

## THE SIGNIFICANCE OF HUMAN RESOURCES IN TOURISM MARKETING. IMPACTS ON THE EVALUATION OF THE TOURISM PRODUCT

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*Human resources in tourism, in the form of service personnel, are vital for the success of a business, operate as a critical factor for the creation of a destination's image and affect its selection from potential visitors. Human resources and image are crucial issues in tourism and travel marketing. However, research connecting them is limited. Taking into consideration these points this paper tries to assess the tourism personnel's images held by tourists, prior and after the visit, in an attempt to reveal deviations from their expectations concerning the personnel's performance. The fact that there is limited evidence and research on the personnel as an element of the destination image renders the approach of the current study interesting and can offer suggestions for managerial and marketing actions.*

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**Keywords:** service personnel, human resources, marketing, management, destination, expectations, performance

JEL Classification: *L83, M1, O1*

### INTRODUCTION

The tourism industry, in our days, operates in a global marketplace that is very competitive and increasingly sophisticated (Mayaka and Akama, 2007). For countries like Greece that depend heavily on the tourism sector for the employment and development of local economies, the skills of human resources are crucial in order to achieve a comparative



advantage in the highly volatile and competitive tourism environment (Velissariou, 2012). Vitouladiti (2012) argues that in our days the issue of service is a rising one and emerges among the most important destination choice criteria by several targets-markets.

Human resources development plays a significant role in supporting enhanced productivity and quality at all levels within organizations, destinations and countries. Therefore, human resources issues are also applicable, at both the levels of the firm and in a macro-national context (Baum, 2007).

Christou (2002) emphasizes that all employees in every tourism business transfer a destination image to the visitor and he concludes that the employees are image carriers. Therefore, they can operate as an element of the destination's and enterprises' image. It can be said that people have a tendency to "humanize" enterprises, to attribute personality characteristics to them, to see them much as they do humans, in terms of being friendly, polite, mature etc.

The point is that image has two dimensions. The first one is the secondary image which has been created through the advertising, the several promotional activities and the word of mouth and exists prior to the visit. The second one is the primary image which is developed during the vacations. It is formulated after the visit and the "consumption" of the vacation package.

Tourism is an industry with a variety of enterprises which offer a wide range of occupations with a diversity of human capital requirements. The tourism sector in a destination has various sub-sectors (various types of accommodation, food services, local transport, tour operators, travel agencies, facilitation, tourism gift shops, heritage etc.) and the human resources employed in these enterprises. The operation of these businesses and the offered services by their personnel contribute to the earnings of an area and create income and multipliers. However, the main body of the existing studies (published empirical and conceptual analysis) of human resources issues in tourism has focused mainly on the hospitality sub-sector (Kaye and Taylor, 1997; Haynes and Fryer, 2000; Nolan, 2002 in Wang 2006; Lockyer and Scholarios, 2004; Wang, 2006; EFG Eurobank, 2007; Velissariou and Zagotsi, 2009). Inevitably existing evidence is drawn, mostly, from hotels and restaurants (Baum, 2007). This is a challenge faced by researchers, since major areas of the tourism business seem to be neglected (Lucas, 2004). Wang and Xiang (2007) have underlined that conventional research in destination marketing usually focuses on external environments for tourism destinations (e.g. segmentation studies).

This study will try to combine the issues of personnel, working in several areas of tourism and their secondary and primary image as perceived by the visitor. Also, to compare these two kinds of personnel images, in order to identify possible alterations, either positive or negative, to see possible deviations from the expectations and make proposals for improvements and managerial actions. Basically, the study will attempt to approach the issue of the personnel employed in the various sectors of tourism as an element of the tourism destination image. Also, it will try to cover the gap in research terms concerning the internal environment of tourism businesses.

