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## Hotel internships and student satisfaction as key determinant to career intention

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### **ABSTRACT**

The hotel internship experience can be viewed as the pivotal point where hospitality students decide whether to stay or leave the industry. This paper aims at presenting hospitality students' satisfaction from internships and its impact on career intention. A survey of 172 students, both EU and Greeks, was conducted to investigate their internship satisfaction at 4 and 5 star hotels as a key determinant to career intention. The findings suggest that, the most important factors contributing to students' satisfaction were the real working conditions and the learning experience. All participants acknowledged long working hours, poor pay, and lack of coordination as key challenges, however they all identified their internships as a valuable way to link their studies with real life practice. This study proposes that student satisfaction in hospitality internship programs can have a direct positive effect to the graduates' career intention. It also suggests that educational institutions should maintain the practical/applied

elements of hospitality management programs in order to develop qualified, knowledgeable graduates.

**Key words** – Hospitality management education; Internships; Student satisfaction; Employability; Career intention

## **Introduction**

Nowadays, there is pressure on universities to prepare students for employment by embedding skills-related elements in curricula (Wilton, 2012). Courses in hospitality and tourism management emphasize the importance of practical training and offer internship programs for students (Hsu, 2012; Zopiatis & Theocharous, 2013) either as a mandatory part of the programme or as an elective (Zopiatis & Constanti, 2012), making it an inseparable aspect of the educational experience (Zopiatis, 2007). Hospitality-related internships help students understand the industry, obtain practical experience, make connections at the workplace (Self, Adler & Sydnor, 2016) and impacts on career intention (Silva et al., 2016). Farmaki (2018) suggests that student satisfaction emanates from the trade-off between their expectations and perceptions of internship experiences. Depending on their experiences, students may have a positive or negative perception of their internships. This perception may influence their future relationship with the industry, including their ultimate decision about whether to pursue a career in hospitality. Many studies present concerns over the efficacy of tourism and hospitality internships and their impact on career development (Farmaki, 2018). At the same time universities in the UK are getting away from the vocational practical element of hospitality management studies, reduce funding and focus on mainstream academic fields (Lugosi & Jameson, 2017).

Internships provide multiple benefits to students, employers, and institutions. Tse (2010) argues that on-the-job training is an excellent opportunity for students to acquire and exercise managerial competencies through observation and practice. This experiential training has been found by Marinakou & Giousmpasoglou (2013) to increase student satisfaction and enhance their learning experience. Despite the importance of internships for the industry, a number of studies suggest there is a paucity of research on this topic and highlight the need for further investigation on the efficacy of hospitality internship programs (i.e., Airey & Tribe, 2005; Zopiatis, 2007; Zopiatis & Constanti, 2012). Most studies present the current state of hospitality education rather

than a thorough analysis of the challenges regarding teaching and learning in such programs (Lugosi & Jameson, 2017). There is a gap in knowledge regarding students' viewpoints on the challenges in the provision of hospitality management education including internships. The purpose of this study is to investigate students' attitudes towards their internship experience by identifying the factors that contribute to their overall satisfaction and the elements of the internship they value most. In addition, this study explores the use of luxury hotel internships as determinants for career intention. The research objectives of this study are to:

- a) Identify the factors such as motivators and demotivators that contribute to internship satisfaction.
- b) Explore the potential differences between EU and Greek students on their expectations and internship satisfaction.
- c) Investigate whether internship satisfaction is influenced by internship expectations.
- d) Identify the relationship (if any) between internship experience and career intention.

## **Literature Review**

### ***Hospitality Internships***

Hospitality students, regardless of their backgrounds, have been found to face common challenges during their placements at hotels. In general, hospitality students are concerned with the capitalisation of their internship in an effort to find jobs (Collins, 2002), working conditions (Richardson, 2009), their relationships with their co-workers and supervisors (Kim & Park, 2013), and preparing themselves for the reality of work in the industry (Zopiatis, 2007). Many studies on hospitality internships have been conducted in different countries, including Australia (Richardson, 2009), Cyprus (Farmaki, 2018; Zopiatis, 2007), Greece (Christou, 1999; Christou & Chatzigeorgiou, 2019), Hong Kong (Lam & Ching, 2007), Malaysia (Austin, 2002), Taiwan (Chen & Shen, 2012), South Korea (Kim & Park, 2013), the Netherlands (Akomaning et al., 2011), Turkey (Collins, 2002) and USA (Hussien & Lopa, 2018).

