

Hospitality and tourism industry amid COVID-19 pandemic: voices from small Mediterranean town

Tourism
industry amid
COVID-19
pandemic

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Received 16 July 2021
Revised 30 August 2021
14 October 2021
Accepted 22 October 2021

Abstract

Purpose – The study sought to examine the impacts of COVID-19 on tourism from the stakeholder perspective in the case of Famagusta town in Northern Cyprus.

Design/methodology/approach – Via a qualitative research approach, data are collected through face-to-face interviews from direct and indirect tourism stakeholders operating in Famagusta. A judgmental sampling strategy was employed to collect data from tourism stakeholders on the impacts of COVID-19 on tourism. Descriptive data analysis is engaged to report the results.

Findings – Results of the study showed that the novel coronavirus has hampered the tourism sector in Famagusta, Northern Cyprus. Indeed, as the globe suffered its effects in terms of economic gains, business and business closure. It has been the same with Famagusta, while a few private sectors positively gained (Internet and Technology), all other tourism-reliant sectors such as hotels, restaurants, travel agencies and the transport sector massively suffered as a result of the global lockdown due to COVID-19 pandemic.

Originality/value – Given the ever-changing state of knowledge and scarcity of literature, the current study seeks to summarize what has been learned from previous crises and back it up with qualitative research including senior industry stakeholders.

Keywords Hospitality, Tourism industry, Small island, Themes, Qualitative study

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

The new coronavirus COVID-19 has had a significant impact on the global economy and human life (Arasli *et al.*, 2020; Rezapouraghdam and Karatepe, 2020; Lim and To, 2021; Karatepe *et al.*, 2021). Due to extraordinary movement limitations, the tourist industry has been one of the most seriously impacted industries (Farmaki *et al.*, 2020; MacSween and Canziani, 2021; Ghaharian *et al.*, 2021; Rahimzhan and Irani, 2020). As a result, countries all around the world established stringent travel restrictions and closed their borders,

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The authors would like to thank the Editor and the two anonymous reviewers for their insightful and constructive comments from which the present paper greatly improved.

Declaration of conflicting interests: Authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship and/or publication of this article.

Funding: This research received no external funding.



International Hospitality Review
Vol. 37 No. 2, 2023
pp. 243-264
Emerald Publishing Limited
2516-8142
DOI 10.1108/IHR-07-2021-0054

effectively halting international travel (Mao *et al.*, 2021; Peterson *et al.*, 2021). Airlines, in particular, have grounded their fleets and halted operations (Sahin, 2020). Similarly, the international hospitality and leisure business has been hit hard by the epidemic, with hotels in most nations forced to close as a result of governments' lockdown reaction (Farmaki *et al.*, 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic has had an impact not just economically, but also politically and socially (Jaipuria *et al.*, 2021). As the number of infected cases rises across the country, pressure is mounting to put a stop to the tourism industry/business. Measures and limitations such as social distancing, community lockdowns, work from home, self- or mandatory quarantine, crowd control and so on are being implemented (Jaipuria *et al.*, 2021; Sigala, 2020). In addition, it has been reported there is a drop of international tourists of about 78%, causing a loss in export revenue of US\$1.2 trillion and representing the largest decline in the tourism job cuts, which is about seven times the impact of the 9/11 incident (UNWTO, 2020). In addition, the decline in visitor demand has resulted in serious financial difficulties (Crespi-Cladera *et al.*, 2021; Dube *et al.*, 2021; Wieczorek-Kosmala, 2021). In 2017, more than 1.7 million visitors visited Northern Cyprus, bringing in over \$800mn in revenue (MTE, 2018). To help with this, the tourist sector employed over 12,000 people in the area. Following the 1974 political upheavals that split the island into north and south governments, Northern Cyprus primarily focused on mass tourism (Ilkhanizadeh, 2021). However, in 2020, the situation is different: COVID-19 has wreaked havoc on the Northern Cyprus economy, with passenger arrivals down 75.1% in October 2020 compared to October 2019 (Ertac and Cankan, 2021). In reality, the overall number of passenger arrivals fell from 1,472,155 in 2019 to 366,003 in 2020 in the first 10 months of the year (TRNC Public Information Office, 2020). As a result, the city that has been worst hit by the pandemic has become Famagusta. This is because Famagusta is a university town and one of the island's most popular tourist destinations (Saydam, 2017). Hence, this research analyzes the impact of COVID-19 on tourism and the hospitality industry, which is the main source of income for the local people of Famagusta. Studies on tourism and hospitality in light of the COVID-19 issue are only now beginning to emerge (Kaushal and Srivastava, 2021). For example, the COVID-19 outbreak is a major impediment to the tourism industry (Dube *et al.*, 2021). Despite extensive assessments of COVID-19's influence on the three-tiered tourism sector workforce (Ye and Law, 2021), there is little literature on the impact of COVID-19 on the hospitality industry especially in small Mediterranean island (Peterson and DiPietro, 2021). In other words, given the ever-changing state of knowledge and paucity of literature, the current study aims to summarize what is known from prior comparable crises and back it up with qualitative research including hospitality industry stakeholders. To ensure the long-term viability of tourist enterprises, the capacity to interact with stakeholders is important. Even when they are not communicated with, hospitality stakeholders have such a significant influence in the success or failure of a business that it is important to examine and incorporate their opinions, feelings and concerns directly (Peterson and DiPietro, 2021). Thus, to fill these research gaps, this study analyzed the impact of COVID-19 on hospitality and tourism sector. Therefore, to narrow down the aim of the study, the objectives are as follows:

- (1) To investigate the impact of COVID-19 on tourism operations in Famagusta, Northern Cyprus.
- (2) To identify the experiences of tourism stakeholders and the challenges they face as a result of the pandemic in the city of Famagusta, Northern Cyprus.
- (3) To assess the coping strategies of tourism stakeholders in the current pandemic.
- (4) To provide solutions for sustainable coping strategies during and after the pandemic.

