

## Research Article

# Dimensions of employability in the hospitality industry at destination level—the case of a spa destination in Bulgaria

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## Abstract

The paper presents the results from the application of the holistic approach to employability based on secondary data and a questionnaire survey of the human resources employed in the hotel and restaurant sector (198) and semi-structured interviews with tourism sector employers (11) in the municipality of Devin, Bulgaria. The results outline some of the dimensions of employability, existing problems of employability and their potential solutions. It is typical for the municipality of Devin that a large part of the local population in the region is directly dependent on tourism. This leads to relatively low staff turnover and high motivation to offer a quality tourism product. Respondents exhibit a high self-assessment of their own knowledge, skills and attitude in terms of development of tourism, but this does not correspond to the real situation given their activities to improve their own skills during the pandemic period closure. Recommendations are proposed for upgrading the qualification of staff at municipal and enterprise level.

**Key words:** Education, human resources, motivation qualification, staff, training



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## 1. Introduction

Human resources in Bulgaria are considered to be the most important factor in the development of any modern tourist organization, and the quality of the offered tourist products and services depends on their educational level, degree of acquired qualification, motivation, moral and ethical values (Iliev 1993, 2016; Ribov 2003a, 2003b; Slaveykov and Naydenov 2009; Assenova et al. 2010; Vodenska and Assenova 2011; Paunov et al. 2013; Petrova and Genev 2015; Borisov et al. 2018; Petrova et al. 2019).

In the national context human resources have been the “bottleneck” since the very beginning of the development of mass tourism in Bulgaria—from the late 1950s and early 1960s (Ivanova 2018; Marinov et al. 2018). One of the main problems of Bulgarian tourism has been the lack of qualified and motivated personnel (Assenova et al. 2010). In recent years, the problem has worsened, its main aspects being the quantitative deficit and the quality gap (education and qualification). The trend shows not only absence of qualified and motivated staff, but of any staff at all. Recent survey of the Bulgarian Association

of Hotel Executives (BAHE) identified that for 36% of hotel managers the key challenge is the lack of staff (BAHE 2023). The situation is getting worse also due to the image of the industry as an unreliable employer that emerged during the COVID-19 pandemic. Managers in the hospitality industry are forced to lower their standards and ignore their vision of high level of service in the name of simply being staffed and able to operate. Even before the pandemic, businesses in Bulgaria started recruiting staff from abroad. The majority of them are hired for seasonal and low-skilled work, but some are also highly qualified professionals hired with a long-term perspective.

Those employed in the tourism sector in 2019 are 9% of all employed in the country, and in 2020 and 2021 their share is 7.2% (WTTC 2022). Due to the decrease in the volume of the working-age population, a total decrease in the number of employees in the hotel and restaurant sector is expected in 2024 by 6.4% compared to 2020 to 154.2 thousand, and in 2034 by 26% to 125 thousand (Simeonova-Ganeva et al. 2019). An additional reason will be the consolidation of accommodation facilities (larger sites will dominate at the expense of smaller ones), thus increasing labour productivity in the sector. Also deepening the negative trend are some traditional, for the human resources in tourism, factors, such as lower pay and lag in technological development, compared to the other sectors in the country, insufficient specialized and foreign language training, staff mobility and interest in working abroad in high-class facilities and/or cruise ships and others (Matev and Assenova 2012).

Regional imbalances in the labour market (Koulov 2018) also predetermine territorial differences in tourism staffing problems, which are reinforced by the highly pronounced territorial concentration of the accommodation facilities and specialized infrastructure, the seasonal nature of tourism and the relatively short tourist season. In addition, differences in the employment problems in tourism are established depending on the specific features of the four generations that are currently on the labour market—generations T, X, Y and Z (Petrova et al. 2019; BIA 2020).

All of the factors above outline the complexity of the issue of employability in hospitality and tourism and predetermine the need to research and analyse the aspects of employability both at national and subnational—regional and local—levels, as a basis for adequate planning that would cope with the arising problems.

## 2. Literature review

Although employability as a concept has been largely discussed in the last decades there is no consistent widely accepted definition, may be due to the changing nature of employability, depending on the labour market conditions and government policies over time (Rothwell and Arnold 2007; Williams et al. 2016). Based on his literature review, McGrath (2015) describes employability as “the individual’s ability to gain initial employment, maintain employment, move between roles within the same organization, obtain new employment if required and secure suitable and sufficiently fulfilling work”. Similarly, Kir et al. (2021) define employability as “the one’s possession of abilities, capabilities, knowledge and skills to identify a job, remain on existed job or seek for new employment”.

As pointed out by McGrath (2015) education-for-employability relation is mostly debated in terms of employability. The graduate employability based on the relationships that exist between the skills and knowledge obtained by graduates and how they can use them for acquiring a job are discussed by Pool and Sewell (2007), Lowden et al. (2011), Adeyinka-Ojo (2018), Römogens et al. (2020), Kir et al. (2021). Recently the focus is also on the digital literacy and employability skills in an emerging digital economy and the disruptive impacts on hospitality and tourism operations (Adeyinka-Ojo et al. 2020). From that point of view some potential responses of higher education providers to employability are presented by Artess et al. (2017). The competence-based conceptualization of employability stresses on employability as a multidimensional process (Van der Heijde and Van der Heijde 2006) that is in development over time, incorporating the work place learning, thus identifying the competences at the level of the individual (Römogens et al. 2020). But employability is definitely also affected by inter-organization factors (internal labour market) and external factors (external labour market), as well as by the demand for the respective occupation (Rothwell and Arnold 2007). The literature review shows that:

- employability is not simply the state of being employed (McGrath 2015);
- employability is not only about individual attributes—personal and occupational (Rothwell and Arnold 2007);
- a systemic integrative approach and a wider interpretation of employability is needed (Guilbert et al. 2016).

