

Selecting Human Resources in Greek Tourism Enterprises

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Abstract: Recruitment is an important process for employing efficient and productive human resources in tourism. This article aims to investigate the criteria of human resource selection in Greek tourism enterprises. To this end an empirical study was conducted focusing on employers of Greek tourism businesses trying to explore the current trends in the selection of the personnel they employ. The findings of the study reveal that the selection of tourism employees is mainly related to their references and additional qualifications, while it is less related to their education and professional qualifications. In terms of selection methods, it was found that most employers recruit their employees through references, and job vacancy notices in the printed and electronic press. As far as the pandemic COVID-19 is concerned, employers pointed out that the impact they expect it to have on the way they recruit their staff is related to decisions affecting the financial aspects of the business (i.e., preference for flexible forms of employment and a reduction in employee pay). The findings of the present study mainly contribute to the industry's understanding of the criteria and ways of selecting staff and then highlight the need for reflection on them in order to adopt a specific framework for the selection of appropriate staff and the efficient operation of tourism businesses in Greece.

Keywords: Tourism industry, human resources, recruitment, selection, employers, Greece, Covid-19.

Introduction

Tourism industry depends heavily on the human resources it employs to ensure the quality of its services. It is characteristic that both the tourism product and tourism services are addressed to people and potential customers have only an 'idea' of what they are likely to experience and use (Benetatos, Papageorgiou, & Stergiou, 2004). In particular, the purchase of a tourism product implies the possibility of using a service for a certain period of time, while there is no concept of ownership of it. In this context, the tourism product is consumed at the very moment it is produced, there is no possibility of storage, and it is not always the same, as it is often differentiated, since it concerns services provided by people. Its quality depends on the people who offer it, their training and even their mood at the time (Andriotis, 2002; Ladkin, 2013; Varvaressos, 1997).

In fact, the human resources of tourism businesses and especially hotels, are the protagonists of the tourist experience, through the provision of quality services, such as excellent quality services, effective settlement and resolution of any problems that arise, communication and kindness. The above are critical parameters, which, among others, shape the overall experience of tourists (Quan, & Wang, 2004; Zátori, 2016). Therefore, human resources are an integral part of the tourism product and the role they play in determining its quality is particularly important (Ladkin, 2013; Yildirim, Bahar, & Ilal, 2019).

On the other hand, considering the specific characteristics of the tourism industry (high rates of staff turnover, lack of qualified personnel, flexible forms of employment, low wages, seasonality, diversity in the size of firms), the critical role of the management of human resources employed in this industry is highlighted, with the aim of business development (Baum, 2007; Baum, 2015; Belias, Trivellas, Koustelios, Serdaris, Varsanis, & Grigoriou, 2017; Kotler, Armstrong, & Cunningham, 2002; Peacock, & Ladkin, 2002; Richardson, 2008) and particularly the selection of personnel in order to contribute to the achievement of these objectives. In this context, the selection and recruitment of personnel is, among other things, an important factor that determines the future success of companies, forms a specific system of standards and principles, helps in their smooth operation, upgrades their position in the market, since competent personnel increase the demand for the services they provide.

Taking into account the aforementioned issues, the purpose of this article is to investigate the selection of personnel in tourism enterprises in Greece. In particular, the objective is to investigate the criteria and ways of selecting human resources, as well as the effect of the Covid-19 pandemic on the way of selecting human resources. To address the above, the selection of personnel in tourism enterprises is initially investigated. The methodological framework of the research is then outlined, followed by the presentation and discussion of the results. Finally, the conclusions of the research are presented.

Personnel selection in the tourism industry

Recruitment and personnel selection is a process in which companies search for and acquire potential employee candidates in sufficient numbers and quality (Dowling, & Schuler, 1990; Gold, 2007).

Human resource of a tourism company is its strength and is what differentiates it from other companies. In particular, human resources, with high quality skills, ensure for the enterprise in which they are employed increased competitiveness and innovation, improve career prospects and facilitate the process of adaptation to the ever-changing labour market (Urosevic, Karabasevic, Stanujkic, & Maksimovic, 2017). Actually, the success of a tourism enterprise depends largely on its employees, therefore investing in their training is considered the most profitable and secure than other investments. However, many firms are not willing to invest in human resource training because it is not easy to measure the benefits against the resulting costs (Evans, & Lindsay,

2013). Due to this fact, in general, tourism industry lacks high demands on specialized knowledge, which can be acquired and also consolidated through intensive and methodical effort. At the same time, because of the need to develop rapidly, the tourism industry often uses workers from other sectors without the necessary training in tourism (Ladkin, & Kichuk, 2017). In many cases, tourism companies even tend to select non-graduate employees and pay particular attention to personal skills (such as communication, adaptability, and leadership skills) and language skills (Zagonari, 2009).