## **THEORETICAL BACKGROUND**

### **Human Resources employed in tourism, as an element of the destination image, Tourism and Travel Marketing**

Tourism is an activity offered by people. The most important, and perhaps the most difficult element of the tourism product to control, stems from the existing human interactions that are part of the travel experience. The participants in this process can be divided for purposes of marketing not only into: a) the visitors and b) the host community but also c) the human resources of the tourism industry in the form of employees. Tourism is a labor-intensive industry, a service industry, which depends very much on the quality of hospitality offered by employees at hotels, restaurants, attractions, gift shops, travel agencies and tourist offices (Vogt and Fesenmaier, 1995). People, operating in the tourism sector, are also widely recognized as crucial to the operational success of businesses in the sector (Baum, 2002).

Already by early 1980's, Booms and Bitner stressed the need for extending the marketing mix in tourism and travel, introducing another p due to its significance. The fifth p of the tourism and travel marketing mix refers to people, namely the human factor. The significance of this element, led not only to the extension of the marketing mix but also to the enrichment of marketing and of internal marketing, which refers to those processes associated with development, education, motivation, compensation system, recruitment and evaluation of human resources.

According to Berry and Parasuraman (1991), the essence of service marketing is that the service and its quality are its foundation. This element of the marketing mix is so important to the field of travel and hospitality that several scholars (Zeithaml et al, 1996) argue that people who work in the tourism industry are able to create and promote a

positive or negative image. Place, in many respects the 'stuff' of tourism marketing, cannot exist in isolation of the people who inhabit the spaces that they contain (Baum, 2006). The main factor that appears to make the difference for the experience of the guest and can justifiably be regarded as perhaps the most essential element in configuring the primary image is the human resources and quality of service it offers.

The importance of service quality for tourism and hospitality businesses is gaining tremendous attention. In order to provide quality service to the customers, knowledge of their service quality expectations is considered very important (Odeh and Alghadeer, 2014).

Considering the issue of image the literature, mainly, focuses on the contribution that people within the wider community make to tourism imagery and how such images are commodified and exploited (Cohen, 1995; Dann, 1996; Hollinshead, 1996). However, development of such themes within the employment context is rather neglected.

The human resources, who are responsible for the service offered, play the main role in tourism and travel marketing. No clever or persuasive advertising promotion can compensate for poor quality of service. Although most of the tourism products of a destination concern attractions, entertainment, facilities and equipment, most experts believe that the level of service makes the difference between success and failure, meaning the element of human resources, the people, this extra variable of the tourism marketing mix (Morrison, 2002). Dann (1996) refers to a group of pictorial images where, natives are service providers, entertainers and vendors. Through this multitude of roles they play a role that is supplementary to the main images promoted within the brochures. All the while their intense level of interaction with visitors can affect the perceived image of the destination and the tourism businesses they represent. Therefore, they contribute to the creation of the primary image which will be transferred to friends and relatives and will create the secondary one feeding the cycle of image creation.

As Zeithaml and Bitner (1996) suggest employees in tourism industry are the embodiment of the product, its living and breathing advertisements and images. The employees represent in the eyes of the customer the company itself and its services. Hoffman and Bateson (1997) refer to the human element as "the public face, the image of" the entire business entity. Their appearance, behavior, knowledge of their subject, friendly disposition etc. have a strong influence on the perception and image that the customer will form for the services and vacations purchased (Middleton, 2001).

Specific images regarding personnel are frequently part of the visitor's expectations of a destination, as presented by the secondary sources of information (brochures, word of mouth etc.). Urry (1990) rightly notes that the social composition of the producers, at least those who are serving in the front line, may be part of what is in fact "sold" to the customer. In other words, the "service" is inextricably linked to a production process infused with particular social characteristics, of gender, age, race, educational background and so on of the service provider and producer. Where these characteristics are represented in the marketing and branding of the destination, they may become infused into the overall destination image simplified stereotypes of place that visitors bring with them when they arrive as tourists. Employee characteristics however are not a static fixture, they can change, dramatically, in response to the way in which a destination evolves and changes, as Cukier (1998) stresses.

