

MILITARY SERVICE, DESTINATION IMAGE AND REPEAT VISITATION ON A GREEK BORDER ISLAND

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The obligatory military service for adult Greek male citizens creates a particular form of domestic “tourism”, although the members of the Armed Forces are not officially included in tourism statistics. Aim of this paper that takes as a case study the Greek border island of Samothrace in the Northern Aegean is to discuss how the so-called here “army tourism” could be used to develop a competitive advantage for the destination. A structured questionnaire method has been used in order to a) identify aspects of the soldiers’ “tourist” behaviour, b) evaluate destination image from the soldiers’ point of view, c) find out whether the soldiers wish to return as tourists to the island or not and underline the reasons leading to this decision and finally d) analyze the soldiers’ word-of-mouth.

Keywords: *Samothrace/Greece, destination image, repeat visitation, word-of-mouth, “army tourism”.*

INTRODUCTION

It is a common place in literature that “all tourism includes some travel but not all travel is tourism”, since people may travel for a wide variety of purposes of which tourism is only one (Medlik, 2003: vii; Hall and Page 2006:76). According to the World Tourism Organization (WTO, 1994), tourism is defined as a “set of activities engaged in by persons temporarily away from their usual environment, for a period of not more than one year, and for a broad range of leisure, business, religious, health,



and personal reasons, excluding the pursuit of remuneration from within the place visited or long-term change of residence” (cit. in Smith, 2004:29). Therefore, the term “traveler” –domestic or international– comprises “tourists” and “same-day visitors” –both included in statistics, but also categories of travelers excluded by convention from tourism measurements (Eurostat, 2007). More specifically, transit passengers, border workers, nomads, refugees and immigrants are not included in international visitor arrivals and departures, as well as diplomats, consular officers and members of the Armed Forces traveling from their country of origin to the country of their assignment and vice versa (including dependants accompanying them).

However, every traveler can be considered as a “potential” tourist, while it is generally acknowledged that most of the travelers use or can be induced to use part of their available time and money budget for leisure purposes. Furthermore, if properly handled by marketing strategies, a part of the travel for non tourism purposes can be motivated into travel for tourism as an additional purpose and most of the times it is up to the destination and the industry managers to convert travelers not included in tourism statistics into “actual” tourists. Taking these into consideration, the present paper discusses the case of the Greek soldiers on the border island of Samothrace in Northern Aegean so as to provide a better understanding of the “tourist aspects” of military life and focus on the marketing strategies that can motivate soldiers to return as tourists to the destination.

Domestic tourism and repeat visitation seem to be important for a destination –especially a peripheral one– and the travelers’ evaluation on the destination image is considered as a key factor that influences their repeat visit decisions and their word-of-mouth (Zhang, 2000). There is no doubt that soldiers *are not* tourists. However, during the weekends or free of duty afternoons, while they are out of the camp, they are in search of relaxation and enjoyment. How do soldiers spend their free time and how do they feel? Can their practices be considered as aspects of a special (or even hybrid) form of “tourism”, maybe called “army tourism”? How the soldiers evaluate the destination image of Samothrace and are they willing to return as tourists and/or propose the island for vacations to friends and relatives? This study raises these questions and tries to give some first answers.

The paper is divided into four main sections. The first part provides an account of relevant definitions, followed by explanatory remarks on the conceptual framework and a brief literature review of destination image, repeat visitation and word-of-mouth. The second part offers

clarifying information about military service in Greece, while the third part focuses on the island of Samothrace as a tourist destination with emphasis on the current development and the main attractions and visitor activities. At the core of this paper is an empirically informed analysis of soldiers' "tourist" practices, thoughts and evaluations that will be presented in the fourth section. The concluding part considers some implications of the findings for multiplying the benefits of "army tourism" for the border island.

