

Tourism education and training system in Greece. The transition from 20th to 21st century

Polyxeni Moira¹, Dimitrios Mylonopoulos², Aikaterina Kikilia³

^{1,2,3}Professor, Department of Tourism Management, University of West Attica, Greece
polmoira@uniwa.gr

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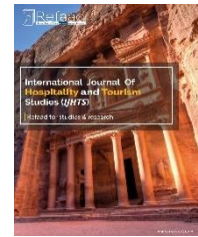
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Polyxeni Moira¹, Dimitrios Mylonopoulos², Aikaterina Kikilia³

^{1,2,3}Professor, Department of Tourism Management, University of West Attica, Greece

¹polmoira@uniwa.gr

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Abstract: *Tourism represents one of the most prosperous sources of income in Greece and its contribution to the country's GDP is acknowledged by all economic factors. To this day, however, a stable and reliable educational-vocational system in the field of tourism has yet to be developed. The country makes constant efforts to improve the education provided in this department, without having a clear orientation. The present study aims to analyze the course of the public education of tourism over time, whilst indicating the weaknesses of the corresponding policy and providing relevant suggestions to the topic.*

Keywords: *Tourism education; tourism training; Technological Education; Universities; Greece.*

1. Introduction

Without a doubt the educational system, the economy, and the country's productivity share a direct correlation. (Becker, 1974: 15-14; Mincer, 1975: 72-73; OECD, 2004: 6). The interdependence of the educational system and the economy is clearly determined by the current social reality, as each worker needs to acquire special qualifications that can only be adopted through some level of education or training. Employers look forward to finding trained and experienced employees, to raise productivity and improve the quality of the business's services - increasing in that way their profits. The country pursues this interdependence to achieve gradual development and strengthen the competitiveness. Employees try to improve their skills, because the improvement of their performance, theoretically, leads to a better job status while affecting the boost of their income. (Dessler, 2013; Wilkinson, Redman & Dundon, 2017).

As an economic activity, tourism affects many aspects of the economy, such as transportation, accommodation, the food industry, and the amusement and entertainment activities. Known as complicated "industry" that has an influence on a wide range of other economic activities, tourism requires a substantial investment in human resources. In fact, as a labor-intensive industry, it is essential to attract highly skilled employees (Wang, Ayres & Huyton, 2010) with the appropriate knowledge and qualifications, to meet the requirements of employers and clients.

The industry of tourism in Greece recorded significant growth, at least until the outbreak of the Coronavirus pandemic. According to the Greek Tourism Confederation¹ (ΣΕΤΕ), the total contribution of tourism to the GDP amounted to 20.89% and its contribution to employment to 21.7%, which concludes to 946.200 job positions. According to the available data, tourism is the most valuable source of income in Greece. In 2019, 31.3 million tourist arrivals and a revenue of 17.7 billion euros, were recorded (cruise revenues not included). The hotel infrastructure in the country amounts to 10.121 hotels with 798.650 beds (ΣΕΤΕ, 2019).

The Greek Tourism Confederation (ΣΕΤΕ, 2005: 56) has emphasized that Greece cannot be differentiated from the competing countries regarding the level of cost, but it can be discriminated from them regarding the offered products and the variety of amazing experiences that the tourists can embark on. If only there is a qualified and

¹ The Greek Tourism Confederation (ΣΕΤΕ) was established in 1991. Its primary goal is to bring together tourism enterprises that provide high-quality services.

trained workforce, the above statements will be accomplished. (Moscardo and Benckendorff, 2015; Farber-Canziani et al., 2012).

The educational and vocational training of the suitable workforce, which is crucial for a developed or on-the-making tourism industry, requires a carefully designed and well-organized tourism educational and training system. Acquiring and developing skills is of vital importance to the labor market performance and modernization, to provide new forms of flexibility and security for job seekers, employees and employers (COM (2016) 381 final; COM (2020) 274 final).

On a European level, with the increasing interest in tourism, state institutions gradually began to participate in the provision of tourism education to meet the needs of tourists as well as to fulfill the requirements of the employers (Airey & Tribe, 2005). What's more, the flourishing occupation of the provided tourism services has highlighted the need to offer tourism education beyond the level of training and the technical aspect that dominated in the past.