Trying to define the term of image a lot of definitions can be used. According to Crompton, (1979) and Gartner (1993) in general the term 'image' refers to a compilation of beliefs, and impressions based on information processing from a variety of sources over time, resulting in an internal accepted mental construct. This construct can involve products, services or even the human factor.

A lot of studies have been conducted on destination image over the years (e.g Crompton 1979; Gartner 1996; Gallarza et al 2002, etc.). Some studies have underlined its importance on issues of supply (e.g Baloglu and Brinberg, 1997; Chen and Kerstetter, 1999; Hyounggon and Richardson, 2003; Lee et al, 2005; Pike, 2009; Qu et al, 2011, etc). However, no specific attention has been paid to personnel as an element of the tourism destination supply and image. Therefore, there is a lack of research on this specific issue, rendering the approach of the current study interesting.

So, this study focuses on the comparison between the secondary and primary image of the human resources employed in tourism, as an element of the destination image. The aim is to grasp the pragmatic aspect of their performance and its evaluation by the visitors. The approach will use the visitor's demographic characteristics which can operate as differentiating factors.

This comparison will guide towards effective actions for the allocation of the local authorities' and business stakeholders' budgets regarding tourism education, employee qualifications enhancement and job requirements. Also, it will guide towards the consumers' satisfaction and their loyalty because these factors depend on the assessment of the service offered compared to the expectations.

A comparative study between the secondary and primary personnel's image variables, essentially their social and professional skills (see table 1), by carrying out empirical research is the only way to test the impact of the visit and to grasp the pragmatic aspect of the personnel performance.

## **HYPOTHESES**

Therefore, the Hypotheses which result and have to be tested are:

Hypothesis A. The visit for the first time visitors modifies significantly the variables of the secondary image for the service personnel. (general hypothesis)

Hypothesis A1. The visit for the first time visitors modifies significantly the variables of the secondary image for the service personnel. The age group contributes to the modification of this image.

Hypothesis A2. The visit for the first time visitors modifies significantly the variables of the secondary image for the service personnel. The income level contributes to the modification of this image.

Hypothesis A3. The visit for the first time visitors modifies significantly the variables of the secondary image for the service personnel. The education level contributes to the modification of this image.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The survey was implemented in Corfu island, a traditional Greek destination and the sample was British first-time visitors. The majority of the survey participants had booked their holidays via a tour operator or travel agent. They were chosen by random sampling (from the entire island's visiting population and from all the accommodation categories) that gave a reliable sample size of 375 participants. ( $e=5\%$ ). The research tool was a dual self-completion questionnaire where the first section was completed upon check-in and the last before check-out, by the same participant. The first section allowed us to identify the secondary image of the tourism personnel held by the visitors, while the second one to record their primary image of the tourism personnel, which was formed after the "consumption" of the holiday package. Therefore, the contrast of the two sections and the variables analysis could offer the answers to the questions and hypotheses of the research.

The questions used a 5-point rating scale. The personnel's assessment was based on six (6) variables (social and professional skills, see table 1)

and a rating scale from 5 to 1, where very good=5, good=4, neither good nor bad=3, poor=2, very poor=1.

The sample size was analyzed as follows: Concerning age groups, 27%, 44% and 29% belonged to the age groups 18-34, 35-54, 55+ respectively. Concerning income levels, 36%, 41% and 23% belonged to the income group under £20.000, £20.000 - £40.000 and £40.001+ respectively. The duration of stay for the 50, 5% of the sample was at least one week. While the duration of stay for the 40% was two weeks. This is a positive characteristic of the study, since the sample population had a prolonged interaction with the service personnel of the tourism enterprises.

### **Research Hypotheses A, A1, A2, A3. Analytical statistical tests**

For the test of the following hypotheses the study focused on the comparison of the means, t-test, p-value, CI 95% (Confidence Interval), 2-tailed test.

A. The visit for the first time visitors modifies significantly the variables of the secondary image for the service personnel.