The review of literature devoted to employability in hospitality and specifically at destination level shows that the topic is fairly under-researched or one-sided. Most often the studies reflect on the graduate and undergraduate knowledge, skills and competences needed for future employability and the respective curricula design and the modern educational system (Malec and Kiráľová 2018). A tree-based classifier is proposed by Crisostomo et al. (2023) as an algorithm for predicting employability of tourism graduates in the tourism and hospitality sector, using the following attributes to classify the employment status of the graduates—occupation, job sector, specialization, degree, age, personality development skills, cultural competency, leadership, interpersonal skills, creativity, and problem-solving skills. Specially addressed are the role of internships for enhanced employability and retention in hospitality (Chen et al. 2018, 2021) and work integrated learning (Sonnenschein et al. 2017). Perceived skills in the classroom and during the internship of students and their effect on adaptability and perceived employability of the career of students are researched by Tavitiyaman et al. (2023). Competencies of university students are compared to those required by the industry based on the opinions of students, lecturers and industry representatives (Ezeuduji et al. 2023). The required skills with changing labour market are discussed within the framework of the factors determining the concept of “skills” (Nadda 2022) and encompass formal qualification, on the job training to individual ability to perform certain jobs, but differing based on cultures, customs, traditions, and ethnicity and on changing employment patterns, technology, vocations, globalisation, glocalization, etc. A research on the perceptions of graduates of the preferred competencies identifies three critical groups required in future employment in tourism and

hospitality—fundamental, functional and professional competencies (Putra et al. 2022). Omarkhanova et al. (2022) study the factors influencing the employability of graduates in the tourism industry focusing on the different aspects of social competition and competitiveness. The importance of work motivation based on work values as a tool to generate retention strategies and reduce staff turnover is studied by Ramírez et al. (2022) with the conclusion that apart from training, feedback and promotions, work-life balance and flexibility should also be addressed by employers. In the last few years, the research covers the required entrepreneurial skills (Shirandula 2021) and the digital capability in higher education as building employability skill and its relationship with sustainable behaviour (Liu et al. 2023). Sustainable development and information technology in the context of hospitality education, particularly graduate employability are investigated (Ali et al. 2018). The competencies of online learners that influence satisfaction in the employability of the hospitality and tourism industries in the post-COVID-19 period are also studied (Sincharoenkul and Witthayasirikul 2022). Finally, the expectations and aspirations of Generation Y undergraduate students with work experience in the hospitality industry for pursuing careers in the sector are explored by Maxwell et al. (2010). The need to develop the employability skills of next-generation hospitality graduates such as automation at work, upskilling of employees, man-machine interaction and service robots is also addressed (Hussain et al. 2023). No publications have been identified that discuss comprehensively the issues of employability in hospitality at destination level.

Employability in tourism is not widely discussed in the Bulgarian literature. Moreover, human resources problems are usually considered in general for the country, mainly referring to the large sea and ski resorts. Regional characteristics seem to be greatly underestimated, although they probably imply a specific approach to human resource management.

The most appropriate for identifying the problems of employability in hospitality in a destination is the holistic framework of employability, offered as a model by McQuaid and Lindsay (2005) and further developed by McGrath (2015). The proposed model takes into consideration the individual factors, the personal circumstances and the external factors and emphasizes on the fundamental importance of the interactions between each of the components (Table 1). No examples of applying that approach in hospitality at destination level have been identified in research publications.

**Table 1.** Employability Factors. Source: McGrath (2015) after McQuaid and Lindsay (2005).

Individual factors	Personal circumstances	External factors
Employability skills and attributes	Household circumstances	Demand factors
Demographic characteristics	Work culture	Enabling support factors
Health and well-being	Access to resources	
Job seeking		
Adaptability and mobility		

The main aim of the study is to reveal the dimensions of employability in hospitality at destination level based on the case of a Bulgarian spa destination and to outline potential solutions. The fulfilment of the goals requires the following tasks to be performed:

- Obtaining of secondary data from relevant sources of information on national and regional level in regards of demographic characteristics, work culture, staff demand, etc.;
- Carrying out field research for acquiring primary data on the individual factors;
- Data processing and analysis of the dimensions of employability in Devin Municipality;
- Drawing conclusions on current and emerging problems related to employability.