However, tourism is a sector in which workers have to face a number of problems related not only to their training but also to other factors, such as low pay, high rates of temporary or part-time work, high staff mobility, a large number of low-skilled jobs, working hours that are very different from normal ones, and the negative image of the tourism industry in the minds of future employees (Richardson, 2008; Peacock, & Ladkin, 2002). Therefore, on the one hand, the demand for cost reduction and on the other hand, the low-level workforce, make the tourism industry as an unattractive employer and give the outline of the characteristics of workers in the tourism industry, with the main features being: (a) part-time employment in the middle and lower levels of employees with low economic rewards; (b) low demands on economic rewards from workers from other industries; (c) unskilled, young, low-paid employees; (d) increased and irregular working hours; and (e) employment under informal/black economy conditions for a large number of employees (Kotler, Armstrong, & Cunningham, 2002; Ladkin, & Kichuk, 2017).

However, ensuring the quality of a company's services relies on its human resources, which are the basis of the company and are selected by the management. Specifically, the role of management on the one hand is related to selecting the right people in the right positions, and on the other hand, it offers staff the appropriate benefits and incentives to improve their efficiency (Tefa, 2015; Ghani et al., 2022).

However, employers in the tourism industry do not seem to consider tourism expertise as a necessary qualification, but rather look for personal skills and knowledge of foreign languages or broader expertise, for example in business administration and finance (Zagonari, 2009). As noted in a survey of tourism employers regarding the importance of tourism qualifications (Petrova, 2008), the estimated value of tourism degrees is based on both relevance to employment and academic status. Specifically, employers consider that for entry-level jobs available to graduates of tourism degree programmes, the possession of a degree is not required, but the personality of the candidates and the relevant experience acquired through the internship programmes that form part of the tourism programmes are assessed. As for jobs for which a degree is required, employers point out that qualifications in tourism are not an advantage. They associate tourism qualifications in particular with new universities and consider that their graduates lack higher level skills.

As far as employees are concerned, surveys have reported that they do not feel sufficiently prepared to meet the demands of the tourism industry (Christou, 1999) or that they believe that a degree does not guarantee employment in the tourism industry. Moreover, they believe that, at the beginning of their employment in the tourism industry, family network, as well as language and computer skills, are more important than the degree itself (Moiras, Milonopoulos, & Anastasiou, 2004). Similarly, tourism graduates identify the need to enrich tourism education curricula with practical application of knowledge, such as restructuring curricula with an emphasis on applied knowledge and increasing the length of internships in companies during studies (Diplari, & Dimou, 2010).

Research methodological framework

Considering the above, an empirical study was conducted in Greece between June 2020 and October 2020 aiming to explore the selection of personnel in companies of the tourism industry in Greece. The survey was conducted among employers of hotels, food service and travel agencies. Data collection was carried out by completing appropriately structured electronic questionnaires from employers of tourism businesses. In particular, the survey questionnaires were sent through federations, unions, and employers' associations, in order to have representation from employers of tourism enterprises throughout the country. Due to this fact, the total number of population size could not be estimated, since it was not possible to know the exact number of the questionnaire recipients.

Specifically, the research questions of the study focus on the criteria of personnel selection, as well as the ways of selecting personnel. Specifically, the following research questions were formulated:

Q1: What personnel recruitment methods do tourism businesses use?

Q2: What are the criteria for selecting personnel in tourism businesses?

Q3: How will the COVID-19 pandemic affect the recruitment of personnel in tourism businesses?

In order to answer the above questions, a quantitative methodological approach was followed.

Findings and Analysis of the research

This section initially presents the demographic data and then the results of the survey.

A. Demographic data: 457 employers of tourism businesses participated in this survey. The demographics of the participants are shown in Table 1.