The image for the service personnel consists of 6 variables. Therefore, the above hypothesis is divided into equal number of partial hypotheses. The statistical analysis is about paired samples t-test differences and the level of significance,  $\alpha$ , is 0, 05. The general form of the hypotheses is:

$$H_0: \mu_{D_i} = 0 \qquad \mu_{D_i} = \mu_{IS} - \mu_{IP}$$

vs , where  $i=1, \dots, 6$  service personnel variables

$$H_1: \mu_{D_i} \neq 0 \qquad S: \text{Secondary image,}$$

$P: \text{Primary image}$

Statistically significant modification of at least one of the 6 variables means statistically significant modification of the secondary image for the service personnel.

A1. The visit for the first time visitors modifies significantly the variables of the secondary image for the service personnel. The age group contributes to the modification of this image.

There are hypotheses for every age group. The statistical analysis is about paired samples t-test differences, the level of significance,  $\alpha$ , is 0, 05. The general form of the hypotheses is as follows:

$$\begin{array}{ll}
 H_0 : \mu_{D_{ij}} = 0 & \mu_{D_{ij}} = \mu_{ijs} - \mu_{ijp} \\
 \text{vs} & , \text{where } i=1, \dots, 6 \text{ service personnel} \\
 & \text{variables} \\
 H_1 : \mu_{D_{ij}} \neq 0 & j=1: \text{ under 34, 2: 35 - 54, 3:} \\
 & 55+ \\
 & S: \text{ Secondary image, P: Primary} \\
 & \text{image}
 \end{array}$$

A2. The visit for the first time visitors modifies significantly the variables of the secondary image for the service personnel. The income level contributes to the modification of this image.

There are hypotheses for every income level. The statistical analysis is about paired samples t-test differences, the level of significance,  $\alpha$ , is 0,05. The general form of the hypotheses is as follows:

$$\begin{array}{ll}
 H_0 : \mu_{D_{ij}} = 0 & \mu_{D_{ij}} = \mu_{ijs} - \mu_{ijp} \\
 \text{vs} & , \text{where } i=1, \dots, 6 \text{ service personnel} \\
 & \text{variables} \\
 H_1 : \mu_{D_{ij}} \neq 0 & j=1: \text{ under 20.000 GBP, 2:} \\
 & 20.000- 40.000 \text{ GBP,} \\
 & 3: 40.001 + \text{ GBP} \\
 & S: \text{ Secondary image, P: Primary} \\
 & \text{image}
 \end{array}$$

A3. The visit for the first time visitors modifies significantly the variables of the secondary image for the service personnel. The education level contributes to the modification of this image.

There are hypotheses for every education level. The statistical analysis is about paired samples t-test differences, the level of significance,  $\alpha$ , is 0,05. The general form of the hypotheses is as follows:

$$\begin{array}{ll}
 H_0 : \mu_{D_{ij}} = 0 & \mu_{D_{ij}} = \mu_{ijs} - \mu_{ijp} \\
 \text{vs} & , \text{where } i=1, \dots, 6 \text{ service personnel variables} \\
 H_1 : \mu_{D_{ij}} \neq 0 & j=1: \text{ Secondary/Technical,} \\
 & 2: \text{ Higher technical} \\
 & 3: \text{ University} \\
 & S: \text{ Secondary image, P: Primary} \\
 & \text{image}
 \end{array}$$



**Table 1. Statistical Analysis – Hypothesis A**

Variables / Total sample	secondary	primary	primary secondary	-
	mean	mean	Mean Diff	<i>p-value</i>
Quality of service	4,50	4,41	-0,09	0,03
Communication skills	4,28	4,44	0,15	0,00
Politeness	4,54	4,50	-0,03	0,42
Level of professional knowledge	4,30	4,26	-0,03	0,45
Personal hygiene/appearance	4,39	4,31	-0,09	0,05
Friendliness	4,61	4,51	-0,10	0,01