2. Literature review

2.1 Famagusta as a case study

The geographic location of Northern Cyprus makes it a popular tourist destination in Europe and the Middle East (Alipour *et al.*, 2020). The island's environment, particularly its extended dry seasons, puts it in a competitive position among Mediterranean vacation spots (Koutra and Karyopouli, 2013). The tourist industry in Northern Cyprus generates significant income, with almost 3,547,930 visitors in 2015. The ratio of net tourist revenue to trade balance was 43.4% in the same year, with net tourism income of \$746.7mn. Tourism is responsible for about 12,000 jobs in Northern Cyprus (Ministry of Tourism and Environment, 2015). The island as a whole is known for its sun, sea and sand tourism; nevertheless, Northern Cyprus has the most appealing and appropriate beaches for 3S tourist. In addition, unlike the southern portion of the island, most of the beaches and coastal regions in the north have escaped overdevelopment. Northern Cyprus' 3S tourism image is believed to be a key component in encouraging visitors to return to the island (Alipour *et al.*, 2020). Famagusta City is located at the eastern end of island. On average, the city is 25 m above sea level (Ouria and Sevinc, 2018). Its geographical location is 35.1° N, 33.9° E. Its hot Mediterranean climate leads to mild/moderate seasons (Kottek *et al.*, 2006). Famagusta, with a population of about 54,000, is the third-biggest city of Northern Cyprus (Fuladlu *et al.*, 2021). The city of Famagusta located east of Nicosia and has the island's deepest harbor. Famagusta was the island's most significant port city and a gateway to commerce with the ports of the Levant, from whence Silk Road merchants brought their wares to Western Europe, throughout the Middle Ages (particularly under the maritime republics of Genoa and Venice) (Saydam, 2017). In addition, Northern Cyprus' Famagusta is a major commercial center. Tourism, education, construction and industrial production are the city's primary economic activities. It features a 115-acre free port, which is Northern Cyprus's most significant seaport for transport and business. Although the embargo on Northern Cyprus limits the port's amount of trade, it is a major source of revenue and jobs for the city. It is a tourist destination due to its ancient attractions, which include the walled city, Salamis, the Othello Castle and the St Barnabas Church, as well as the sandy beaches that surround it; attempts are also being made to make the city more appealing for international.

2.2 COVID-19 studies

The COVID-19 pandemic is more complex than the crises and disasters examined in the hospitality literature, which typically focuses on a single type of crisis (e.g. financial crisis, natural disaster, epidemic or terrorist attack), within a single country/region, or within a single industry (e.g. cruise) (Lai and Wong, 2020). COVID-19 is more complicated and severe than the calamities studied in aforesaid investigations. What began as a local public health crisis in China quickly escalated into a global economic crisis, resulting in massive job losses and an economic recession affecting all major economies (Lim and To, 2021); job losses and recessions are known to result in increased mental health problems (Karatepe *et al.*, 2021). For hospitality firms, unstable economic conditions and fear of the virus have impacted travel and tourism expenditure among both business-to-consumer and business-to-business clients (Canhoto and Wei, 2021).

The hospitality and tourism literature presents studies on the COVID-19 pandemic. A study conducted by Jiang and Wen (2020) aimed to explore the impact of pandemic on hotel marketing and management practices. Cited authors found that, in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, different forms of artificial intelligence may open up distinct research streams at the confluence of health emergencies and hotel management. Furthermore, afore-mentioned study suggests that researchers look beyond traditional viewpoints on the causes and consequences of hotel hygiene and cleanliness to investigate visitors' impressions of the cleanliness of individual hotel surfaces. Another study done by Zhang *et al.* (2020) sought to look at the impact of hotel safety leadership on employee safety behavior during the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the function of belief restoration as a mediator and perceived

risk as a moderator between safety leadership and behavior. The findings revealed that hotel safety leadership influenced employee safety behavior positively; belief restoration partially mediated the influence of safety leadership on safety behavior. One study conducted by [Jung et al. \(2021\)](#) aimed to investigate whether job insecurity, as experienced by hotel employees, had a substantial impact on job engagement and turnover intention. The findings revealed that employees in hotels were less engaged due to their feelings of job insecurity. Employee engagement can also help to reduce the likelihood of turnover. Another study done by [Karatepe et al. \(2021\)](#) examined mental health problems as an intervening variable of the effect of COVID-19 as a stressor on nonattendance behavior, as well as life satisfaction. Employees who are at risk of contracting COVID-19 have a higher rate of mental health issues, according to the findings of the research. These employees, in turn, demonstrate nonattendance behavior, as well as low levels of life satisfaction. [Mao et al. \(2021\)](#) found that employee satisfaction with corporate COVID-19 responses moderated the effect of corporate social responsibility on psychological capital among hospitality employees. In addition to the aforementioned studies, the extant literature reports the findings of various studies on aviation sample. For instance, [Pascual and Cain \(2021\)](#) study aimed to find aimed to examine the viability of leveraging loyalty programs in times of crisis in the airline industry. Cited authors found that the structure of American Airlines' AAdvantage loyalty program may be used as a model for understanding how airlines might strengthen their loyalty bases to rekindle travel enthusiasm and use these programs as safety nets in the event of future crises. Another research conducted by [Peterson and Di Pietro \(2021\)](#) summarizes the results of a countrywide survey of 439 Aruban tourism and nontourism employees. The data show that employees' attitudes are usually negative, and their fears about the future are substantially miserable, compared to nontourism employees. The findings suggest that the COVID-19 crisis's perceived well-being and projected length have a substantial detrimental impact on employees' sentiments. In another study documented by [Lee and Deale \(2021\)](#) sought to evaluate customers' perceptions of the hazards of using sharing accommodations like Airbnb before and after the COVID-19 pandemic. During the pandemic, travelers had increased social, physical, performance and convenience risk perceptions. Unsurprisingly, individuals who were more aware of the pandemic in terms of worry and anxiety saw greater shifts in their risk assessments. Furthermore, variations in risk perception varied depending on the travelers' prior experience with the product. One study conducted by [Jafari et al. \(2020\)](#) examined the effects of COVID-19 outbreak on the tourist behavior of Turkish travelers. Their findings showed that pandemic significantly affected tourist' life, work and traveling intention during the COVID-19 outbreak while the impacts on individuals' inclination to travel, the preference of leisure trips and concern of public hygiene vary while [Templeton et al. \(2021\)](#) study targeted to look at the problems and potential for visiting national parks after pandemic, both in general and in the context of Southern Utah in particular. The findings of cited authors highlighted the various challenges that parks and gateway communities face in terms of changing visitor patterns, adaptive measures and alternative forms of unit management that are required as a result of COVID-19, as well as their impact on the future management and marketing of national parks for tourism. [Chi et al. \(2021\)](#) examined management-level hotel employees' behaviors during the COVID-19 pandemic. The findings of this study reported that working-from-home leads to both positive and negative job outcomes. In another empirical work, [Atadil and Lu \(2021\)](#) collected data from hotel tourists. Hygiene control was found to be the most important predictor for future hotel selection behaviors according to their findings. A survey of a total of 759 new and repeat cruisers was conducted in study conducted by [Pan et al. \(2021\)](#). Their research offered valuable visitor impressions and behavior data, assisting cruise companies in overcoming problems during the COVID-19 pandemic. In a study carried out in USA, [MacSween and Canziani \(2021\)](#) looked at how consumers used information sources and planned future travel in the time of COVID-19

pandemic. Authors found that three stresses (health, personal and financial) had different effects on the usage of information sources and, ultimately, on proclivity to reservation.