DEFINITIONS AND LITERARY REVIEW

The proposed term "army tourism" refers to the activities and commonly held actions, behaviours and attitudes that soldiers adopt in the place of their unit (destination) during their off duty time and while being out of the camp, usually in an attempt to relax and enjoy themselves. In other words it concerns a "hybrid" form of tourism. Although the term might sound peculiar, we should not overlook the fact that the Army, like tourism, comprises a ritual process involving all key stages identified by Turner (1969), meaning the "separation" stage from the routine of everyday life, the entry into a state of "liminality" in which the structure of normal life dissolves, the state of "communitas" –a special social bond between strangers who happen to be in the same place (fellow-soldiers) and finally the "return", having obtained an upgraded identity (civilian). Nevertheless "army tourism" should don't be confused with "military tourism", a half legal or not legal at all activity arranged by managers of tourist firms who provide civilians with shooting machine guns and tank rides by means of personal relations with commanders of military units (Russia - InfoCentre, 2007); nor should be associated with the visit to historic sites where great battles took place.

The analysis of destination image, for almost four decades since the first studies emerged, has become one of the most popular topics in tourism research literature (Pike, 2002). In general, image can be referred as the sum of beliefs, ideas, and impressions that people have of a place or destination based on information processing from a variety of sources over time, resulting in an internally accepted mental construct (Crompton, 1979; Assael, 1984; Gartner, 1993; Baloglu and Brinberg, 1997). Gunn (1972) in his pioneer image research argued that images are developed at two levels: organic and induced. The organic image develops internally because of actual experience or visitation, while the induced image forms because of externally received and processed information (e.g. advertisements, publicity, word-of-mouth) (Sönmez and Sirakaya,

2002:185). Milman and Pizam (1995) proposed a similar to Echtner and Ritchie's framework (1993), suggesting three components of destination image: the product (e.g. level of cost and quality), the behaviour and attitude (e.g. towards the hosts) and the environment (e.g. landscape, weather, scenery). Baloglu and McCleary (1999) proposed and tested that image has two different distinct components but interrelated each other such as affective (feelings) and cognitive (beliefs) image. Affective image deals with the emotional response of individuals to a place/product, while cognitive image represents knowledge of place environments/ product features.

Studies have shown that word-of-mouth seems to be the only information source which has a significant influence on all image dimensions and that it can be used to develop a competitive advantage for a destination (Kaplanidou and Vogt, 2003). Marketing research on word-of-mouth dates back to the '60's and over time various definitions have evolved (Litvin et al., 2008). In general the term describes an unofficial form of communication that allows consumers to share information and opinions about products, brands and services (Buttle, 1998; Simpson and Siguaw, 2008). In tourism, word-of-mouth is among the first three sources of information people use and the emotional involvement of the customer (tourist) is usually a good predictor of how often a person informs others about his positive or negative experience (Kaplanidou and Vogt, 2003:2).

Given that destination image is based on perceptions about tangible characteristics and at the same time associated with psychological dimensions manifested by feelings and attitudes towards the destination, aim of this study is to emphasise the importance of the military service experience that could result in a positive word-of-mouth and in an increasing number of repeat visitors –where the term here describes more or less experienced tourists (or at least “hybrid tourists”) who –in opposition to first time visitors– have already been previously to the same destination. The studies on first-time and repeat visitors so far, have explored some evidences on issues such as: the visitors' motivation, expectations, attitudes and practices (Fakeye and Crompton, 1991 & 1992, Tiefenbacher et al., 2000; Hughes and Morrison-Saunders, 2002:21; Freytag, 2008), the importance of repeat visitors for tourism destinations (Wang, 2003; Reid and Reid, 1993), the patterns of repeat visitation (Oppermann, 1997; Gitelson and Crompton, 1984) and the modelling of repeat visitation as well (Zhang, 2000). Generally, the results indicate differences regarding travel behaviour of first-time and

repeat visitors and prove that the latter category is more beneficial economically to a destination than the first one.

MILITARY SERVICE IN GREECE

According to the provisions of the fourth article, sixth paragraph of the Greek Constitution: "Every Greek citizen who is capable of carrying a weapon is obliged to contribute to the defence of the Country, as it is stipulated by the law". In compliance with this constitutional mandate, the military legislation stipulates that all Greek males between 19 and 45 years old are obliged to serve in the Armed Forces, namely the Army, the Navy and the Air Force (Ministry of National Defence, 2004a; 2004d). Consequently, the Greek Army's personnel includes: permanent officers, non-commissioned officers, professional soldiers and citizens/conscript enlisted men that serve their obligatory military service. Until 2009 military service reduction, the duration of the complete service in Greece was 17 months for the reserve officers and 12 months for the soldiers of the three branches of the Armed Forces, although there were also soldiers entitled to a reduced service according to the military law provisions, who usually served 9 months. In 2008 there were 93.500 military personnel on active duty (Wikipedia, 2008b).

