1 Tourism education and industry expectations in Greece: (re)minding the gap

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1. INTRODUCTION

The tourism industry in Greece is experiencing growth even in the midst of the current economic crisis. In 2013, international visitors consumed more than €11 billion worth of goods and services produced by the Greek economy, which accounted for 26.5 percent of the country's total exports (World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), 2013). The level of arrivals to Greece increased by 6.1 million (38.2 percent) between 2008 (the year the crisis hit) and 2014 (SETE (Association of Greek Tourism Enterprises, 2014; World Bank, 2015), with revenues reaching €13.4 billion (Bank of Greece, 2015). Moreover, in 2014 tourism directly supported 340 500 jobs (9.4 percent of total employment). According to the latest WTTC (2015) research, this was expected to rise at an annual rate of 2.4 percent to 446 000 jobs (10.4 percent of total employment) in 2025.

From an educational perspective, this growing demand for tourism employees can be translated into a growing need of tourism education to adequately prepare the workforce to serve present and future needs of the industry. As Ladkin (2005) points out, tourism higher education, as a major platform for human capital development for the tourism industry, has a mission to provide graduates with the particular skills and attributes necessary for successful operation in tourism workplaces. In other words, tourism education needs to enhance the employability of tourism graduates. Indeed, students enrolling in tourism programs of study are motivated by anticipated career outcomes (Airey and Johnson, 1999). However, employability of the future graduates is not likely to increase unless they demonstrate their ability to cope with the circumstances of the business world.

Yet there appears to be a considerable gap between what is taught in tourism education and what is actually needed by the industry (Amoah and Baum, 1997; Zehrer and Mössenlechner, 2009). In this respect, tourism education has often been criticized for over-emphasizing theoretical knowledge, at the expense of practical application (Dale and Robinson, 2001; Koh, 1995). At the same time, the tourism industry tends to discount students' formal qualifications on the grounds of insufficient knowledge and expectations about tourism employment conditions and lack of experience (Hjalager, 2003; Jugmohan, 2010; Kusluvan and Kusluvan, 2000). Similar results are reported by a set of evaluative studies of the Greek tourism education system, presented later in this chapter. However, findings from these studies are almost exclusively based on the views of hotel managers and graduates working in hotels and are, therefore, of limited scope because they are confined to a single sector of the tourism industry. To this end, this chapter takes an interest in tourism industry expectations of tourism graduates in Greece. The scope of these earlier studies is broadened by using empirical material from an interview study of tourism managers in Athens, representing a wider range of tourism organizations.

These concerns are explored in four sections. First, some observations are made regarding the development of tourism education and its links with tourism employment, particularly drawing on the UK experience. The second section reviews the tourism curriculum in Greece at undergraduate level, with the purpose of illuminating the nature of provision and its relevance to industry needs. This is followed by a presentation of the study's methodology and findings. The conclusion presents a summary of the outcomes of the study and considers inferences from the data obtained.

2. INDUSTRY AND TOURISM EDUCATION: AN EXPECTATION GAP

Education for the tourism sector is a relatively recent arrival in the education system. Although the study of tourism can trace its origins back to the 1930s or earlier (Airey et al., 2015a), it was not until the 1960s that it was established as an 'area of study in its own right and as a subject of study up to degree and diploma level' (Airey, 2005, p. 13). It was developed against a background of the recognition of the link between an educated work force and economic prosperity; a rapid expansion of higher education, including the development of many new universities and other institutions; and a growth in tourism itself (Airey, 2015). Tourism was identified, particularly by these new institutions that were relatively free from the constraints of older academic disciplines, as a new area of study that would attract students. Tourism was seen as providing a direct link to employment in a growing activity. Ayikoru et al. (2009) have pointed to the extent to which the expansion of further and higher education generally in the UK in the 1960s was very much driven by the need for an educated workforce and tourism was very much a part of this. As noted by Airey and Johnson (1999, p. 233), the consequential tourism programs placed great emphasis on the subsequent employment opportunities that they provided with 'Career Opportunities' and 'Employment/Employers Links/Work' being among the top aims of such programs.