### 3. Data and Methods

#### 3.1. Study area

The area under study is Devin Municipality, which is located in the Rhodope Mountains, neighbouring Greece to the south, and is one of the municipalities in the district of Smolyan. The municipal centre—the town of Devin, is located at an altitude of 710 m and is 220 km away from the capital of Sofia, 45 km away from Smolyan and just 35 km afar from Pamporovo international ski resort (Fig. 1). The municipality has a population of 12,097 people (NSI 2023). Leading economic sectors are trade and tourism (hotel and restaurant industry), processing industry (woodworking, mineral water bottling, construction, electrical engineering, etc.) and agriculture and forestry (plant breeding, animal husband-

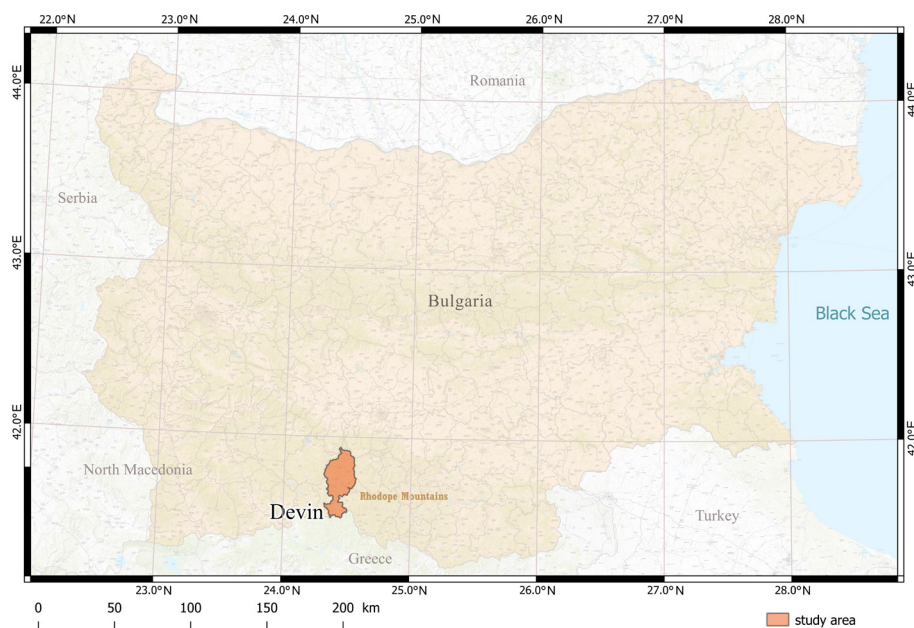


Figure 1. The municipality of Devin on the map of Bulgaria.

ry, forestry and fisheries). Business entities mainly fall into the category of micro- and small enterprises. The municipality is rich in mineral waters and three of the settlements—Devin, Beden and Mihalkovo, are officially declared as spa resorts of local importance in the period 1963–1967.

### 3.2. Methods

The research approach is based on the holistic employability model, proposed by McGrath (2015) after McQuaid and Lindsay (2005), presented above. The three groups of components are consecutively studied, presented and discussed. All factors for which information is available or could be collected are considered.

The research methodology is grounded on a thorough review of scientific publications, covering the human resources and employability topic in general and more specifically in tourism and hospitality, including the national context. Statistical data and information from other secondary sources is also used to reveal some of the aspects of employability. For the purposes of the analysis, data from the official statistics of the National Statistical Institute (NSI) (2008–2020) were used, more specifically for the demographic situation, for the activity of accommodation facilities in the municipality of Devin and for the employment structure by sector in the municipality of Devin. Data from the consolidated National Tourism Register on categorized accommodation and dining and entertainment establishments, as well as data from the WTTC, were also used.

The methodological tools implemented for the collection of primary data include:

- questionnaire survey of the human resources employed in the hotel and restaurant sector, conducted in the summer of 2020—198 survey questionnaires are completed, which represents 78.3% of the employed in the hotel and restaurant sector in Devin Municipality (NSI 2019). This high proportion of coverage provides reliable results and allows important conclusions to be drawn;
- semi-structured interviews with tourism sector employers (managers and owners)—11 employers were interviewed in the period July–September 2020. The interviewed persons represent accommodation facilities with 771 beds, which is 44.1% of all the bed capacity of the municipality, thus testifying the reliability of the results.

The survey of the employees is carried out with a self-administered standardized questionnaire. For greater credibility of the survey and elimination of unwanted influences, the survey is anonymous, and the employees are given the opportunity to fill in the survey cards independently. The questionnaire contains 58 questions. They are divided into several groups: assessment of own knowledge and skills, importance of motivational factors, satisfaction with motivational factors, impact of the crisis caused by the COVID-19 on employment and income and questions about the identification of the sample. The majority of the questions are closed, and the open ones are only for clarification and/or if an option is missing. Simple questions (with one answer) also dominate over



multiple questions (with more than one possible answer). Evaluation questions are based on a 5-point Likert scale. The data is processed using the software product SPSS, version 21.0.0.0, summarized and presented in graphic and tabular form (Figs 2–5, Table 2).

The research among employers from the hospitality sector in Devin municipality is conducted in the form of semi-structured interview. The employers are asked ten questions related to their employees and their professional operation, and six questions about identifying themselves. The limitations of the study refer to the fact that the surveys conducted were not specifically developed to explore the dimensions of employability, but human resources in general and for that reason there is no complete substantive overlap with the factors described in the three groups of the approach.

