

Modern Forms of Communication in Tourism Education: The Case of e-Learning in the Tourism Schools of Crete

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Abstract: In this study we present a primary analysis of the opinions held by the students of the Tourist Enterprises department on the introduction and incorporation of e-Learning as a modern form of communication in tourism education. It deals with the resulting aspects from a framework of field research in all three schools operating in Crete. It is also critically researched the common approach background in which both the educational policy and the international models registered in this field, seem to be based on. The alternative approach, depicted in this study, is methodologically based on the fact that both Internet and moving picture constitute traditional learning forms. From that aspect, modern forms of education should not be an extension or complementary to the established approaches and forms of tourism education, which often tend to the formulation of a new learning type. The question, thus, is whether a complete reformation of the institution is required, stemming from the relation between e-learning and tourism education.

Key words: Modern forms, communication, tourism education, e-learning

INTRODUCTION

World Wide Web is truly a pioneering and inspiring tool, with a future that has no limits. In the future the most of the daily activities could take place through the World Wide Web. In almost every house, school, enterprise and organism connected to the web with just few clicks the user could acquire information from around the world (Bill, 1997). The image maps are the graphics through with numerous invisible links through which the user can connect to different pages. When the mouse is moved over a graphic, the cursor is transformed to a hand that shows what the user requests (Front Page, 98 1997). Internet will constitute from now on a key factor in the evolution of tourist industry (Scoviak, 2004). The widespread use and abundant information through the Internet in the sector of tourist education is a matter of time, since the interest shown by all the corresponding organisms is constantly increasing. The personal computer is a common tool nowadays, contrary to what happened in the past, where numerous media, often called supervisory, assisted the educational procedure. This aspect is enhanced by the fact that computers are used as the primary total means of networking for information exchange and novel forms of communication (Balzis and Kelesidis, 2000). So, the appearance of the Internet transforms the way communication is achieved (Frigkas, 2005).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

In this study we try to present the aspect of students of the tourism sector mostly from: ASTEAN (Higher School of Tourist Enterprises), the School of Tourist Enterprises and the Department of Tourist Enterprises of the School of Business Administration of the TEI Crete), targeting on researching a potential introduction and exploitation of e-learning on tourist education, as they were expressed both on the level of lessons taught daily and on the level of educational policy and theoretical level of tourist education. Despite the fact that it is known that in Greece 73% of the population has never used the Internet, which according to Eurostat it is the greatest proportion across the Europe, Greek students use the Internet less than other European students (Kottis, 2006). However, from our side, we tried to investigate the notional background of the aspects of the specimen and identify the educational aims resulting from their analysis. The basic target of this research is to identify whether potential reorganization of the tourism education sector, in which new forms of tourism are included, through e-learning can be clear and the educational outcome of potential choices in touristic education.

Alternative reasoning: Despite the fact that the ideological role of the current tourist direction seems to have altered greatly since its appearance, the basic

orientation did not remain close from a productive scope close to its original process, which can be validated by own examples. The same applies, sometimes to a great extent, for the higher educational institutes, due to the fact that their position presents difficulties of timely adaptation to current requirements.

Therefore, the connection with production can not be considered as contradictory to the productive discipline, that demands the obedience of the employees (as taylorism demanded), but the bridge between theory and production. This connection, however, preconditions developing initiatives in the rules of tourist enterprises through developing skills of methodological character (Roupas and Laloumis, 1998). It also preconditions examination and development of critical reasoning that would be oriented to the direction of improving efficiency and incapable of overcoming the ethics of established social relations.

The procedures of touristic education in modern communication forms and more specifically e-learning could satisfy the general demand for modernization of the touristic education and production process and might also satisfy the need for systematic devotion to the touristic happenings. This is the reason why teaching specific lessons through e-learning (which was also stated by the majority of the specimen) would cultivate the adaptation skills necessary in a constantly evolving reality, while at the same time cultivate the audiovisual and electronic tourist education for these specific educational subjects-a fundamental element for developing orientation skills in a reality in which modern communication forms as means of educational policies-as it can be validated by a presidential decree 446/1995 (FEK.260/1995, T.A).

On the other hand, this kind of touristic education preconditions devotion that can advantage from this audiovisual and electronic tourist educational procedure. This directive preconditions the application and exploitation of modern forms of communication in touristic education that would be based on an alternative reasoning, instead of a constitutional or medium-based reasoning.

