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## Article

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Expert journal of marketing

## Provided in Cooperation with:

Expert journal of marketing

*Reference:* Tzioras, Nikolaos (2019). Policies and proposals of primary importance for a sustainable tourism development and a competitive Greek tourist product. In: Expert journal of marketing 7 (1), S. 7 - 13.

This Version is available at:

<http://hdl.handle.net/11159/4585>

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# Policies and Proposals of Primary Importance for a Sustainable Tourism Development and a Competitive Greek Tourist Product

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*This article aims to identify and develop policies and proposals of primary importance for a sustainable tourism development and a competitive Greek tourist product. As the tourist product is an amalgam of services and resources that are offered and controlled by various businesses, organizations and agencies, the implementation of proposals is the collective responsibility of all, as it involves the cultivation and development of synergies and a climate of cooperation among all the tourist partners. These proposals also refer to the necessary actions both at the macroeconomic level of destination and at the microeconomic level of tourism enterprises. To locate these proposals, the article begins by exploring the tourism development and policy pursued in Greece over the last decades. On the basis of this analysis, the analyzed proposals focus on the following (Mihalic, 2016): (1) organizational, management and institutional reforms required by emphasizing the establishment and operation of a National Agency for Destination Management with clear roles, objectives and functions (Dodds and Joppe, 2017); (2) exploiting new technologies to increase competitiveness, innovation and sustainability of tourist destinations and businesses. Gravity is given to the development of Electronic Management Systems and Destination Marketing with specific services, purposes and functions (Budeanu et al., 2016); (3) the continuous development of key factors in tourism, such as human resources, tourist facilities, infrastructure and businesses (Song, 2016); (4) the development and continuous modernization of tourist attractions and products, with emphasis on the creation of inter-company networks aiming at the development of integrated thematic tourist packages that can enrich and diversify the tourist product as well as support a more sustainable tourism development.*

**Keywords:** tourism, development, policies, Greece, tourism marketing

**JEL Classification:** M31

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Article History:

Received 5 December 2018 | Accepted 21 February 2019 | Available online 1 March 2019

Cite Reference:

Tzioras, N., 2019. Policies and Proposals of Primary Importance for a Sustainable Tourism Development and a Competitive Greek Tourist Product. *Expert Journal of Marketing*, 7(1), pp. 7-13.

## **1. Introduction: Development and Tourism Policy in Greece**

The current economic crisis, both at the international level and in our country, is an up-to-date and hot topic of discussion with representatives of all productive classes. This discussion has highlighted the special importance and contribution of the tourism industry for our country's future exit from the crisis and the economic downturn. Tourism is, for the Greek economy, the most important pillar of growth and revenue inflow, both in a direct and indirect way. the contribution of tourism to the country's GDP is estimated to be between 15% and 18% over the past five years, or between about 30 billion and 45 billion (Gao et al., 2016).

Although according to most initial estimates 2013 was an upward year for Greek tourism, we should not miss out on the fact that the tourist sector in Greece has entered a cycle of prolonged crisis with features of slow but steady decline for several years, especially after the Olympic Games in Athens and the subsequent apparent weakness and obvious failure of the touristic exploitation of the legacy of the games in the long run. It has been found that if during the last three years various competing countries (such as Egypt, Tunisia, Turkey, etc.) were not faced with exceptional situations and problems from which they occasionally benefited (and little compared to benefits from other countries), tourism in Greece, then the extent of the decline in the Greek tourism industry would be significant (Vongsaraj, 2018). Moreover, the prolonged crisis of our tourism industry is also influenced by the general image of Greece abroad, which is not the most ideal in recent years. However, the root causes of the crisis are not conjectural but relate to how we treat tourism as a country, as a state, as a business, as a society, but as a citizen and a worker. In this context, the role of the country's visibility abroad is a crucial factor in improving the current problem situation of Greece's image, however, if the promotion techniques are organized, with plans and corresponding changes in the country's tourism product not fragmentary, occasional and decorative, as almost always happened so far (Hail et al., 2016).

In this context, it is worth noting that tourism has been the locomotive of our economic development for the past 30 years, but it has grown largely uncoordinated (like other sectors in our country). Careful and long-term planning, as appropriate in a heavy industry of national importance, was often inadequate. Any change of persons (e.g. ministers and other decision-makers) led to overturning the plans the previous ones drew up, resulting in no strategic, administrative and operational coherence and duration. At the same time, the lack of tourist education and consciousness of the average citizen has resulted in tourism being treated as an opportunistically lucrative sector and not by the attention it deserves as the real heavy industry of Greece.