## 4. Results and discussion

### 4.1. External factors

The external factors include the demand factors (local and regional labour market demand) and the enabling support factors (McQuaid and Lindsay 2005; McGrath 2015). More than half of all the inhabitants of the municipality of Devin—6,527 (54%), live in the town of Devin (NSI 2023). The share of the employed in the “Hospitality and restaurant industry” sector in the municipality of Devin exceed the average values for the country, which indicates the importance of the tourism sector for the entire municipality. In the period 2008–2019, the number of employees in the sector varies between 230 and 500 people, and their share in the total number of employees—from about 9% to almost 15%. The deviations are multidirectional and no clear trend can be identified, obviously the dynamics is related to the economic situation. A high proportion (72.7%) of the interviewed employers had no problem finding employees at the time of the survey. The main deficits identified are in the catering sector and, in particular, in the kitchen, where the lack of qualified personnel is most felt. It might mean that due to a labour shortage local employers are inclined to recruit available personnel with lower than required knowledge and skills but may not select that same employee candidates under different circumstances, which is a potential risk.

In the region of Devin (including due to the proximity of the Pamporovo resort) there are long-standing traditions that motivate people to seek fulfilment in tourism. Moreover, hospitality and tourism are one of the main livelihoods in the area. A large part of the population is directly dependent on tourism, as it is employed in tourism as service personnel. From the interviews with the employers, it may also be concluded that with few and insignificant exceptions (manager and expert job positions), almost all employees are local to the municipality. The lack of an alternative for employment in other sectors means that a large number of employees rely on developing a career in this sector. According to popular belief, working in the hospitality and tourism industry is a temporary phenomenon until finding the “more serious job”, not a long-term commitment, especially for service staff. However, the situation in Devin Municipality is radically different. The relatively low turnover of employees and their relatively long-term commitment to the industry is impressive—31% (al-

most 1/3) of all respondents have been in the hotel and restaurant sector for more than 10 years, and 21% have that much experience in the same workplace (Table 2). Only 15% have been in the sector for less than one year (just as much as the share of respondents in the 16–24 age category). It should also be noted that year-round employees predominate, while about a quarter of the staff (28%) is seasonally employed during the higher summer season in Devin (Table 2).

Although turnover is low, the training and qualification levels of those employed are relatively unsatisfactory and personnel needs training and standardization programmes. Two secondary schools operate on the territory of Devin Municipality, but more significant for the research is the vocational high school for electrical engineering in Devin. The school strives to be innovative and keep up with the demands of local business. During the academic year 2006–2007, the class specializing in “Hospitality Organization” is opened. In the academic year 2021–2022, the specialty “thermal procedures performer” is introduced as a dual form of education. The purpose of this specialty is to train personnel who can directly perform activities related to health procedures for people. The school concludes annual contracts with the local tourist enterprises to ensure the respective facilities and trainers for conducting educational practice and industrial placements for the students.

#### 4.2. Individual factors

Individual factors include demographic characteristics, employability skills and attributes, health and well-being, job seeking, adaptability and mobility (McQuaid and Lindsay 2005; McGrath 2015). The survey results help to outline the demographic structure of the hospitality and tourism employees in the spa resort. The majority of employees (Table 2) are women (69%), which is reasonable for this service sector. Just above 1/3 of all employed fall in the 35–44 age group, and the rest are almost evenly distributed across all other age groups. The respondents with secondary education dominate (76%), but the relatively low share of graduates, who mainly occupy managerial and expert positions, is unexpected. The share of employees who define themselves as managers and experts is 10%, and the dominant part of the respondents are classified as service personnel.

The religious structure of the local population is specific to the municipality—32% of local residents are Muslim, 31% are Eastern Orthodox Christians, and 27% did not specify their religious affiliation (NSI 2023) and impacts the reproductive behavior of local residents (Traykov and Tsvetkov 2019). Such a structure positively reflects on the cultural diversity and the variety of lifestyles and cultural traditions, and could also be regarded as an opportunity to attract visitors from different religious groups in a friendly and hospitable environment.

Out of the total number of interviewed employers, six are owners and five are general managers. The majority of them (64%) are men. Except for one person who is in the age category of 25–34 years, all others fall in the category of 35–55 years, which indicates that they are all in their most active age period. Employers are relatively well educated—64% are higher education graduates, while all those with secondary education are in fact owners of accommodation and catering facilities. The interviewees with professional experience of up to