**Table 2. Statistical Analysis – Hypothesis A1**

Age			Quality of service	Communication skills	Politeness	professional knowledge	hygiene/appearance	Friendliness
under 34	secondary	Mean	4,47	4,32	4,58	4,20	4,36	4,59
	primary	Mean	4,42	4,48	4,56	4,26	4,28	4,57
	diff	Mean	-0,04	0,17	-0,01	0,06	-0,06	-0,02
		p-value	0,61	0,03	0,90	0,43	0,42	0,80
35 - 54	secondary	Mean	4,51	4,31	4,51	4,32	4,40	4,62
	primary	Mean	4,41	4,47	4,50	4,25	4,32	4,50
	diff	Mean	-0,11	0,17	-0,02	-0,07	-0,08	-0,13
		p-value	0,07	0,00	0,76	0,28	0,21	0,03
55+	secondary	Mean	4,52	4,22	4,53	4,35	4,42	4,62
	primary	Mean	4,42	4,34	4,45	4,29	4,30	4,48
	diff	Mean	-0,10	0,12	-0,07	-0,05	-0,12	-0,14
		p-value	0,21	0,16	0,32	0,50	0,19	0,07

**Table 3** Statistical Analysis – Hypothesis A2

Income			Quality of service	Communication skills	Politeness	professional knowledge	hygiene/appearance	Friendliness
under 20000	secondary	Mean	4,49	4,31	4,58	4,31	4,42	4,66
	primary	Mean	4,51	4,46	4,62	4,36	4,40	4,59
	diff	Mean	0,02	0,15	0,04	0,05	-0,01	-0,07
		p-value	0,75	0,03	0,50	0,45	0,83	0,26
20000-40000	secondary	Mean	4,52	4,32	4,52	4,27	4,41	4,58
	primary	Mean	4,34	4,44	4,42	4,24	4,24	4,46
	diff	Mean	-0,18	0,12	-0,10	-0,03	-0,16	-0,12
		p-value	0,00	0,04	0,11	0,63	0,02	0,05
40001+	secondary	Mean	4,49	4,17	4,49	4,33	4,33	4,59
	primary	Mean	4,40	4,39	4,46	4,16	4,27	4,48
	diff	Mean	-0,10	0,22	-0,04	-0,17	-0,06	-0,11
		p-value	0,33	0,02	0,69	0,08	0,53	0,21

**Table 4** Statistical Analysis – Hypothesis A3

Education level			Quality of service	Communication skills	Politeness	professional knowledge	hygiene/appearance	Friendliness
Secondary/ Technical	secondary	Mean	4,56	4,36	4,56	4,30	4,46	4,65
	primary	Mean	4,40	4,41	4,43	4,30	4,19	4,46
	diff	Mean	-0,16	0,05	-0,14	0,00	-0,26	-0,19
		p-value	0,02	0,41	0,05	1,00	0,00	0,00
Higher technical	secondary	Mean	4,49	4,26	4,56	4,30	4,44	4,63
	primary	Mean	4,37	4,37	4,52	4,23	4,33	4,54
	diff	Mean	-0,12	0,11	-0,04	-0,07	-0,10	-0,10
		p-value	0,09	0,17	0,55	0,33	0,17	0,16
University	secondary	Mean	4,45	4,21	4,47	4,28	4,27	4,54
	primary	Mean	4,48	4,55	4,56	4,25	4,42	4,55
	Diff	Mean	0,04	0,34	0,11	-0,03	0,17	0,01
		p-value	0,62	0,00	0,13	0,72	0,02	0,90

**Table 5** Importance of service personnel's quality according to education level

	Total	Education level		
		Secondary/ Technical	Higher Technical	University
	mean	mean	mean	mean
Quality of service personnel employed in tourism enterprises	4.40	4.40	4.44	4.35

**Table 6** Importance of service personnel's quality according to income level

	Total	Income level		
		under 20000£	20000- 40000£	40001+ £
	mean	mean	mean	mean
Quality of service personnel employed in tourism enterprises	4.40	4.35	4.38	4.53