This link between higher education and employment has remained a key theme for higher education institutions, and if anything it has been thrown into sharper focus by the more recent changes in the funding of higher education. Airey et al. (2015b) point to the extent to which students (and their parents), rather than the state, are increasingly responsible for funding their higher education. As a result, students leaving higher education, often with considerable debts, are increasingly conscious of their employment prospects and associated money-earning opportunities. Hence employment opportunities have become a key factor in students' decisions about which subjects to study. With this influence, employment success rates have become one of the important drivers of the league tables in which the performance of subjects and of whole universities is compared. Subject areas such as Medicine achieve almost 100 percent graduate employment records. By contrast other subjects have much lower post-graduation employment rates. For example, Airey et al. (2015b) quote figures from Australia of 34 percent unemployment for tourism graduates four months after graduation compared with 32 percent for sciences and 30 percent for economics (Hobsons, 2012). For the UK, six months after graduation, they give employment figures for tourism graduates as 45 percent compared with 66 percent for economics and 67 percent for mathematics (*The Guardian*, 2012). Further, they draw

on Walmsley (2012) to indicate that only about one-half of employed tourism graduates in the UK were employed in the tourism sector itself and on Hobsons (2012) to suggest that starting salaries for tourism graduates in Australia lag behind other subject areas.

This brief account points to a number of dimensions in which the link between tourism education and tourism employment is important. First, in many ways, employment stands as one of the important reasons why tourism first appeared in the academy. Secondly, success in graduate employment is a key indicator of the success of tourism education programs and this is becoming increasingly important. And thirdly, there are clearly some doubts as to the success of the link between tourism and employment. As Ladkin (2005, p. 437) puts it, 'the vocational element of tourism education necessitates that it is considered in the wider labour market context'. Given this importance from its very beginning, it is in many ways surprising that attention to post-graduation employment and careers in tourism came in for so little attention at an early stage. Ladkin (2005, p. 440) voiced her surprise about this some ten years ago, writing 'surprisingly little is known about careers and employment in the tourism industry' and Petrova (2015, p. 392) continued in a similar vein, suggesting that 'there is a dearth of systemized large scale research focusing on recent graduates and their transition to employment'.

Early writings on this topic seem to be confined to studies setting out employment opportunities and directions (Chester, 1985; Hebblethwaite, 1973) for those contemplating a career in tourism. However, notwithstanding its relatively limited development, Ladkin (2005) is able to identify themes in the literature. Notably, in relation to progression from education to employment, she draws attention to the work of Ross and others (Airey and Frontistis, 1997; Ross, 1997), who write on interest and motivations for careers in tourism. She also points to work on the values of tourism degrees to employers (Petrova and Mason, 2004) and on career progression, especially in relation to the hospitality sector, which she suggests is rather better documented than tourism (Ladkin, 2002; Ladkin and Riley, 1996). Since Ladkin's account, and very much influenced by the focus on the employment potential of graduates from different subject areas, far more information is now readily available, at least about first employment positions. For example, the subject association in the UK, the Association for Tourism Higher Education, has produced a series of reports that include statistics on career progression (Walmsley, 2009, 2012).

At the same time the link between education and tourism has continued to be explored. Most recently, for example, Petrova (2015, p. 386) explores the employability of tourism graduates and, drawing on the work of various authors (Airey, 2005; Churchward and Riley, 2002; Cooper, 1993; Dale and Robinson, 2001; Evans, 1993), makes the point that 'Research capturing employers' perspectives claimed that there was a mismatch between skills and knowledge required by industry and those provided by universities'.