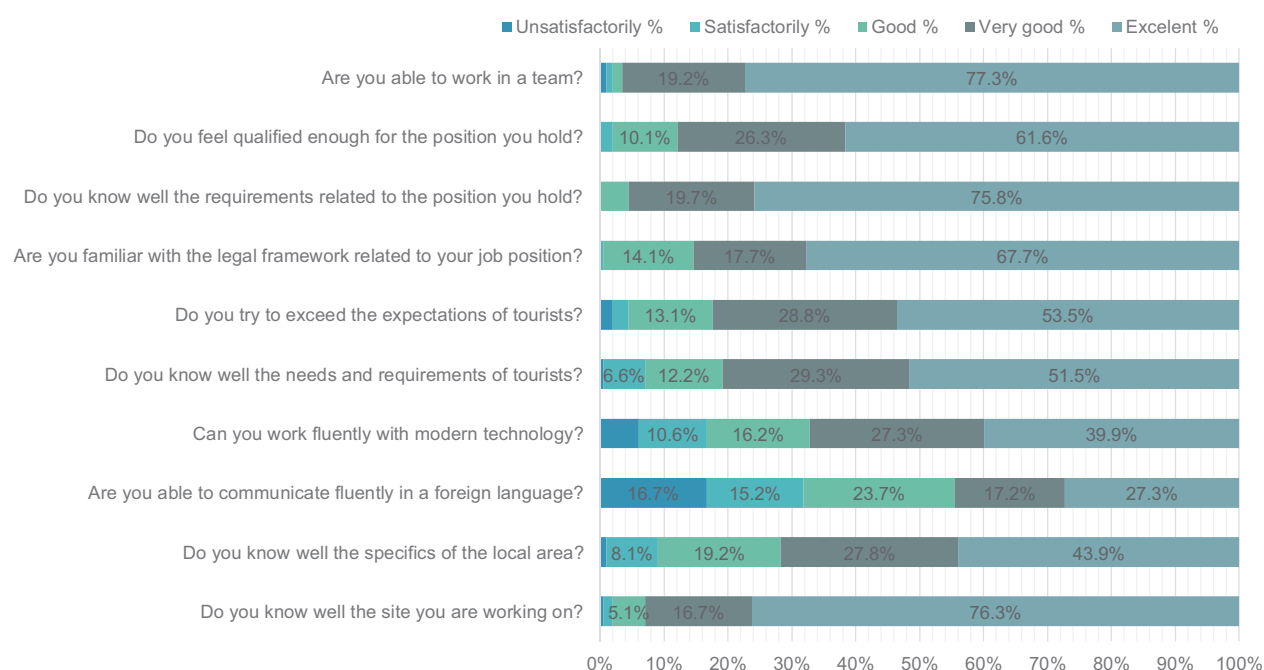
Table 2. Respondents' structure.

Characteristics	Scale	Number of respondents	Share (%)
<b>Gender</b>	Male	46	24
	Female	133	69
	I don't want to answer	14	7
	<b>Total</b>	<b>194</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Age</b>	16–24 years	29	15
	25–34 years	35	18
	35–44 years	67	35
	45–54 years	40	21
	More than 55 years	23	12
	<b>Total</b>	<b>194</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Education</b>	Primary or lower	12	6
	Secondary	148	76
	Higher	31	16
	Other	3	2
	<b>Total</b>	<b>194</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Type of employment</b>	Permanent	129	67
	Seasonal/Part-time	55	28
	Industrial placement	2	1
	On call/hourly	8	4
	<b>Total</b>	<b>194</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Duration of work time</b>	Full work time	169	87
	Part-time work	25	13
	<b>Total</b>	<b>194</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Hierarchy level</b>	Employee/worker	175	90
	Expert/Specialist	16	8
	Manager	3	2
	<b>Total</b>	<b>194</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Duration of employment at the work place</b>	Less than 1 year	45	30
	1–2 years	48	32
	3–5 years	56	38
	6–9 years	14	9
	More than 10 years	31	21
	<b>Total</b>	<b>194</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Duration of employment in the sector</b>	Less than 1 year	29	15
	1–2 years	39	20
	3–5 years	43	22
	6–9 years	22	11
	More than 10 years	61	31
	<b>Total</b>	<b>194</b>	<b>100</b>

five years are 27%, and the experienced ones with more than ten years of total experience are 55%, with 45% having worked in the same position for more than ten years.

Among the most important individual factors are the employability skills and attributes, the qualification, and the work experience (McQuaid and Lindsay 2005; McGrath 2015). The high self-assessment (Fig. 2) of the own knowledge and skills of the employed in the hotel and restaurant sector within Devin municipality is impressive. Almost 93% of the surveyed stated that they know well the needs and requirements of tourists, with 95.4% striving to exceed their expectations, which is indicative of the commitment of employees to quality customer service. Almost all respondents stated they are well acquainted with the legal framework and the specific requirements regarding the position they hold, and only 2% believe that they are not sufficiently qualified for their job position. Respondents unexpectedly evaluate highly their language training (68.2%) and the abilities to use modern information technologies (83.4%). The teamwork skills turn out to be excellent for 77.3% of the employees, while only 2% confess their unsatisfactory level of team work abilities. In reference to the relatively low turnover of employees only 2% of respondents stated that they know little about the enterprise and the facility they work in. Having in mind that the majority of employees are local people, it is only natural that only a small share of them (just about 9%) has limited knowledge about the region, which in turn is a prerequisite for the provision of high-quality information service to visitors.

On the side of the employers, they are also generally satisfied with the professional, linguistic and technical qualifications of their employees. Only 18.2% share the opinion that the level of preliminary training is low. It can be assumed that either the level of training of the staff is really good or the requirements of the high management are understated.