According to the Greek Ministry of National Defense (2004c), the main mission of the Armed Forces is the defence of the country's independence and integrity, the safeguarding of the national territory as well as the decisive contribution to the achievement of the country's policy objectives. The Greek Army, as the land force of the modern nation of Greece, has a history of nearly 190 years. It consists of the Active Army, the National Guard and Reserve Force and it is divided into Combat Arms and Corps, which offer Administrative and Logistics support to the Arms. The Army is composed of units, groups and formations. The main formations of the army are the brigade, the division, the army corps and the field army (Ministry of National Defence, 2004d).

Those who are called to serve in the Army report to one of the various Enlistment Centres according to the Arms or the Corps that will serve. Until last year military service reduction, soldiers remained there for approximately two months in order to receive their basic training and afterwards they joined the Special Training Centres, where they were trained on the specialty they were assigned. After concluding the special training, soldiers were transferred to borderline units, where they served for approximately six months. Depending on the "points" they gathered in field units, they were then transferred to units at their place of residence

or of close proximity to the latter (Ministry of National Defence, 2004b). More specifically, the “points” given in each unit depended on 8 factors (Tsakiris, 2003): a) the distance from the borders and b) from the prefecture’s capital, c) the region’s population, d) the climatic conditions, e) the living conditions in the unit, f) the transfer possibilities for the soldiers, g) the correlation between the climatic conditions and the available means of transfer and finally h) the region’s tourist development. Given all that, it is not by chance that the borderline unit in Samothrace/Northern Aegean [Tactical Command/ 41st Infantry Regiment/ 289 Infantry Battalion] provided soldiers with 199.5 points and is considered as one of the most “tough” units in Greece.

TOURISM ON THE GREEK ISLAND OF SAMOTHRACE

The island of Samothrace in Greece, located in the north-east of the Aegean could be better described as an imposing forested mountain in the sea. Besides, its name has probably derived from the pre-Greek word “samos” which meant “height” and therefore “Samothrace” stands for “high Thrace”. The mountainous island covers a geologically complex area of 178 sq-km., its average altitude is the highest in the Aegean Sea and near its centre rises to more than 5.200 feet (~1.600 m.) in peak “Fengari” (moon), the third highest peak in the Aegean. It is not by chance that according to Homer, from this particular point of view on mountain Saos, Poseidon –the Greek god of the sea– watched the battles on the plains of Troy (Iliad, xiii, 12). Samothrace lies about 22 miles in the southwest of Alexandroupolis and only a few kilometres west of the maritime boundary between Greece and Turkey. It is a self-governing municipality in the prefecture of Evros included in the province of East Macedonia and Thrace and has a population of 2.723 inhabitants (2001 census). Its capital is Hora, its main port is Kamariotissa and between the most important rural settlements of the island are: Alonia, Lakkoma, Prophitis Ilias, Karyotes, Therma, Xeropotamos and Paleopolis.

Although Samothrace has many “fans” that visit the place for 20 and more years, tourism itself has been rather recently developed, basically because the most remote island of the northern Aegean faces intense problems of marine communication which result to its isolation and delay in economic growth (increased cost of transported products and consequently increased cost of life, reduction in tourism demand and consequently reduction in the local incomes etc.). Given that the island does not have an airport, the only way to access it is by ferry mainly from Alexandroupolis. The naval connection is though considered to be

problematical and very expensive. The distance is covered in approximately 2½ hours and theoretically there is a daily sea link all through the year; however during the autumn-winter period the island might be cut off from the mainland for days, due to weather conditions. On the other hand, during the summer season there are usually two boats a day. Additionally there are boats to Samothrace from Kavala and from Lavrio once a week. As Mayor I. Petroudas has pointed out, “until 1978, when the first ship connecting Samothrace to Alexandroupolis entered service, the only means of transportation were just the fishing boats. In 1985 a second ship entered service as well and as a result tourism development started on the island” (Iordanoglou, 2008).