**Table 7** Importance of service personnel's quality according to age categories

	Total	Age		
		under 34	35-54	55+
	mean	mean	mean	mean
Quality of service personnel employed in tourism enterprises	4.40	4.24	4.38	4.58

Additionally, the survey participants were asked to rate the importance they attributed to the quality of service personnel as a factor of destination choice. The tables 5, 6 and 7 show the importance attributed by the participants to the quality of service personnel according to several demographic characteristics. It is evident from the means, in the above tables, that the survey participants either as the total sample or as

the demographic segments consider the issue of the human resources as an important or very important element when they choose a vacation destination (all the ratings are above 4).

**Table 8. Findings – Hypothesis A**

Total size of the sample	
POSITIVE MODIFICATIONS	NEGATIVE MODIFICATIONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communication skills</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Quality of service</li> <li>• Hygiene/appearance</li> <li>• Friendliness</li> </ul>

**Table 9. Findings – Hypothesis A1**

According to the demographic characteristic: age	
POSITIVE MODIFICATIONS	NEGATIVE MODIFICATIONS
<i>Under 34</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communication skills</li> </ul>	
<i>35 – 54</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communication skills</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Friendliness</li> </ul>
<i>55 +</i>	

**Table 10. Findings – Hypothesis A2**

According to the demographic characteristic: income	
POSITIVE MODIFICATIONS	NEGATIVE MODIFICATIONS
<i>under 20.000£</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communication skills</li> </ul>	
<i>20.000 – 40.000£</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communication skills</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Quality of service</li> <li>• Hygiene – appearance</li> <li>• Friendliness</li> </ul>
<i>40.001£ +</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communication skills</li> </ul>	

However, some variations can be noted among the different demographic groups. Specifically, the age groups appear to differentiate the importance attributed to the quality of service personnel. The younger age group displays less interest on the personnel compared to the older age group. This is expected because the older ages have more experience and demands for service. The income level also differentiates the findings

with the lower income travelers showing less interest in the quality of service personnel compared to the higher ones. This is also to be expected since more affluent visitors are also more demanding.

**Table 11. Findings – Hypothesis A3**

According to the demographic characteristic: education level	
POSITIVE MODIFICATIONS	NEGATIVE MODIFICATIONS
<i>Secondary /Technical</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Quality of service</li> <li>• Politeness</li> <li>• Hygiene – appearance</li> <li>• Friendliness</li> </ul>
<i>Higher technical</i>	
<i>University</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communication skills</li> <li>• Hygiene – appearance</li> </ul>	

## SUPPORT OF HYPOTHESES A, A1, A2, A3 – CONCLUSIONS

The analysis of the data proved that the visit, for the first time visitors, modifies significantly the variables of the secondary image for the service personnel. All the hypotheses, the general one (A) which refers to the total size of the sample as well as the A1, A2, A3 which refer to age, income and education level respectively are supported. Significant modifications are observed at the total size of the sample as well as at the categories of age, income and education (Tables 1, 2, 3, 4.  $p \leq 0, 05$  and Tables 8, 9, 10, 11).

Specifically, concerning the total size of the sample significant positive modification is observed in one variable, while negative modifications are observed in three variables or attributes. Regarding the modifications in the categories of age, income and education level there are differentiations among the variables with significant modifications. At the age categories alterations are detected in two attributes, while at the income and education level, the alterations concern more attributes.

At the category of secondary/technical only negative changes are observed, on the contrary at University level only positive changes are observed. Especially, the attribute of hygiene-appearance, has positive modification only in the category of University, while it has negative

modifications (income, education) or remains unchanged in other demographic categories (age).

The attributes that seem to have the more changes are the “communication skills”, where only positive modifications are detected, and “friendliness” where only negative modifications are detected. The only variable which remains unchanged is the level of professional knowledge.