In Greece, the need to provide tourism education as a distinct field of study (Fidgeon, 2010) was perceived in the 1960s due to the impact of a series of social, political, and economic changes which referred to the form and nature of the tourism activity. The realization that tourism employees are directly involved in the tourism product design and affect its quality, led to recognizing the need for a trained and qualified workforce to staff tourism businesses. Gradually, in Greece, the teaching of tourism initially appeared in individual courses in educational institutions. Later, it was categorized as a specialization in Business Management studies (Λογοθέτης, 2001). The complex and imaginative side of the tourism activity that led and continues to lead (Μοίρα & Μυλωνόπουλος, 2014: 321-328) the development of new forms of tourism and the provision of specialized services later highlighted the need to create and offer specialized curricula in the higher level of education and to enrich the existing curricula, moving from hotel education and training to other more specialized fields of tourism education. At the same time, tourism, as a rapidly growing field concerning the country's economic activity, is recognized by students as a prosperous career field. This recognition leads to greater acceptance of tourism as a way of rapid employment and professional growth. As a result, tourism is gradually being established in the educational system at all levels.

To make matters worse, the recent crisis in the health system that was caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, reduced the tourism activity by 80% and endangered approximately 7 million work positions in the European Union. The European Commission pinpoints the need for employees that are experienced in online marketing, whilst also in recycling and managing waste pollution, and water and energy resources, in order to advance leisure travel and work towards sustainability in the tourism field. Further, it is important that employees acquire such strong communicative skills, that they are experienced in intercultural communication. (European Committee, 2020).

2. The Research

During the last twenty years, significant developments have been recorded in the field of tourism educational and vocational system, in Greece. Especially the merging of the Technological Educational Institutions (TEI) and the University Educational Institutions (AEI) that was implemented by law in 2018, significantly affects the tourism industry, because the detailed and more specific knowledge and experience that the technological education offered was completely abolished (European Commission, 2021). The present study demonstrates that tertiary tourism education in Greece makes clear efforts to adapt to the newly emerging needs that have resulted from the economic crisis. At the same time, however, it aims to satisfy the general demand to upgrade tourism studies and consequently elevate the social profile of graduates, thus it is not a product of a systematic study on the labor market needs.

To monitor the changes and evaluate such an educational reform that takes place in the tourism education of Greece, recording and mapping the available curricula, as well as, evaluating the adjustments made in the curricula and at the study levels, is attempted, as an effort to collect and present data in a more unified and integrated way.

This research was carried out from September 2018 until January 2021. The purpose of it was to record and evaluate the significant changes in the education of tourism in Greece, with reference to post-secondary/tertiary (higher) education and it is a continuation of previous research conducted on the specific topic (Maira, Mylonopoulos & Kefala, 2019). The current study was conducted with thorough research, and with recording and processing data from all educational and vocational state institutions. In addition, the institutional framework, the reformation decisions, and the number of students admitted to higher education per institution from 1998 to 2021 were researched, examines, and associated with the collected information. The data will be presented in analytical charts, to illustrate the evolution of tourism study programs at high, upper band/ under-graduate, and postgraduate level of education.

3. The Development of Tourism Education and Training in Greece

Tourism education was only offered in high school during the early stages of tourism's development in Greece. Particularly, it was provided by state Technical Vocational Schools of Tourism Professions (TESTE), by Technical Vocational Schools and Vocational Training Departments of the Greek Manpower Employment Organization

(OAEΔ). The courses were mainly based on hospitality and restaurant knowledge, as the field of tourism was related to hotel and food service, and more specifically to cooking and serving. Progressively, the flourish of tourism as the dominant economic activity of the country led to the establishment of new training and educational specializations, hence Guide schools (Law 710/1977), whilst there was an evolution in Higher Technical and Vocational Training Centers into Higher Technological Education Departments, with emphasis on the Tourism Business Administration ones (Λογοθέτης, 2001).

The establishment of tourism studies at the highest level of education, although proposed in the mid-1960s by corresponding institutions and representatives of local communities of tourist destinations, aiming to staff the country's hotel businesses, found no response until much later. Only later, in 2001, the technological education was lawfully upgraded (to level 6 of studies). Moreover In 2018, the technological education was effectively abolished because the Technological Education Institutes (TEI) were upgraded to University level. To this day, the system of tourism education is at constant risk due to the continuing instability, and it faces perpetual changes that are in dispute.