This alternative reasoning methodologically commences from the fact that both the Internet and animation are not considered traditional forms of communication. As communication forms, they impose radical changes in the relations of the students and the way we perceive the world. There is, however, another educational framework with specific steps: understanding of meanings, standards, skill analysis, practice, self-estimation and translation of education to attitude (Rudolf, 1998). However, traditional forms of touristic

education that apply nowadays, in an attempt to include these modern communication forms in their older frameworks, fail to analyze in depth their new qualitative characteristics and their importance to formulating a modern touristic reality. This is their outmost methodological deficiency that exists in the touristic educational and business extension.

MODERN FORMS OF COMMUNICATION

Modern forms of communication, exactly due to the fact that they reorient the way we perceive the world, demand the development of specialized forms of touristic education, even if the general purpose of touristic education is not the development of adaptation skills, but also the development of tourist orientation that expresses the modernization of the touristic education. While the modernization does not have a meaningful content, everyone systematically identifies it with technological evolution, the technology train (Kaftantzogloy, 1989). We also identify technological evolution with the technology train and this is why we researched the necessity of a potential reorganization of the customs of tourism education, in the direction observed. And this is but the target, beyond the development of the necessary operational tourist education in the systematic development of justified audiovisual and electronic tourist education, so as to orientate students' choices towards tourism reality. In a different case, every possible outcome stemming from information society may remain incomplete, as for example the static educational programme of the tourism schools. The research for the relation between the programme and the level of tourism education nowadays, along with the requirements of the modern tourist market and the future tourist education. Patellis (2006), have led us to perform a field research. This was the outcome of the fact that higher tourism education, while in Greece it was slowly developed the last 20 years, has not promoted a novel knowledge field. This can be also depicted by the fact that it has been offered by higher educational institutes as a 4-year bachelor programme for more than 80 years abroad, while in Greece only recently and in a very limited extent. One can also study the social needs or pressures that define or affect the educational programmes in the social reproduction (Dimitrakos, 1986).

E-learning and its efficiency: Internet is an ocean of information. One cannot measure the extent of information wealth, since countless people around the globe contribute to it (Zongoing, 2003). During the research we found out that e-learning is considered a revolution in the

educational frameworks. It is an alternative to the educational methods, providing access to the educational material through the World Wide Web-Internet. The educational material (lesson) is in different kind of forms, not only text, but can also be presented in the form of audio or other interactive forms, thus controlling and estimating the study, efficiency and knowledge reception degree of the learner's knowledge.

The advantage of e-learning in the tourism education of the 21st century: Traditional tourist education is completely based on the presence of students and the professor. On the other hand, e-learning is time-independent. The students of the university schools of Athens use Internet, for example, to inform themselves, which reflects the possibility offered by Internet for the active engagement of the users, while at the same time offering the possibility for greater participation, use and choices, in relation to other communication media (Papathanasoupoulos and Armenakis, 2002).

Tourism education in Crete is realized in 3 levels:

- School of Higher Tourist Education. Ag. Nikolaos Kritis.
- School of Tourist Education, Kokkini Chani, Herakleion Crete.
- Department of Tourist Business, TEI Crete.

The preconditions for studying are initially to undertake the Examinations of the Ministry of Education and Religion according to the National System applying every year. The studies last for 6 semesters. Each semester is divided in 2 study cycles: the Theoretical, beginning every October and finishing every June and the Practical, which follows the Theoretical and begins on July and ends on the end of September. The lessons taught are: 1st semester: Introduction to Hotel Hospitality, Business Relations, Beverages and Drinks, Good Hygiene, Restaurant Technique, Computers I, Tourist Geography, Cooking, Foreign Language I, Foreign Language II. 2nd semester: Micro-economy, Macroeconomy, Organization and Administration of Annonary Units, Bar and Oenology, Mass Food Productions Technique, Computers II, Tourism and Alternative Forms of Tourism, Foreign Language I, Foreign Language II. 3rd Semester: Business Administration, Customer Reception Service I, Beverages and Drinks Administration, Tourist Policy, Law, Computers III, Foreign Language I, Foreign Language II. 4th semester: Customer Reception Services II, Floor Operation Department, Computerization of Lodging Industries, General Logistics, Marketing,

Business Communication, Statistics, Foreign Language I, Foreign Language II. 5th Semester: Hotel Marketing, Hotel Logistics, Hotel Legislation, Hotel Architecture 7 Equipment, Hotel Business Administration, Tourist Economy, Customer Psychology, Sociology, Customer Entertainment and Sports, Foreign Language I, Foreign Language II. 6th Semester: Organization and Operation of Tourist Offices, Hotel Enterprises Human Resources, Sales Promotion/ Advertisement, Conference Organization, Total Quality Management, Foreign Language I, Foreign Language II, Graduate Seminar.