In the past, and mainly until 2002, Greek tourism grew steadily, mainly due to the low cost of production and sale of tourist products, which resulted in a good price relation for the foreign tourist being satisfactory (Mowforth and Munt, 2015). Although there were encouraging signs of improvement in 2013, it should be noted that over the last ten years the cost has been high, with either the final price of the tourist product being very expensive in proportion to its quality or maintaining the value at reasonable levels but the quality of the product is disproportionately lower. In both cases, the quality-price ratio for tourists is decreasing, resulting in a steady decline in the competitiveness of our country's tourism industry. At the same time, for decades, we have been embroiled in stealthy stereotypes and obsessions, such as "we have the most beautiful country in the world and the finest beaches, or Greece is the best plot, etc.", which intensify the often introverted approach and myopic management of our tourist product (Homer and Swarbrooke, 2016).

Regarding the image of Greece as a tourist destination (and consequently the image of the Greek tourist product), the existing situation is very vague and heterogeneous. First of all, it is more appropriate to refer to the image of individual components and tourist products in the country. In particular, we can identify two main products that make up our portfolio of tourism: a) mass tourism, and b) various alternative or special forms of tourism. Among these two major tourist products, there are significant differences and differentiations, both in the image and management, as well as in the quality of the services offered and thus in the customer service (Christou and Nella, 2010).

Mass tourism in Greece (because in other countries there are variations) means seaside holiday tourism what is internationally defined as the tourism of 3S (sun, sand, sea). apart from a few exceptions (and bright examples of some good practices), the image abroad of the Greek product of mass tourism, which is the backbone of the tourism industry, is quite confusing and partly problematic. is considered as a product with relatively good or very good natural resources (e.g. climate, landscape, sea, etc.), medium to good hotel and other tourist infrastructure (e.g. airports, harbors, sidewalks, cleanliness etc.) but moderate to poor (and in some cases rather poor) quality of service and customer service. The latter combined with objectively high prices (at least until 2012) make the value-for-money value of the bulk Greek tourist product as compared to its competitors generally problematic (Christou, 2011). It should be noted that this image was not suddenly created but is the result of a long-standing process over the past ten years. this image has been created both

through the experiences of foreign tourists themselves and from the comments they send to their friends, acquaintances and relatives, even on relevant websites on the Internet, such as in wikis, fora, customer review websites and in other similar websites that take advantage of the so-called Web 2.0 (or social web) philosophy. Yet, they are not responsible for creating this image and the strategy to date (or possibly the lack of effective strategy) that has been followed and marketed (Pike, 2016).

Regarding the products of the special or alternative forms of tourism, although they constitute a relatively small part of the country's tourism industry, the existing situation is quite different in relation to mass tourism. In general, the quality of the services provided is quite good in some cases very good. However, the main problem of this tourism industry is related to the high diversity of the quality and service offered from region to region, as well as between different tourist businesses, which in turn contributes to a picture of reduced product reliability and growing mistrust tourism market (Christou, 2011; Bornhorst et al., 2010).

In order to develop an optimal framework for the implementation of a new tourism strategy, some crucial elements relating to the tourist product itself (bulk or alternative) should be made clear and taken into account. In particular, as far as the nature of the tourist product is concerned, it must be clearly understood and understood by all those involved in the tourism industry and in its visibility that the tourist product differs greatly from all other products. Most people believe - incorrectly - that the tourist product is part of the services (Sigala, 2013). However, reality is different (McCamley and Gilmore, 2016): the tourist product is essentially a "hybrid", as it includes a variety of interrelated components such as materials, services, the natural environment, ideas, information, activities, but also people including: the tourist product, the local community and its agents, as well as other visitors present at the destination. at the same time, the tourist product also presents all the classical features of the services, such as: the short depreciation (services cannot be saved for future sale and consumption and consequently unsold services are lost sales forever), its intangible nature he / she knows and cannot judge / evaluate exactly what he / she is buying before consuming and experiencing the product), the dependence (quality, service, etc.) on the human factor, and finally his often simultaneous production and consumption a requires the provider's readiness and ability to provide quality and listen to and meet the requirements of each visitor in real time, as it is not feasible for the provider to first produce and then dispose of services that have been audited / evaluated as qualitative. All of the above parameters should be taken into account in formulating a new tourism policy strategy for more effective management and marketing of the tourist product (Pike and Page, 2014).