Notably, in examining the issues that influence the take-up of graduate employment in tourism, Petrova refers to the extent to which academics prioritize research over working with industry, the lack of agreement over the nature of skills or even of content provided by tourism degrees, the size structure and sheer diversity of the tourism industry, the predominance in tourism of small and medium sized enterprises, the low proportion of managers educated to degree level, and entry points to the industry not requiring graduate-level qualifications. She also suggests that the moves to widen participation in higher education which have been successful in many tourism programs may have influenced some employers' perceptions of tourism graduates and further that

the strong intake of female students, who have often found it more difficult to secure employment than their male counterparts, may have had an overall effect on progression to employment. In brief, as she puts it, ‘the vocational link of tourism and hospitality courses, which is often featured in the way these courses are advertised, and is part of tourism and students’ considerations when embarking on their HE studies, is contested’ (Petrova, 2015, p. 387).

What is clear from the literature, as presented by Petrova (2015), is that there is a gap between tourism education and tourism employment. This is reflected in the metrics of graduate employment in which, as noted above, tourism tends to perform relatively less well than other subject areas. This is surprising not only because it is obviously important that there should not be a gap but also because tourism itself, as a subject for study, has such a clear vocational link to a particular sector of the economy and, what is more, most tourism programs build upon this link in the form of inviting guest speakers, and providing for field trips and supervised work experience, all of which directly bring industry and education together (Busby, 2005). Petrova’s work gives some pointers to the nature of the gap from a UK perspective. This study now seeks to explore this further in the context of a country where tourism is relatively very important.

3. TOURISM EDUCATION IN GREECE

After about 45 years of development, Greece has a fairly well-developed higher education system in tourism, even though recent educational reforms cast doubts over its future. More specifically, according to Greek legislation, public higher education comprises two parallel sectors (Papazoglou, 2006).¹

The first sector includes universities, polytechnics, and the Athens School of Fine Arts. Within this sector, degree-level modules with a tourism management component (but not degrees on tourism) are offered by the Business Administration Departments of the University of the Aegean and the University of Patras. Also in the university sector, three Universities (University of the Aegean, University of Piraeus, and the Hellenic Open University) offer postgraduate programs in tourism, leading to Master’s or PhD degrees, established during the past sixteen years.

The second sector includes the Technological Educational Institutions (TEIs). It should be emphasized that TEIs are very similar to the former British polytechnics (Christou, 1999) and were fully integrated into the higher education system in 2001. Up until recently, there were seven TEIs offering courses leading to an undergraduate degree in tourism management. In all cases, these courses were offered by independent departments of tourism management. However, recent reforms initiated by the government in response to the ongoing economic crisis that has struck Greece have changed the map of tourism education. Space precludes details but suffice it to say that the latest educational reform, named ‘Athena’, took effect in the academic year 2013–14 and aimed to curtail state expenditures by reducing the number of higher education departments (Tsiligiris, 2012). Accordingly, under the Athena plan tourism departments have either been abolished, merged with other departments, or will only continue to operate until currently enrolled students have graduated. The situation is still very unclear as tourism departments are trying to come to terms with the full impact of these changes. In any case the result of these developments is that

tourism management is now offered only as a degree specialization in TEIs and the number of tourism modules has been drastically reduced.² For example, the specialization 'Tourism and Hospitality Management' offered by the Department of Business Administration at the TEI of Thessaly stems from the merger of three pre-existing departments (Department of Business Administration, Department of Tourism Management, Department of Project Management). In the same TEI this transition from a tourism course to a tourism specialization also meant that the number of tourism-related modules has gone down from 26 to 18. These changes have been met with skepticism and hostility by tourism educators and students, who perceive them as degrading tourism education. The most telling criticism to be leveled against the plan in this respect is that the shrinkage of tourism education will render it unable to respond to growing industry needs, thereby raising questions about its usefulness for future employment.

The remainder of this section now turns to a consideration of the nature of tourism education in the technological sector, which still acts as the sole provider of tourism education at the undergraduate level. However, many of the issues presented are also relevant to the wider tourism educational system of Greece.