Samothrace may not be on the main tourist route, but its natural rough beauty and various attractions have the ability to enchant all those who decide to visit the place. The majority of foreign tourists come from Germany and Scandinavia, while during the summer months (June-August) the island’s population along with the visitors reaches the 10.000 (samothrace.gr). According to statistical data from Alexandroupolis port authorities, in June 2007 travelled from Alexandroupolis to Samothrace almost 7.800 individuals and 880 car vehicles, while the same month in 2008 were transported 7.200 individuals and 890 car vehicles (Karantzavelou, 2008). Samothrace could, in fact, be considered as an ideal destination for many special and alternative forms of tourism, such as:

– *Cultural and archaeological tourism*: Since antiquity, Samothrace has had a reputation as a “sacred” and “mysterious” island because of its association with the worship of the “Great Gods” –also known as Cabeiri – and for its subsequent Cabeirian mysteries, which are considered to be the most important mysteries of ancient times, equally honored as, or even more honored than, the Eleusinian (Goudeli, 2001:299; Evslin 2006). The ruins of the celebrated “Sanctuary of the Great Gods” are located near Paleopolis (=old city). Excavations held on that same area revealed in 1863 one of the most famous statues in the world: the “Winged Victory of Samothrace”, a masterpiece of Hellenistic sculpture, prominently displayed since 1884 at the Louvre, in Paris. A replica of the statue is on display in the local Archeological Museum in Paleopolis too. Other sites of archaeological or cultural interest include the ruins of Genoese towers and forts, mysterious megalithic monuments –probably “holy rocks” where the sacrifices for “Great Mother” took place (Malkidis, 2003:164), the remains of the “Cyclop Walls” and the picturesque Hora (old town) where the Folklore Museum is located.

– *Religious tourism*: Christian monuments are to be seen in various spots all over the island –churches, monasteries and chapels that according to tradition their number runs to 999. Especially worth mentioning are the Monastery of Aghios Athanassios at Alonia, the ruined church of the Saviour at Therma which was once a dependency of the Ivriion Monastery on Mount Athos, the church of Panaghia Kremniotissa with the enchanting view and the remains of the palaeochristian temple built in honour of the Apostle Paul who set foot on European soil for the first time at Paleopolis. Also of great importance are the numerous local religious festivals, held practically year round, indicating the islanders’ deep faith but also their vivid spirit and love for traditional music and dancing.

– *Ecotourism*: Green-clad highlands, successive slopes, rivers, waterfalls and rare flora and fauna species (cormorants, sea shags, herons, hoopoes, falcons, hawks and kestrels) make Samothrace a paradise on earth for nature lovers. One of the most famous spots on the island is the “Fonias” (killer’s) stream, a few km. away from Therma, where the water springs from the mountain and pours to the river forming waterfalls. “Vathres”, natural small lakes surrounded by igneous rocks, are parts of that river and are free for swimming. The island’s unspoiled coastline is approximately 47 km. The sea is clean but most beaches are pebbled.

– *Sports/adventure tourism*: 80% of the island is mountainous, so climbing, trekking, rapel and biking on mountain Saos or even canyoning are some of the activities of Samothrace Climbing Club (since 2001) in which visitors may participate. Furthermore, one may join the Samothrace Diver's Club for taking Scuba diving seminars, obtaining official Scuba Diving Licence or enjoy underwater explorations in interesting places of the island. Dive excursions are also available for snorkelling divers and non diving public.

– *Thermalism*: Therma is 14 km away from Kamariotissa and it is believed that the medicinal effect of its springs has been known as early as ancient times. Their healing properties are surely mentioned in Byzantine historical sources. Samothrace medicinal baths have sulphurous and radium springs and are suitable for many diseases, mainly degenerative arthropathy and respiratory disorders.

The production of many agricultural and stockbreeding products should be considered as a great asset for the island although Samothrace has not yet developed *agrotourism* neither *gastronomy (culinary) tourism*. Local delicacies include grilled wild goat, traditional pasta, white village bread and rusks from the liquid of boiled chickpeas, “lioto” (meat in tomato sauce with melted walnuts), “mandi” (roasted pork mincemeat in leaf dough with filling of rice) etc. The rural cooperative of the municipality of Samothrace produces excellent olives and olive oil, while visitors can also savour local cheese varieties produced at the traditional cheese dairies of the island. Moreover, Samothrace is famous for its unrefined flower honey and royal jelly and for its preserves made from local fruit such as cherries, quinces, apricots, wild figs etc. A wild plum preserve called “praousto” constitutes a local specialty par excellence (agrotravel.gr).