In fact, consumers of tourist products buy dreams - they buy the benefits they expect and imagine they will experience when they visit a tourist destination or when staying in a tourist accommodation. Consequently, we can conclude that people do not just buy tourist products but buy the expectation of an experience. From the point of view of tourism production, at the macroeconomic level (operators and administration of a tourist destination) or at microeconomic level (tourism enterprises), the crucial issue is to shape the offer of a consumer-friendly experience with high quality and good service (Kompula, 2014). Moreover, the objective is to offer an unforgettable and certainly positive tourist experience that can offer a variety of benefits to the visitor, such as: functional (rest, calm), social (acquaintance, interaction and development of relationships with other people, groups and cultures) cognitive (learning, capacity building) and psychological (self-expression, personal expression and development) (Sigala, 2011). Consequently, the tourism policy of the future should incorporate the "expected experience" logic on which a clear branding strategy for Greece should be developed (Gossling et al., 2015).

## **2. Necessary Organizational, Management and Institutional Reforms**

The management of Greece as a tourist destination, both on the whole of the country and on individual tourist areas, is carried out by many different bodies and organizations, primarily the wider public sector and, secondarily, the private, non-coordinated, staffed tourism, often with incompatible and fragmentary practices (Sigala, 2013). About 50 years ago, the Greek Tourism Organization was a central and effective organization for managing Greek tourism, but it is currently under-functioning. At the same time, the Ministry of Tourism (which is sometimes established, abolished, merged with other ministries and then re-established) has powers that change on average every two years, and at the same time often does not only exercise the executive role that it actually holds. At the same time, many other bodies, both at the level of local government (in municipalities and in regions), as well as organizations of various ministries, secretariats, etc., exist and operate in a separate way. In this misty landscape, private sector operators, usually employers, such as SETE, HSE, HATTA, etc., are also being added, who also deal with tourism policy issues, development and visibility of the country. However, international experience has proven to be the best practice at country level for the

operation of a single dedicated Destination Management Organization (DMO), such as Maison de France in France and Visit Britain in Britain. As stated by the World Tourism Organization (WTO), 2007: "By 2015 the DMO will be the dominant and most influential power behind the world's largest industry," the tourism industry (Day, 2014).

Indeed, if we consider the complexity of the tourist phenomenon, the need for synergy of numerous and heterogeneous factors to produce the final tourist product, and if we take into account the impact and impact on a wide range of cultural, environmental, economic and social aspects in everyday life, then we find the necessity of cooperation between the individual players in the production of the tourist product - in this case the tourist destination so that it operates in the to satisfy the expectations of the visitor while at the same time satisfying the business objectives of the producers. Although marketing is considered to be the most important, perhaps, functioning of a DMO, there is a growing recognition of the need to shift from a narrow focus on marketing to a more comprehensive and integrated approach, while emphasizing the design, development and management of the tourism product (Pike, 2015).

For all the above reasons, it is proposed to create a single DMO for the whole of Greece, which will be the sole body responsible for the implementation of tourism policy and the promotion of the country, both strategically and tacitly. That is, the Ministry of Tourism should be solely involved in the development of tourism development policy (following cooperation and consultation with all parties involved in the public and private sectors) and the overall supervision of its implementation, while the DMO will exclusively deal with the operational implementation of the policy. the basic functions of the DMO should be (Mariani, Di Felice and Mura, 2016):

- Networking and co-ordination of large, medium and small-sized enterprises involved in the production process of the country's tourism product (with the ultimate goal of achieving social consensus and commitment to developing cooperative activities).
- the enrichment and continuous development of the tourist products of the country in order to increase competitiveness, prolong the tourist season and increase the multiplier effects of tourism.
- the creation of jobs resulting from the optimal exploitation of tourism resources and the prolongation of the tourist season.
- ensuring and achieving sustainable tourism development (environmental, social, economic).
- the creation of primary or supplementary incomes in population groups.
- the reinforcement of investment.
- encouraging and supporting entrepreneurship.
- Improving the quality of the urban environment.
- encouraging the qualitative upgrading of tourism businesses.
- the operation of a tourism observatory, which will collect, analyze and share information on tourist destinations, markets, resources, products and implementation of policy actions to support better decision-making and tourism policy development.
- promoting actions relating to the certification, rewarding and publicizing of the quality, authenticity and originality of the tourist services and goods offered.
- effective promotion at national and international level and the development / preservation of the image of the country (continuously but mainly in crisis management).
- the strategic promotion and distribution of the tourist products of the country.
- Serving and providing quality services / information to visitors throughout their journey (before, during and after).