To a large extent the development of tourism education in Greece has been driven by what Tribe (1997) has referred to as a 'vocational action' approach. As Tribe (1999, p. 123) explains, vocational actions 'are activities or performances in the world and generally involve exercise of a skill or technique'. It follows logically that within the context of tourism, vocational actions refer to the actions of those employed in the tourism industry. So, for example, the preparation of a profit and loss account, the operation of a reception desk and the marketing of an attraction involve vocational actions. In this connection, the aims of a tourism education for vocational action are defined as preparation for employment in tourism workplaces (Tribe, 2005).

Considering its origins and development, this vocational emphasis is not surprising. Greek tourism education originated as a response to the remarkable growth of the tourism industry during the last 40 years and the associated employment needs of this growing sector. It was given added impetus by students anxious about future employment (Christou, 1999). The result of these developments was that formal qualifications became, at least in principle, the main route for potential workers to gain employment in the tourism industry. Not surprisingly tourism courses offering these qualifications were strongly geared towards employment needs. This vocational orientation was further supported by a strong national vocational ethos, which emphasized, and continues – at least in principle – to do so even today, the important links between an educated workforce and a strong tourism industry.

This industry influence was seen in the initial establishment of technological educational institutions in the 1970s as Centres of Professional Technological Education. Today it can be felt in that the location of tourism specializations in all TEIs is in Schools of Business Administration. This organizational arrangement played a pivotal role in setting out a vocational orientation for tourism education, which subsequently exerted strong influence in the content of degree programs. A relevant comment on this in the UK was made by Tribe (1999, p. 29), who pointed out that 'the importance of this [organization] for the process of curriculum development is that the curriculum is born into, nurtured, and developed in departments which have an established culture and community of business orientation'.

Table 1.1 Tourism modules included in a four-year program in Business Administration with a specialization in tourism

1st semester Introduction to Tourism	5th semester Organisation and Operations of Travel Agencies <i>Food and Beverage Management</i> English for Tourism
2nd semester <i>Front-desk Management</i> Hotel Procurement	6th semester Alternative Forms of Tourism Tourism Economics <i>Professional Cooking</i> Bartending-Oenology
3rd semester Tourism Geography <i>Clients Record Keeping</i>	7th semester Customer Relationship Management in Tourism Hospitality Management <i>Global Reservation Systems</i> Graduate Seminar
4th semester Sociology of Tourism Events Management	8th semester Dissertation Six-month industrial placement

Note: Modules in italics include a laboratory component.

Source: Table developed by the authors, based on Technological Educational Institute of Thessaly (2015).

The outcome of this process can be seen in the list of the tourism modules provided in Table 1.1. These are part of a four-year program on Business Administration with a specialization in tourism management, spread progressively throughout the semesters of study and starting from the first semester after entrance. The emphasis on industry-oriented content is apparent in module titles such as *Tourism Economics*, *Customer Relationship Management in Tourism* and *Hotel Procurement*. The prevalence of laboratories in *Front Desk* and *Professional Cooking*, and six-month industrial placements as part of the students' experience, also provide evidence of this focus. The industry influence is also demonstrated clearly in the 2013 prospectus of the TEI of Athens (2013, p. 55), which states that the aim of the offered tourism curriculum is 'to prepare and form highly qualified professionals in the field of tourism management'. This theme is also echoed in an earlier study conducted by Christou (1999, p. 687), who argues that tourism graduates gain 'knowledge and practical skills in food and beverage operations, accommodation services and front-office operations'.

What all this adds up to is an orientation that produces a vocational curriculum. This is to be expected as in many ways the vocational orientation fits the needs of the key stakeholders in tourism education: the employers, the students and the educators. As Airey (2003) explains, the emphasis on vocational actions helps meet employers' immediate workforce needs, thus providing students with fairly good initial employment prospects. It also ensures that the educators have a good student demand for their programs. Indeed, this combination is often seen as one of the strengths and successes of this aspect of education.