Generally, tourism education and training is described as complicated and multidimensional. Such education is provided by various institutions either public, or private ones (Maira, Mylonopoulos & Anastasiou, 2004: 59). The primary institution is the Greek government, through the Ministry of Education and Religion – a common similarity with other European countries. The Greek education system is mainly focused on and controlled by the Ministry of Education and Religion. As a result, the room for flexibility regarding the regulated institutions in tourism education and training is truly little. Meanwhile several operating private institutions of tourism education, adapt programs that are approved by the Ministry of Education. According to a study, there are 39 private institutions that offer tourism training and 25 colleges, running independently or in collaboration with foreign universities (Thelen, Zouni & Papatheodorou, 2017).

As a result, regarding the tourism education, vocational education and training in the public field of study, it is observed that the crucial and dominating role belongs to the Ministry of Education and Religion, whereas the Ministry of Tourism holds a more secondary role (N. 3270/2004).

Following the changes that were lawfully established with the law 4763/2020 (GG A'254), tourism education and professional training are composed by three levels: 3, 4 and 5. They are provided by Vocational Training Schools (EEK) and Apprenticeship Vocational Schools (ΕΠΑΣ) which are run by OAEΔ (Greek Manpower Employment Organization/Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs) for professions of the tourism and hospitality businesses (level 3). They are also offered by Vocational Upper Secondary Schools (ΕΠΙΑ) specializing in tourism businesses (level 4) and Institutes of Vocational Training (IEK) and Vocational Upper Secondary Schools (ΕΠΙΑ) (level 5). The IEK are both public and private. The public IEKs are under the supervision of the Ministry of Education and Religion and the Ministry of Tourism (and sometimes-in specific situations- under the supervision of other Ministries). All graduates are certified by joint examinations conducted by the Ministry of Education.

3.1. The School of Tour Guides

The Ministry of Tourism supervises the operation of the School for Tour Guides (Xenagoi). The Tour Guides school is considered a post-secondary vocational school. Up until 2011, for one to be able to work as a tour guide, it was necessary to enroll in the school of tour guides, which then belonged to the Organization of Tourism Education and Training (OTEK), which was run under the supervision of the Ministry of Tourism. The institutions in Athens and in Thessaloniki operated regularly. The other schools of Rhodes, Corfu, Lesbos, Rethymno and Irakleio, Crete functioned depending on the *urgencies/needs/demands*. So that the candidate would be admitted to the school, he/she had to be examined in various subjects, such as composition, geography, and history of Greece. The attendance to such school was free and lasted for five academic semesters with a curricular that consisted of courses, visits to museums and archeological sites, internships, educational excursions and tours, attendance to professional tour guides and lectures. The courses were mainly focused on the Greek history (Ancient, Byzantine, Modern), the History of Art, the Greek Mythology, the History of Greek Literature, the History of Greek Music and Dance, the Geography of Greece, the Greek Archaeology and Tourism Legislation, etc. (Μυλωνόπουλος & Μοίρα, 2011). The Athens School of Tour Guides was rewarded by CEDEFOP as the best vocational school in Europe (Καραντζαβέλου, 2013). In 2012, the institutional framework endured significant changes, when the law 4093/2012 (G.G. A'222) led to the interruption of the operation of the School of Guides and to the function of intensive training programs for Guides by Universities (Mylonopoulos, Maira & Kikilia, 2012). The law allowed only graduates of archeology, history, history and archeology, archeology & social anthropology and cultural values management, history and ethnology institutions, to attend these programs; as a result, access to these programs from other candidates that derived from different categories was limited. The duration of these programs was reduced from 2.5 years to 2 months. The cost of these intensive programs was a burden to the trainees as it ranged from 600 to 900 euros. The programs were restricted to teaching theoretical courses without any practical execution. According to the data of the tour guide department of the Tourism Education Directorate of the Ministry of Tourism, since 2013, when the training programs started, a total of 12 different programs were organized and 411 participants successfully graduated. The new arrangement created “two-speed” guides and, admittedly, with

different guiding skills and abilities. Graduates of traditional tourist guides schools reacted to this change. In fact, the Association of the Athens School of Guides, emphasizing the wording in the statute which declares that only graduates of the School of Guides can register, does not accept the registration of graduates from intensive seminars in the profession of tour guides. As a result of the protests and the overall problematic situation caused by the existing system, the Ministry of Tourism announced in 2017 that the Athens School of Guides would re-construct from the beginning its two-year program of studies (YA 13239/2017).