The majority of hospitality and tourism courses offer internship programs to students, which are considerably promoted during student recruitment. This experiential form of learning is viewed as an excellent opportunity for students to integrate their thinking and action (Davies, 1990;

Petrillose & Montgomery, 1997), apply theory taught in the classroom to real world situations (Stansbie et al., 2016), develop skills such as decision making and critical thinking (Zopiatis & Constanti, 2007) or improve students' self-confidence (Ko, 2008) and become familiar with the industry, improve adaptability and familiarize students with the profession (Robinson et al., 2008). Various definitions are provided on the concept of an internship. Agheorghiesei & Prodan (2011) propose that an internship is a systematic way for students to learn at work by interacting with others and learning by observation, reflection, analysis and communication. Zopiatis & Constanti (2013, p.34) view internships as "*a short-term period of practical work experience wherein students receive training as well as gaining valuable job experiences in a specific field*". Students learn in a professional context where they understand the theoretical concepts and how they apply in practice (Beggs et al., 2008; Busby, 2005). There are three key stakeholders in the internship process: students, employers, and higher education institutions (Busby, 2005; Zopiatis, 2007), and all contribute to the internship program and experience (Marinakou & Giousmpasoglou, 2013). This paper focuses only on the students' experience and attitudes towards the industry based on their internship satisfaction in order to investigate their intention to stay in the industry and pursue a career. Farmaki (2018, p.51) proposes that "*examining interns' expectations and perceptions of the internship can shed light on the efficacy of internships in enhancing the career development of students*".

### ***Positive Aspects of Internship Satisfaction***

Incorporating practical experiences in the hospitality curriculum provides numerous advantages (Hussien & Lopa, 2018; Lam & Ching, 2007). Internships are found to prepare students for successful and fulfilling careers (Chen et al., 2011, 2018). Internships contribute to students' learning in a real environment in which they are given the opportunity to reflect on the knowledge acquired during their studies (Busby, 2005; Chen & Shen, 2012; Kim & Park, 2013; Self et al., 2016). Interestingly, internships provide students with the opportunity to develop a clear understanding of the context of work in the hospitality industry and to be aware of all the realities. Mihail (2006) in his study proposes that internships help students develop critical skills required for a career in hospitality such as communication, time management, and self-motivation.

For many students, an internship is the first step in their careers (Kauffman, 2010; Ko, 2007) and a way to test their strengths and weaknesses in the workplace (Busby, 2005; Daugherty, 2001). It is also a process that requires students to be flexible and adaptable. Hussien and Lopa (2018) found that the following factors contributing towards internship satisfaction: feedback, autonomy, university supervisor support, academic preparedness, flexible working hours, student self-initiatives, location, and skills variety. Yoonjoung et al. (2018) investigated the hospitality student internship satisfaction in relation to generational differences. They found that fostering good relationships among colleagues, can increase millennials' internship satisfaction and eventually reduce their intentions to leave the industry. Gender, personality and nationality are found to regulate student satisfaction (Chen & Shen, 2012) and career intention (Lugosi & Jameson, 2017).

### ***Aspects of Internship Disatisfaction***

The effectiveness of internships as an experiential approach to learning is heavily criticised by a number of studies. Various factors have been found to create dissatisfaction and decreased motivation. Agheorghiesei & Prodan (2011) found that an internship may be ambiguous as the students are not clear on how much they may be involved in practical work and/or other jobs. They claim (*ibid.*, p.61) that “*Romanian organizations do not have trained personnel to coordinate the internship*”. In addition, there is no provision for any kind of compensation for students. Host organizations do not pay well, and there is no proper planning and coordination. Most of the placements are conducted based on the tutors' acquaintances, and, in most cases, they do not impose any rules or contracts. Hence, students are employed in difficult situations, without receiving proper training, and this results in dissatisfaction with their internships. Discrepancies are found between students' and industry expectations of an internship. Hospitality organizations expect students to demonstrate an understanding of the industry, interpersonal skills, a work ethic, teamwork, problem-handling, and good communication (Daugherty, 2001; Farmaki, 2018). A number of scholars suggest that students are not appropriately prepared to meet the industry requirements and have unrealistic expectations regarding work and employment in the sector (Dickerson, 2009; Farmaki, 2018). Zopiatis & Constanti (2007) propose that often students find discrepancies between what they are taught in

the classroom and what is practiced in hotels. Nevertheless, they suggest that some educational institutions still adequately prepare students to adapt to actual work environments by confronting them with operational issues and practices during their studies. Dickerson (2009) stated that students have high expectations of working in hotels, with a gap between their expectations and satisfaction. Agheorghiesei and Prodan (2011) and Zopiatis and Constanti (2007) propose that universities should prepare students with the required knowledge. The level of training prior to the internship is important in forming expectations (Marinakou & Giousmpasoglou, 2013; Singh & Dutta, 2010), while host organizations should help develop skills and competences and motivate the students to learn and engage. They add that a perceived fit should exist between students' and organizations' expectations and provision of an internship program.