Yet despite its vocational orientation, there is debate about whether tourism education in Greece is responsive to the needs of the tourism industry. This is reflected in the results of a number of studies relative to the vocational link of tourism courses. An early study was that of Christou (1999), who explored perceptions of tourism graduates employed in the hospitality industry about their educational preparation for the workplace. This found that graduates had problems in applying their knowledge to real-life working situations and concluded that tourism graduates in Greece 'are not fully prepared for the requirements of the hotel and tourism industry' (Christou, 1999, p. 689). In a study on the employment status of tourism graduates, Moira et al. (2004) came to the conclusion that holding a tourism degree does not necessarily ensure gaining entry to the industry, with only 34 percent of respondents being employed in tourism with similar salaries to non-graduate employees. A later study of hotel managers' expectations found that tourism graduates may not be able to cope with the demands of employment, suggesting 'a clear gap between education and the reality of the industry' (Prinianaki, 2005, p. 6). More recently, Diplari and Dimou (2010) reported a need for tourism education to respond to industry needs by adding more practical elements in the curriculum, as expressed by a group of hotel and travel agency managers. Based on these results, all of these studies highlight the need for nurturing closer industry/academic interaction.

One attempt to actually create an interface between what educational institutions offer and what is needed by the industry is to look at practitioner expectations of employees who are graduates of tourism education programs as well as perceptions of current provision. For the purpose of this case, in March 2013 an interview study of tourism managers took place in Athens, Greece. The results are presented below as they provide one of the few accounts of how tourism professionals perceive tourism education issues in Greece.

4. THE STUDY

Data for this analysis were taken from an interview study with tourism managers in Athens. The tourism industry of the city covers a broad array of sectors including accommodation, food service, transportation, attractions, entertainment and tours (Asprogerakas, 2007). This broad representation made Athens an appropriate context to undertake industry-related empirical research. A personal invitation to participate was emailed to people who worked in tourism companies that employ tourism graduates and were personal acquaintances of one of the authors. The email included a request for the recipient to refer the researcher to three other potential interviewees among their professional acquaintances. The interviews asked respondents about: their educational background and their experience in hiring/supervising tourism graduates; their perceptions of tourism education; knowledge, skills and attitudinal qualities expected from tourism graduates; and the preparedness of tourism graduates to enter professional practice. The participants were also invited to make additional comments at the end of the interviews.

In order to broaden the scope of earlier studies, an attempt was made to identify respondents closely mirroring the classifications of tourism activities presented in the International Recommendations for Tourism Statistics 2008 (see Annex 3, United Nations Statistics Division, 2008). This proved to be unattainable, as it was either not possible to identify respondents from certain sectors or some sectors did not appear to hire

tourism graduates. Still, the sampling procedure resulted in 22 participants employed in the following sectors: accommodation ($n = 6$), food and beverage services ($n = 2$), water and air passenger transport ($n = 5$), travel agencies and other reservation service activities ($n = 7$), cultural activities ($n = 1$), and sports and recreational activities ($n = 1$). The respondents were well-qualified to answer the interview questions, having experience in hiring between five and over 80 employees, and in supervision of between four and over 100 employees. Twelve respondents had a Bachelor's degree, three a Master's degree, and seven a post-secondary (non-tertiary) diploma. The degrees/diplomas were mostly in management-related fields ($n = 15$); six respondents had a degree in tourism management, and one in statistics.

All interviews took place at the offices of the respondents at a time convenient for them as respondents had indicated limited time availability for the study. Accordingly, interviews were relatively short (average: 30 minutes, longest: 45 minutes) to fit into the respondent's working day. This resulted in much less exploration of expectations than had been planned. The interviews were not tape-recorded as participants indicated that they were uncomfortable with the idea. Rather, the first author took hand-written notes using a form of shorthand. Following the interviews, the interviewer typed up the interview notes and emailed participants a summary of responses for clarification to ensure accurate representation of the interview content. This process was followed as a means to validate interview responses (Rose, 2013). The researchers read through the typed notes several times in order to identify recurrent unifying concepts or statements. This analysis was conducted independently by each researcher to serve the purpose of establishing inter-rater reliability. During this iterative process it was discovered that key emerging issues could be conveniently grouped into three main headings: graduates' preparedness, expectations from tourism graduates, and additional comments. The remainder of this section is structured around these headings. Moreover, since interviews were not recorded, the quotations presented here were reconstructed from the interview notes and might therefore be approximations of the respondents' comments.