As previously stated, the COVID-19 pandemic poses a significant barrier to the hospitality industry (Dube *et al.*, 2021). Despite extensive study on COVID-19 in the hospitality domain, little is known about the influence of COVID-19 on the hospitality, particularly on island context (Peterson and DiPietro, 2021). In other words, given the rapidly changing state of knowledge and scarcity of literature, the current study will synthesize what is known from past similar crises and supplement it with qualitative research involving hospitality sector stakeholders. Additionally, the study is unique in that the research cited previously favored the quantitative technique methodologically. This study showed the perspectives of hospitality actors on the pandemic, based on the island context using qualitative approach. Qualitative approach can provide crucial insights into emerging issues that require development of knowledge (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). As a result, our study explored the effect of COVID-19 on the hospitality industry in order to address aforementioned research gaps.

2.3 *Tourism and pandemics*

The hospitality sector is an essential foundation of revenue (Arasli *et al.*, 2021) and has grown steadily over the past decade, recording approximately 1.4 billion international tourist arrivals in 2019 (UNWTO, 2020). The organization further estimates that by 2030, international tourist arrivals will reach at least 1.8 billion, with the WTO projecting growth of approximately 1.8 billion international tourist arrivals (UNWTO, 2020). As evidenced by the literature, it goes without saying that tourism is the reason for most human mobility worldwide (Renaud, 2020). However, due to COVID-19 pandemic, loss of international tourist arrivals was 1 billion as noted by WTO (WTO, 2020). As mentioned in the literature, there are no other ways to explore new places and or meet new people except through travel. However, these options have been considered in the event that there are no disease-free and/or crime-free routes and destinations. In the past, pandemics and epidemics have been described as the most alarming news for vacationers, planners and tourists (Ugur and Akbiyik, 2020). Pandemics not only affect tourists but also become a problem for local people in the visited destinations. In other words, pandemics and epidemics also cause harm in tourist destinations. As a result, travel becomes a catalyst for the spread of disease. There is ample evidence in the literature that travelers play a critical role in the transmission of pandemics and/or epidemics between destinations (Hollingsworth *et al.*, 2006).

Pandemics and epidemics are not a new thing or a new issue in tourism. In fact, global tourism has been affected and exposed to numerous crises over the years (Gossling *et al.*, 2020). Examples of some of the crises (including pandemics) that have greatly affected global tourism over the past 2 decades (years 2000–2020) include the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the outbreak of the severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) in 2003, the global economic crisis in 2008 and 2009 and the outbreak of Middle East respiratory syndrome (MARS) in 2015 (Wen *et al.*, 2005).

In Otsch's (2020) words, COVID-19 is a crisis of economized societies locked into growth paradigms. Allen *et al.* (2016) concluded that viruses like COVID-19 are the result of many connections or interrelationships of the many dimensions of urbanization, globalization, environmental change, contemporary capitalism and agribusiness. Considering the above notions, Sigala (2020) agrees and refers to the travel and tourism industry, its development and growth paradigms as a significant contributor to socioeconomic systems that help to rapidly accelerate the spread of viruses. While the industry is also a tool for controlling and containing the virus, it is certainly a catalyst for the spread of infections of the virus. Sigala (2020) further sees the travel and tourism industry as highly responsible for the interconnected and global world, waste, climate change, pollution, global, national and regional economic development. Thus, the pandemic is ultimately not due to travel but due to climate change (IMF, 2020).

2.4 Impacts of COVID-19 in the hospitality sector

As mentioned earlier, the tourism industry is very diverse and includes restaurants and cafes in addition to hotels and lodging (Pascual and Cain, 2021). Due to restrictions imposed by governments in travel destinations around the world, the hospitality industry has also been affected resulting (Kong *et al.*, 2021). Without a traveler or tourist in a destination, there is ultimately no business in the hotels, accommodations and restaurants. Booking cancellations in the hospitality industry were once again the order of the day following global measures to contain the pandemic (Mao *et al.*, 2021). As further stringent measures were affected at the destination level, with most establishments closed and, in some cases, where total lockdowns were enforced, there was no domestic tourism to help the hospitality industry to some extent at the local level. "Stay-at-home" policies and social distancing policies were reinforced, which ultimately led to the closure of places and businesses (Arbulú *et al.*, 2021). According to Elliot (2020), in response to the pandemic restrictions imposed, many cancellations were recorded in the hospitality industry and the industry as a whole. Hotel occupancy rates dropped drastically. For example, Italy, one of the first and worst affected countries, recorded about 90% booking cancellations in Rome in the first days of the pandemic, and 80% in Sicily (Mensah, 2020). Spain, for example, was the second most visited country in the world by the end of the decade. When taking into consideration overnight and same-day visits, foreign tourism in the Iberian country dropped by more than 70% in 2020 as a result of the COVID-19 epidemic. Moreover, despite a gradual improvement in the first half of 2021, the Spanish international tourist sector still has a long way to recuperate (Statista, 2021b). In France, the hotel sector has sunk to a 14.6% occupancy rate in April 2020 as a result of the consecutive lockdowns in 2020. Tourist transport firms have also seen a major loss in revenue, with Air France-KLM, the flagship of French air transport, having its revenue cut in half by 2020 (Statista, 2021a).

Restaurants were also affected, so most of the employees in this sector were laid off, as shops were temporarily closed, while some were completely closed (Ozili and Arun, 2020). Supportively, Elliot (2020) reported about 24 million jobs lost worldwide. In monetary terms, losses of about USD150bn occurred globally due to the hotel industry outages. The pandemic did not leave us unscathed.

In summary, the literature describes travel as a modern form of transportation that allows people to travel the world in a luxurious manner, but with the possibility of increasing disease mobility (Tatem *et al.*, 2006). It is further argued that the travel sector has high chances of inviting suboptimal crisis situations due to its hypermobility and interconnectedness with the global economy (Hall *et al.*, 2020). In other words, travel is highly responsible for the increase in pandemic cases. Gossling *et al.* (2020) agree identifying some of the practices that support the spread of the pandemic, including various transportation methods. The authors also point to other facilitating modes, such as human density, food consumption characteristics and the rate at which the population is growing. Their conjecture may be correct, considering that one of the ways to control the spread of the virus is through social distancing and quarantine. Given previous reports and discussions, it is a proven fact that the novel coronavirus (COVID -19) has a high impact on H-H transmission and ultimately thrives in large populations. And because the virus is asymptomatic, it is a deadly catalyst when traveling because it takes a while for infected patients to show initial symptoms of illness. For these reasons, too, reports again show that the hospitality, travel and tourism industry is one of the most affected sectors worldwide.

3. Research methodology

3.1 The case study technique and the study setting

In the exploratory research designs, a case study of Famagusta, Northern Cyprus is used to examine the impact of COVID-19 on tourism in the country. A case study involves an in-depth

investigation of a single or specific subject (Yin, 2012) (such as a group, a person or place), and it seeks to understand the underlying principles of a phenomenon. It is associated with theory building and testing (Bryman and Bell, 2007) and is therefore most appropriate for the present study. As the above authors note, a case study involves obtaining detailed and intensive data from a single case, and they are used to assess whether theories and models apply to a phenomenon, especially when little or no information is known about the topic at hand (Yin, 2012).