Moreover, Kim & Park (2013) suggest that unfair promotions, unsatisfactory pay and benefits, and inappropriate behavior of co-workers can contribute to unfavorable conditions that negatively shape students' perceptions of the industry. Jaszay & Dunk (2003) claim that if the mentor-managers or supervisors lack experience and efficiency, then students' experience will be limited. Similarly, Zopiatis & Constanti (2012) propose that supervisors play a direct role in overall student satisfaction with their internships. Furthermore, Taylor (2004) proposes that students assign a share of responsibility for problems at their internships to the employers and the receiving company. Their main concern is that they are used as cheap labour. Others claim that companies are not prepared to enhance and contribute to the overall student experience (Roney & Oztin, 2007). Thus, employers are faced with the challenge of offering projects to keep students challenged and interested. Other studies suggest that factors such as the ineffective design of an internship program, wage discrepancies, and poor treatment of students may cause them to leave the industry after their internships (Ko, 2007; Richardson, 2008; Roney & Oztin, 2007; Stansbie & Nash, 2016, Wu & Wu, 2006). Internship programs that fail to meet students' expectations discourage them from entering the industry after graduation (Chen & Shen, 2012). This experience should provide students with suitable career factors, such as job satisfaction, job security, and reasonable salaries and workloads (Kim & Park, 2013). In addition, the literature suggests that a successful internship program should be structured, planned, and organised to provide students with a challenging experience (Farmaki, 2018). It should also provide students with the opportunity to feel they play a significant role in the organization and, thus, have a sense of fulfilment (Edwards, 2010). Zopiatis (2007) argues that the interns' hosting organizations

should be aware of adult learning styles and share their knowledge and skills while encouraging them to learn about and solve problems.

### ***Career Intention***

Career intention is found to correlate with career success. Career success refers to the psychological outcomes of the work experience (Chang & Busser, 2020). Studies split career success in two dimensions, objective (extrinsic) and subjective (intrinsic). Objective career success is tangible and includes salary, promotion and job level (Ng et al., 2005), occupational status, respect and recognition by the organization (Hirschi, 2010), whereas subjective refer to the individual's inner feelings and satisfaction with their career achievements (Judge et al., 1995). Career satisfaction contributes positively to career intention. Individuals may be dissatisfied with the specific job but still have positive feelings about work in the profession (Zopiatis et al., 2016, 2018). *"Employees' experience at their current job serves as critical signals to their future career"* (Chang & Busser, 2020, p.198). A study of frontline employees in Seoul showed that organizational support increases job satisfaction (Kim et al., 2018). Zhao and Zhu (2014) proposed that strong leadership style, autonomy and interesting work can improve career intention. The learning experience shapes one's career choice, as individuals learn how to shape their career expectations, which they align with career goals, actions and choices (Chang & Busser, 2020). The individual's intrinsic psychological content intervene in making the right career decision (Hirschi, 2010).

The steady growth of the hospitality sector dramatically increases the demand for talent which can be provided by new graduates entering the profession. Thus, it is suggested that a successful internship completion can enhance career intention and reduce high employee turnover in hospitality (Chen & Shen, 2012), improve diversity with trained workforce that demonstrates required skills and competences. The hypotheses proposed for this study are:

*Hypothesis 1: Internship expectations impact on internship satisfaction.*

*Hypothesis 2: There are differences among EU and Greek students in relation to their internship satisfaction.*

*Hypothesis 3: Internship experience impacts on career intention.*

## **Methodology**

### ***Sample and Data Collection***

This study employed a quantitative approach with data gathered through self-administered questionnaires among hospitality students who conducted their internships in Greek luxury (4\* & 5\*) hotels. Singh and Dutta (2010) proposed that the context in which the internship takes place influences student satisfaction, therefore both students studying at Greek institutions as well as students from other institutions abroad that were doing their placement in Greece were included in the study. A typical internship program in seasonal hotels takes place during the summer months, starting in May or June and concluding at the end of September or October. In Greece, summer is the peak season for hospitality and tourism businesses, many organizations take advantage of the internship programs to make up a sufficient labor force (Zopiatis, 2007). The sampling frame of this study consists of students at hospitality colleges and higher education institutions in Greece and abroad (EU). The sample included EU (n=63) and Greek (n=109) students that did their internship in Greece. All students were employed in four- and five-star hotels in major tourism destinations such as Rhodes, Athens, Thessaloniki, Kos, Cyclades, and Crete. In total, 172 valid responses were collected during a period of three months (August - October). Convenience sampling (Bell, Bryman, & Harley, 2018) was used as the questionnaire was distributed to students after they had completed their internships and at the beginning of the academic year at private (two) and public (two) higher educational institutions in Greece. The students received a hard copy of the survey questionnaire during one of their lectures and the questionnaires were collected by one of the researchers. The EU students received a hard copy of the questionnaire from their line manager towards the end of their internships at their placement hotels. The completed questionnaires have been returned by post or collected in person by the researchers.