Concluding, the visit affects negatively more attributes of the image of service personnel and positively less. The changes in image are detected mostly in the categories of income and education level and less in the category of age. Even though the ratings remain in the higher scales, indicating a generally positive experience, the negative modification of specific variables suggest that the visitors are underwhelmed by their experience of the service personnel during the visit rather than the opposite.

- Regarding the primary image of the human resources and personnel employed, the majority of the alterations are negative. Only one stable positive change is observed which is related with their communication skills. Attributes such as, quality of service, hygiene and appearance, friendliness, politeness demonstrate significant negative modifications. The element of the professional knowledge demonstrates a non significant alteration. The visitors, who belong at the middle income and education level, appear stricter.
- Above all, as presented in the tables 5, 6, 7 concerning the importance attributed to the quality of service personnel as a choice criterion for a destination, this element emerges as a very important factor for all the demographic groups. The ratings which range from 4.24 till 4.58 show that this element is considered “important” and “very important” by the respondents.
- These ratings in relation to the above findings reveal significant negative deviations between the tourists’ expectations and evaluation. Such negative results for an important destination element should alarm all tourism stakeholders regarding the quality of the services provided, the impact on the destination image and attest to the necessity of corrective actions on the subject of personnel training and management.

## **HUMAN RESOURCES DEVELOPMENT AND TOURISM MARKETING APPROACHES, COMMENTS, SUGGESTIONS**

From the findings emerge the importance of personnel and the quality of service provided, as an element that affects the destination choice. Therefore, negative modifications, in regards to the human resources employed in tourism, are expected to lead to disappointment, negative word of mouth and affect future buying decisions.

The findings offer insights into variables capable of increasing substantially the positive future evaluation of a destination's supply and as a result contributing to the development of the area. Positive evaluation of a visit to a destination in relation to expectations, could lead to increased satisfaction and subsequently gain the customer loyalty (Bosque et al, 2005). As Sigala (2008) supports, the image the tourist forms for a tour and a destination is holistic and the tour operator packages rely on the high level of service of all the involved providers.

The key point is not only to satisfy consumers' needs but exceed their expectations, so the benefits (sources of satisfaction) greatly outweigh the potential disbenefits (sources of dissatisfaction) (Teare, 1998). It must be repeated that the personnel skills ratings remain in the higher scales, indicating a generally positive experience, however the negative changes of specific variables/skills suggest that the visitors are underwhelmed by their experience of the service personnel during the visit rather than the opposite.

In our days, customer loyalty is a basic request from destinations and a vital component to the "survival" of destinations, looking for competitive advantages and differentiation in order to support and expand their life cycle. Recent studies have proved that there is both a direct and indirect relation between customer loyalty and service quality in order to achieve high level of customer satisfaction (Olsen, 2002).

The findings of this research demonstrate the need for scientific and orderly study to determine the working conditions, the difficulties of the tourism industry, the needs of employees and enterprises, as well as to identify solutions and suggestions for producing better results. Also, the findings offer guidelines for training priorities, content of program studies, collaborative marketing and management actions creating economies of scale.

Employment is a big issue in the service sectors, as the effectiveness of service organizations is often linked with the individual qualities of their employees (Lockyer and Scholarios, 2004). The tourism industry is exceptionally sensitive regarding employment since it is characterized by

several particularities (seasonality, recruitment of unskilled workers, employee mobility to and from other industries, large number of personal businesses, identification of the executive status with the business owner status, etc.). Additionally, it shows rapid changes and developments that obviously affect the content of the service provided.

The above particularities, combined with the findings mentioned before, explain how easily a negative image of the human resources and the services provided, can occur. While, at the same time lead to a series of imperative suggestions concerning the design and implementation of periodic surveys on the developments in tourism employment. Even though part time and seasonal employment is the norm in the tourism sector, there is no reason not to apply the proper human resources practices.

Indeed, facing more turbulent market environments, development of human resources has become a critical issue in recent years with the growing interests of relying on it to achieve competitive advantages (Nolan, 2002 in Wang, 2006). It can be argued that the development of human resources will constitute the crucial element of future successful marketing strategies in a variety of destinations and tourism enterprises (hotels, tour operators etc.).

