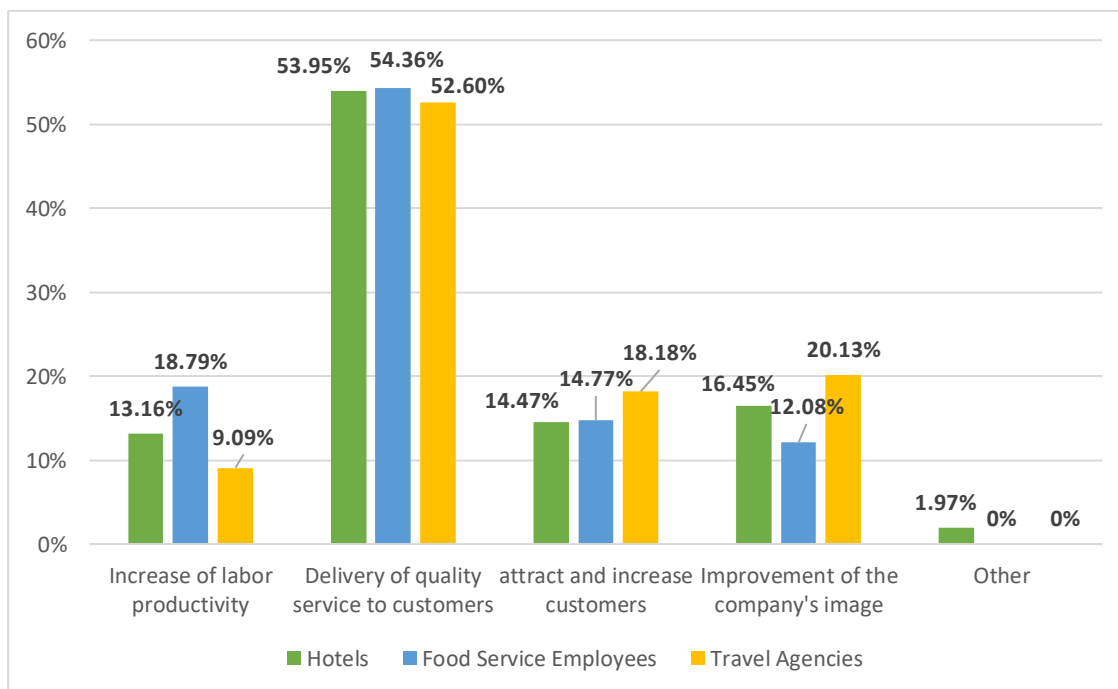
Next, it was investigated whether employees consider that lifelong education and training in tourism contributes to the improvement of their professional skills. According to the responses of the sample, it seems that most employees acknowledge its positive impact (Mean = 3.84, S.D. = 0.768). Specifically, most employees acknowledge that it contributes "much" (47.7%), "very much" (19.8%) or "quite a lot" (29.9%), while a small percentage of them consider that it has “a little” (2.4%) or no contribution (0.2%) on the improvement of their professional skills. The distribution by business type of these employee responses is shown in Figure 8. It is evident that hotel (Mean=3.98, S.D.=0.801) and travel agency employees (Mean=3.92, S.D.=0.682) are more likely to recognize the contribution of lifelong education and training, while employees in food service are not that positive (Mean=3.62, S.D.=0.775).

**Figure 8: Contribution of lifelong education and training to the improvement of the employees’ job skills for each business type**



Finally, the benefits for tourism businesses in terms of lifelong education and training of their employees were explored. Most employees (53.63%) consider that the main benefit is the delivery of quality services to the customers. This is followed by improving the image of the company (16.26%), attracting and increasing customers (15.82%), and increasing labor productivity (13.63%). The distribution of these responses by business type is illustrated in Figure 9, which shows that across all business types, providing quality service to customers is identified as the most important benefit, while for the other benefits there is some variation in the choices by business type. Specifically, employees in hotels and travel agencies identify improving the image of the business as the next most important benefit, while employees in the food service sector identify increasing labor productivity as the next most important benefit.

**Figure 9: Benefits for businesses in terms of lifelong education and training of their employees for each business type**



**Inferential statistical analysis**

In this section, it was explored whether the factor “type of business” influences the employees’ views as regards the extent to which lifelong education and training of human resources is necessary for the enhancement of their job skills (Variable 4: Mean=3.84, S.D.=0.768).

To statistically confirm the differentiation of the above in terms of type of business, it was investigated whether there were statistically significant differences between the participants' responses by type of business.

A normality test of the data distribution was performed using the Shapiro-Wilk statistical criterion, where it was found that the values of this variable do not follow the normal distribution ( $W=0.847$ ,  $p\text{-value}<.001$ ) and therefore, a non-parametric test was performed.