### ***Measures***

The questionnaire was based on an extensive review of the literature on student satisfaction and expectations from internships. Zopiatis' (2007) survey questionnaire was used, after being

adapted to the purpose of this study. The questionnaire was piloted with 10 students who had just completed their internships. Minor changes were applied in the order of the questions, and one open-ended question was added to explore other views on the topic. Content validity (Zikmund, 2002) was employed to examine items and provide feedback for greater clarity and alignment with construct dimensions in the study. Five sections were included in the questionnaire. The first included four questions on demographic information. In section two, students were asked to rate eight different aspects of their experience during the internship on a 5-point Likert scale that ranged from “*Always (1)*” to “*Never (5)*”. Section three examined the student’s employability options, and section four measured the overall internship experience with a single-item instrument developed by Van de Ven and Ferry (1980) on a 10-point scale ranging from “*Terrible (1)*” to “*Excellent (10)*”. Section four measured students’ favourable and less favourable aspects of the internship (nine items for each category) as well as their overall expectations of the internship programme (ten items). In this section, students were required to choose their most preferred aspect among a list of factors that emerged from the literature review. In order to identify any other factors that were not included in the previous sections, section five asked the students to comment on their internship experience.

### ***Data Analysis***

Statistical analysis was performed to test the hypotheses. In order to identify the factors that contribute to student satisfaction from internships and their expectations as well as their intention to remain in the industry. In order to identify any differences between the two groups of students (Greek and EU), independent sample t tests were performed. Regression analysis was used to test the correlation of internship satisfaction with expectations of the internship. A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was then used to investigate if there were any differences between the two groups in terms of their internship expectations and satisfaction. Finally, multiple response analysis was performed between the groups to explore the motivators, demotivators, and any other expectations to identify and relate to career intentions. The findings were triangulated with evidence from the qualitative responses provided at the end of the questionnaires.

**Findings and Discussion**

The sample consisted of 109 (63.4%) Greek and 63 (36.6%) EU students. In terms of gender, the sample was balanced in the Greek students' population, whereas the EU population was dominated by female students. Since the participants were all undergraduate students between 18 and 24 years old, it was decided not to include age in the demographics. Participation from private and public institutions was almost equal, with the latter providing slightly more participants (46.8%) among Greek students; on the other hand, all EU students came from public universities. Most students were in their first or second year of study during their internship. Table 1 summarises the demographic data of the participants in the study.

**Table 1:** Sample Demographics

Variable	Frequency (%)	
	Greek (n=109)	EU (n=63)
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	59 (54.1)	26 (41.3)
Female	50 (45.9)	37 (58.7)
<b>Institution</b>		
University	51 (46.8)	63 (100)
TEI	20 (18.3)	0
Hotel School	30 (34.9)	0
<b>Year of Study</b>		
1	34 (31.2)	17 (27)
2	41 (37.6)	25 (39.7)
3	14 (12.8)	13 (20.6)
4	20 (18.3)	8 (12.7)

To test Hypothesis 1 the authors conducted multiple response frequencies to identify the students' motivation and demotivation factors and the qualities they valued most in their internships; this was analysed for Greek and EU students separately as well as for the group as a whole. The results are demonstrated in Table 2.

**Table 2:** Multiple Responses: Motivators, Demotivators and Expectations Comparisons

Motivators	Freq. (%)			Demotivators	Freq. (%)			Expectations	Freq. (%)		
	GR (n= 109)	EU (n= 63)	ALL (n= 172)		GR (n= 109)	EU (n= 63)	ALL (n= 172)		GR (n= 109)	EU (n= 63)	ALL (n= 172)
Made good money	22.0	12.7	18.6	Too much work	19.3	39.7	26.7	Like co workers	20.2	22.2	20.9
Professional environment	<b>46.8</b>	27	39.5	Didn't learn anything	8.3	7.9	8.1	Professional environment	49.5	54	51.2
Made valuable contacts	25.7	34.9	29.1	Disconnected from co-workers	6.4	4.8	5.8	Make good money	10.1	30.2	17.4
Felt like part of the team	25.7	<b>44.4</b>	32.6	Not enough supervision	11	3.2	8.1	Receive school credit	12.8	6.3	10.5
Flexible schedule	8.3	17.5	11.6	Not paid well	<b>24.8</b>	<b>55.6</b>	<b>36</b>	Feel like part of the team	34.9	52.4	41.3
Interesting work	38.5	25.4	33.7	Disorganised work environment	18.3	22.2	19.8	Receive a job offer	18.3	15.9	17.4
Learned a lot	45	41.3	<b>43.6</b>	Work was boring or menial	11	3.2	8.1	Interesting work	31.2	36.5	33.1
Liked co-workers	20.2	15.9	18.6	Work was not well defined	8.3	14.3	10.5	Make valuable contacts	35.8	31.7	34.3
Good supervisor	30.3	41.3	34.3	Not enough to do	12.8	6.3	10.5	Good supervisor	25.7	<b>57.1</b>	37.2
								Learn a lot	<b>56</b>	54	<b>55.2</b>