As for the second educational unit of business touristic education and specialization, the preconditions for studying and applying for it are conditioned by the Ministry of Touristic Development with a different entering system than that of the Pan-Hellenic Examinations with three potential sectors: Sector A-Hotel and Annonary Services, Sector B-Cooking, Sector C-Pastry. The lessons taught in Sector A are: Operation of Annonary Business, Structure and Operation of Hotel Units, Kitchen Operation and the Fundamentals of Cooking, Tourist Geography, Oenology and Wine Servicing Techniques, Safety and Hygiene in work areas, English Language, French or German Language, Computer Applications in Annonary Enterprises, Tourist Economy, Floor Sector Operation, Tourism, Culture and Society. The lessons of sector B are: Greek and International Cuisine, The fundamentals of operations of Annonary Units, Nutritional value of foods-dietology, Hygiene and safety in work areas, Meat and Fish Anatomy and Cutting Techniques, French language, Structure and Operation of Hotel Units, Tourism, Culture and Society. The lessons taught in Sector C: Pastry, Kitchen operation and the fundamentals of cooking, the art of Bakery, Nutritional value of Food-dietology, Hygiene and safety of work areas, the fundamentals of amnonary units, French language, Structure and operation of hotel units, Tourism, Culture and Society.

As for the Department of Tourist Enterprises in TEI Crete, the following apply: The preconditions of applying and studying are defined by the Hellenic Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs, depending on the concurrent Hellenic National System of Entering Higher Education. The courses last for 8 semesters, while the last one is Work practice semester. The lessons taught are: Semester A: Microeconomy, Urban Legislation, Introduction to Computers, Introduction to Tourism, Enterprise Statistics, Catering I. Semester B: Macroeconomics, Financial logistics, Tourist Psychology, Catering II, Marketing, Management. Semester C: Tourist Economy, Business Logistics, Floor sector operation, Financial Administration, Reception operation, Commerce

legislation. Semester D: Tourist legislation, Pricing Control, Business Relations, Customer Keeping, Tourist Geography, Tourist sociology. Semester E: Tourist Market Research, Structure and Administration of Tourist Enterprises, Tourist Enterprises Marketing, Human Resources Administration in Tourism, Tourist Development planning, Leisure Time Administration, F/B Management, Sustainable and Alternative Forms of Tourism. Semester F: English Language Tourism Terminology, Hotel Logistics, Tourist Marketing, Travel Guides. Semester G: Graduate seminars, Tourist advertisement and Public Relations, Airfares, Conference organizations, Travel organization, Agrotourism. Optional lessons: English Language I, French Language I, German Language I, Italian Language I, English Language II, French Language II, German Language II, Italian Language II, English Language III, French Language III, German Language III, Italian Language III, Crete-4000 years, Greek Language and Tradition, European Politics, Culture History, Health Tourism, Sports Tourism, Environment-Administration organizations, Extreme Weather Conditions, Environmental Protection Framework, Novel methods of waste processing, Enterprises and Environment.

The description of the research framework: The aim was to research the way the students consider e-learning technology is evolving and whether it can be considered a new form of educational communication. The students were asked to answer to the following questions among others: Can e-learning in the tourist education make the lesson more appealing or enrich the information or even change drastically the educational methods? Should more lessons be taught through e-learning and why? Do you think that a generalized use of e-learning in tourist education would affect the relations between: the professor and the students, the students, the students and knowledge? They were also urged to identify whether the consequences would be positive, negative or neutral. The last question was to identify whether the introduction of e-learning in every lesson of tourist interest would affect the occupation of the professor and in what manner.

The research identity: The research is based primarily on empirical validation of the conclusions so as to define all the proposals stated. The methodological framework was based on visits on the institutes where the questionnaires were delivered on the framework of specimen research that would cover the basic characteristics of the roles and that would be affected by the research subject. The method was qualitative with anonymous questionnaires.

Population: The specimen was made up by students of the touristic sector (125+33+23 students). A layered approach was utilized. Time of Research: December 2006-February 2007.