By applying the non-parametric test Kruskal-Wallis H test with a significance level of  $\alpha=0.05$  and  $df=2$ , it was found that there are statistically significant differences between the three business types as regards variable 4 ( $\chi^2=19.19$ ,  $p\text{-value}<.001$ ).

Next, it was explored between which types of business employees were detected statistically significant differences, by conducting Dwass-Steel-Critchlow-Fligner Pairwise comparisons. As it is shown in Table 3, there is a statistically significant difference between food service employees and employees of the other two types of businesses (hotels and travel agencies) in terms of their views on the necessity of lifelong education and training of human resources (variable 4) (since  $p\text{-value}<0.05$ ).

**Table 3. DSCF Pairwise comparison for the necessity of lifelong education and training of human resources (variable 4) depending on the business type**

Business Type		W	p
Hotel Employees	Food Service Employees	-5.383	< .001
Hotel Employees	Travel Agency Employees	-0.956	.0778
Food Service Employees	Travel Agency Employees	5.283	< .001

It seems that the hotel and travel agency employees acknowledge more the contribution of lifelong education and training to the enhancement of their professional skills.

**Discussion**

Since tourism education and training play a key role in the development of human resources and enterprises, a study was carried out. This study explored the views of employers and employees in tourism industry in terms of education and training in tourism industry focusing on the necessity and contribution of human resource education and training.

Based on the statistical analysis of the employers' responses, it was concluded that overall employers recognize the necessity of lifelong education and training of human resources in tourism enterprises, with hotel employers recognizing it to a greater extent. Moreover, employers acknowledge the contribution of tourism education and training to the effective operation of their business, with greater acknowledgement also by hotel employers. It was also found that almost all employers consider lifelong education and training to be essential, due to the new demands and needs of customers, while many mentioned technology developments and emergencies/natural disasters that may occur. The above findings show that for the employers, meeting the needs and requirements of customers is of paramount importance. At the same time, they recognize the need for their businesses to adapt to technological developments and to respond to emergencies that may arise in order to be competitive through the human resources they employ. These findings are in line with previous research in the tourism sector and in particular in the hospitality sector, which highlights the contribution of education and training of employees to the diversification of the company, to the enhancement of its competitiveness and to the increase of its productivity, as well as to the improvement of the company climate (Stavrinoudis, 2017). It seems that when human resources of tourism industry have the opportunity for further training and development, they are usually motivated to work with more enthusiasm and are more committed to the objectives of the company, and, at the same time, the performance of the company is improved. Consequently, company grows, while the services and products offered are constantly improved (Paximadis, 1993; Sakellaridis, 1999; Sandhusen, 2000). Furthermore, according to the OECD (2010:57), the provision of appropriate education and training programmes is crucial for promoting innovation and improving productivity in the tourism industry. Let alone the fact that European Commission also calls the tourism community to invest, among others, in education and training of human resources and overall, in skills to ensure the availability of skilled workforce and attractive careers in the tourism ecosystem (European Commission, 2022).

In addition, it seems that most tourism enterprises support lifelong education and training, with hotels being more supportive. Yet, there are still companies that do not support lifelong education and training for their employees, mainly due to the cost, which is also noted by Evans and Lindsay (2013). Given that most tourism businesses are small and family-owned, these findings are possibly expected since it is difficult for them to afford the costs of supporting lifelong education and training of their employees (Lange et al., 2000; Peters, & Buhalis, 2004). Nevertheless, larger tourism enterprises typically pay more attention to both education and training, since they are increasingly aware of the role of education and training in the enhancement of profitability, productivity, and turnover (Cooper, & Shepherd, 1997). To overcome these obstacles, incentives (e.g., financial) could be given to tourism businesses to encourage and support lifelong education of their staff. However, apart from cost, another reason

why employers do not support education and training of their personnel is that some employers consider that the nature of work in tourism does not allow it. This might be the reason for employers' preference for on-the-job training rather than organized education and training on specific tourism topics. It seems that this type of training is also the most popular, which was also pointed out by Kitching and Blackburn (2002). Moreover, distance learning programmes seem to be quite popular probably because of the COVID-19 pandemic. In terms of training frequency, it seems that most tourism businesses train their staff every year. The above findings are consistent with Greenidge et al. (2012) conclusions, according to which each tourism business adopts different ways of training its staff, depending on its size and type, with small companies adopting mainly non-formal ways of training.

Employers also reported that the subjects in which their personnel are trained are “Customer service” and “Health and safety in the workplace”, followed by “Sales”, “Specialized application systems that support the business, such as Customer Relationship Management (CRM), Supply Chain Management (SCM), Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP), Global Distribution Systems (GDS), such as Galileo, Amadeus, Sabre, etc.)”, and “ICT”. Given the nature of the work and the diversity of tourism businesses, it seems that employers support training in these subjects, mainly because they want to provide services to their customers in the most professional and safe way. At the same time, by training their staff in these subjects, they support the adaptation of their businesses to technological developments, which are causing changes in the aspects and ways of work of their employees.