The given rapid changes in the field of tourism, demand efficient approaches. They require that companies invest in education and quality, develop employment opportunities and avoid frequent change of employees (Dedousopoulos, 2010). Today more than ever before, investment in education is imperative. The economic crisis, in principle, confirmed an already existing crisis in the workplace. Moreover, the debt burdens of the enterprises, rents, etc. push companies to reduce labor costs. These, however, are inefficient growth patterns and false prescriptions for these labor issues (Dedousopoulos, 2010).

Research interest on tourism training and education has grown significantly in recent years (Mayaka and Akama, 2007). Tertiary educators, mostly in the hospitality sector have long recognized the necessity of collaborating with tourism industry stakeholders for updated educational programs fitting to the job requirements (Raybould and Wilkins, 2006), while previous research in hospitality has investigated the employer expectations of graduates (Baum, 1991; Nelson and Dopson 1999; Kay and Russette, 2000; Perdue et al., 2000). Asonitou and Koutoulas (2013) propose that teaching and assessment approaches like case studies and new types of formative assessment, should become part of the curriculum in order to enhance deep learning strategies to students. It is known (Dedousopoulos, 2007) that, over time, job tasks associated



with a certain profession change. The talk now is of the “knowledge age” rather than the “information age” (Asonitou and Hassall, 2008).

The relation that exists among service quality, service capability and customer satisfaction is mainly determined by the level of comprehensive training programs that are provided to the staff and the team environment that is introduced inside the organisations (Stanley and Wisner, 2002). Velissariou and Zagotsi (2009) support in their study, focused to the hospitality sector, that enterprises should hire people experienced in tourism, provide opportunities for advancement and promotions as well as regular training programs to keep them up to date with current technologies and clients’ developing demands. It is their opinion that travel and hospitality enterprises should make an attempt to rehire seasonal employees, strive to create a harmonic working relationship between them and make them realise their importance as the most significant asset of the business.

Major issues concerning the management, motivation and involvement of this new type of workforce can be addressed, and new models of partnership between companies and their flexible workers can be formed (Field, 1996). The creativity of the personnel, their abilities and work, move the company (Stoner, 1999). We need to offer to future executives or entrepreneurs holistic education which will empower their critical capabilities, beyond technical expertise and factitious knowledge (Asonitou and Koutoulas, 2013)

According to Dedousopoulos (2007), employers no longer demand technical skills only, arising from technology and organization of work within the production unit, but social skills as well. Basically, what emerges is the need for a holistic education for the tourism work force with a definite orientation towards the needs of the tourism sector.

Companies should explain to their employees the importance of customer satisfaction, and allocate substantial parts of their annual budget in quality management training programs. Considering, that there is a strong relation, between the human resources performance of a company and the quality of the services provided, companies should develop job specifications, exchange available information, and provide effective training programs. It must be stated that in the long run an effective service quality policy is expected to reduce the total expenditures. (Stanley and Wisner, 2002).

All the above lead to the revelation of the role of internal marketing in providing a high quality service. Basically, internal marketing recognizes and acknowledges that all employees are customers of managers and employers wishing to carry out the firm’s objectives and

achieve them (Odeh and Alghadeer, 2014). Internal marketing is defined as the task of hiring, training and motivating the employees who want to serve the customers well (Kotler and Armstrong, 2007). Actually, internal marketing must precede external marketing since it is practically impossible for the personnel of a company to provide excellent service if the company itself has not decided what the service should be.

In countries which have significant inbound tourism, the effects on employment are very important. In these countries, education and vocational training in tourism professions is essential to the quality of services in tourism. Higher Education should balance between liberal and vocational aspects of the discipline (Asonitou and Koutoulas, 2013).

Although this study underlined important issues, further research is necessary, supported by several techniques, with additional attributes and a variety of market segments in order to confirm, challenge or even expand the findings.

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