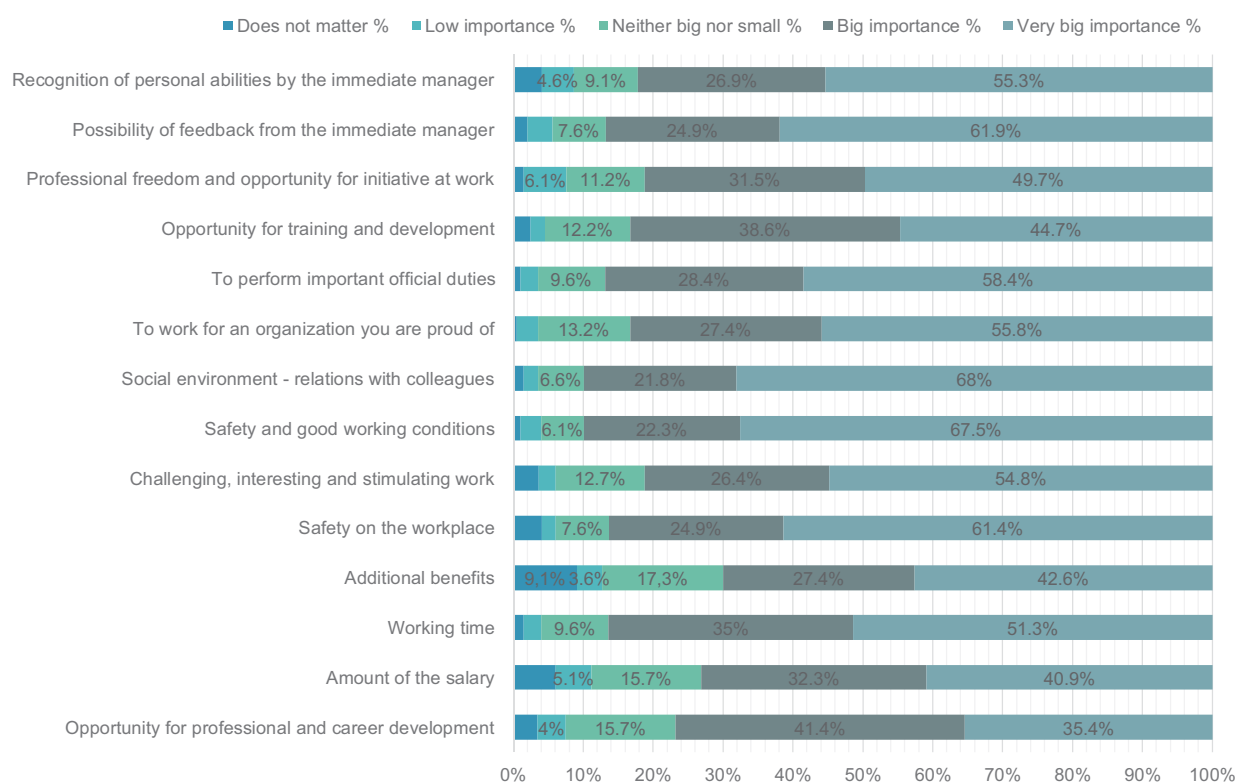


**Figure 2.** Self-assessment of own knowledge and skills by employees.

A good level of service cannot be achieved without the necessary on-the-job training of all employees, but especially those who are in direct contact with customers. Few of the interviewed employers (18.2%) frankly answer that they do not train their employees. The same share of employers accept that in their organizations training is carried out following the principle that older employees train younger ones. However, 63.6% of employers point out that they regularly provide staff training in one form or another. During the interviews, none of the employers reported the use of an external specialized organization for the trainings, nor did they share information about the existence of a special training plan for the employees.

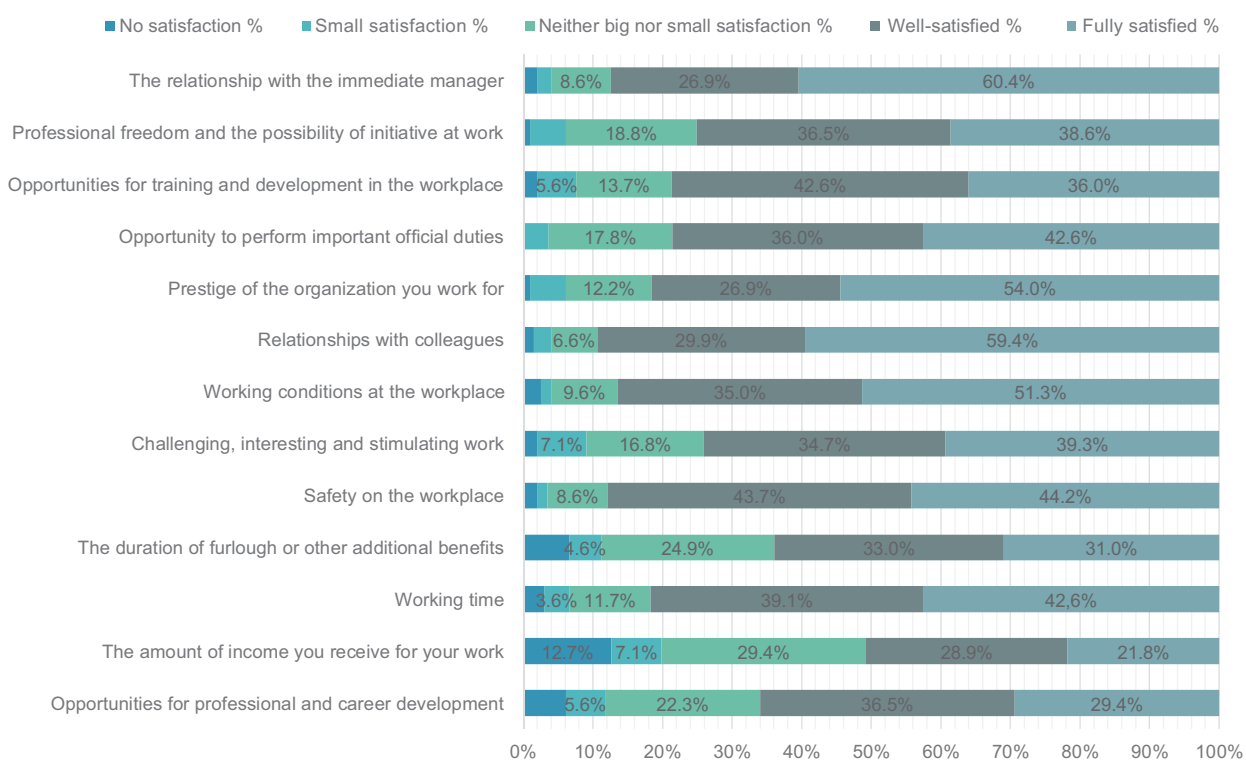
Motivation in its organizational and work dimensions represents the driving force (generally “causality” for work) for loyalty to the employer and attachment to the organization, for the specific professional orientation, etc. (Paunov et al. 2013; Lambova 2015). Absence of motivation leads to mediocre performance, formal attitude to work, lack of correctness and low work morale. The study of the significance of motivational factors and the degree of satisfaction with them shows that for 76.8% of the respondents, the opportunity for professional and career development is very important for their motivation, and 65.9% state that they are satisfied with the situation, thus dissatisfaction with the lack of realization at work is within 10–12% (Fig. 3).