Based on the statistical analysis of the employees' responses, it was found that half of the participants have a specialization in tourism, and they are mainly post-secondary or secondary vocational school graduates and to a lesser extent tertiary graduates. Furthermore, it seems that hotels employ more specialized employees in tourism than the other two types of businesses, in contrast to food service, which employs fewer specialized in tourism personnel. In addition, hotels seem to employ the highest proportion of employees with tertiary education qualifications in tourism.

As regards lifelong education and training, it seems that most tourism employees have participated in lifelong education and training programmes in tourism, especially in short courses. In terms of their participation mode, it emerged that most of them have participated either on their own initiative or through the company they work for, while there are also employees who have participated in both ways. Regarding training subjects, “Customer service” and “Sales” seem to be the most popular ones, followed by “Health and safety in the workplace” and “Specialized application systems that support the business, such as CRM-Customer Relationship Management, SCM-Supply Chain Management, ERP-Enterprise Resource Planning, GDS-Global Distribution Systems Galileo, Amadeus, Sabre, etc.)”.



Finally, from the employees' perspective, it seems that most of them recognize the contribution of lifelong education and training to improving their professional skills, with hotel and travel agency employees being more supportive. In details, employees consider that the main benefit of lifelong education and training in tourism is the provision of quality services to the customers. These findings are also consistent with the ones for the employers, while they are also in line with the findings of Kitching and Blackburn (2002), according to which the necessity of training and its contribution to better business performance is recognized. However, it should be noted that barriers to human resource education and training usually come from the employers rather than the employees and these barriers include lack of time, cost, staff shortages and difficulty in covering staff absent during training with other staff, as well as the mobility of employers who do not remain in the company for a long time after training (Dewhurst et al., 2007). Nevertheless, it is a fact that the costs of education and training are obvious and clear, while the benefits are usually not measurable and immediate (Clements, & Josiam, 1995). According to Dessler (1994), human resource education and training is a complex and specifically designed learning process, which aims to improve employees' performance, as well as to enrich and update their knowledge, develop professional skills, and modify the employees' attitudes. At the same time, it aims to change the attitudes towards the job, and constitutes a continuous process adapted to specific requirements of each company and each employee. Thus, it aims both to develop employees' skills and, at the same time, to meet the current and future needs of a business (Çınar, 2020; Hsu, 2018; Kim, & Jeong, 2018). Moreover, it is an investment in people to improve their performance and competencies (Bourantas, & Papalexandri, 2003). Overall, for tourism education to be developed to meet the needs of the expanding and diversifying global tourism industry, it is necessary to design training programmes that equip future employees with the necessary knowledge and skills to add value to businesses and organizations operating in the tourism industry (Dale, & Robinson, 2001).

## **Conclusions**

The present study aims to investigate specific aspects of the role of tourism education and training in the tourism industry in Greece, both from the employers' and employees' perspective, in three different types of business. Based on the results of the study, it can be concluded that tourism employers consider that lifelong education and training of human resource is essential for employees to meet the ever-changing needs and requirements of the tourism industry, with hotel employers recognizing this more than those of food service and travel agencies. Tourism employers also consider that lifelong education and training contribute both to the improvement of the professional skills of employees and to the development of tourism enterprises. However, hotel employers acknowledge more the contribution of lifelong education and training than the employers of the other types of business. As to the reasons for its necessity, it seems that

employers recognize first the emergence of new customer demands and needs and then the technological developments that arise, as well as possible emergencies and/or natural disasters that may occur. In terms of the ways in which lifelong education and training contributes to business development, the provision of quality services to customers combined with improving the image of the business is mostly identified.

Regarding the extent and the way in which tourism enterprises support the lifelong education and training of their employees, it seems that according to the employers' views, tourism companies support the lifelong education and training of their personnel, and do so mainly through “on-the-job training”, or to a lesser extent through “in-house seminars” or distance learning programmes. However, hotel employers were also found to have a more positive attitude towards lifelong education and training of their staff than the employers of food service and travel agencies, since they are being more supportive of it.

From the employees' perspective, it seems that overall, they consider lifelong education and training to contribute to improving their professional skills. However, hotel and travel agency employees seem to be more positive about its contribution to improving their professional skills than employees in the food service sector. This difference is arguably to be expected, given the different nature of work in the three business types of survey participants and the specific needs that are essential for each one of them. At the same time, it confirms the multidimensional and broad nature of tourism, as it is related to a variety of subjects, and it encompasses a wide range of stakeholders with different educational and training needs. Thus, their training is a multifaceted but also a critical issue. After all, it is acknowledged that tourism sector includes different types of businesses, wide geographical spread, different sizes of companies, as well as educational cultures, and all of them should be considered by those involved in tourism education and training (Kalbaska, & Cantoni, 2022).

