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TOURISM AS A FACTOR OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN GREECE

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Introduction

Tourism can help sustainable development in several ways. Resources, cultural legacy, and livelihoods are not only preserved but enhanced by it. Tourism can connect societal development, environmental preservation, and economic growth when it is properly planned, developed, and managed.

Today, the main features of Greek tourism are the dependence on international tourism which represents about 77% of the total overnight stays, the seasonality, the unbalanced distribution of tourism development (namely, the four main destinations, Athens, Rhodes, Crete, and Corfu absorb about 65% of the total overnight stays), the lack of adequate infrastructure in most tourist destinations as well as the inadequacy of qualified staff. [1]

The development of tourism, precisely because of the economic benefits it brings, erodes the ecological conscience and distorts the cultural and moral values of the people involved in tourism, who are looking for an easy profit in the short term, as tourism activities are partial employment, for a specific period and treat the natural environment only as a source of economic benefit.

Thus, the idea of sustainability and tourism and its sustainable management was developed for increasing the sustainability of the country to commit to social progress, environmental balance, and economic growth. This idea is not so new, however, in recent years the effort has been intensified to put into practice the principles and policies of sustainable tourism and the sustainable development

of tourist areas in general. In Greece, there is a delay in this process, although the effort is evident in many cases. In a time of economic crisis, where national or regional funding for local development is limited, there is a need, as abroad, for bottom-up development, in which the local community itself will create the development prospects, through the cooperation of all bodies for this purpose. A basic condition is a need to improve the social well-being of all inhabitants, without undermining the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Therefore, the issue of the viability of local businesses, social infrastructure, tackling socio-economic inequalities, and the proper use and protection of natural resources, so that the development of tourism is sustainable, or in other words cyclical.

The contribution of tourism to sustainable development in Greece

It is known that tourism is one of the most important sectors of the economy of Greece. It is also a horizontal activity rather than a vertical one, unlike most manufacturing or primary sector activities. For example, the metallurgical sector is made up of metal product companies and the cereal sector is made up of agricultural grain companies. In contrast, tourism activity affects many sectors of the economy that provide housing, catering, transportation, travel, and other ancillary tourism services. Thus, tourism is an activity that concerns many different parts of the social and productive fabric of a country.

The main effects of tourism on the economy of a region include the contribution of revenue to the state through taxation, the creation of jobs and income for the local population, and the regional distribution of development and tourist consumption. [2]

The great importance of tourism as a factor of economic growth and the creation of new jobs has begun to be realized worldwide during the last two decades. The rapid increase in demand for tourism services, combined with the fact that tourism is considered a "labor-intensive sector" has made its comparative importance for national economies obvious. Today, tourism ranks among the most important industries with rapidly increasing turnover and with a substantial contribution to the growth of national income, employment growth, and regional development. Especially in countries with strong tourist traffic from abroad, such as Greece, tourism plays an important role in foreign exchange inflows and in reducing the Balance of Payments deficit.

In addition, due to the dispersion of tourist destinations in Greece, tourism has a catalytic role in the dispersion of national income. Therefore, it contributes substantially to regional development, to the alleviation of the regional disparity of the national product, and the retention of the population in the regions, by creating new jobs both in tourist units and in other productive and commercial activities, which are additionally developed for the support of the tourism process. Figure 1 shows the number of Hotel Units/categories in Greece in 2019. [2]