According to Iliev (2016), money (respectively the salary) motivates the behavior of employees at work, because it ensures that they can daily satisfy their current, medium-term and long-term needs, including health care, security, certain level of comfort and quality of life. About 73% of the hotel and restaurant



**Figure 3.** Significance of factors for personal motivation.

staff in the municipality of Devin attach great significance to the salary, but only half of the respondents (50.7%) are satisfied with their remuneration. It is not surprising that working hours and workplace security are of higher importance to people (86.3%) and it corresponds to the higher satisfaction achieved (87.9%). The situation is almost similar with the motivational factors concerning the challenging, interesting and stimulating work, safe working conditions (including measures to prevent COVID-19 infection), relations with colleagues; the public importance of the organization, the assignment of responsibilities by management, training and development opportunities, opportunities for initiative in work, access to the immediate supervisor, including recognition. There is significant dissatisfaction with additional benefits, including vacation, with only 64% of respondents giving a high assessment value, while the working conditions satisfy the employees to a significant extent (Fig. 4).



**Figure 4.** Degree of satisfaction with motivation factors.

Like employees, employers also rely mainly on salary (money) as a motivational factor. For 63.6% of interviewed employers, the financial expression of motivation is the most important, and 18.2% of them do not apply any motivation methods, counting that employees do not have much choice. Slightly more than half of the employers interviewed (54.5%) indicate that they conduct a motivation assessment. These results show that unless significant changes in the mindset of employers occur, the future development of the destination is uncertain.

Attitudes towards self-improvement are a sign of the real attitude of employees towards their profession. It was found out that people highly value their knowledge and skills, as well as their desire to provide high-quality services, but in fact more than half of the respondents (51.2%) did not use their free time rationally and did nothing for their professional and personal development during the spring closure in 2020, when in fact the opportunities for learning and self-education were very good (Fig. 5).



**Figure 5.** Learning and self-education involvement of employees during the COVID-19 closure.

#### 4.3. Personal circumstances

The personal circumstances include household circumstances (which are not covered by the survey), the work culture and the access to resources (in terms of income, social networks, etc.) (McQuaid and Lindsay 2005; McGrath 2015). As discussed above the employee respondents of the current research fall in all generation groups that are nowadays on the labour market. The T-generation (more than 55 years of age) represents the smallest group of only 12%, while the Z-generation (16–24 years) is better represented with a share of 15%. The largest group comprise the staff of age between 25 and 44 years (Y-generation) and with a share of about 20% is the X-generation at the age of 45–54 years. Those generations differ significantly in terms of their cultural-historical and social context, leading insights, dominant values, motivation at work and work culture. The most important features of the elaborated generation profiles (BIA 2020) are presented in Table 2.

#### 5. Conclusion

At national level, there are three serious obstacles to employability and attracting quality personnel—the deepening demographic crisis in the country, the change in work attitudes in the generations after the 1990s, as well as the image of the industry as not being a very reliable employer imposed mainly during the pandemic period.