3.2. The Higher Schools of Tourism Education (ASTE).

At the level of higher professional education (level 5), the Ministry of Tourism has two Higher Schools of Tourism Education (ASTE) under its supervision, one in Rhodes (ΑΣΤΕΡ2) and one in Crete (ΑΣΤΕΚ3) (European Commission, 2020). These schools have been operating since 1956 and 1996 correspondingly (Μυλωνόπουλος, 2016: 126-130). Their unique feature is that they are more advanced (level 5 of the National Qualifications Framework), i.e., in comparison to secondary and the university level of education. In addition, the enrollment into these schools depends on an examination system that is run by the Ministry of Education and Religion. Graduating from them does not come with the possibility of pursuing postgraduate studies unless the graduate continues to admit in the 6th semester of a Tourism Business Administration department of the Technological Education Institutes (TEI) and acquire a *diploma/degree*.

In 2020, a change is recorded in the institutional framework of the schools, even though it mainly concerns the duration of the course of study. Aiming for the - formal - coverage of the time limit of the four-year study, so that the graduates are able to acquire the recognition of the highest level of studies, and without any modifications in the essential qualifications of the teaching staff of the Schools, a ministerial decision was issued, approving a new four-year study program (Ministerial Degree 20071 / 29-12-2020, GG B'5824) - without, however, substantial changes in the selection process of the teaching staff and in the high qualifications required by the Universities. This defect was determined immediately and the Common Ministerial Decision with no. 2664/2021 (GG B'618) suspended the commencement of the new program.

Table (1): The enrolled students in ASTE

SCHOOLS	Number of enrollments 2012-2013	Number of enrollments 2013-2014	Number of enrollments 2014-2015	Number of enrollments 2015-2016	Number of enrollments 2016-2017	Number of enrollments 2017-2018	Number of enrollments 2018-2019	Number of enrollments 2019-2020	Number of enrollments 2021-2021	Number of enrollments 2022-2023
ASTE OF RHODES	60	60	75	75	90	90	101	122	122	122
ASTE OF ST NIKOLAOS ⁴	50	50	75							
ASTE OF CRETE				75	90	90	101	122	122	122
TOTAL	110	110	150	150	180	180	202	244	244	244

Source: Ministerial Degrees, 2012-2021

Editing: The authors

3.3. Technological Education.

At the high school level and up until 2000, tourism studies were provided by a well-structured tourism education system. Such courses began from secondary level education and carried on to the level of technological education that was conducted at a higher tertiary level (level 5) with 7 semesters, but not at the highest level of education. After the addition of one more semester of studies (8 semesters) in the technological education, in 2001, and to become a four-year course, the Technological Education Institutes (TEI) were upgraded to the highest level and recognized to be considered equal to the University institutions (level 6). At the same time, changes took place regarding the qualifications and the rank in the teaching staff to reach the level of the universities' teaching staff⁵. After the transformation of TEIs to (Technological) Universities, and under the constant pressure of local communities for the operation of a Higher Education Institute in their region, a rapid increase of new TEI departments of Tourism Management in the district followed. In that way, new departments⁶ were created as

² Higher School of Tourism Education of Rhodes.

³ Higher School of Tourism Education of Crete.

⁴ The Higher Schools of Tourism Education of Agios Nikolaos which were in Agios Nikolaos in Crete, were renamed in 2014 "ASTE of Crete".

⁵ Until this upgrade, the professors of the TEI were not obliged to acquire a PhD. What's more, many of them did not even own a master's degree. After this upgrade, professors of the TEI institutes were exposed to embark upon earning master's degrees and PhD. The candidates, however, that wanted to be elected after the new adjustments needed to obtain the new upscale qualifications.

⁶ The new departments that were continuously and yearly created regarded specific qualifications. The current project only focusses on the departments that were organized with the subject of tourism and more specifically the (Management) of Tourism Businesses.

branches of the TEI (hence the ones in Igoumenitsa / TEI of Epirus, in Amfissa / TEI of Lamia⁷, in Spetses / TEI of Piraeus, in Argostoli / TEI of the Ionian Islands⁸). A long period followed, during which efforts were made to "convince" the Greek society that technological and university education were equal. In 2011 a newly conducted law paradoxically stated again (Law 4009/2011) the upgrade of the technological education of TEIs to university level and the distinction between the two equal sectors of education: the technological and the university sector. From 2001 until 2013, these departments of «Tourism Business Administration» regulated autonomously from seven Higher Technological Educational Institutes (TEI)⁹. In 2013-2014 the education system suffered from long-term understaffing problems (for example, there were Tourism Business Administration departments with only two faculty members), lack of specialized teaching staff, disintegration of subjects and curricula. Therefore, the seven Departments of Tourism Business Administration, which were attended by 3,106 active students (2012) and 385 newly admitted students (2012-2013), were only staffed with 42 faculty members, and faced various housing, land planning and other problems. As a matter of fact, their operating cost often surpassed the one of a similar department in Athens by ten times. For example, according to a report addressed to the General Assembly of the Department of Tourism Businesses of the TEI of Piraeus (ΑΠ 681/26-4-2010), the branch-institute of Spetses had yearly operative costs of 190.000€ for only one department, with 3 members of teaching staff, 427 admitted students, whereas only 220 were enrolled and about 50 were active students (Maira, 2010).