3.2 Sampling strategy and analysis

The target population of the current study includes some tourism stakeholders in the city of Famagusta, Northern Cyprus. More specifically, the respondents included academics from the Faculty of Tourism in eastern Mediterranean university, a travel agency, supermarket, taxi operators, hotel and restaurant managers. A target population can be defined as the total number of people or elements that can be drawn from a sample to be studied. Thus, the sample constitutes the group of elements or entities that participate in the study. Accordingly, the target population defines the elements that a research seeks to generalize (Zhao *et al.*, 2013). Defining a target population in research is important because it helps determine whether or not the samples are appropriate for analysis. As mentioned above, the sample forms a part of the population under study. Thus, the sample of the present work consists of 11 participants from different organizations within and or related to tourism in the city of Famagusta in Northern Cyprus as depicted in Table 1.

Considering the importance of data in research and how it helps to establish the meaning of a theoretical framework, data collection is very crucial in research (Bernard, 2017). Accordingly, the manner in which data is collected must be done with sound judgment (Tongco, 2007). With this in mind, a purposive sampling strategy was used, which in some cases is also referred to as judgmental sampling.

The present inquiry is looking into a pandemic that is still going on as this study is being conducted. The scenario is unique, and little is known about this ongoing and rapidly worsening disaster. Qualitative techniques can provide crucial insights in the case of emerging problems that require more investigation (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). With a small sample size, judgmental sampling, a nonprobability sampling method, was utilized in this investigation. A group of senior industry individuals and academics were judged acceptable for gathering responses for the study topic at hand (Farmaki *et al.*, 2020). The researchers are responsible for selecting components from the population based on the samples' representation of the population of interest in judgmental sampling (Malhotra and Birks, 1999). Individuals in senior positions were chosen because they are faced with the immediate

Participant name	Job titles	Sex	Years of experience
Respondent 11 (R11)	Academician	M	15
Respondent 10 (R10)	Academician	M	30
Respondent 9 (R9)	Travel agent	F	18
Respondent 8 (R8)	Academician	F	10
Respondent 7 (R7)	Taxi operator	M	14
Respondent 6 (R6)	Taxi operator	M	21
Respondent 5 (R5)	Branch manager	M	20
Respondent 4 (R4)	Supermarket owner	F	22
Respondent 3 (R3)	Hotel owner	M	31
Respondent 2 (R2)	Front office manager	M	15
Respondent 1 (R1)	Restaurant manager	M	9

Table 1.
Interviewees names,
affiliation and job titles

challenge of accountability amid adversity. The sample size was similarly limited, but the nonprobabilistic character of sampling allowed for the selection of the most appropriate respondents (Farmaki *et al.*, 2020). For our research, data were collected from various tourism stakeholders, i.e. hoteliers, restaurant managers, academics, travel agents, super marketer and local taxi operators from the city of Famagusta, Northern Cyprus. Broadly speaking, three of the interviewees were academicians. To illustrate this, the two academics we interviewed worked in the food and beverage industry for over 2 decades. The other academician whom we interviewed with is already the owner of a travel agency. As a result, the academicians we interviewed are sector-oriented. On the other hand, our research made a rigorous effort to reach out to all stakeholders in the hospitality industry to be able to achieve a comprehensive result. Parallel to this purpose, we sought to involve government representatives but received no positive response.

Although personal information was obtained about the respondents by asking them to describe themselves, no specific demographic details were included. For the most part, data were collected face-to-face, while some respondents chose to respond via online interviews. Thus, a total of 11 interviews were conducted, the information from which was later transcribed during analysis. Transcribing the data is an important step and action during the analysis as it enables the researcher to analyze the data accurately, and it also helps to notice unanticipated phenomena (Bailey, 2008). The data were analyzed using Yin's (2009) analytic approach. To discover convergent findings, eliminate bias and enhance the robustness of the analysis, each kind of data was evaluated separately before being compared with others (Jick, 1979). To reduce bias, the interviews and documents were coded separately by each of the researchers. Following that, the two coders exchanged their coding findings and addressed any concerns that needed to be clarified (Canhoto and Wei, 2021). Finally, the findings were reviewed with the participants in order to confirm the researchers' interpretation and to fulfill Guba and Lincoln's (1994) authenticity criteria.

4. Data analysis and findings

4.1 Impacts of COVID-19 on the various business sector

All respondents were asked to answer how each of the sectors is affected by COVID-19. Based on the responses of all respondents, it is undeniable that COVID-19 has left and is still leaving its mark on the various sectors represented in the sample. Like the rest of the world, Famagusta, Northern Cyprus, was not spared when the world went into a global lockdown after the first signs of high human-to-human transmission of the virus. Northern Cyprus also followed suit, closing all entrances and exits. All interviewees confirmed at least the shock of businesses having to close for at least 1.5–2 months while the world digested what had happened and searched for solutions to combat and revive the global economy.

The literature confirms that the travel and tourism industry is one of the most affected sectors by the pandemic, which ultimately affects travel supply and demand (Nicola *et al.*, 2020). The respondents in the current study could not agree less with these terms as they expressed the same sentiments in their responses. The results clearly show that the tourism sector in Famagusta, Northern Cyprus, has suffered from the effects of COVID-19 and although the world is again working with precautionary measures to contain and control the virus, the effects are still very visible and it will most likely take a while for the sector to return to normal. Respondent 9, a senior executive in the travel agency sector, noted that the impact of COVID-19 on the tourism industry was remarkable and rated it 100% although other sectors were also affected. Precisely, they had the following to say:

I think all sectors have suffered from COVID-19, but the tourism sector has suffered one hundred percent from COVID-19, not North Cypress I do not know We are just talking about Northern Cyprus all over the world we have suffered a lot from COVID-19, both mentally and financially, and it was a

really difficult time, now it is getting better, but we will deal with In the beginning the number of victims was very small, then it started to spread and all the flights were canceled, one by one, the borders and airports were closed, we had a lot of passengers who had one ticket, the last 30 cats, trying to book another one, they could not get to the other one, they tried a few times, they asked for return flights and the airlines collapsed (R9).

Respondent 1, a restaurant manager who has been in the industry for over 20 years, could not agree less with the findings as he also pointed out the significant impact of the pandemic on tourism in general and on Northern Cyprus. They had this to say,

We had a massive blow as a tourism sector, all sectors were affected except producers, we are now affected as a tourism sector, the circulation of people in the world has stopped (R1).

An experienced academic within the travel and tourism sector (Respondent 11) who teaches at one of the largest state universities in Northern Cyprus also confirmed the impact of COVID-19 on all forms of tourism, although some sectors such as Internet services, the technology industry and the serviced home industry have instead seen a boost as evidenced by the high turnover in these sectors.