**Table 3.** Generations' profiles (summarized after BIA, 2020).

<b>Generations</b>	<b>Cultural, historical and social context</b>	<b>Dominant values</b>	<b>Motivation at work and work culture</b>
<b>Z</b> (18–26)	Attach the greatest importance to dynamism and speed in change in all its aspects; realists and pragmatists; developed intuition and sense of the new and progressive.	Happiness, independence, freedom and love,  achieved through:  professionalism, adaptability, courage, creativity, hard work, intelligence and pragmatism.	Need to believe that they are working for a useful cause and match their desires and values with the company's goals. Leading motivational factors: remuneration, opportunities for training and improvement, timely and objective feedback, the opportunity to communicate and express opinions freely, modern technological equipment for the workplace, opportunities for career development, diversity and challenges.
<b>Y</b> (27–39)	A transitional generation that bears the burden of uncertainty; perfectionists, mostly optimistic about their future and the development of the economy.	High income, happiness, love, security,  achieved through:  professionalism, intelligence, hard work, adaptability, creativity.	Work to achieve success. Own notions of usefulness and benefit, personal standards of success and achievement. Leading motivational factors: evaluation and feedback, remuneration, competent and principled leadership, appropriate working relationships, effective organization, opportunity to communicate and freely express opinion, opportunities for career development.
<b>X</b> (40–54)	Intermediate generation; independent, mostly self-reliant, with more realistic expectations, more pragmatic, flexible decisive, uncompromising in defending their interests; holding to the family model and to the loyal, responsible attitude to work.	Security, high income, dignity, independence, respect, peace, happiness,  achieved through:  hard work, professionalism, intelligence, responsibility, honesty, knowledge.	Motivations mainly based on material benefits and job security; 4 things are most important: family, stability, awareness of what is happening and the ability to take advantage of every opportunity that arises. Leading motivational factors: appropriate pay, fair assessment and job security.
<b>T</b> (> 55)	Traditionalists, value the work ethic of past years, safety, security, and consistency; for them it is more difficult to perceive uncertainty, challenges and dynamics of modern times.	Dignity, security, peace of mind, respect, recognition, independence, authority,  achieved through:  hard work, professionalism, responsibility, loyalty, honesty, intelligence.	Value attitude to work, driven by external standards and the desire to join and receive approval and recognition from others, tend to identify with the goals of the company and put collective interests above personal ones. Leading motivational factors: job security, competent and principled leadership, appropriate relationships, working conditions and remuneration, fair assessment and objective feedback, lack of tension and stress at work.

The analysis of the secondary data and information, coupled with the field research in the municipality of Devin, helped to identify the employability problems in the local hospitality and tourism industry. These were classified in three groups:

1. In terms of external factors of employability, no clear trend in the number and the share of hospitality and tourism employees can be identified. The demand of staff deviates over time depending on the economic condi-



tions. Currently, employers have no problem finding the proper staff, except for the catering sector and, in particular, the kitchen work. However, labour shortage is envisaged in the future based on the worsening of population structure, which justifies the foreseen potential risk for the future staffing of the respective facilities;

2. The individual factors discussed reveal unexpectedly high appraisal of the professional, linguistic and technical qualifications of the employees but some problems related to the on-the-job training and staff motivation (including payment) require substantial change in the thinking of employers, who strongly count on the fact that employees do not have many recruitment choices;
3. The personal circumstances revealed through the generation profiles indicate significant differences in generational values—for generation Z primary life goal is happiness, for Y—high incomes, for X—security, and for T—dignity. To achieve their goals in life, young people (generations Z and Y) rely mainly on qualities, such as adaptability, creativity, inspiration, curiosity and pragmatism. For older generations (X and T) traditional values are of leading importance, such as hard work, responsibility, endurance, honesty and loyalty. Those differences require integrating intergenerational management into the human resource management systems and policies, in order to take advantage of each generation specifics in work ethics.

The potential solutions for solving the problems with personnel in hospitality and tourism differ in their time horizons (Kotsakov 2023):

- In the short term, activities can be carried out to mobilize the remaining reserves on the labour market: unemployed and inactive persons; persons with disabilities; the part-time employees; the retention of persons in retirement age on the labour market; the return and integration in the labour market of Bulgarian expats; engaging undergraduates and upper high school pupils with internships and other employment programs; attracting and recruiting foreigners seeking employment in Bulgaria;
- In the long term, the most efficient decisions are in the sphere of investment in human capital—education (including dual education, qualification and retraining), employees' health care, job security, policy to increase incomes, training of personnel internally and outside of the organization, etc.

Staff shortages can be addressed by raising wages in hotels, so that they become competitive with other sectors. However, this measure will inevitably come into conflict with the reluctance or even the inability of many hoteliers to raise their room rates comparably (BAHE 2023).

The research illustrated that the holistic approach to employability (McQuaid and Lindsay 2005; McGrath 2015) is appropriate for identifying and clarifying the problems with personnel in hospitality and tourism, in terms of searching adequate solutions on corporate and public policy level. The theoretical contributions comprise the application of the approach on a destination level, providing primary and secondary information to reveal the current situation of

employability, as well as the inclusion of the issue of generation differences in work culture and management, as well as in attitudes to work and motivation as part of the personal circumstances. The paper's results help to enrich the applied concept of employability, especially in the intergenerational management aspect. Further research should rely on specially developed questionnaires to cover all external and internal factors, and try to apply appropriate methodology to reveal the personal circumstances to the permissible level.

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## Additional information

### Conflict of interest

No conflict of interest was declared.

### Ethical statement

No ethical statement was reported.

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### Author contributions

Conceptualization: MA, VM. Formal analysis: MA, RM, VM, VK. Investigation: RM, VM, MA, VK. Methodology: VK, MA, VM. Validation: VM. Visualization: VK. Writing - original draft: VM, MA. Writing - review and editing: MA, VM.

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### Data availability

All of the data that support the findings of this study are available in the main text or Supplementary Information.