Due to the economic crisis and the pressure of the Institutions of the European Union to reduce public spending, in 2013-2014, a large-scale reformation of the education system took place ("Athena" project). Its outcome led to mergers, abolitions and renaming of departments as well as alterations in the curricula. The "Athena" project anticipated for the profound restructure of the country's academic map and the 'reduction' of public continuing education, with a hasty "modernization" of its foundations, for the management of existing problems, such as the lack of teaching staff with the necessary qualifications, the lack of infrastructure, spatial dispersion, etc. (Υπουργείο Παιδείας, Πολιτισμού και Αθλητισμού, 2013).

In regard to tourism studies, this reformation led to the union of the Tourism Business Administration Departments with other departments of the Faculty of Management and Economics, e.g. Business Administration, Marketing etc. under the supervision of a uniform Department of "Business Administration" which branched out to different specializations, either introductory from the first semester of study or in advanced semesters. Consequently, the Department of Tourism Business Administration developed as a specialization of Tourism and Hospitality Business Administration, as part of the Business Administration Department.

Concerning the reduction of the government expenses on education and despite the initial intention to limit the departments and thus the spending, the alterations of the "Athena" project resulted in an increase of the number of departments that occupied tourism studies at the TEIs from seven to ten, as one was added at Grevena and two new departments were created in the TEI of Western Greece and Central Greece with the specialization: «Economy and Communication management of Cultural and Tourism Establishments». The Department of Tourism Business Administration in the TEI of Patra, which was based in Patra, stopped accepting students while it intended to proceed its service until 2017-2018. Such information corresponded that the enrolled students would have until then to complete their studies. Nevertheless, in 2017-2018 the operation of the department as an independent department of Tourism Enterprises was agreed anew and accepted 120 students (Maira, Mylonopoulos & Kefala, 2019: 24).

At the same time, these changes were the starting point of the gradual increase in the number of student admissions from 385 in 2012-2013, to 1734 in 2020-2021. Surely, these numbers would later change because of the transfer students that came from the regional departments to the ones of the urban centers. These changes are shown in detail in the Table 2.

These changes caused several problems to the operation of the Departments that offered tourism education. As it was no longer an autonomous Department of Tourism Business Administration but became instead an introductory orientation within the wider Department of Business Administration and as the teaching staff were specialized in different subjects, which were often not related to tourism, the new programs were organized to combine different courses, whilst also have other expectations from both professors and students. A typical example is the reduction of the offered tourism courses at the TEI of Piraeus from 24 to 19 and at the TEI of Larissa / Thessaly from 26 to 18.

In fact, as Stergiou and Airey (2017: 7) accurately observed, the changes were dealt with skepticism and hostility by professors and students who supported that the level of tourism studies was downgraded. The strongest

⁷ Presidential Decree 147/1998 (GG A'113) «Foundation of branches of the institutions and departments of the Technological Educational institutions (TEI) and the regulation of the matters regarding its organization and its operation».

⁸ Law 3255/2004 (GG A' 138) «Regulations of the matters of all of the education levels».

⁹ The higher institutes of the technological department (A.T.E.I.) are similar with the Technological Universities of Great Britain. They emphasize in training with high quality executions; due to the theoretical and practical scientific knowledge they provide, they form the connection between knowledge and practical application. In that way they create a practical dimension of sciences and arts in the corresponding professional fields while transferring, using and promoting the contemporary use of technology as well as using methods, practices and techniques in the field of practical training.

argument was that this downgrade made it impossible to meet the needs of the constantly developing tourism industry.

In addition, the degrading of the educational procedure is apparent in Table 2, which indicates that the changes led to an increase of the number of the admitted students from 495 to 1734, without a comparable increase in the number of professors, which decreased due to retirements and reduction of new recruitments following the 1: 5 European Union institutions obligation (N. 3899/2010 and INE-ΓΣΕΕ, ΑΔΕΔΥ, 2012).