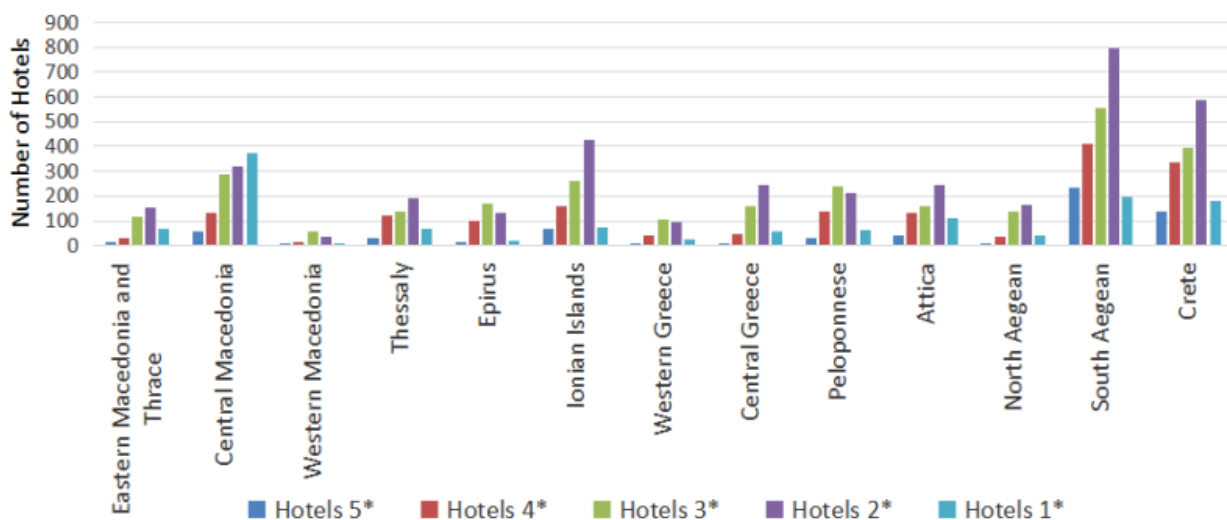


Figure 1. Number of Hotel Units/category in Greece in 2019

Tourism development is one of the most effective tools for the regions of Greece that are trying to set priorities for their future development. These priorities include economic benefits, such as the creation and distribution of income, with social consequences, the creation of new jobs, and the improvement of the quality of life. For every direct employment position in the tourism sector, almost another one is created in the economy as a whole. Based on the productivity of the Greek tourism sector per arrival, for every approximately 30 arrivals, one 1 job is created in tourism, which means 1.9 jobs in the total tourism economy. The demographic evolution of the regions of Greece proves in practice that in the developed tourist areas, not only is their population retained, but they also accept an increasing number of seasonal workers. [3]

Apart from the contribution of tourism in the field of employment, the reference to the effects of tourism on the increase of incomes is of special importance. It has been observed that the money of the tourist expenditure passes through many hands, at the same time generating income. This results in the producer finding a market for its products (supplying hotels and restaurants), and the craftsman channeling his products to the market, while at the same time developing the home industry that additionally supports the income of several rural families. Also, a local transport network is developed for the movement of tourists and tourist goods, while construction work has direct and positive effects on several relevant professions. Also, tourism can be a lever of development for many downgrading regions. This is due to its special nature, which develops mainly at the regional level, and the dynamics it has to activate the development process, causing positive economic effects on the productive base of the regional economy. [4]

The increased disposable income resulting from tourism, of all the social classes mentioned above, expands consumption, creating new multiplier effects, while tourism development causes an increased flow of transfer payments from the state to each region. A brief look at the tourist traffic in Greece in recent years shows an upward trend during the Olympic Games, which was interrupted in 2008 due to the economic crisis. This economic crisis has given negative publicity to the image of Greece internationally. The country's tourism recovery occurred in 2013 when the economy stabilized, and markets grew. In 2013, arrivals of non-residents at the border increased by 15.5%, while in 2014 there was a significant increase in incoming tourist flows (Figure 2). [4]