4.1 Graduates' Preparedness for the Workplace

Participants in the interview process all painted a negative picture of tourism education struggling to cope with industry needs. This is clearly illustrated in common statements relating to 'irrelevant content', 'over-theoretical knowledge', and 'unprepared graduates'. When asked explicitly to rate the preparedness of graduates entering the workforce, all respondents unanimously agreed that this should be rated as merely adequate or inadequate. More specifically, respondents repeatedly emphasized that new graduates generally lack specialized knowledge. As they said, 'Educational institutions provide knowledge which is of limited use in the workplace' and 'Institutions provide tourism knowledge, but they do not specialize on the use of that knowledge'. However, these comments should not be taken to totally disregard the importance of theory in tourism studies. Several participants were of the opinion that some theoretical principles of tourism and tourism management are desirable to industry as long as they advance the practical skills of graduates.

Respondents involved in job interviewing also expressed concerns about the degree of professionalism displayed by tourism graduates. Some of the 'unprofessional' traits cited were inappropriate attire, poor personal appearance, and being overconfident. They

further emphasized that most graduates were unprepared for the interview and unable to provide coherent responses to company or industry-specific questions. In the study by Christou (1999) referenced earlier in this chapter, new tourism professionals also indicated transferable skills, such as the ability to 'sell oneself', to be the area in which they felt least prepared upon entering the workforce. If this is still the case today, it might explain the unpreparedness of graduates for their job interviews. On-the-job complaints from supervisors included poor punctuality, lack of care, poor work ethic, and being uninterested. Taken as a whole, the industry agreed that it is the responsibility of educational institutions to undertake this aspect of education. In the words of one respondent, 'Educational institutions should be prepared to teach the business standards of dress and conduct'. The issue of unprofessionalism among tourism graduates is also generally raised by Prinianaki (2005) and Diplari and Dimou (2010), even though no details on specific unprofessional behaviors or traits are offered.

Outdated educational content was also identified as a weakness of tourism education. This was particularly evident in the case of sectors requiring the use of specialized software. For example, one respondent explained, 'By the time students graduate, the front-office applications they were taught are not used anymore'. Another one said, 'Taught computer reservation systems modules are clearly outdated and need significant changes to reflect current industry practices of travel professionals'. Although these comments are more directly related to front-office activities and reservation services, the lesson may be equally applicable to other tourism modules concerning Information Technology (IT) applications. Also in relation to the use of software, respondents cautioned that new graduates often know how to use a particular type of software but are not aware of the analytical principles that are applied. This means that they are often unable to make the transition from one software system to another. It can also lead to overreliance on packaged programs and inability to develop creative solutions to problems. This lack of creativity seems to extend beyond the use of IT. Several participants were of the opinion that tourism graduates are accustomed to working standard problems with a standard approach, looking for an, often unrealistic, textbook solution.

Industry participants in the interview process also stated that many graduates enter the tourism industry unprepared for 'real life', with glamorous expectations of fun, excellent wages, and important managerial responsibilities. When confronted with the realities of employment they are severely disappointed. However, as one participant argued, 'New graduates should not expect to take on managerial responsibilities immediately, but must learn business fundamentals from the bottom up'. In connection with this, it was also noted that some graduates seem to resent being supervised by managers who lack formal education and have 'come up through the ranks'. Research by Airey and Frontistis (1997), conducted many years ago, concluded that Greek pupils had unrealistic expectations of tourism employment fueled by their impractical views about the tourism industry and limited knowledge of tourism employment. It appears that this 'rosy' representation of the industry is still present today at the level of higher education.