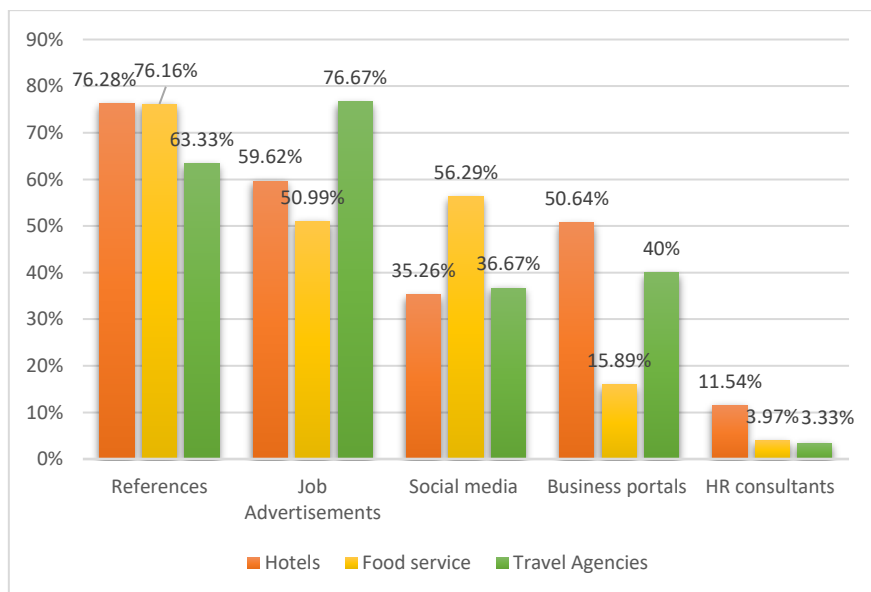
B. Survey questions: First, the ways of searching human resources in tourism businesses were explored in order to answer the first research question. The responses of the participants revealed that most employers (71.99%) search for employees in their businesses through references, while print and electronic press job advertisements are also used to a large extent (62.36%). This is followed by social media (42.67%) and business portals (35.67%). Finally, few

employers reported using HR consultants (6.35%) and far fewer (4.16%) chose the "Other" option, in which they reported using out-of-store advertising, their partner network or word-of-mouth search to find employees. Employers' choices by type of business for each of the ways of searching for personnel in tourism businesses are presented in Figure 1.

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of participants

Participants		457	
Male	75.3%		
Female	24.7%		
Age		Business Type	
41-50 yrs	42%	Hotels	34.1%
51-60 yrs	29.5%	Food service	33%
31-40 yrs	16.8%	Travel Agencies	32.8%
61 yrs and above	8.5%		
30-18 yrs	3%		
Administrative Region			
Attica	17.72%	Central Macedonia	8.53%
Crete	14.22%	Peloponnese	7.66%
South Aegean	13.79%	Thessaly	5.69%
Ionian Islands	9.85%	Western Greece	5.03%
Other	17.51%		

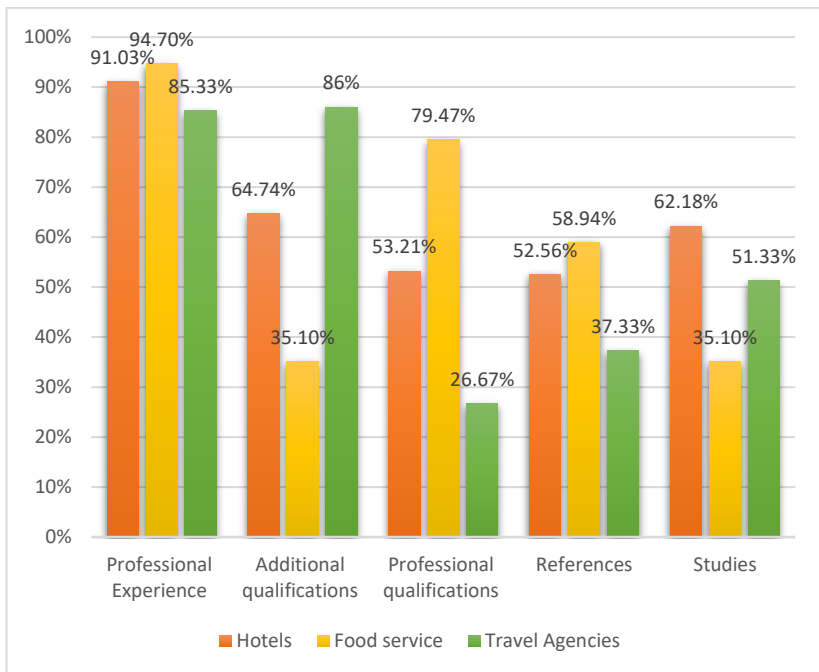
Figure 1: Ways of searching personnel by type of business



In detail, with regard to the references, it emerges that all types of businesses are distinguished by the relatively high percentage of preferences for this characteristic. Similarly, advertisements in the printed and electronic press are also one of the media that attract relatively high preference rates for all three categories, with travel agencies being distinguished by the highest preference rate in this respect. Social media constitute a medium that is preferred at a relatively high percentage by food service businesses, while business portals are chosen at a relatively high percentage by hotel businesses. Finally, recruitment through HR consultants is a method which is not preferred by any category of employers.