Taking into consideration that tourism in Samothrace undergoes faster development in latter years, inhabitants are in some way “divided” into “Northerners” and “Southerners”: people on the north side of the island make a living from tourism, while people living in the southern villages are mainly cattle-breeders and farmers (Iordanoglou, 2008). According to the official website of the municipality (Samothrace.gr), about half of the active population (approximately more than 500 people) is occupied in the tertiary production sector –meaning services and tourism (trade, hotels, rooms to let, taverns, supermarkets, cafés, public services etc.). As the mayor I. Petroudas underlines “the traditional professions decline. Young people deny getting involved in agriculture or traditional livestock-farming” and choose to turn into the promising tourism industry (Iordanoglou, 2008).

Although Samothrace does not have a fully developed tourism infrastructure and superstructure, more than adequate accommodation facilities are available all over the island, but quality standards vary. More specifically, there are 10 hotels (1 in Ano Kariotes, 3 in Kamariotissa, 2 in Paleopolis and 4 in Therma), 10 apartments/studio suites (1 in Ano Kariotes, 3 in Kamariotissa, 2 in Makrilies, 1 in Palaiopolis and 3 in Therma), 83 registered rooms to let (1 in Alonia, 2 in Ano Kariotes, 1 in Dafnes, 1 in Hora, 28 in Kamariotissa, 9 in Kato Kariotes, 2 in Lakkoma, 2 in Makrilies, 1 in Pahia Ammos, 6 in Paleopolis, 1 in Profitis Ilias and 29 in Therma 29) and 2 camping sites (samothraki.org). Nightlife options are limited but there are enough taverns, cafeterias and café-bars. Public transport is done by bus; taxi services are also available, but there are only 3 taxis on the island. However there are 3 rent- a-car/bike agents in the seaport of Kamariotissa.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY, RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The present study, focusing on the soldiers of the 289 Infantry Battalion in Samothrace, has adopted a structured measurement technique, mainly employing Likert scale questions for a) identifying “tourist” aspects of military life, b) measuring cognitive and affective components of destination image and c) measuring word-of-mouth as well (Baloglu and Brinberg, 1997). The research was conducted at the end of October 2008 and the research population comprised all the 112 soldiers of the 2008 2nd enlistment rank (meaning the soldiers that enlisted on May 2008), who had spent at least four months on the island. The questionnaires were distributed to 85 soldiers (75.9% of the population), since the rest of them were on legal leave from the unit. However it should be noticed that that all potential participants in the survey had familiarized themselves with the island and were all equally suitable as interviewees.

The demographic data collected from the survey reveal that the samples’ major age group was 18-21 years old (26 soldiers –30.6%), followed by 24-27 and 27-30 years of age (18 soldiers each group – 21.2%) and then by the group 21-24 (14 soldiers – 16.5%), while there were only nine soldiers over 30 years old (10.5%). The majority of soldiers came from cities in Southern Greek mainland (44 soldiers – 51.8%), while the rest came from cities in Northern Greece (31 soldiers – 36.5%) and from the islands (10 soldiers – 11.7%). It is worth mentioning that only 11 of the 85 soldiers had visited Samothrace before their military service (13%) while the rest 74 of them had never been to the island before (87%).

First of all, the soldiers were asked about how they spend their free time, meaning the time when they are off duty and out of the camp (usually 3 times a week: afternoons 17.00-22.00 and weekends 12.00-22.00). It should be noticed that the camp is 10-15 minutes away from Kamariotissa and that a military bus or taxis transfer the soldiers from camp to the port and vice versa. In particular, the soldiers were asked to rate the following options on a 1-5 scale, where 1: rarely, 2: sometimes, 3: quite often, 4: usually, 5: almost every time. The results in Table 1 represent the average rating of all respondents.