It is evident in Table 2 that Greek students mostly valued the professional environment and the opportunity to work in real hospitality organizations (46.8%), whereas the EU students put priority on the fact that they felt part of a team (44.4%). When looking at the whole sample the learning was mostly valued (43.6%). This study affirms Roney and Öztin (2007) who claim that students value their internship experience in forming perceptions about their future in the industry. One of the participants in the open-ended question said: *“It was really good, helpful supervisors, learned so many new things. I recommend this company to all new employees in the hospitality industry. A very good ‘first school’”*. Similarly, Abdullah et al. (2015) propose that

students value a learning experience for which they can earn financial compensation as well as receive academic credit and a grade.

The least-valued motivator for Greek students was the flexible schedule (8.3%), due to the fact that work in the hospitality industry requires long hours and there is a lack of flexibility to work, especially during the high season when these students conducted their internships. Roney & Öztin (2007, p.13) affirm this and state that “*irregular working hours is a well-known negative characteristic of tourism employment*”. For EU students, the least important factor was “*making good money*” (12.7%). Dickerson (2009) & Girard (1999) similarly found that low pay and long working hours are less valued by interns. Lee and Chao (2013) indicate that student interns are not satisfied with their salary (or, in some cases, complete lack of payment, which is not the case in the Greek hospitality context as internships are paid). Although Riley et al. (2002) propose that there are occupations in tourism that are well paid, this study proposes that internships are not among these as students were unhappy with their pay.

In terms of demotivators, the most important factor for all students was ‘*pay*’ (36%). This view is in agreement with Zopiatis & Constanti (2007) as students are not highly paid during their internships, and they do not approve of the existing working conditions. Students suggest that the pay during their internship does not reflect the amount of work they are required to do. The least important issue for Greek students was the ‘*disconnection with colleagues*’ (6.4%), whereas for EU students it was ‘*inadequate supervision*’ (3.2%) and ‘*work that was boring*’ (3.2%). During their internships, students perform routinized tasks and are not always provided with the opportunity to make decisions. According to Lam & Ching (2007, p.348), “*managers are reluctant to empower decision-making authority to students as they are afraid of taking the risk of complaints from customers*”. Liu (2006) suggests that organizations lack quality and diversified jobs for student interns. The host organization should provide quality to students’ training as well as regular feedback and evaluation in order to help students develop further (Zopiatis & Constanti, 2012). Other studies propose that host organizations should include student in-put into the content of their internship programme. Many studies similarly relate problems at internships with supervision and the behavior of internship supervisors (Lee & Chao, 2013; Wu & Wu, 2006). Moreover, the coordinators from the collaborating institutions should oversee such practices and ensure they comply with the internship program and guidelines provided (Zopiatis and Constanti, 2012). They suggest that coordinators should also clarify to

students the scope and goals of their internship in order to foster the required mentality and to nurture realistic work expectations. Finally, ‘to learn a lot from their internships’ was the most important expectation for both Greek (56%) and EU students (54%). The findings affirm Collins (2002) who suggests that internship programs provide students with knowledge and skills necessary to pursue a career in the industry. The least important quality of an internship was ‘to make money’ (10.1%) for Greek students and ‘to receive good credit’ (6.3%) for EU students.

In order to test Hypothesis 2 and investigate whether there were differences between Greek and EU students in terms of their internship experience, independent sample t-tests were performed (Table 3).

**Table 3:** Independent Sample t-tests – Internship Experience

Internship experience	Lavene's test of Equality of variances		T test for Equality of Means		
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig.(2-Tailed)
5a Meaningful tasks	1.096	.297	-.421	170	.674
5b Relevant to academic course	1.247	.266	-1.841	170	.067
5c Relevant to interests	1.962	.163	-2.232*	170	.027
5d Regular supervision and guidance from supervisor	.455	.501	2.850*	169	.005
5e Supervisor and staff are available	1.052	.307	-2.013*	170	.046
5f New knowledge	5.653*	.019	-1.123	169	.263
5g New skills	2.038	.155	-.722	170	.471
5h Something new about myself	1.402	.238	-2.783*	170	.006