The questioned students of the TEI Crete were 125 in total. They state that e-learning is suitable for the following lessons: Financial Administration, Marketing, Management, Tourist Legislation, Tourist Geography, Tourist market research, Sustainable and alternative forms of tourism, Conference and Meeting organization. The questioned students of the Ag. Nikolaos were 33 and they propose that e-learning is suitable for the following lessons: Customer Psychology and Sports, Customer Reception Service, Enterprise Communications, Sales Promotion and Advertisement, Organization and Administration of annony Units, Food Hygiene, Tourism/Alternative Forms of Tourism, Business Relations. The questioned students from the Kokkini Hani School were 23 and considered that the following lessons are suitable for e-learning: Structure and Operation of Hotel Units, Tourist Geography, The fundamentals of annony units operation, Public Areas Safety and Hygiene, English Language, German Language, Tourist Economy, Structure and Operation Hotel Units, Tourism Culture and Society.

Expansive analysis and comments on the answers: In the previous years, the most predominant aspect was that the schools should be equipped with televisions and that the television programme should be enhanced with educational documentaries, or to produce according videotapes in order to enhance and upgrade the quality of the educational procedure. It was not considered vital for the teachers or the students to be enraptured in the moving picture culture or even to the fundamental audiovisual alphabet. This happens only the last few years, by the teachers, without, however, exceeding the opinion of specialization and commercial means (Vamvoukas and Kanakis, 1997). Accordingly, the situation can be observed nowadays, with e-learning. Yet, the nature of a personal computer preconditions some form of alphabet learning, at least. Despite the fact that, today the ideological role of modern education has been greatly changed from the time computers were introduced, its fundamental target was not to provide synchronous services. The same applies for technological education, both due to the fact that it remains subordinate to general education and because of the fact that it presents inherent difficulties of prompt adaptation to evolution (Anthogalidou, 1998b). The structural changes underlying the productive discipline in the need for productive dedication have brought to the surface the incapability of

the educational institution to react satisfactorily to this evolution and have defined the demands for reorientation of the educational system. The productive dedication, in contrast to the productive discipline, does not demand subjugation of the employee (as Taylorism demanded) and is not content to an internal feeling of personal responsibility and participation in adjusting general social characteristics. Productive dedication preconditions the development of initiative and, ultimately, the exceeding of the productive discipline. The capability of developing initiatives, however, preconditions the cultivation of skills and dexterities of methodological character.

The logic of education in the modern forms of communication, satisfying the general demand for modernization of the relation between the institution of education and the production process, seems to fully satisfy the need for systematic cultivation of the productive dedication. For this reason, it is orientated to the formulation of a novel kind of employment, since the student does not get computer educated to express and broaden his ideas on different subjects, but is trained in order to be easily absorbed by the current work market (Zamanis, 1997). The logic of the tourist education is therefore in position to satisfy the modern needs of the work market, by contributing to the development of adaptational skills in a constantly evolving reality.

At the same time, it adopts both according to research, the systematic development of audiovisual and electronic education—a fundamental factor in the development of orientational skills in a reality in which modern forms of communications prevail.

On the other hand, this kind of education that is preconditioned the productive dedication, includes the development of systematic intelligence, which can “serve as an intense critical social force.

The modern forms of communication in the tourist education, exactly because they reorganize the manner in which we differently perceive the world of tourism, demand the cultivation of more specialized forms of tourist education, if the general target is not only to cultivate adaptational skills but critical orientation skills. For this reason, both their approach and touristic education is not just the “extension” or complement of the traditional approaches and traditional forms of education. This implies that the logic of specialization and visual medium is not enough. A complete restructuring of the tourist education institution is required, that should begin from the content of studies, the retraining of the teachers and the redefinition of their role and should even apply to the time distribution, the areas and the educational models that are used daily in practice (Kelesidis, 1998).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In our study we present the findings of our research and more specifically the factors that were primarily researched were: the area of origin of the students, their age, their sex, their level of knowledge of computers and their opinion if this form of education would threaten tourist education. It is obvious that these factors analyzed in the data area we are interested in, are qualitative since this part of the research does not target of counting postures, but registering and encoding aspects held by students of the tourism sector.