Of course, all sectors that have gone for technology have suffered during COVID-19, and higher education has suffered because we have had to move to online education [. . .] In fact COVID-19 has affected all industries except very few like market industry, serving house and technology industry, Internet industry these all have naturally increase their business: Laptops, iPad, phones have been sold much more than before because the house has been closed and this is the only tool to communicate globally, but the rest of the businesses in the service industry have all closed down (R11).

As already seen in the literature (Elliot, 2020; Ozili and Arun, 2020; Ugur and Akbiyik, 2020) and from the few responses highlighted in the paragraphs above, the tourism sector has been greatly affected by the pandemic. However, the impact has been significant not only in the industry but also in other sectors both negatively and positively.

My customer is afraid of being transmitted because of not coming, that people are very afraid. There are many people who order their food from take-away restaurant at home, in this case, our work is reduced, even wearing a mask is not enough to comfort. My student customers are not on the island at the moment, they are almost unable to come, and I have no tourist customers because it is closed on flights. COVID-19 because our number of tourists has decreased. No tourists come; locals do not go out (R4).

A significant number of local taxi operators rely on business from international students, but due to the lockdown and closure of entry and exit points into the country, students who had traveled home were unable to return to the country, and also due to the current online courses, students preferred to stay with their families and study from home. Cognitive of the above, herewith sentiments by one taxi driver relying on educational tourists for business:

Like the whole world, our industry has also affected. We saw the bottom in terms of business. No tourists, my student customers, which consist of a small portion, start distance education. I see the industry as dead because the military's permits are lifted and the local people have their own cars (R6).

The school has switched to distance learning. Most students have gone to live with their families (R7).

Evidently business operators indirectly linked to tourism have suffered as a result of the novel coronavirus.

4.2 Impacts of COVID-19, Famagusta: a tourism stakeholders' perspective

As highlighted in the literature, the travel and tourism sector are a highly interconnected system (Ugur and Akbiyik, 2020) on which various other sectors depend, so disruptions in

this sector ultimately have an impact on the other sectors. In the case of tourism in Famagusta, the country thrives on international and educational tourism. While it relies on its pristine beaches to experience sun, sea and sand, educational tourism has greatly boosted the country's economy. In addition, there are other sectors indirectly related to tourism that benefit from the two main forms of tourism, namely the hospitality industry, supermarket and local transportation (e.g. local taxi drivers). While the world has experienced a number of epidemics and pandemics, none have been as severe as the novel coronavirus pandemic that paralyzed the world for a while.

As a result of closing borders, enforcing travel restrictions and travel bans on both inbound and outbound travel (Ozili and Arun, 2020), Northern Cyprus did not sit idle, especially in the early months of the COVID-19 scare. As the world went into a global lockdown, Northern Cyprus was also closed during the months of March to May. For a good two months, entry and exit points to Northern Cyprus were closed in the first months of 2020; there were some strict rules on who was allowed to enter the country. Tourists were not allowed in; even more so, new international students were not allowed into the country, as would be the case for some nationalities if they were only staying temporarily. As with the curfews imposed in most cities around the world (Pinchoff *et al.*, 2021), there were also some curfews in the country. In the early months of 2020, as COVID-19 spread across the world, Northern Cyprus imposed a total lockdown with very strict curfews that all residents had to abide by, with hefty fines for noncompliance. For at least two months the streets of Famagusta were quiet with little to no movement. Shops were temporarily closed, and some eventually closed after the economy reopened.

Analysis of responses from participants in the current study revealed that almost all respondents noted temporary closure of shops in all areas. All shops, restaurants, cafes and some hotels were closed. The only hotels that were operating were those that had quarantined tourists and staff after the first cases of COVID-19 were recorded in Northern Cyprus. Respondent 4, a local supermarket whose business came from both locals and international visitors, reported a loss of customers as a result of the restrictions. The following are the statements of a local taxi driver, Respondent 7;

We were quite affected by COVID-19. Whereas before we did not have time to sit down, now we are thinking where to sit down and spend time as the hotels are closed. There is no such thing as tourists here. Because of the virus, no one can come here because it's not safe, and you can tell because everything is closed. The airports are closed, there is no transportation (R7).

From the above, it is evident that although the restrictions have been lifted and some precautionary measures have been taken to ensure business operations, the economy is still affected today. Where business used to boom, there is hardly any business today as a result of the loss of international arrivals. Another taxi driver noted that some passengers now prefer to walk because they are afraid of contracting the virus even though taxi drivers clean their vehicles to ensure the safety of their customers.

In the case of the higher education sector, this has helped the economy to some extent, while there has been no impact in financial terms because students have managed to register online. Other ancillary beneficiaries of this have instead suffered the loss. The dormitories that have benefited from housing international students in the country have lost business due to the absence of new students or those who have left the country to return to their home countries. The local transport sector, as well as the food and beverage sector that once catered for students, has been badly affected. Where business once boomed, it is now almost nonexistent due to the elimination of international arrivals. Another taxi driver noted that some passengers now prefer to walk because they are afraid of contracting the virus even though taxi drivers disinfect their vehicles to ensure the safety of their customers.

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In conclusion, the impact of the novel coronavirus is very significant not only in the tourism sector but also in all other business sectors within the city of Famagusta, Northern Cyprus. As in the rest of the world during the first months when the virus hit the world and became a global pandemic, all businesses in Famagusta were closed for at least three months, after which some strict curfews and precautionary measures were imposed, which are still effective today to maintain business operations.

4.3 Impacts of COVID-19 on lives

The impact on people's lives is obviously considerable from a global perspective. Several deaths were recorded in the most affected countries (Spain, Italy and United Kingdom) (Hall *et al.*, 2020). Northern Cyprus was one of the few countries with few coronavirus cases and fewer deaths. By May 2020, a total of four deaths were recorded in Northern Cyprus, while thousands of people were dying every day in the highly developed and healthy economy at that time (Sultanoglu *et al.*, 2020).

The virus did not spare anyone; no matter how stable some economies are. As a result of the measures taken to contain the virus, the literature states that offices, factories, schools and shops were closed (Gössling *et al.*, 2020), including in the case of Famagusta, Northern Cyprus, where schools and all forms of shops were closed, as evidenced by the respondents' feedback. Respondent (10), an academic at a local university in Famagusta, had this to say.

[. . .] other private businesses in Famagusta have suffered a lot from the COVID-19, they lost many businesses that closed, many employees that became unemployed, and the situation of the city of Famagusta is very difficult because many business owners had to close the restaurants, boutiques, shops and everything, and the investments are postponed and the homeowners could not rent their house anymore (R10).