The mission of the DMO will be to coordinate the efforts of Greek tourism operators and businesses to meet the needs of tourists (or visitors) in a profitable economic, social, environmental and cultural way for Greek society and businesses. at the same time, the DMO will aim at safeguarding the private and public interests, safeguarding the rights of tourists and permanent residents, balanced and sustainable development and dissemination of benefits to the wider community (Dwyer et al., 2014).

In order to succeed in his corporate mission, the DMO should specify its action with specific aims (Bornhorst et al., 2010):

- In producing new income, employment and tax revenues, contributing to a more diversified local economy, acting as an "economic generator" and "lever of growth".
- Creating and promoting the most appropriate image of Greece, its poles and infrastructure in selected visitor markets, acting as a "communication and marketing organization".
- To promote a clear single national target, to discourage private interests and to break down the

industry, to develop a "common tourism voice" and social consensus so that there is a collective participation and transparency in the distribution of the growing benefits of tourism, 'interests / partners' in the industry'.

- Protecting and consolidating a sense of familiar and safe environment for individual and group tourists and enhancing and respecting the legitimacy of the industry by acting as a "socially and legally acceptable representative".
- To support and encourage the implementation of cooperative activities such as marketing, distribution, product development and the cultivation of a collaborative culture and climate, where businesses treat others as competitors rather than as competitors, acting as "regulator and co-ordinator of cooperative policies and actions".
- Promoting the quality of life and making it a model of behavior for residents and visitors, acting as a "local pride laureate".

The organizational structure of the DMO should take the form of a public-private partnership with a corporate form of a private-law entity or, alternatively, as a non-governmental organization. Financially, the DMO will be based on a combination of public and private funding, this form of funding being found in developed touring countries and has the advantage that none of the members apply to the other. As a rule, DMO funding may come from (Sigala et al., 2012):

- grants from the central government
- Local government resources (regional and municipal)
- Funding from EU programs
- Subscriptions by members of the private sector (e.g. sectoral operators, enterprises)
- business tax (for example, part of the fees incident to hotels may be allocated directly to the DMO to fund its activities)
- commercial activities
- Sponsorships of individuals and agencies

The DMO at the strategic level will be run by a board of directors (involving representatives of all its partner shareholders), but business management will be run by managers. the DMO's administrative staff will be recruited by the private sector through international competitions and without state intervention. In addition to the DMO, public administration and co-ordinating services for tourism issues, it is necessary to achieve the following objectives (Gofi, Masiero and Pencarelli, 2018):

1. With regard to issues of tourist interest, the establishment and operation of a more efficient and coordinated state mechanism at all levels: national, regional and local. it would also be possible to set as a rule the priority to serve and deal with tourism issues in all public services.
2. Horizontal reduction of unnecessary bureaucracy and atherosclerotic operating system of public bodies on tourist issues.
3. Staffing this mechanism and its bodies with qualified and trained human resources that will not be controlled and not affected by party interests and decisions.
4. Acceptance by all stakeholders that the tourism ministry has set a tourism policy and the DMO implements it with specific goals, commitments and actions.
5. Establishment of a joint acceptance by the State Secretary of State for a term of office, which will not change in any governmental change.
6. Development and direct operation of a National Tourism Observatory in collaboration with universities and technological educational institutions and with the assistance of the Greek Statistical Authority. the operation of the Observatory is seen as an urgent need not only to support a more effective decision-making and action, but also to contribute to the adoption of a proactive administrative approach to the management and policy of the tourist product and to eliminate the philosophy of reactive policy and administration for years it characterized the Greek reality and made us operate as firefighters.

### **3. Conclusions**

Tourism is not only the heavy industry in our country but also an amalgam of services and resources offered by many different businesses, organizations and institutions. Therefore, the cultivation of collectivism and cooperation between all the tourist partners (private and public) is essential for the design, implementation,

management, marketing and continuous improvement and development of the tourist product of Greece. Also, the management and development of the tourist product is not only a national obligation but also a national affair, as it requires cooperation, collectively coordinated actions and especially the elimination of the excessive pursuit of the individual interest prevailing in Greece. This article attempted to identify and focus on tourism and priority and priority proposals, since competitive destinations have already gone a long way towards implementing similar actions. Let's do the following: "we advertise Greece, we manage our country".

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