First of all, the aspects of students of the questionnaire specimen for the introduction and the role of e-learning in tourist education are in no way connected to their perceived level of computer knowledge. With regards to the technological dangers, in contrast to the aspect of maximum technological danger (Cadet *et al.*, 1989) and despite the specialties of different technological activities, the questioned students are of the opinion that there is no maximum technological danger. We asked about the way of expanding the impersonal culture and naturally we concluded to the fact that the majority, with some minor circumspection talked-from a pedagogical aspect-about the expansion of the massive and impersonal culture and the pathetic posture against the image and the easier guidance. However, the research of the educational procedure was not limited to transformations of the attitude of the student under the influence of novel technological stimuli.

The aforementioned conclusions neutralize the idea that it is time to exploit methodological the aspect, according to which a crucial point in the evolution and changes observed is the use of the Internet and therefore new forms of education are established along with new forms of learning culture. This is exactly what was stated by the students in question, which is a fact that has been omitted by the theoretical sections between high technology tourism and the tourism education.

In addition to that, in the question whether e-learning institution can be considered as a new form of educational communication, the students reacted positively, since in tourist education it can make the teaching procedure more pleasant, or enriched with information or even change completely the educational procedure. In the question whether the majority of the lessons should be taught through e-learning or not, the majority of the students answered the lessons that are already mentioned in the study.

Annex-diagrams: The specimen of the research was 181 students of all 3 schools and educational levels.

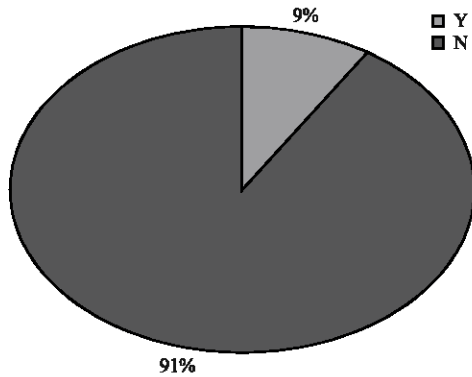


Fig. 1: Is modern tourist education satisfying?

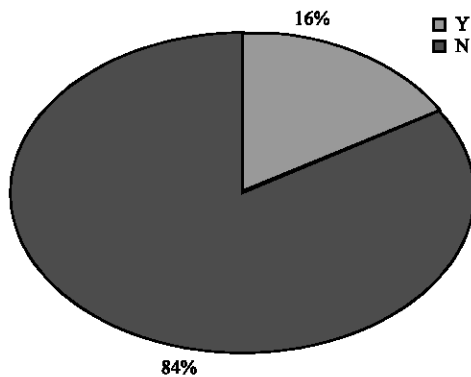


Fig. 2: Does tourist education reflect to the demands of work market?

Among others, we investigated the level of satisfaction of the specimen by the modern tourist education. The findings are rather unpleasant since 91% of the specimen is dissatisfied by the modern touristic education, while only 9% is satisfied (Fig. 1).

We also tried to investigate whether tourist education reflects the requirements of the work market. The replies were disheartening as only 16% considers it to be according, while the rest 84% considers it to be insufficient (Fig. 2).

The next question was about whether the current tourist education can transfer the adaptation capability in the tourist market. Again only 28% considers tourist education capable of transferring the adaptation capability to the market, while 72% again considers it incapable (Fig. 3).

Furthermore, we asked whether they agreed with the traditional form of tourist education. Again the vast majority (76%) disagreed with the traditional form of tourist education, while only 24% holds a positive opinion (Fig. 4).

By analyzing the aforementioned answers the reply to our next question was not surprising, since 92% stated

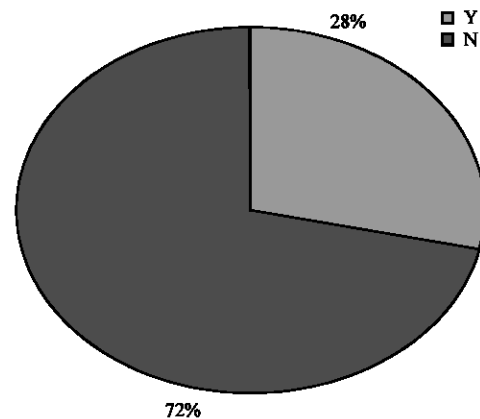


Fig. 3: Modern tourist education transmits the capability of adaptation in the work market

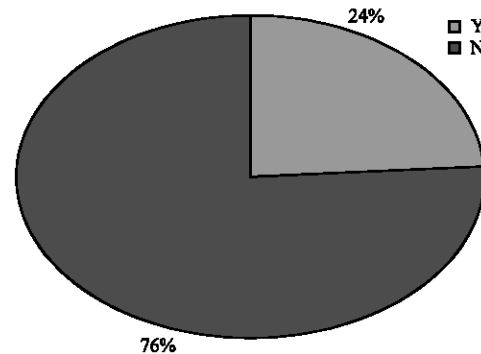


Fig. 4: Do you agree with the traditional form of tourist education

that a complete reorganization of the current tourist education should be made (Fig. 5).