In 2018, a new legislation cancelled the higher technological education and consequently the technological tourism education. With this legislation, all higher education institutes in the technological sector were merged to form a new university institution (for example the University of West Attica, Hellenic Mediterranean University) or were absorbed by existing higher university education institutions. This resulted in the abolishment of the higher technological education that was offered by the TEIs.

Table (2): The changes in the Higher Tourism Education in Greece 2012-2021

HIGHER TECHNOLOGICAL EDUCATION INSTITUTES OF THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION											
2012-2013 Tourism Business Administration Department	admissions 2012-2013	2013-2014 Business Administration Department/Specialization Tourism and Hospitality Business Administration	admissions 2013-2014	admissions 2014-2015	admissions 2015-2016	admissions 2016-2017	admissions 2017-2018	admissions 2018-2019	admissions 2019-2020	admissions 2020-2021	admissions 2021-2022
Athens	85	Athens	85	85	90	120	110	*** ¹⁰	0	0	0
Piraeus	50	Piraeus ¹¹	100	100	110	140	140	***	0	0	0
Thessaloniki	120	Thessaloniki	100	100	110	130	130	146	0	0	0
Patras	70	Western Greece (former Patras ¹²)	0	0	0	0	120	135	0	0	0
Larissa	0	Thessaly (former Larissa)	100	125	140	150	150	169	0	0	0
Crete (Herakleion)	60	Crete (Herakleion)	85	100	100	140	140	158	0	0	0
Epirus (Igoumenitsa)	0	Epirus (Igoumenitsa)	100	125	100	80	80	90	0	0	0
		Western Macedonia (Grevena)	100	150	170	170	170	191	0	0	0
		Ionian Islands (Lefkada)	130	175	190	230	240	270	0	0	0
TOTAL	385	TOTAL	800	960	1010	1160	1280	1159	0	0	0
		2013-2014 Economic Management and Cultural and Tourism Establishments Departments									
		Western Greece (Pyrgos)	150	200	170	210	210	236	0	0	0
		Central Greece	130	125	150	170	170	191	0	0	0
		TOTAL	280	325	320	380	380	427	0	0	0
UNIVERSITIES MINISTRY OF EDUCATION 2017-2022											
		Piraeus (Piraeus)	0	0	0	0	70	79	91	91	91
		University of the Aegean (Chios)	0	0	0	0	70	79	91	91	91
		University of West Greece (Egaleo)	0	0	0	0	0	288	332	332	332
		Hellenic Mediterranean University (Herakleion)	0	0	0	0	0	0	300	300	300
		International University of Greece (Thessaloniki)	0	0	0	0	0	0	320	320	320
		Ionian University (Corfu)	0	0	0	0	0	0	130	130	130
		University of Patras (Patras)	0	0	0	0	0	0	170	170	170
		Hellenic Open University	0	0	0	0	0	0	300	300	300
		TOTAL	0	0	0	0	140	446	1734	1734	1734
GENERAL TOTAL	385	GENERAL TOTAL	1080	1285	1330	1540	1800	2032	1734	1734	1734

Source: Laws, Ministerial degrees 2012-2022, official websites

Editing: The authors

3.4. University Education

Regarding the university education, until 2018, there were not any undergraduate level and distinctly tourism-related departments that were operating. On the other hand, individual courses were taught in some departments -mainly Business Management Departments (Μοίρα, 2007) either as compulsory or as elective courses, as was the case at the University of the Aegean. Since all Higher Technological Education Institutes from 2017-2018 suddenly upgraded to university level (Law 4485/2017), the operation of tourism departments in other universities was

¹⁰ The Technological Institute of Athens merged with the Piraeus University of Applied Sciences and created the University of West Attica.

¹¹ The Technological Institute of Piraeus has been renamed "Piraeus University of Applied Sciences" since 2014 (G.G. B'3681).