From a global perspective, many employees were laid off (Ozili and Arun, 2020). In contrast, given the respondents' feedback on the business sector that has suffered COVID-19 and when asked how many employees have businesses lost as a result of the pandemic? Of the 11 respondents, only two respondents reported staff losses. More specifically, Respondent 4 reported about 20–25% in staff losses. On the other hand, Respondent 5 reported that he had to lay off about 20% of his staff, while about 15% were transferred to other companies and another 40% chose to leave their jobs and return to Turkey to be with their families. In some cases, such as the higher education sector, there was no experience of staff losses and some business operators considered it highly unethical to dismiss staff because of an unexpected event. Instead, alternatives were resorted to where staff worked part-time for half pay.

In some cases, employers even supported their employees by providing food during the pandemic because they could afford to pay salaries. In short, although the impact of COVID-19 on the economy was significant, it appears that most employees kept their jobs. Faced with difficult conditions for all, some employers instead retained their staff. Nine of the 11 participants reported that they did not lose their staff, with at least two of them developing sustainable coping strategies for both the employer and the employee.

4.4 Impacts of COVID-19 on the travel industry

The travel industry was literally blamed for the spread of the virus throughout the world, leading to the first measure to contain the pandemic being to restrict or close all forms of travel throughout the world. Passingly, Respondent 7 highlighted that there were no tourist arrivals as a result of the pandemic and due to the fact that borders have been closed hence as well as travel. Precisely, the respondent said the following

There is no such thing as a tourist here. Because of the virus, no one can come here because it is not safe and that is evident by the fact that everything is closed. The airports are closed, there is no transportation (R7).

Losses in the airline industry were noted (Pascual and Cain, 2021). In the beginning of 2020, the effect of airlines' losses could have destructively reduced World GDP by 0.02–0.12% in parallel with the observed data and, in the worst case circumstances, at the end of 2020, the loss could be approximately 1.41–1.67% and unemployment rate may reach the value of 25–30 million (Iacus *et al.*, 2020). Based on the responses of the participants, it is clear that the travel sector in Northern Cyprus was also affected. All respondents reported the closure of borders, airports and all entry and exit points in the country. Not only was international travel prohibited, but amid the full and partial closures, travel between cities and or near borders was restricted to not allowed at all. One travel agent reported that the travel industry experienced several booking cancellations where customers had to be given refunds. As a result of the lack of international flights into the country and the reduction of flights into the country, the local transport sector, such as taxis, has suffered immensely, losing revenue and profit. The number of working hours has also been reduced due to some curfews imposed, affecting the overall sales. While turnover has not been good, drivers have benefited to some extent from the extra time to rest between business hours and also from the curfews imposed.

4.5 Impacts of COVID-19 on the hospitality sector

As a result of the imposed restrictions, hotels and restaurants around the world were closed. Hotels reported significantly low occupancy rates and room rates (Mensah, 2020). This was no different in the case of Northern Cyprus, especially for hotels in Famagusta. In the first months after the COVID-19 attacks, all hotel establishments closed restaurants, holiday homes and cafes. The only exception was for the hotels that brought the first cases of COVID-19 into the country. As the restrictions eased, more hotels were opened to cater for the returning residents and any visitors who came into quarantine. However, this did not make the situation any better for the hospitality industry, as the government instead subsidized the establishments instead of fully covering the required costs.

One hotelier, when asked how his business suffered as a result of COVID-19, had this to say:

When Covid-19 first came out, it was with a German tourist. One of the people who was on the same plane stayed at our hotel. In the broadcasts of TV, we are mentioned as the first quarantine hotel. This caused a great depression in our hotel. The decision of the Ministry of Health that our staff in quarantine should stay indoors and not communicate with the outside world caused a loss of motivation. This brought uncertainty and fear. During the 15-day quarantine, we had a lot of contact with the Covid-19 patient. Later, when the 72-hour quarantine was over, we were quarantined again when we encountered a new case. After that, guests could no longer stay at the hotel. Flights were stopped. We were given many habits, such as being banned from going out and wearing masks. Because of the government decision, we were closed for a long time. We did not work for 4 months. When we started working again in August, we had no customers. Since the reservations we did not have changed with the government decision, when the flights stopped, it exploded all over the world at the same time

This shows that while the COVID-19 cases in Northern Cyprus were minimal, the hotels, restaurants and some accommodation businesses were affected to some extent. Indeed, one

respondent highlighted that some holiday homes became redundant as a result. The responses also revealed that restaurants temporarily ceased operations, with some closing completely as soon as the closure was lifted. And although restaurants are still operating today, sales have dropped drastically as hours have been reduced due to the curfews. However, it is imperative to note that during the earlier period of the pandemic surge, there were significant, huge losses.

We are almost 70% affected, now we are just trying to turn the wheel, but the house is advancing even though it is impassable, it is falling into the negative. Before we did not have time to sit down, we tried to finish the work, we could not reach the phones, unfortunately that is not the case now. The locals do not use taxis that much because almost everyone has a car, and of course there are students with cars (R6).

In general, 60% of my customers were students and the remaining 40% were tourists. The 60% was made up of foreign students. I had two cars. My friend worked in one. But because of COVID-19, we had to part ways because the jobs went away because their earnings were also affected and I had to take them out. Right now, only me and my father are working (R7).

We lost 100%. We are not doing business right now. Since my wife is a local Cypriot, I was one of the few taxis that could pass to Greek. Larnaca, Ayia Napa, etc. I was working hard on the Greek side. Therefore, my client was mostly tourists. The closing of the doors completely finished me for me (R6).

4.5.1 Feedback on staff losses due to the pandemic or other issues. When asked whether there had been any staff absences due to the pandemic and or lack of motivation. At least two respondents reported staff losses. The first respondent (No. 4) reported that his company experienced a staff loss of 20–25% because the employees who had come from Turkey to work preferred to return during the pandemic and were family members. In the other case of staff loss, they had to lay off about 20% of their staff because the business suffered. Below is what a respondent had to say in this regard:

other staff members left because they were afraid, they were living in Turkey and went away when the pandemic does not want to return the moment was gone so I staff by 20–25% (R4).

The rest of the respondents retained their staff although all of them suffered from the normal effects of the pandemic such as closure of shops and no work in the country for almost two months.

We did not lose anyone during the pandemic period, I work with 7 personnel, we provide boutique service and our cafe consists of 25 personnel.

Another respondent stated that the following on retaining their staff back after easing off the lockdown:

We did not lose anything for the first three months because of course our shop was closed and no one was working, but after that they came back. It was not ethical to ask them to leave, and we have to show each other both sides and be understanding of each other, so we asked them to work part time so they could get paid half as well (R9).

During the pandemic, some business owners parted with their business to run it alone to minimize operating costs, as reported by a taxi driver. No records were kept of employees who left work due to demotivation. In some cases, as mentioned in the discussion on impact on lives, some employers eventually took the urge to take care of their employees instead by offering them free accommodation and some food parcels for living expenses.