We also asked if the students believed that e-learning is dependent on the level of computer knowledge. 69% state that there is no special knowledge demands, while the rest 31% stated exactly the opposite (Fig. 6).

The next question was whether they considered that a major technological danger is at imminent through e-learning. 73% of the specimen agreed to that while only 27% stated that there is no danger through electronic education (Fig. 7).

We also asked them, if they considered that e-learning would result in an impersonal educational culture. The greater part of the specimen (82%), agreed to the previous comment, while only 18% does not worry about that option (Fig. 8).

The aforementioned aspect is completed by the following question, as we tried to find out whether a complete guidance of the electronic media may arise. 74% considered that a possible outcome, while only 26% rules it out (Fig. 9).

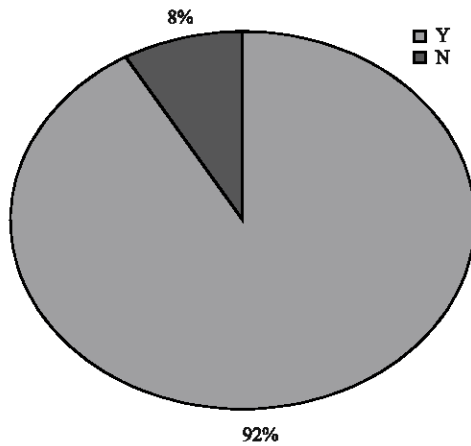


Fig. 5: Is a complete restructuring of the present tourist education required

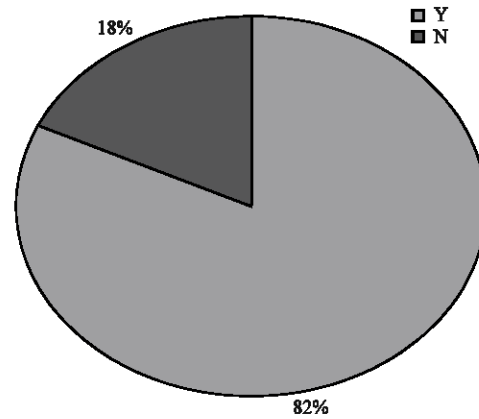


Fig. 8: Can elerning cultivate impersonal behaviour?

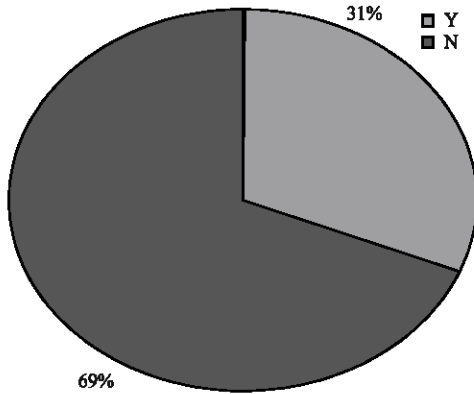


Fig. 6: Do you think that elerning depends on a special level of computer knowledge?

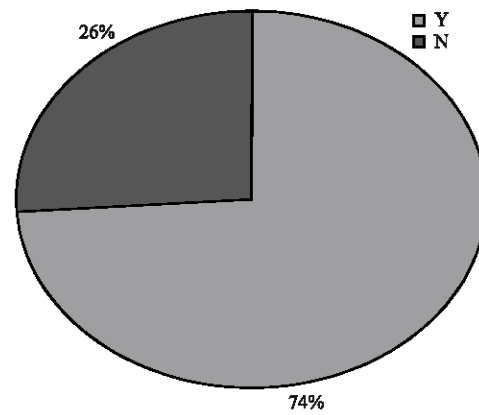


Fig. 9: Can a total manipulation of the electronic means occur?