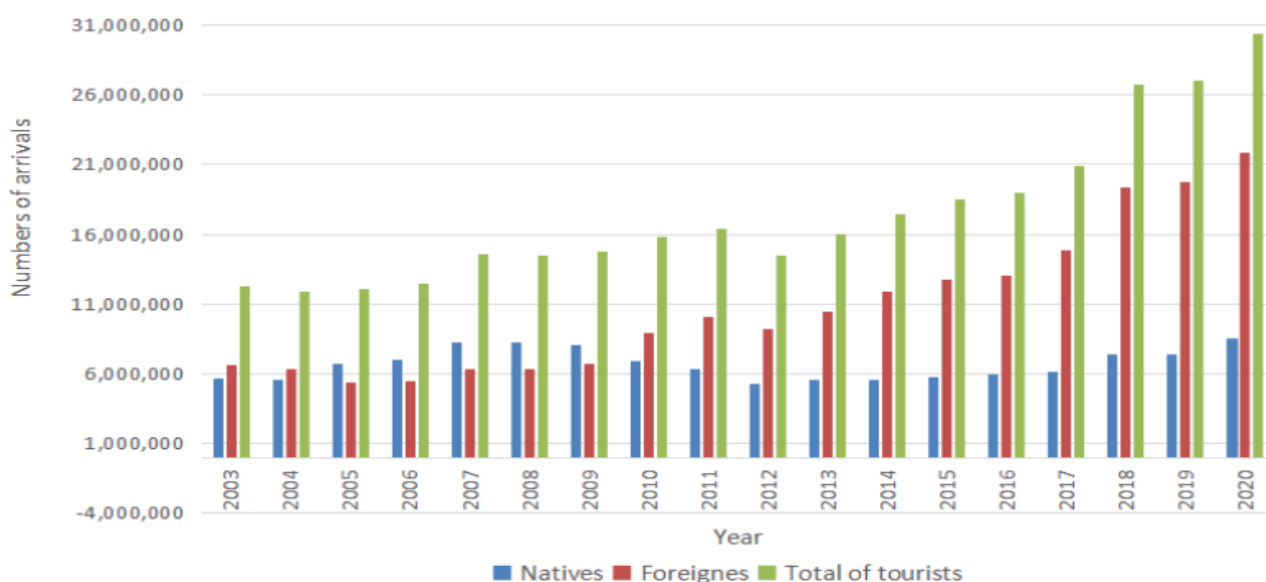


Figure 2. Arrivals of tourists in Greece during the period 2003-2020

One of the reasons that led to the quality upgrade of tourism is the construction of large infrastructure projects to indirectly support tourism, such as the metro of Athens - the new airport in Athens, the new highway of Attiki Odos, the suburban railway and the tram, the upgrade of the port in Lavrio, the construction of Olympic facilities, the new marinas of Floisvos and SEF in Athens and many others throughout Greece, the upgrading of archaeological sites and hotel facilities. [5]

Therefore, for Greece, tourism is a sector of particular importance that brings many benefits and improves its economic situation, and keeps sustainability. Greek tourism contributes to the economy at the national, regional, and local levels. The climate, the rich national, natural, and cultural wealth, the variety, the pleasant climate, and the hospitality are important advantages that can partly explain the tourist development that Greece has experienced so far. In recent years the goal has been the radical restructuring and the shift to sustainable tourism. Through sustainable tourism, the economic and cultural benefits of Greece are expected to increase, a fact that will contribute to local and regional development and will be a springboard for further development.

Analysis: Problems for sustainable tourism development in Greece and Kazakhstan

The most crucial problem with sustainable tourism development comes from the side of tourist entrepreneurs. While UNWTO has provided certain definitions of what constitutes sustainable tourism along with the Greek state which defined it in its legal context in the legislation about the operation of GNTO in 2014. However, a key problem arises from the operation of the Greek entrepreneurs who often are using the word sustainability without implementing it. While there are certain criteria and regulations, still many entrepreneurs are calling their operations sustainable, but they derail from the related regulations. Another problem that applies in Greece is that often sustainability is used for political reasons and there are many plans related to this, but they are never implemented hence sustainability is found in several research and plans but not in reality. [6]

As for Kazakhstan, the problem of ensuring the sustainable development of tourism in Kazakhstan is closely related to the search for optimal ways to maximize the use of its potential. The solution to this problem is impossible without improving the quality of the composition and rational use of the tourism potential itself. In this regard, there is a problem in ensuring the further effective development of Kazakhstan's sustainable tourism by improving the use of its potential. Therefore, research on the problems of further development of tourism in the republic should be based on its potential, which will allow for more full taking into account unused reserves and provide scientifically sound planning of the pace, and proportions of the building and using its potential. [7]

It has identified several issues which can be examined such as the fact that there are many plans but there is a lack of implementation and also that there are some misunderstandings on what constitutes sustainable tourism from the side of the entrepreneurs and its potential for both countries.

Greece and Google partner to support sustainable tourism growth

The Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) establishes and manages global sustainable standards, known as the GSTC Criteria. There are two sets: Destination Criteria for public policymakers and destination managers, and Industry Criteria for hotels and tour operators. These are the guiding principles and minimum requirements that any tourism business or destination should aspire to reach to protect and sustain the world's natural and cultural resources while ensuring tourism meets its potential as a tool for conservation and poverty alleviation. A new training program to help tourism businesses accelerate their sustainability transformation and communicate their environmental-friendly actions, in collaboration with Global Sustainable Tourism Council. [8]

A new partnership between the Ministry of Tourism and Google was announced at the Delphi Economic Forum to speed up the green and sustainable transformation of the Greek tourism sector. The partnership includes a new training program for tourism SMEs in collaboration with the GSTC. In addition to this, Google announced \$1 million in funding from Google to support organizations

assisting social entrepreneurs working on environmental sustainability causes and eco-tourism in Greece.

According to the minister of tourism, the strategy for turning the country into a sustainable tourism model, in addition to government actions to achieve the goals of sustainability, goes through similar partnerships. Through the educational program, tourism professionals also share this effort, while the commitment to strengthen institutions and social enterprises that deal with sustainability mobilizes wider groups in a joint effort for the future of Greek tourism.