It is evident that the soldiers tend to spend most of their free time in cafeterias and taverns, while they often visit the one and only internet café at the port which –besides others– offers them the possibility to communicate via web camera with their friends/relatives. The fact that during summertime soldiers go quite often for a swim in the sea suggests

one of the most solid “tourist aspects” of military life along with the activity of sightseeing, although the latter takes place only sometimes. At this point we should mention that one of the “musts” when visiting Samothrace is a visit to the “Sanctuary of the Great Gods” and the Archeological Museum in Paleopolis. This usually takes place as an excursion organized by the unit, transferring soldiers to and from the archaeological site with unit’s buses. In addition the survey reveals that soldiers are quite “active” in moving and getting around in Kamariotissa by walking short or longer distances –a pastime totally “free of charge”. Reading newspapers and magazines (probably while drinking a coffee), staying in the campus for sleeping and relaxing or other activities (e.g. jogging) are among the least popular activities for the soldiers during their free afternoons. Anyway, every time they are out of the camp the soldiers tend to spend an average of 15 euros.

Table 1. How the soldiers spend their free time in Samothrace

<i>1: rarely – 5: almost every time</i>	
I go for a coffee	4.17
I go for food	4.03
I go to the internet café	3.30
I go for swimming in the sea (during summertime)	2.93
I go for walks around Kamariotissa	2.57
I rent a car/motorcycle or take the bus and visit the villages (sightseeing)	2.35
I read magazines/newspapers	2.12
I remain on the military camp to relax/to sleep	2.07
Other (please specify)	1.14

In the next two questions, the soldiers were asked to rate on a scale from 1 to 5 how much they enjoy their free time in Samothrace and how much they enjoyed their free time before their military service, where 1: not at all and 5: an extreme amount.

Table 2. Soldiers’ evaluation of their free time

<i>1: not at all – 5: an extreme amount</i>	
How much do you enjoy your free time in Samothrace?	3.10
How much did you enjoy your free time before your military service?	3.87

The average ratings of all respondents in both questions reveal that the “gap” between the “enjoyable free time” before and during military service is not that wide as one would expect. Soldiers seem to quite enjoy their free time in Samothrace by adopting leisure tourist practices that neither correspond to first time tourists nor repeat visitors and of course nor to residency. Although rushing from one tourist attraction to another taking pictures and similar practices –which are generally attributed to first time visitors and often rejected by repeat visitors (Freytag, 2008:13)– seem to be rejected by the soldiers majority as well. However 41 of the respondents (48.2%) admitted that would buy a tourist souvenir or local products for themselves or their family before leaving the island, 23 soldiers (27%) had not decided yet, while 21 soldiers (24.7%) stated that didn’t intend to buy anything as a souvenir.

The results in the crucial question “Regardless of whether you have visited Samothrace before your enlistment or not, would you like to visit the island again after the fulfillment of your military obligations” are shown in table 3.

Table 3. Soldiers’ intentions to visit Samothrace as tourists after their military service

	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes, I would like to visit Samothrace as a tourist.	30	35.3
Maybe/ I am not sure if I would like to visit Samothrace as a tourist.	28	32.9
No, I wouldn’t like to visit Samothrace as a tourist.	27	31.8
<i>Total</i>	<i>85</i>	<i>100</i>

As it is obvious the responses are almost equally divided and for exactly this reason the next questions that try to underline the causes behind the soldiers’ decisions are of great importance. Results in Tables 4 and 5 represent the average rating of all respondents; soldiers that had answered “yes” to the previous question were specifically asked to rate from 1 to 5 six possible reasons leading to their decision where 1: extremely important and 5: not important at all. Those who had answered “no” were asked to do the same with seven possible causes. The soldiers who had said “maybe” were asked to rate both the reasons leading to a “yes” or a “no” decision.

Table 4. What are the reasons behind the “yes” or “maybe” answers to the question “...would you like to visit the island again after the fulfillment of your military obligations?”