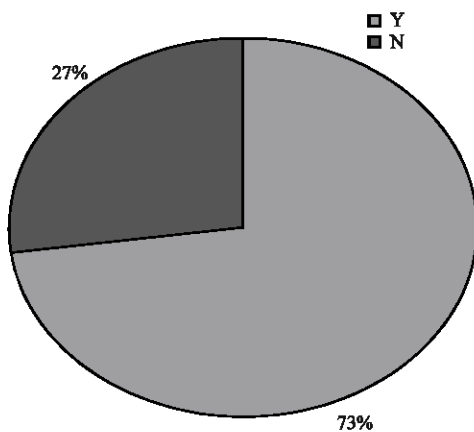


Fig. 7: Is ther an underlying technological danger?

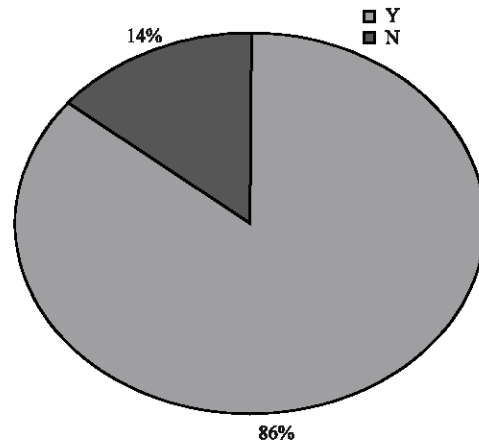


Fig. 10: Can elerining be considered a new form of educational communication?

In the next question, whether e-learning can be considered a new form of educational communication, 86% agreed, while only 14% disagreed (Fig. 10).

The next question is connected to the previous one as the specimen answers to what lessons can be taught through e-learning. The complete majority considers that

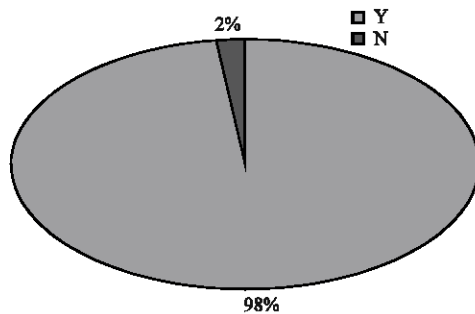


Fig. 11: In what lessons?

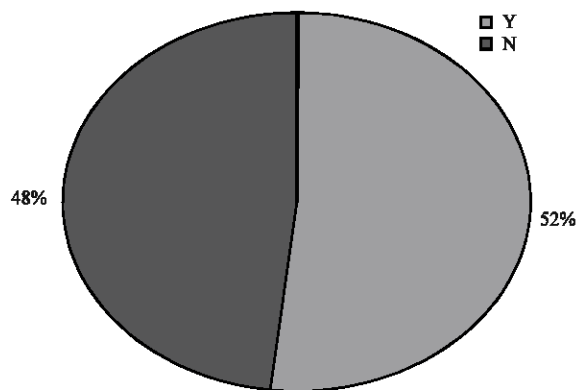


Fig. 12: Are there going to be consequences in the relations between educator and learner?

the theoretical lessons can be taught through e-learning (98%), while only 2% states that the laboratory lessons are appropriate (Fig. 11).

In the last section we tried to find out whether consequences may arise in the relation of teacher-student through the utilization of e-learning. In this question the answers are almost shared since 52% stated that consequences may be imminent, while the rest 48% stated that e-learning cannot affect the long-lasting traditional relation (Fig. 12).

CONCLUSION

E-learning for schools of tourism stands for an alternative form of tourism, synchronous since it utilizes virtual teaching rooms, whose efficiency, however, is directly related to the time and flexibility of the educational programme. Even from off-the-record conversations, one can conclude that it is a very promising model, that offers solutions to important matters of the touristic educational procedure. At the same time, however, it faces the tourist education with a

different logic, which leads to the need of engaging more research on the area. Even the issues it deals with extend the decisions and handles of the educational procedure beyond the ordinary, currently engaged, organizations. So this issue remains open for negotiation-discussion and research.

E-learning application was considered to be pioneering for the specimen, despite the fact that it combines all the modern available technologies and can offer a theoretical tourist education and specialization, since it fulfills the rules of the relation between traditional education, from the aspect of space, time, content form and supplied educational material. To sum up, from the field research, we came to the conclusion that e-learning has the opportunity to become (even if the specimen was very cautious) in the future a primary form of education for specific lessons in the area of tourist education.

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