¹² This is about the TEI of Patras which accepted admissions until 2012-2013 and its operation was stopped with the implementation of the "Athena" project. Its operation was planned to continue without accepting new admissions until 2017-2018, when the already enrolled students would have graduated. In 2017-2018, its re-operation was approved, and it was considered as an independent department of "Tourism Management".

allowed. Initially, there were two new undergraduate departments of Tourism Studies, one at the University of Piraeus in Athens (Department of Tourism Studies) and another one at the University of the Aegean, in Chios (Department of Tourism Economics and Management). At the same time, the TEI of Athens and the Piraeus University of Applied Sciences merged and formed a new oversized University under the name of University of West Attica (Law 4521/2018). The merger between the two directions of Tourism & Hospitality Business Administration from the old institutes, resulted in the operation of a department of “Tourism Management” within the University. The new formation of the current tourism education is interpreted as follows (Map 1):



Map (1): Undergraduate tourism departments 2018-2021
 Source / editing: The authors

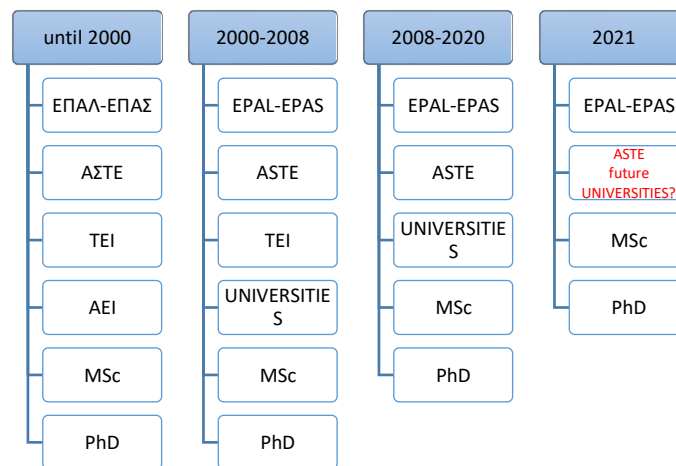


Figure (1): The evolution of tourism education levels
 Source: Editing: P. Moira - D. Mylonopoulos (2021)

This upgrade of tourism education to university level, lead to the formation of 8 Tourism Departments in 8 different Universities (in total 23), with 1,734 students and only 66 elected faculty teaching staff members. The inconsistencies created by the lack of professors are overcome with the help of faculty members from other departments and related course fields or by emergency hiring of professors with different legal status and often lower qualifications.

In addition, it is observed that the fields of study that are offered at different universities, along with the courses taught, all seem remarkably similar and at equivalent and comparable levels (Moira, Mylonopoulos & Kefala, 2019).

3.5. The offer of postgraduate study programs

Along with the expansion of the offered undergraduate programs, an expansion is also recorded in the offered postgraduate studies (level 7). Until 2010 the TEIs could not organize independent postgraduate study programs. As a result, 5 Universities provided postgraduate study programs¹³ that did not supply Tourism Studies at an undergraduate level. Nevertheless, the changes in the higher education system led to a rapid proliferation of the offered postgraduate programs in the field of tourism. In 2018 there were 11 postgraduate programs that were now run by both Universities and TEIs, autonomously, interdepartmentally or in collaboration with Universities and TEIs. This revamping that took place in 2018, led to the raise of such programs to 22 with constant increasing tendencies. In fact, a small offer from non-tourism departments is recorded as a specialization, e.g. Theology, Economics, Spatial Engineering, etc. proving the interdisciplinary nature of tourism. The MSc programs are expected to obtain tuition fees that are determined by each institution, except for two programs which are offered free of charge, one of which is entirely financed by the Municipal Authority (University of West Attica & Municipality of Fili). The postgraduate programs are aimed for graduates that derive from different specializations, like tourism business management, financial departments, international studies, engineers, lawyers, environmentalists, philologists, etc., reasoning initially correct as tourism is not a purely scientific discipline, but it requires an interdisciplinary approach.



Map (2): Postgraduate tourism programs offer 2018-2021

Source / editing: The authors

Along with the offer, the Covid-19 health crisis raised the demand for postgraduate programs as the use of distance learning tackled the problem of distance, travel costs, whilst it additionally increased the available time that came from the suspension of employment contracts for thousands of tourism employees.

4. Observations

The provision of tourism education and vocational training in Greece is *arranged/regulated* by the state through the Ministry of Education and secondarily by the Ministry of Tourism, usually without a necessary coordination between them.

The changes in tourism education, that began in 2000 and run on to this day, correlate with the "superficial upgrade" of diplomas awarded by higher education institutions (technological institutions and universities), with the merging and the "disappearance" of levels of tourism education and with the emerging tendency to make tourism education adaptable. These changes were carried out under the pressure of several political, social, economic and more recently, health factors.