4.6 Feedback on precautions effects on business

The researcher asked whether participants experienced any impact on their business as a result of the precautions taken to contain the virus. Undoubtedly, as the world seemingly

opened the doors for business, with some individual destinations implementing their own control measures. The most common precautions include social distancing, wearing masks, disinfection and quarantine when traveling. In the case of Famagusta, Northern Cyprus, it is mandatory for everyone to wear masks and maintain social distance at all times. There are some regulations on gatherings where a certain number of people are expected to gather depending on the size of the halls. In responding to the questions, service operators remarkably reported a loss of customers as some people refused to comply with the measures. Three respondents reported that some clients refused to wear their masks when asked to do so; hence, they did not use the service. The fourth respondent (4) noted the following:

It is boring for the client to stay with a mask and there are too many people who do not want to stay with the mask. As a result, we have lost customers and the number of people taking the paint off the mask and painting it themselves has increased (R4).

In other cases, where customers have approached a shop without a mask, the operators have taken it upon themselves to get the customers one and in the event that the customers refuse and still insist on using the services, other measures have been taken such as fines. In this regard, Respondent 5, a restaurant manager, said the following:

There are too many people who do not want to have a mask. Let's say we solve this problem slowly. The customer comes, we already give the mask by ourselves, we explain that there is a judgement rule who does not want to wear it, and if they do not want to wear it again, suddenly a controller can come and a fine can be written instead. For example, I myself feel incomplete if I do not have a mask for 5 minutes. Despite what we said, there are people who refuse the mask and leave, so there is a loss of customers (R5).

In other cases, most businesses were affected by the social distancing measures. One participant reported that his restaurant lost up to 40% of its tables due to the social distancing rules. In another case, it was noted that despite the precautions, there was a concern that staff could catch the virus from customers because the restaurants had customers enter wearing masks but eat without masks, so infection from symptomatic customers was possible.

4.7 Feedback on government support to businesses

One of the questions aimed to find out whether the government provided assistance during the pandemic. Apparently, according to the participants' answers, there were some government assistance programs for businesses. However, not all businesses took advantage of these funds. A significant number of businesses were offered assistance of up to 1,500tl for their staff, while some businesses received profit-free loans and a small number did not take up the funds at all.

In light of the above views, a respondent said the following:

The state applied for 1500 TL support, but we could not benefit. Because the taxi is in private (R7).

Respondent 10 had the following to say about government support:

Yes, certain regulations and rules and instructions that support institutions and organizations EMU was also supported, for example Social Security was supported by the government for certain. And etc. but of course the rest detailed numerical support gained by rector towards office adopted numerically he knew numerically of course all the regulations and decisions as taken by the government applies to EMU, because mainly EMU is a state university precaution (R10).

Part of the help some business got was via a non-profit loan. Business were offered interest free loans. One respondent (9) commented on it as following:

This kind of last-minute politics that the government is doing, opening and closing the airport and stopping other airlines from operating, is a big problem for us, especially the refund of the money and the government. They are starting to give a no-profit loan, and we have been using it, so it is very useful for the other agency (R9).

While some considered the interest free loan a means of help, others had mixed feelings about it. Respondent 3 had the following to say:

The state has in no way helped the Famagusta's tourism, now or before. Until the government was of no use. We did not receive any loans during the pandemic period. We did not get anything under the name of support. They are all lies. We started with our own effort. Even though the conditions in the state aid were me, it was really ridiculous that I needed money. I myself told this to the minister. This cannot be called a loan support program (R3).

4.8 Feedback on policy suggestions to minimize effects of COVID-19

Respondents pointed to the need for the government to implement strict quarantine procedures and ensure that visitors or travelers in quarantine are retested. A significant number of respondents maintained the need to block unnecessary entries into the country; more specifically, suggestions were made to block educational travelers and gamblers. Respondent 4 had the following to say in this regard:

The state had closed its doors but opened it in a short time. Thus, the virus spread again. People coming from abroad can be infected, so three-day gamblers should stop. Quarantine should be mandatory. The end of the virus will keep our country alive and make it safe for tourists to come. The quarantine period should be long and mandatory, after the virus is completely over, I think the student, tourist, and student will enter here (R4).

There were also calls for the search for and introduction of vaccines that fight the virus into the country, while an urgent need for concerted efforts by all concerned stakeholders to minimize the impact of COVID-19 were raised. Below herewith a few of the respondents' sentiments;

I hope we will have the vaccination soon, that is another precaution that will help, everything will OK and we do not have a very well prepared Meadow Lake medical and the treatment structure, so if it spreads everywhere we will have a big serious problem, hopefully in the summer, maybe we will be open for the rotation [. . .].

The current quarantine policy should continue just fine. This is most important for our health. No matter how bad it is for the economy.

4.9 Feedback on how to improve tourism in Famagusta

The researcher endeavored to find out how tourism in Famagusta could be improved during and after COVID-19. It is without doubt that tourism sustains the economy; this was discussed in the literature and proved here in the above discussions. In this sense, participants reemphasized the use of vaccines to combat the virus, while some called for investment in the construction of five-star hotels in the city to make the most of the pristine beaches for sun, sea and sand. Interestingly, a significant number of respondents noted the need for development and investment in Varosha, a once attractive tourist destination before its misfortune. Some respondents commented on this idea as follows:

I believe in something about Varosha. I have been thinking for years that it will be a war museum, and the place we are coming to shows it. I think too many people will come to see an oasis; we will not have such numbers yet (R3).

The island should be open to innovation Varosha will become a very popular place if it is in settlements with interests and investments (R7).

Hotels need to be opened. Tourist flow should be provided. Development is a must for Varosha. It is not something that will happen immediately, I see it for at least 5 years (R6).

Accordingly, there is still hope for the tourism sector, with mixed feelings between further development and control of the virus.

5. Conclusion

In some ways, the results of the current study are consistent with what is known in the literature about the effects of COVID-19. The effects of the novel coronavirus are clearly being felt around the globe. The same ideas about how it has disrupted business in the Famagusta have been expressed by a global viewpoint and several other nations. As a result of the global lockdown imposed in the first few months of COVID-19, many companies in Famagusta closed their operations. Business declined dramatically for many operators. This was evident in most of the participants' responses. Some businesses directly or indirectly involved in tourism noted that the number of customers in their establishments dropped drastically. One taxi driver in particular noted that customers nowadays prefer to walk rather than use a taxi, despite all efforts to ensure passenger safety. Another operator highlighted that some customers are adamant about following the guidelines, making it very difficult for service providers to turn away customers in some cases, given the low turnover last year. In addition, some once booming restaurants have closed as a result of the pandemic in Famagusta, while some, although still in operation, claim to do so with minimal profits. One restaurant manager mentioned that although restrictions on operations had been relaxed, the hours of operation were no longer the same. Due to curfew restructuring, restaurants now have shorter hours than before, resulting in a decrease in sales and customers.