<i>1: extremely important – 5: not important at all</i>	
I would like to visit Samothrace as a tourist with my friends/family so as to show them the place where I spent some months of my military service.	1.74
I would like to experience the island as a tourist (civilian), having much more time at my disposal.	2.36
I have made friends here and I will definitely come back to visit them.	3.09
My experience on the island –up until now– is very enjoyable and therefore a visit after the end of my military service would recall pleasant memories.	3.15
I won't seek to return to the island as a tourist, but I wouldn't bother to spend here some of my vacation time; it would be like going to any other destination for a second time.	3.62
Other reason (please specify).	4.74

Most soldiers who wish to return as tourists in Samothrace seem to have developed a strong emotional attachment to the place, wishing to come back with friends and relatives, probably in an attempt to reaffirm their “new”, “upgraded” identity (after the military service) within the family/friends group. Furthermore, the fact that they rate as second important reason for returning the experience of the island having more time at their disposal, suggests that the military service creates a special type of “repeat visitors” who want to go beyond the superficial encounter with the destination. Rather than being perceived as physical or geographical space, places are locales to which personal meaning is ascribed (Marles, 2006); and when the associated experiences are enjoyable, the recall of such pleasant memories seems to be a quite powerful motive for repeat visitation. However there are soldiers who admit that they have no special reason for returning to Samothrace as tourists but they wouldn't bother to spend there some of their vacation time. On the other hand there are some soldiers for whom the most important reason for visiting Samothrace again is the local friends they have made there. As Marles (2006) points out, people interact with other people in the various destinations and therefore they develop affective bonds to the community as well as to the place –an interaction that should be perceived again in terms of emotions.

Table 5. What are the reasons behind the “no” or “maybe” answers to the question “...would you like to visit the island again after the fulfillment of your military obligations?”

<i>1: extremely important – 5: not important at all</i>	
I would like to return to Samothrace as a tourist but the access is very difficult.	2.24
I have already experienced the island (or part of the island), I liked it but I don't think that I have any reason to return as a tourist.	2.71
I have already experienced the island (or part of the island), I didn't like it, and therefore I have no reason at all to return as a tourist.	3.05
My experience on the island –up until now– is not enjoyable and therefore a visit after the end of my military service would recall unpleasant memories.	3.35
I haven't experienced the place enough, but I don't care to experience it as a tourist.	4.24
Other reason (please specify).	4.57
I had already visited Samothrace as a tourist before my military service.	4.71

As we can see, the difficulty in access is considered as the most serious obstacle for the majority of the soldiers who don't wish to return to Samothrace or haven't made up a decision yet, along with the fact that although they like the island they don't have any special motive to come back. The admission that they have experienced the island (or part of it) but didn't like it has been ranked by the soldiers somewhere in the middle and then follows the recalling of unpleasant memories from Samothrace as a “military” and “tourist” destination. However there are soldiers who although declare not having experienced the place enough (and therefore are not sure whether they like it or not), don't wish to return so as to form a complete opinion. Other reasons that prevent a few soldiers from returning is “the lack of night-life choices”, “the expensive prices” and the “unfriendly locals”, while there are also –even fewer– soldiers who had already visited the island before their military service and therefore don't want to come back for a third time.

The key cognitive/perception factors in creating a positive or negative destination image for Samothrace are given in Table 6. Respondents rated the factors on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1: very poor and 5: excellent.

Table 6. Image-influencing factors for Samothrace
 (1 - 5 scale, 1: very poor – 5: excellent)

Untouched and unpolluted nature/ beautiful scenery/ natural attractions	4.37
Interesting cultural/historical attractions	3.23
Taverns/ restaurants/ cafés	2.67
Local cuisine	2.59
Interesting and sociable local people	2.23
Accommodation facilities	2.20
Night life/ entertainment	1.79
Transportation: buses	1.71
Transportation: taxis	1.62
Shopping/services (how easy is to find what you are looking for)	1.60
High hygiene and cleanliness standard in public spaces	1.57
Accessibility (how easy is to get to Samothrace)	1.45

According to the results, Samothrace received high ratings as a destination with untouched nature, beautiful scenery and interesting historical/ cultural attractions. The ratings for its taverns, restaurants, cafés and local cuisine were modest, while the island received poor ratings for the sociability of the local people, accommodation facilities, night life, transportation (taxis and buses), shopping facilities and hygiene standards in public spaces. The lowest rating was for the destinations’ accessibility. At this point we should note that not all the soldiers rated the accommodation facilities of Samothrace and that those who did it –19 out of 45 persons– had either visited Samothrace before or, as explained in another question, had formed an opinion by friends or relatives who had visited them and had spent from 2 to 10 days on the island. This detail implies that apart from creating repeat visitation from soldiers themselves, “army tourism” has as a consequence the generation of “actual” tourism by the soldiers’ friends and relatives who visit them during their military service –an undoubtedly beneficial fact for the destination’s economy.