\*indicates significance level .05

Lavene’s test demonstrated that the variability in the two samples was about the same for all elements of the internship experience except for item 5f ‘new knowledge’ (p=.019). No significant differences were observed in the scores for Greek and EU students for items 5a ‘meaningful tasks’ (M=1.8, SD=.911) and (M=1.86, SD=.840), 5b ‘relevant to the academic

course' (M=1.96, SD=1.009) and (M=2.24, SD=.817), for 5f 'new knowledge' (M=1.82, SD=1.090) and (M=2.00, SD=.905), and 5g 'new skills' (M=1.97, SD=1.126) and (M=2.10, SD=.979). On the other hand, there were significant differences in the scores for Greek and EU students on items 5c 'relevant to interests' (M=1.86, SD=.967) and (M=2.19, SD=.859), for 5d 'regular supervision and guidance from supervisor' (M=1.95, SD=1.036) and (M=1.51, SD=.896), for 5e 'supervisor and staff were available' (M=1.53, SD=.877) and (M=1.81, SD=.859), and for 5h 'something new about myself' (M=1.97, SD=1.126) and (M=2.10, SD=.979). In their study, Singh & Dutta (2010) found that supervisor support and coordination between the educational institution and the hospitality organization were important factors in internship success. Others have also highlighted the need for better communication and coordination among the stakeholders (Rodriguez & Prior-Miller, 2009). Zopiatis & Constanti (2012) propose that internships should address individual students' interests and their desire to learn and experience new things. It is evident that the findings partially confirm H2.

In order to test Hypothesis 3 and assess any correlation of internship satisfaction with expectation in general and whether it impacts on career intention, the dependent variable overall satisfaction was regressed on all seven items measuring students' internship satisfaction. There was no significant relation to any of the items when the tests were performed separately for each group. When the same test was conducted for the entire sample, the data showed that only item 5g ('learned new things at my internship') significantly ( $p = .002 < .005$ ) related to the overall satisfaction. The  $R^2$  of .128 indicated that 12.8 per cent of the observed variability in the dependent variable satisfaction was explained by this dimension of internship experience. This test confirmed the findings from the multiple responses' analysis. This study proposes that students were satisfied when they believed they learned from this experience. This result is in agreement with Bohlander & Snell (2010, p. 225) who claim that students during their internships become 'employees' and are given the opportunity to learn at the workplace and acquire hands-on experience (See, also, Kim & Park, 2013). Interestingly, 136 (79.1%) of the respondents would recommend the place of internship to others compared to 32 (18.6%) who would not. Similar results were identified when the samples were separately tested.

Finally, overall satisfaction was grouped into four main categories: bad (1-3), fair (4-6), very good (7-8), and excellent (9-10). The majority of Greek students evaluated their overall experience with 8 (very good, 56.9%) and 9 (excellent, 36.7%); only one of the participants in

this group evaluated the experience with 1 (bad, 0.9%). Similar results were evident among the EU students as 19 (30.2%) evaluated the internship experience as excellent and only 6 (9.5%) as bad. When the internship experience and satisfaction were measured against the entire sample, 59 (34.3%) rated the experience as excellent, 86 (50%) as very good, 20 (11.6%) as fair, and only 7 (4.1%) as bad; of the final group 6 were EU students (Hypothesis 3). A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to determine whether there were any statistically significant differences in internship satisfaction between the means of the two independent groups. The analysis showed that there was a statistically significant difference between groups as determined by one-way ANOVA  $F(11,19)$ ,  $p = .001$ . The mean of Greek students' satisfaction was  $M=8.05$  and the mean of EU students was  $M=7.13$ . Evidently, the overall experience was very good. The qualitative question also affirmed this finding, as, for example, one of the students stated, *“That was such a brilliant work experience actually we had the opportunity to learn enough and the team spirit was so open mind and helped me improve my abilities”*. Another reply was *“My experience of the hotel gave me the footsteps to achieve my expectations to fulfil my career! The hotel environment is the root to accomplish my professional dreams”*.

All the above analysis and hypotheses testing are shown in table 4.

**Table 4:** Hypotheses

<b>Hypothesis</b>	<b>Analysis</b>	<b>Result</b>
<i>Hypothesis 1: Internship expectations impact on internship satisfaction.</i>	Multiple response Regression	Supported
<i>Hypothesis 2: There are differences among EU and Greek students in relation to their internship satisfaction.</i>	Independent sample t-tests	Partially supported
<i>Hypothesis 3: Internship experience impacts on career intention.</i>	Regression analysis, ANOVA	Supported

## **Discussion and Conclusions**

A limited number of research studies have investigated the relationship between the hospitality internship student satisfaction and career intention. This paper provides empirical evidence about internship programs with a focus on factors that contribute to students' internship satisfaction and career intention.