To answer the second research question, the selection criteria of employees in a tourism company were investigated. The survey revealed that most of the employers in the sample (90.37%) consider that professional experience is a key criterion for the selection of personnel in the business, followed by additional qualifications (such as knowledge of foreign languages and computers, professional certifications, etc.) (61.93%), professional qualifications (53.17%), studies (49.67%) and references (49.67%), while a very small percentage of employers (3.50%) mentioned other selection criteria such as personality traits of the potential employees, interviews and the existence of a probationary period. Figure 2 illustrates employers' choices by type of business for each of the personnel selection criteria.

Figure 2: Selection criteria of employees by type of business

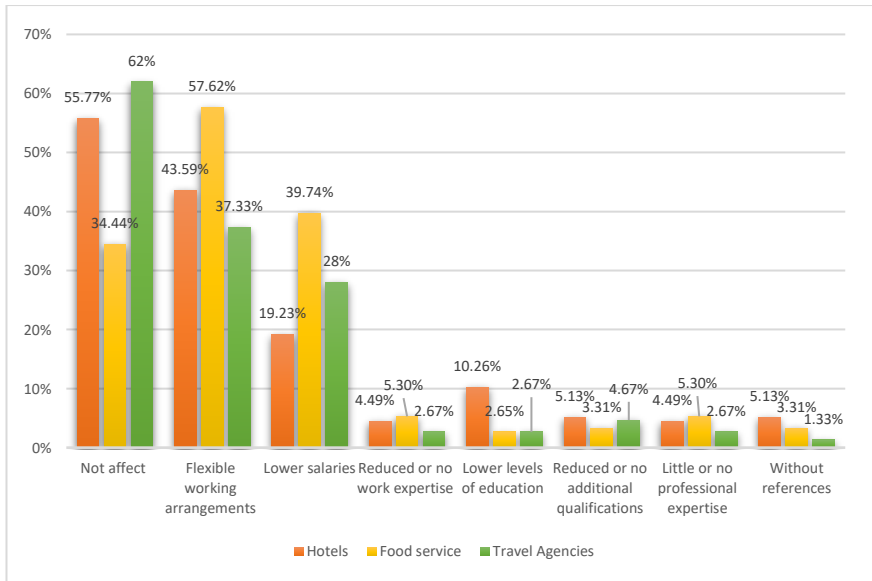


In detail, professional experience has a high preference rate among employers of all types of businesses. Hotels are characterized by a relatively high percentage of preferences for the studies of potential employees. Regarding additional qualifications, travel agencies and hotels are distinguished by the relatively high preference rates for this criterion (e.g., knowledge of foreign languages and computers, professional certifications, etc.). Food service businesses, on the other hand, are distinguished by the relatively high percentage of preferences for the professional qualification of potential employees and references, as is the case of hotels.

Finally, to answer the third research question, the way in which the Covid-19 pandemic is expected to affect the selection of personnel in tourism businesses was investigated. It emerged that half of the employers (50.77%) consider that it will not affect it. However, those who think that it will affect it consider that it will mainly affect it either by selecting personnel with flexible working arrangements (46.17%), or by selecting personnel with lower salaries (28.88%). To a lesser extent, participating employers said that the pandemic will affect their companies in selecting personnel with reduced or no work expertise (9.41%), with lower levels of education (5.25%), with reduced or no additional qualifications (4.38%), with little or no professional expertise (4.16%) or without references (3.28%).

Figure 3 shows employers' choices by type of business on the ways in which the pandemic will affect personnel selection.

Figure 3: Way in which the Covid-19 pandemic is expected to affect the selection of personnel by type of business



As illustrated in Figure 3, there are differences in the employers' choices for each type of business. Specifically, food service employers consider that the pandemic will have a strong impact on staff selection especially by adopting flexible working arrangements and paying their employees the minimum wage, while employers of travel agencies and hotels consider that they will be affected to a lesser extent. However, they also report that they will mainly choose employees with flexible working arrangements and pay them the minimum wage.

Discussion

This study aims to explore specific issues related to human resource selection in three categories of tourism businesses from the employers' perspective, namely hotels, food service businesses and travel agencies.