4.2 Expectations from Tourism Graduates

In an open question, respondents were asked to identify important skills expected from new graduates entering the workplace. To a large extent the respondents produced a list

that was similar to their responses in the previous section. In this context, it seems reasonable to suggest that these responses are related, since areas in which tourism graduates have been found wanting are also areas sought from the industry. Accordingly, specific skills and desirable characteristics included the ability to apply knowledge to real life situations, the ability to approach problems creatively, to demonstrate professional behavior and appearance, and to be current with the industry.

In addition, the respondents all agreed that foreign language competence is extremely important. There is little doubt that foreign languages are invaluable when communicating with people from other countries, as is often the case in the cross-cultural interface between tourism organizations and tourists. Tourism graduates must also have excellent verbal and written communication skills and be able to understand the needs of diverse groups of customers. Taken together, these skills are necessary if the graduate is to manage guest problems effectively. This suggests that tourism employers do not simply seek graduates to provide basic service to customers, but to be able to manage the service encounter. Interestingly, in a study of desirable graduate competencies according to the views of Greek hotel managers, the ability 'to manage guest problems with understanding' emerged as the single most important skill (Christou, 2002, p. 30).

Participants in the interviews also felt that tourism graduates must be patient, committed and motivated in pursuing a tourism career. The industry reality is that tourism employees must be prepared to work unsocial hours, such as weekends, holidays and evenings. These conditions might require greater commitment and self-motivation than other jobs (Zehrer and Mössenlechner, 2009). As reinforcement of their earlier comment, respondents added that these characteristics are clearly linked to the issue of having realistic employment expectations. The industry perception was also that most work is undertaken as a team effort and graduates should be able to function as team members. The ability to accept criticism, willingness to learn, and a strong work ethic were also valued. Altogether, these personal competences were perceived by respondents as equally important to other occupational requirements of tourism jobs.

4.3 Additional Comments

The usefulness of industrial placement as a means for acquiring employability skills and putting graduate knowledge to a real-life test was acknowledged by all respondents. However, they also raised concerns about the way the undergraduate placement scheme is implemented. As one respondent stated, 'As far as I am concerned, students are not always able to undertake their placement in their desired field, but often have to settle for available employers'. Others commented that industrial placement is not adequately supported by educational institutions, with academics not monitoring students during their placement. Further on the issue of work experiences, participants strongly recommended opportunities for part-time employment for graduating students. They believe that these would provide students with a real feel of employment conditions prior to graduation, thus reducing the possibility of unpleasant surprises for both employers and new employees.

Finally it should be stressed that several participants were surprised and appreciative that people working in academia were interested in their input with regard to the evaluation of tourism education and its graduates. For most of them, the only interaction with educational institutions was limited to scarce meetings and phone conversations with

industrial placement coordinators. Taking this opportunity, they registered a willingness to reinforce their company's links with tourism education by providing guest lecturers, hosting student visits, and providing material for study projects, for example. However, despite this willingness to nurture closer interaction with educational institutions, it was clear that the industry does not look to academia for new sources of knowledge or research assistance. Given respondents' perceptions of tourism education and the fact that tourism graduates do not seem to bring new skills and ideas to the workplace, this is hardly unexpected.

5. CONCLUSIONS

From the results of this interview study, which was undertaken with tourism managers who hire and supervise tourism graduates, a clear picture emerges of the demands for knowledge and skills of tourism graduates. Some desired skills are generic. Communication and team skills are not specific to tourism studies, but tourism curricula should provide students with ample opportunities to develop them. Other expectations, such as the ability to apply tourism knowledge in practical situations, should be integral in tourism education courses, yet it was raised as a specific inadequacy of tourism graduates during the interviews. Personal characteristics, such as being patient and self-motivated, were also regarded as essential to achieve career success. There is an important lesson here for tourism educators and graduates that tourism employers look for both specific knowledge/skills and personality.