Training Program for SMEs. The partnership between the Ministry of Tourism and Google will kick off with a new training program, in collaboration with the Global Sustainable Tourism Council. The training, which will be free of cost for attendees, aims to support small and medium-sized tourism businesses in their journey toward sustainability. The program, which is a new pillar of the Google initiative “Grow Greece with Google”, is built upon some key components, including helping businesses to effectively communicate their environmentally friendly actions, create a strategy for sustainability, obtain and promote an eco-certification, learn about funding opportunities for tourism SMEs, as well as learn some of the best practices for energy, water and waste management. For tourism businesses to operate in terms of sustainability, their staff must be aware of what this means and be committed to continuously expanding and improving their knowledge. In this regard, the GSTC is particularly pleased to support Google’s efforts to offer such opportunities to the tourism industry. [8]

Growth drivers of sustainable tourism for contribution to sustainable development

Public Private Partnership. Greece’s newly implemented PPP (Public Private Partnership) scheme provides significant opportunities for investors to participate in new infrastructure projects, including marinas and thermal springs.

National Strategic Reference Framework. The National Strategic Reference Framework (NSRF) for the years 2007-2013 establishes the broad priorities for EU Structural Funds Program in Greece. Greece’s NSRF seeks to achieve a balanced development of the country, with 82 percent of its budget focusing on regional projects. With a total budget of almost €40 billion, NSRF will advance projects directly and indirectly related to tourism development and will provide investors with ample opportunities to participate in a wide number of projects.

For tourism, NSRF provides significant financial support, with a budget of more than €500 million until 2013. A core NSRF objective is to increase demand and upgrade the quality of tourist products and tourist services at all levels. NSRF support focuses on:

- prolonging the tourist period throughout Greece, and reducing seasonality
- promoting the country’s international appeal as a safe and attractive tourist destination
- Increasing the number of foreign visitors
- Reinforcing domestic tourism. [9]

Sustainability. Inherent in Greece’s tourism development policy is the issue of sustainability. Many hotels and resort complexes are installing photovoltaic systems to become more carbon-neutral. The need for new and efficient building solutions, desalination plants, energy-efficient power supplies, closed-loop resource systems, and software monitoring systems are just some of the areas in which Greece’s tourism sector will take advantage of new technologies for years to come.

Also, Greece is promoting its unique ecosystems and nature reserves, many listed under the Ramsar Treaty. These are exceptional destinations where visitors may enjoy some of the most diverse flora and fauna in Europe. From bird watching to mountain hiking, activities that can be combined with distinctive lodging and singular experiences are highly popular for today’s traveler that is seeking out-of-the-ordinary experiences.

Human Resources. Because Greece, a country of 11 million inhabitants, hosts more than 17 million visitors, education and training in tourism services are paramount. The workforce is multilingual, well-versed in the tourism sector, and willing to respond to new challenges. From management to catering, human resources for tourism enterprises is a Greek strength. [9]

Ministry of Tourism. Reflecting the importance of tourism to the Greek economy, a ministry dedicated to formulating and overseeing tourism policy is a core component of the Greek government. The Ministry of Tourism coordinates a wide number of diverse policies and developments with other ministries so that Greece's tourism sector remains strong, vibrant, and responsive.

Greek National Tourism Organization. The Greek National Tourism Organization (GNTO), under the direction of the Ministry of Tourism, is responsible for promoting tourism in Greece and oversees several organizations related to tourism education, development, and real estate.

Global Marketing Support. Greece as a tourism destination enjoys an extensive, multilingual, global marketing campaign in all media. In addition, Greece is fully represented at all key tourism trade shows and is promoted by major travel and tour operators worldwide.

Conclusion

Thus, it can be concluded that Greece has a huge potential for the development of the tourism industry. Tourism is one of the few sustainably developing types of modern business that significantly affects the growth of sustainable development of the country. Having analyzed the potential of sustainable tourism in Greece is a powerful "weapon" in the armory of tourism competition of any place, aiming at its tourism development, through aspirations in the social, economic, and environmental sectors. At the social level, the objectives concern the active participation of tourists, the good cooperation and communication of tourists with the local population, and the possibility of diffusion in the local community of the economic benefit gained from tourism. Particularly at the economic level, there are aspirations for regional development and balanced development of the regions, aspirations for employment and the creation of a large number of jobs, aspirations for the utilization of locally produced products, but also aspirations for multiplier effects in other economic sectors such as trade, industry, transport. There can be no question of the successful development of tourism without political and economic stability, which is necessary for this period.

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