Finally, the soldiers were asked (regardless of whether they would like to return to Samothrace as tourists or not) if they would recommend the destination to their friends and relatives. Their answers revealed that 35 soldiers (41.2%) would suggest Samothrace as a tourist destination, 23 soldiers (27%) would probably recommend the island, 10 soldiers (11.8%) probably wouldn’t recommend it, while 17 respondents (20%)

declared to be “absolutely certain” that they wouldn’t recommend it. These results imply that even the soldiers who haven’t decided yet if they want to return as tourist to the island (32.9% see Table 3), is more likely to say “a good word” for the destination to other people.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND MARKETING STRATEGY: “COME AS A SOLDIER, RETURN AS A TOURIST”

Although soldiers are in no way “actual tourists”, this paper has shown that the special and hybrid form of “army tourism” offers economical benefits especially to remote areas, while it also seems to affect the place’s visitation; many soldiers wish to return for vacations to the place where they have spent some months of their military life and/or recommend the destination to their friends and relatives. The study sample has been soldiers from Samothrace; therefore this information can be generalized to other areas with military units *only* under certain circumstances and future research needs to be carried out.

The present study has emphasized the importance of destination image held by Greek soldiers for the border island of Samothrace and by examining cognitive and affective images of the place has identified its strengths and weaknesses as being perceived by the soldiers. Necessary actions need to be taken not only on local level but also on the level of the prefecture of Evros, in order to improve the weak or negative aspects of the destination (such as the accessibility, the transportations, the tourism infrastructure and the hygiene standards in public spaces) and promote its strengths (meaning the natural and historical attractions and the local cuisine).

The paper’s results imply that a marketing campaign could be developed and directed to the soldiers in order to motivate them to return as “actual” tourists to Samothrace and promote the destination to other people as well. More specifically, regional and local tourism authorities could adopt the following policy and strategy actions in order to offer to the soldiers of Samothrace a Q.U.A.L.I.T.Y. experience (adapted by Richardson, 2008). In particular, they could:

- Q**uestion soldiers about their expectations and experiences (positive or negative). Extended surveys through questionnaires or even focus groups could be conducted in cooperation with the Greek Army, encouraging feedback and responding to soldiers’ concerns while they are still in Samothrace.
- U**nderstand the soldiers’ needs and wants. As we have already

clarified, soldiers are not tourists and therefore they are not in Samothrace for vacation; however, during their time off duty and out of the camp they undoubtedly seek for moments of relaxation and enjoyment. Providing soldiers with a “special” travel guide of Samothrace that will include useful information and interesting suggestions on what to see and what to do, apart from being helpful it could give them motives to return to the island as tourists, having all the time at their disposal.

- A** sk soldiers to return as tourists to the island and recommend the destination to their friends and relatives by:
- L** isting all the reasons for which they should do that, such as various activities and special events; we shouldn’t forget that Samothrace has the possibilities to develop various special and alternative forms of tourism and improve the existing ones.
- I** ncentives, such as offers and special-price coupons (for accommodation, ferry transport etc.) for the soldiers and for their friends and family as well, not only during but even some time after the end of their military service can encourage soldiers to return to Samothrace, bringing other people with them.
- T** eamwork with local residents is very important, so as to make them serve as “effective community ambassadors” who will express with words and actions to all the visitors of the island that
- “Y** ou are welcome to come back to Samothrace”. If the destination can ensure that all the tourists (“army” and actual) leave the island feeling satisfied, chances are not only that they will be back but that good word-of-mouth about the destination will spread.

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SUBMITTED: JUNE 2009

REVISION SUBMITTED: AUGUST 2009

ACCEPTED: SEPTEMBER 2009

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Acknowledgements

Many thanks are due to A. Dermetzopoulos' fellow soldiers who willingly filled out the questionnaire.