During the descriptive statistical analysis of the survey, with regard to the method of personnel selection in tourism businesses, it was found that references are the main method, followed to a lesser extent by job advertisements in the printed and electronic press. The aforementioned methods are found in all three types of businesses with some variations. Specifically, it seems that hotel and food service businesses look for a large proportion of their staff through references, while travel agencies look for staff through job advertisements in the printed and electronic press. In addition, it is noted that only hotels seem to look for personnel through professional portals, while food service businesses also strongly prefer social media. Finally, HR consultants do not seem to be preferred by employers of tourism businesses. The above findings show that tourism employers prefer both non-formal and traditional recruitment methods, such as references and social media, as well as print and electronic job advertisements, respectively.

These findings are consistent with the findings of another study (Greenidge, Alleyne, Paris & Grant, 2012), according to which each tourism business adopts different ways of selection depending on its size and type, with small businesses adopting mainly non-standard ways. In addition, another study (Chytiri, Filippaios, & Chytiris, 2018) concludes that Greek hotels use old-fashioned and cost-effective recruitment and selection methods. This is probably justified as the vast majority of tourism businesses in Europe are small and medium-sized (European Commission, 2010; Peters, & Buhalis, 2004; Lange, Ottens, & Taylor, 2000) and face enormous competition from larger ones, both in terms of operational capacity to run their business and in terms of technological capacity to operate in the global marketplace (Braun, & Hallick, 2006) and as a result they lack the ability to utilize typical selection methods, such as human resource consultants and professional portals. On the other hand, given the nature of the tourism labor market and the fact that a large proportion of potential employees are unskilled workers, it appears that potential employees themselves turn to non-formal ways of seeking employment, such as their network of acquaintances and social networks, to look for a job.

Regarding the selection criteria of potential employees, it seems that employers select the personnel of tourism businesses by first taking into account the previous experience of potential employees, followed by additional qualifications and professional expertise (such as foreign languages, digital skills, professional certifications, etc.), and then by their education and their references.

The above is in line with the findings of other studies, which found a preference towards factors other than the educational background of employees, such as positive service attitude and commitment to the tourism industry (Chan, & Coleman, 2004), employability skills (such as experience, personality, characteristics and job-related skills) (Chan, & Kuok, 2011), soft skills (Derco, & Tometzová, 2023), personality and talent of potential employees (Shakeela, Breakey, & Ruhanen, 2012). Moreover, in cases of positions that do not require specialized skills, companies select unskilled employees and pay particular attention to foreign language skills (Zagonari, 2009). However, many of the above selection criteria can be supported by both studies and the provision of specialization in tourism-related subjects, but also through the provision of additional competencies and skills, such as digital skills, foreign languages, but also the motivation for lifelong personal and professional development. Furthermore, tourism education can contribute to the acquisition of work experience through the participation of students in traineeships and/or apprenticeship programs.

The investigation of the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the selection of human resources in tourism businesses revealed that there are many businesses that their employers do not think it will affect them in this field. However, employers of food service businesses think it will affect them more. This finding may be explained by the fact that food service businesses employ mainly unskilled staff, which is characterized by high mobility. In any case, the employers who consider that they will be affected mentioned that they will recruit employees with flexible working hours and/or with minimum wages. In other words, it seems that the impact of the pandemic on recruitment relates primarily to decisions affecting the financial elements of the firm (flexible working and employee payment) and less to issues relating to the characteristics of the potential employees, such as education, professional qualifications, skills, and experience.

Conclusions

The present study focuses on employers of tourism businesses (hospitality, food service and travel agencies) in Greece and examines current trends in recruitment in these businesses.

According to the results of the survey, employers of tourism businesses search for their staff using mainly non-formal methods, such as references, and to a lesser extent traditional methods such as advertisements in the printed and electronic press, while there are differences depending on the type of business.

However, when selecting potential employees, employers mainly take into account employees' previous experience, followed by additional qualifications, professional expertise, education and references. Employers in all three categories of companies identify experience as the most important option, but there are also several differences by company category. In particular, travel agencies add importance to the additional qualifications of potential employees, food service companies to professional specialization, while hotel companies also give special importance to studies. Finally, as regards the impact of the pandemic on recruitment, it seems that overall employers' views are divided with half of them believing that it will have no impact on recruitment. However, employers of food service businesses consider that they will be affected by the pandemic in the personnel selection of their businesses and report that decisions with an economic impact, such as a preference for flexible forms of employment and low pay for employees, will be taken.

The above findings may contribute to research on human resource management in tourism businesses and enhance the industry's understanding of the criteria and methods of personnel selection. At the same time, these findings inform the employers of tourism enterprises regarding the way of personnel selection and highlight the need for reflection in order to ensure a more effective and efficient operation of tourism businesses in Greece.

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