### **Practical implications**

Given the dynamic nature of tourism and the continuous evolution of ICT, it is obvious that tourism staff need to acquire and develop new skills. Moreover, the provision of appropriate tourism education and training is particularly important to promote innovation and develop the productivity of the tourism industry (Romero Dexeus, 2019). Bearing in mind the fact that human capital is one of the main factors promoting business innovation (Divisekera, & Nhuyen, 2018; Panfiluk, 2021), attracting, educating, training, and retaining high quality human resources are key parameters for the long-term development of the tourism industry.

In this context, it is a challenge for tourism education and training to respond to the needs of tourism industry, considering the differences as well as the different educational needs of tourism

sectors (e.g., hotels, food service, and travel agencies) and to adapt the curricula, both in terms of the knowledge and skills provided, so that human resources would be well educated and trained. To this end, cooperation between tourism education institutions, the tourism industry and the state is essential for the design and implementation of the strategic development framework. To achieve this, it is necessary to create a central body that will coordinate and supervise tourism education and training in Greece, and at the same time implement and enforce the strategic plan for the country's tourism education policy.

Subsequently, to ensure that the skill needs of the tourism personnel are satisfied, new or updated skill profiles need to be included in the context of the overall education and training policy and curricula for tourism education and training. The later should be periodically reviewed to meet the needs of the tourism industry. In addition, it is essential to reflect all changes in the field of tourism in the light of scientific developments, social changes, and the rapid changes in technology. Consultation of the tourism industry on skills and competence needs should also be solicited.

The creation of modern curricula at all levels of tourism education and training is therefore undoubtedly a time-consuming and gradual process, but it is essential, as in this way tourism education will contribute to the country's tourism development by providing an appropriately trained human resource. But also, tourism industry as a partner in exploring the needs may acknowledge the importance of providing appropriate and quality tourism education and training for the development of tourism enterprises.

Furthermore, the provision of in-house education and training to all employees of tourism enterprises and in all specializations is a fundamental need for every tourism enterprise, as all employees constitute the intellectual capital of the enterprise. In this context, distance learning, which has become prevalent in the current period due to the Covid-19 pandemic, can be used to overcome the problems of increased costs and time constraints that tourism businesses may encounter.

On the other hand, it is important for representatives of the tourism industry to participate in information and awareness-raising activities on the tourism labor market, to inform young, future employees directly and reliably about the characteristics and requirements of the labor market in the tourism industry.

In addition, employees of the tourism industry, for their own part, also need to be constantly informed about developments in the tourism sector at local, national, and international level. Apart from the daily information through the electronic and printed press, industry magazines, tourism websites, etc., it is advisable to be informed in a more organized way by participating in

relevant activities such as workshops, conferences and presentations related to tourism. In this context, it is important for employees to develop their digital skills to be able to keep up to date, as the use of the Internet is essential to stay up to date.

Furthermore, their participation, on their own initiative, in education and training programmes in the context of lifelong learning, relating to tourism and their specialization, is particularly essential to keep abreast of developments in the sector, to update their knowledge and to acquire new skills or specialization (reskilling/upskilling).

As far as Greece is concerned and given that the education system in Greece is in a process of change, it is a challenge for it to become more competitive to provide learners with modern knowledge and skills. Especially in the field of tourism education and training, it is necessary to establish cooperation between all parties involved to implement a strategic plan for the development of the national tourism education policy, considering existing trends and practices internationally. To this end, national tourism policy and national education policy should be considered in conjunction with economic, political, socio-political perspectives, as well as environmental issues and international practices.

### **Limitations and Future Research**

As regards the limitations of the study, it should be mentioned that this study was part of a broader study that explored tourism education and training in Greece, and it was conducted during the COVID pandemic (June 2020 - October 2020). Due to this fact, it was not possible to access all hospitality, food service, and travel agency businesses in Greece, as most businesses in the above sectors were operating with reduced staff or were understaffed or in several cases not operating. This fact, on the one hand, made it impossible to reach all the employers and employees of the participating tourism enterprises and, on the other hand, due to the unpleasant current climate, did not allow the employers and employees to participate in the survey without any difficulty, as they had to deal with very important problems concerning the very existence of their businesses and their jobs, as well as their health. Furthermore, the period from June to October when the survey was conducted is a high working season for tourism businesses, so even those who were working had to deal with an increased workload, which may have made it difficult for them to participate in this survey. Another limitation of the survey lies in the fact that it was addressed to employees in three major sectors of the tourism businesses. However, for a further generalization of the results, it may be useful to include representatives of other tourism sectors, such as transport and other tourism services, which is in our future plans.

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