These findings replicate and complement the findings of previous studies. These efforts were in response to concerns over the vocational link of tourism courses in Greece. Their basic purpose was to create an interface between tourism education and the tourism industry. These studies have now surveyed or interviewed tourism graduates (Moirá et al., 2004), new tourism professionals in their jobs after graduation (Christou, 1999), and tourism and hospitality managers (Diplari and Dimou, 2010; Prinianaki, 2005). This study has broadened the scope of these earlier undertakings by including wider representation of respondents from diverse tourism sectors. All these studies paint the same picture, that there is a clear mismatch between skills and knowledge required by industry and those provided by educational institutions. Taken together they therefore have cumulative validity that compensates for problems in aligning data from the different methods employed.

These findings here very much hark back to one of the longstanding issues raised in one of the earliest studies of tourism career profiles and knowledge (Airey and Nightingale, 1981) that there is a mismatch between what employers are seeking and what educators are offering. Petrova's (2015) work is one of the most recent offerings on this theme. Clearly Greece is not alone in experiencing the longstanding perceived gap between the dynamics that drive higher education and those that drive the world of work.

At one level the 'take-home' message from this strand of research, including this study, is quite clear: educational institutions in Greece need to bridge the gap between what is taught in tourism education and the needs of the industry. Receiving industry input is very important in this respect. This raises the wider question of how to create a proper interface for information about expectations from tourism employers to tourism educators.

This study has found that the industry is willing to contribute input to tourism education and respondents have suggested ways to involve industry professionals in the educational process. However, the use of interviews and surveys for the purpose of this case is clearly not ideal. These methodological approaches provide only snapshots of a given situation in a given time. They should therefore be repeated frequently to provide a continuous flow of information and knowledge to tourism educators, keeping them up to date with changing industry needs and developments. This may be impractical due to the costs involved in conducting these types of research. Future researchers are therefore challenged to develop better methods for bridging the communication gap between industry and academia.

The findings also prompt a deeper level of query about the role of tourism education in an increasingly complex world and the extent to which such education has a role to play in preparing students and in providing opportunities for employers. This is a theme that has most recently been picked up by Dredge et al. (2015). In a world of increasing complexity, for students and for employers, higher education cannot simply be judged on how well it meets current industry needs. It must prepare students to make decisions for a complex world. Tourism as a multi-dimensional, multi-disciplinary and multi-methodological area of study lends itself well to dealing with the complexities presented by a post-industrial and post-disciplinary world. Such an education has relevance for all employment and especially for tourism employment where the proper stewardship of an activity that crosses economic, environmental, sociological, political and many other boundaries needs multi-talented employees. In this context, perhaps the most important point is for tourism educators to be aware of what they can offer to meet the needs of the future tourism world and to make sure that the communication with industry explains this as well as responding to more immediate employment needs.

Given the undeniable challenges facing Greek tourism education and industry today, it is imperative for educational institutions to re-examine existing curricula, revising them where necessary in response to changes in industry needs. Of course, given the shrinkage of tourism education in the course of the current financial crisis in Greece, it is a fact that the industry desires academia to cover more material than can be adequately covered in an undergraduate tourism curriculum. But at the same time, this suggests that the industry has high expectations of tourism graduates and, as Christou (2002) observes, tourism managers in Greece may be more demanding than their international counterparts. In this context, students wishing to pursue a tourism career should be able to rely on their education to guide their skill development in a way that allows them to fulfill industry expectations and successfully perform their professional roles. Graduating without the skills necessary to carry out their professional responsibilities is damaging for both students and the industry. We therefore invite tourism professionals to think of ways of effectively communicating their needs to tourism educators, and urge educators to be open to the expressed industry needs.

NOTES

1. Private colleges can also offer undergraduate and postgraduate programs of study in Greece, under proper registration with the Greek Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs. The emphasis of this chapter is on public higher education for tourism.

2. A Greek version of the Athena plan can be found at http://www.minedu.gov.gr/publications/docs2013/130305_telikh_protash_athhna.pdf.

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