Obtaining a university degree is associated with gaining social recognition, not only for the graduate but also for his/her the family. For decades, the typical Greek family has been investing time and money in the effort to

¹³ Piraeus University, University of Aegean, Hellenic Open University, University of Macedonia, Athens University of Economic and Business.

ensure the admission of the children into a higher education institution (Πολυχρονιάδης, 2018). University admission has the character of a social event; thus, it is worth celebrating in the wider family circle and it is a reason for pride. It should be noted that the dominant role in studies has always been played by the university and not the technological education, as its with its technical character was considered and is considered to be "secondary", therefore "inferior". As a matter of fact, the university diploma is typically referred as "Golden Bracelet" in the villages of the Macedonia Region (Νικολαΐδου, 2020). Further regarding, acquiring a university degree reinforces financially and hierarchically the position of the employee in the public sector compared to an equivalent graduate from technological education. Certainly, a similar regime applies to the private sector through the relative regulations that are included in the Corporate Employment Agreements (Μοίρα & Μυλωνόπουλος, 2014).

5. Conclusion

The current educational system and vocational training system of tourism in Greece is complicated, multi-level and often overlapping. The provision of tourism studies at various levels (e.g. secondary, tertiary, graded, non-graded, etc.) and by different public institutions is certainly observed. This complexity provokes confusion that is heightened by the lack of formal recognition or legalization at various levels in the exercise of professional rights or the literal recognition of these professional rights at different levels of study. Furthermore, despite the presence of so many levels of education, the distinction of education and vocational training remains often unclear. As a result, many professional institutions provide education for tourism while educational institutions provide vocational training for tourism professions. This observation was indicated 12 years ago during a forum for tourism education and vocational training of the Ministry of Tourism. (Maira, et al. 2008; Maira, 2008a; Maira, 2008b; Maira & Mylonopoulos, 2008a; Maira & Mylonopoulos, 2008b). In addition, very important modifications consistently take place, like changes in the education tourist guides and transforming it into practical training, abolition and revival of departments or the founding of new university departments without teaching staff, etc. Furthermore, very important reforms often take place, e.g. change in the education of tourist guides and its transformation into training, abolition and revival of departments, establishment of university departments without teaching staff, etc. without studying and investigating the necessity of these new regulations. This confusion is transferred to the tourism industry and causes problems in the staffing of tourism companies. This results to a negative impact on the quality of the provided services.

Tourism branches out too many fields of sciences and knowledge. In that way it holistically engages with the tools of various sciences, mainly social sciences but not only. In this context, it is necessary to combine knowledge from different sciences while having the achievement of human communication as a common element, which characterizes every form of tourism activity. In particular, the foundation of tourism entrepreneurship in Greece is the small and medium business and in fact the family business, which is strongly defined by the most important feature of the ancient Greek hospitality. Another characteristic of small and medium-sized family businesses, which is on the one hand positive but at the same time becomes an obstacle to further tourism training, is the fact that these businesses were created by self-made locals, without special knowledge and qualifications. Therefore, it is often difficult, if not impossible, to convince both them and the younger generations about the necessity of vocational training and constant education.

It has been confirmed that the yearly weaknesses of the education system are heightened due to the deficient political actions implemented under the pressure of the economic and health crisis. It is proved that in Greece, tourism education and training endure from inherent weaknesses that are not caused by the economic and recently, by the health crisis; it is possible though that they are intensified by it.

Perhaps, the solution to the problem of tourism education and vocational training for tourism in Greece does not lie in the differentiation of levels into secondary education, higher education, and university education, but in the cultivation of national tourism consciousness (Κικίλια, 2013: 48), which is acquired from school age and is developed throughout life. Tourism and Culture are important from both perspectives as culture attracts visitors and it is promoted by the communication of the inhabitants of the destinations and by their visitors.

The organization of the curricula with a scientific perspective in a more powerful dimension and depending on the specific field of tourism, contributed to this viewpoint.

Glossary

TEI	Technological Education Institute
GG	Governmental Gazette
ΕΠΑΑ	Vocational Upper Secondary Schools
ΕΠΑΣ	Apprenticeship Vocational Schools
ΟΤΕΚ	Organization of Tourism Education and Training
ΟΑΕΔ	Greek Manpower Employment Organization
ΕΣΚ	Vocational Training Schools
ΑΣΤΕ	Higher School of Tourism Education
ΑΣΤΕΚ	Higher School of Tourism Education of Crete
ΑΣΤΕΡ	Higher School of Tourism Education of Rhodes

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