This study investigated the motivators and demotivators that contribute to internship satisfaction. In general, hospitality students value their internship experience, as they believe they have the opportunity to learn and develop themselves, their knowledge, and their networks. Work at well-known and well-organized hotels may improve students' employability, increase contacts with the industry and enhance their resume (Farmaki, 2018). This study affirms previous studies that identify low pay as a demotivator and cause of internship dissatisfaction (Chen et al., 2009; Farmaki, 2018). Pay during the internship, although found to be a significant demotivator, is not considered the most significant factor to leave the industry confirming Brown et al.'s (2015) view that hospitality students place more value on the experience of work in a real professional environment, regardless of the challenges of the working environment, including long hours and low wages. Nevertheless, students want to be compensated for the work they do; they should be reasonably paid in order to be able to subsidize their education (Singh & Dutta, 2010).

Further this paper explored the potential differences between EU and Greek students on their expectations and internship satisfaction. This paper also proposes that there are no significant differences between students from different countries in terms of their internship satisfaction, experience and willingness to pursue a carrier in this industry. Some differences in terms of nationality were found on guidance and supervision provided during the internship confirming Aitchison's (2003) study who suggested that nationality is an influencing factor on students' internship experience. Evidently, the context, background, or place of origin do not seem to demonstrate significant differences in students' views. The difference could easily be justified by the fact that international students are not supervised or monitored by their institutions in comparison to students studying at Greek institution. This study contradicts the findings of other studies (Crawford & Wang, 2016; Farmaki, 2018) that propose the existence of intercultural dimensions on internship experience.

Although some discrepancies were found between students' expectations and actual perceptions of their internships, this paper suggests that the experiential learning approach enables students to comprehend the industry, put their academic knowledge into practice, and decide whether they will pursue a career in hospitality or leave the industry. Education is about equipping people for work, hence knowledge for the sake of knowledge is not relevant to this purpose and employers' needs (Wang et al., 2009, p. 69). Internships allow students to form a realistic expectation about their careers, and develop the required skills to be successful in a competitive market. Nevertheless, due to various reasons, such as the economic crisis, most universities in the UK are getting away from the core principle of hospitality education, which is employability (Whitelaw & Wrathall, 2015), and they propose courses should help develop rounded reflective practitioners which does not cover the expectations for graduates of various stakeholders (Lugosi & Jameson, 2017). All this has contributed to the decline of funding for hospitality management programs in the UK especially for those offering practical training (Alexander et al., 2009) as universities "*seek to concentrate on higher-prestige, mainstream academic fields*" not so vocational in their focus (Lugosi & Jameson, 2017, p.164).

This view is closely linked to career intention. Positive internship experience results in positive career intention. Although studies propose that career intention is not clearly correlated with contextual factors (Chang & Busser, 2020), the findings suggest that internship conducted in luxury hotels in Greece provide students with satisfaction and positively impact on career intention. Finally, this study confirms other studies (Kim & Park, 2013; Zhao & Zhu, 2014) and proposes that when students are satisfied with their internship experience they tend to stay in the industry and pursue a career. The authors propose that a learning environment is important to instil a sense of belongingness and relatedness, which create positive perception of working in hospitality. The higher the internship satisfaction the more likely students will remain in the industry.

### ***Practical Implications***

A well-planned internship can maximize the potential to prepare high-quality hospitality management graduates. The authors propose that managers and host organizations in the industry should add value to the internship programs offered at their hotels by considering students'

expectations. They should not treat students as a solution to a labor-shortage problem (Yiu & Law, 2012). HR managers should investigate the factors influencing employees' intention to stay at the organization rather than what makes them leave. The main purpose of these hospitality organizations is to retain talented employees, hence retaining interns provides them with a good pool of potential employees and/or managers. Onboarding (Bhuyan et al., 2018) should be part of the process, during which organizations should provide students with clear descriptions of organizational structure, vision, and mission and identify the objectives of their job and the requirements to perform their tasks, as well as their obligations and rights (i.e., in terms of payment, working hours etc), and the methods of evaluating their performance. Adequate time should be allocated to introduce students to the requirements of the job and smoothly start their internship. Some pre-employment tests may also be found valuable in identifying students' potential.

The authors propose that employers should be more involved in curriculum design in order to strengthen the internship programs offered by educational institutions (Chang & Hsu, 2010; Lee & Chao, 2013; Liam & Ching, 2007). In this way they will not only provide their own expectations of students' skills and knowledge required to work in the industry, but they will also develop an understanding of the learning process and the importance of the learning experience to students' satisfaction. By providing employment, they help students to obtain the skills required for a career in the industry (Pizam et al., 2013). Companies should provide students with challenging tasks to make the internship interesting and challenging. They could also provide career acceleration courses on management abilities for example the 'Future leaders' course' offered by the Toga East Hotel Group (Goh & Okumus, 2020). Retention is also important thus hotels should provide clear career pathways (Reilly, 2018), with customised graduate management programs.