Not all cases were negative, as the results of the study in Famagusta also found that some operators benefited commercially. The higher education sector, a case of Eastern Mediterranean University, reported that they had more enrollments during the pandemic period. The novel Coronavirus had no impact on student enrollments as the university continued to offer online classes. Although a significant number of students returned to their home countries, they did not default on their fees as business was normal. The accommodation sector within the University, which has relied mainly on international students borrowing, has been badly affected as it has lost some monies from rental fees as students have returned home. On a positive note, however, some service providers, such as those responsible for Internet services, have instead made profits as operations continued during the pandemic and lockdown. With the hype of online education now the order of the day in the city's colleges, at least every homestead needs Internet services, which increases revenue in this line of business.

Due to the closure, Famagusta can now take the opportunity to develop in the tourism industry by renovating and repairing the infrastructure of roads, hotels and beaches to provide better services in the new season. In addition, Famagusta can use Varosha, part of the city, as a new tourist attraction to compensate for the economic damage of COVID-19 by developing opportunities for tourists in the future season. Nevertheless, compared to other countries, there are very few cases of COVID-19 in Northern Cyprus and especially in Famagusta some places are COVID-free, we can use this fact to promote tourism sales and evaluate for future tourism.

As in the rest of the world, the borders were closed, which led to a decrease in tourist arrivals in the country. Although no meaningful figures were given in the research, business people obviously noticed a drop in business as most hotels were closed and accommodated quarantined guests rather than travelers. One tour operator pointed out the problems in processing refunds as a result of the cancellations of reservations. While the higher education system was not necessarily affected as students continued to enroll for online studies, other

dependent businesses such as supermarkets and taxi companies that benefited from educational tourists suffered greatly from the impact of the pandemic. It was noted that most students decided to return home to be with their families due to the pandemic. And although there were new arrivals, not many students made it to Famagusta as a significant number chose to stay in their home countries and study online.

5.1 Theoretical implications

The study contributes to theory through a variety of topics that might be investigated as valuable variables in future research. COVID-19's influence on "lives," the "travel industry" and the "hospitality business" were identified as prominent themes. The literature confirms that the travel and tourism industry is one of the most affected sectors by the pandemic, which ultimately affects travel supply and demand (Nicola *et al.*, 2020; Crespi-Cladera *et al.*, 2021; Dube *et al.*, 2021; Wieczorek-Kosmala, 2021). These should be viewed as critical contributions to modern hospitality and tourism philosophy in light of the ongoing pandemic. A spike in theoretical contribution is also anticipated during this period, and this study contributes to the body of literature on epidemiological crisis in the context of tourism and hospitality. Additionally, the study included perspectives from those responsible for preparing personnel and employing them once they finish required skills training and education for tourism and hospitality in small touristic site, Famagusta. The current COVID-19 outbreak will have a more severe and long-lasting impact, especially in the lack of an early vaccine to instill protection in the general population. Although certain nations (for example, Stockholm) have sought to implement herd immunity, this strategy has been questioned by a group of experts due to a lack of facts to justify such extreme action (Kaushal and Srivastava, 2021). This is crucial for the tourist and hospitality sectors, given the outbreak's persistence. The consequences will last longer, and industries that rely on social interactions, such as tourism and hospitality, must ready themselves for turbulent times ahead. Going forward, it is critical for governments and marketing businesses to do study to determine the impact of the present disaster on the sector, particularly on the island whose economy is heavily reliant on tourism.

5.2 Practical implications

Practical implications are derived from this research study. From a practical point of view, it is quite noteworthy that the pandemic fear is real and has serious implications for national economies. Therefore, new measures should be taken to survive the impact of the pandemic. While the global industry has done its best to contain the spread of the virus, it is also up to national authorities to put in place strict measures and control systems to protect their environment. Local authorities, as well as all tourism stakeholders, must take the initiative in this case to protect themselves and those around them from contracting the virus. For example, all stakeholders must strictly follow the safety measures recommended by the authorities. From the responses given in the survey, it was found that in some cases, customers have refused to wear masks before entering restaurants or shops. In the event that a customer refuses to wear a mask or disinfect their hands, there should be strict guidelines on how to deal with such customers. In the past, if customers were allowed to enter because the business required it, perhaps the health of the staff and other customers in the vicinity may come first, as such customers who refuse to enter the business should leave or not enter. The researcher has generally observed that people take matters into their own hands and sort out some problems. In the case of COVID-19 and what it has brought to the world public, this cannot be the case. Managers and all professionals in the industry are strongly advised to take strict precautions. Recommendations for continuous periodical testing were derived from the survey, so employers are encouraged to ensure that their employees are regularly tested, and they are also encouraged to ensure that all necessary precautions are taken. For

example, instead of using towels and restaurants to dry hands, other devices such as disposable papers and or hand dryers can be used. The issue of hand sanitization and disinfection of vehicles or offices could not be emphasized more. It is very important that this is promoted in all establishments and businesses.

Although the pandemic has caused a worldwide stir, the impact of the virus on people's lives in the Famagusta has not been as severe as in other European countries. Therefore, it is important to create additional awareness for the local people to take precautionary measures seriously in all aspects to maintain the number of cases and infected people. Just as the government orders measures, all stakeholders should adhere to it to keep the cities safe and keep the number of cases of the virus low in the city of Famagusta.

5.3 Limitation and further research

Some limitations emerged during the course of the study. For example, some of the respondents did not understand English, so the research had to convert the interview questions and answers into Turkish, which may be a cause of bias in the interpretation of the data. It is quite possible that meanings were lost in the process. It was also quite a time-consuming process to collect the data as the researcher intended to have collected the data by November 2020; however, this was not the case as most participants were not available until December in most cases. Another hindering factor for the researcher was the movements from one place to another to collect data as the respondents were far from each other. In addition, due to blocking and COVID-19 restrictions in the country, it was virtually impossible to collect data from a larger sample. As a result, accessibility to participants was limited, and some respondents who refused to participate cited concerns about meeting during the restrictions and feared possible contagion with the virus. Largely due to government restrictions on COVID-19 and the complete lockdown, it was impossible to collect data from many more participants. Broadly speaking, the research made a concerted effort to reach out to all stakeholders in the hospitality industry in order to obtain a complete conclusion. Although we attempted to include government officials, we received no favorable reaction. As a result, future research can use quantitative or qualitative primary data to examine the effectiveness and success of government policies on tourists and businesses prior to and following the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the response of businesses to the government's approach to the tourism and hospitality sector (Allaberganov *et al.*, 2021). Last but not least, although other methods of data collection may be useful, this study opted for qualitative approach only. Future studies could use other research methods, such as the mixed method.

Data collection in the current study was limited to city of Famagusta, so the results cannot be generalized. Future studies could look at investigating the impact of COVID-19 on tourism in other small islands' cities such as Mykonos or Antalya. For future studies, it is recommended to collect data on this topic from residents and tourists to measure the impact of COVID-19 in all parameters.

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