One-to-one supervision could also be provided in order to monitor closely the whole process and the students' experience and provide constructive feedback. Host organizations should assign a qualified experienced supervisor-mentor to demonstrate the appropriate skills in training and monitor the intern's performance. Managers should be trained and/or encouraged to use motivating language to inspire interns. Incentives, participation at the decision-making and fairness on rewards are other key HR practices that should be implemented by hospitality organizations. Students may be motivated, and it might increase their sense of belongingness and

commitment to the organization. Negative student experiences affect the interns' image of the organization and may deter them from pursuing a career in the industry after graduation. If students return to the host organization after graduation, then the cost and time spent to train them will be reduced.

Moreover, students should also prepare for their internship by developing the necessary skills, competencies, and attitudes required for the sector. They should understand that this is a process for learning to overcome problems and be more employable. Although, universities are changing the curriculum to be more business oriented, students should understand the value of an internship and request such elements in their programs of study. They could also be more engaging with the curriculum and other extra curricula activities such as field visits, projects in order to be involved with the industry and have a better perception of work in the hospitality industry.

Finally, educational institutions should consider students' expectations and opinions on their internship experience (Tse, 2010). Although students may have limited views on the context of an internship, there are ways to help them develop an understanding of the expectations. Alumni, students who have completed their internship or even employers may offer presentations and discussions with students on the importance of an internship and the requirements of the job. Designated internship coordinators whose main responsibility is to monitor the internship, should liaise with employers, identify potential problems, offer consultation to both students and employers, and provide other support as needed. The internship programs should include training prior to the internship, on-going consultation and support during the internship, and a post-internship review where students may be required to reflect by producing a report on their experience and learning. Training prior to the internship may include practical/applied courses with demonstrations, or for example students may be required to organize an event from the beginning of planning the event to its completion, budgeting, operations. This may provide them with some experience on the operations area. Educational institutions may collaborate with the industry and use their facilities to provide students with hands on experience during their studies. Finally, students may be encouraged to undertake some part-time work during their studies to complement their knowledge. Assignments in the curriculum can also be prepared with real life examples for which students will have to visit hotels, observe, research and write reflective reports with evidence of critical thinking in problem-solving. Post-internship reviews are practice

that is used by many academic institutions; however the authors suggest that interns could focus on a challenge or problem during the internship and provide solutions to this instead of describing the experience. The authors propose that a learning contract between the student and the institution, as well as a psychological contract between the student and the employer be signed to ensure that all are aware of the requirements and the expectations of the internship. Conway and Briner (2009 in Chang & Busser, 2020, p. 195) state that individual beliefs are employees' subjective interpretation of employers' implicit and explicit promises. This would demonstrate student awareness of, motivation and commitment to the expectations of the program. At the same time, educators may use internships as a good way to networking and strengthen links with the industry. This way they establish close links with the industry and more opportunities for graduate employment. The authors propose that they could be given time away from teaching to work at hospitality organizations in order to be in touch with trends and current issues in the industry. This could also enhance collaborative research with employers and the institutions' reputation. Such practices may contribute to the poor employee-organizational fit in terms of expectations and students' preparedness.

Another challenge that has emerged due to Covid-19 pandemic refers to the need of educational institutions to prepare students for the requirements and the new hygiene protocols and standards implemented in the hospitality and tourism industry. Students should be trained on risk management and hygiene and safety issues in order to be ready to deal with similar crises when they join the industry.

Although some dissatisfaction factors were identified, internships play a vital role in students' learning, experience with the industry, and decisions to pursue a career in the sector. The learning provides students with knowledge and skills to build work capability and confidence, hence thrive in the industry. The sense of thriving creates a sense of feeling energized, a sense of continually improving at work (Porath et al., 2012) and finally a sense of autonomy, and meet their need for relatedness.

Educational institutions should develop financial and management models to ensure facilities built for hospitality management programs, such as training restaurants, can generate income and be further used for other purposes. The facilities may be externally facing, open to the public,

and use students as staff. Revenue may be used to support and fund the high cost of practicals offered at hospitality management programs.

Organizations and associations related to hospitality education and employment should push harder to support hospitality management programs to include practical elements, and propose an advertising campaign to place hospitality education as a main career-choice field in the minds of parents and potential students.

### ***Limitations and Future Research***

Although the sample included students from different cultural backgrounds, only four Greek higher education institutions were used in the study; hence, future research could include a larger number of institutions offering hospitality management programs to examine the generalizability of these findings. Future research may also focus on the employers' views on the internship provision and compare them to the findings of this study to ensure the best content and organisation of internships in the hospitality industry. As the context of the study has been Greece, a similar study among students and organizations in other countries may provide different results. Other studies may explore the perceived supervisor support, the perceived organizational support and organizational commitment of interns. Finally, this study was conducted prior to the Covid19 outbreak. It is expected that there will be disruption in terms of planning and facilitating hospitality student internships. More studies are needed to explore the Covid19 effects on student experience and hospitality internships.

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