TOURISMOS: AN INTERNATIONAL MULTIDISCIPLINARY JOURNAL OF TOURISM
Volume 4, Number 4, Spring 2009, pp. 113-126

WELLNESS TOURISM: EVALUATING DESTINATION ATTRIBUTES FOR TOURISM PLANNING IN A COMPETITIVE SEGMENT MARKET

Eleni Didascalou
University of Piraeus

Dimitrios Lagos
University of the Aegean

Panagiotis Nastos
University of Athens

The purpose of the present study is to identify the various factors that decision makers must take into account when ranking destinations for placing a spa resort/hotel in the thriving health and wellness industry. The study will suggest a decision support system (DSS) based on key factors as climate, tourism development and attractions. The DSS, using a computer based information system, will evaluate the aforementioned factors and will propose a hierarchical structure for rating destinations, useful for private or public planners in the wellness market. The research categorized the prefectures of Ahaia, Arkadia, Ilia, Korinthia, Messinia in the region of Peloponnese.

Keywords: *spa/health/wellness tourism, climate, Analytical Hierarchy Process*

INTRODUCTION

The term "wellness" is widely used in European tourism. There is no single definition neither for terms "wellness" and "wellness tourism" nor for the term health tourism. Many researchers have explored concepts and definitions relating to the general theme (Kaspar, 1990; Goodrich and Goodrich, 1987; Lund, 2000). Key among them is the importance of life style, self-responsibility for health, and the exploitation of a person's potential for a better quality of health. For the purposes of this study, it is assumed that tourist activities of this market segment is for "healthy" people whose main motive is pampering and wellness. Pampering

involves offering people an experience that makes them feel good—services such as massages, herbal wraps and exfoliating scrubs. Wellness involves helping healthy people prevent problems so they stay well, both physically and mentally. Sometimes this means offering diagnostic testing to identify potential problems.

Wellness tourism is one of the most ancient forms of tourism if one considers the scrupulous attention paid to wellbeing by Greeks and Romans. This earliest form of health tourism is directly related to contemporary health and wellness and includes visits to mineral and hot springs (Didaskalou and Nastos, 2003). Today's health and wellness programs respond to the growing consumer demands for fitness level improvement; for healthy lifestyle education; for nutrition counselling; for healing; for preventative medicine; for solving personal problems like stress or depression; and for spiritual health. Spas are now a key consideration for many holiday makers because they offer a relaxation and health component to the traditional holiday or break.

Today's wellness tourists are self-aware, active seekers of enhanced well-being, health and happiness. Stakeholders of the market must be aware that the needs of wellness tourists vary enormously at different times and stages of their lives (Smith and Kelly, 2006). Many hotels or resorts in our days offer spa-related services among others activities. This amenity in many circumstances is not for the "Guests Only" but also for local residents as it is a significant revenues producer. Such a spa can be called an "amenity spa" as it is added to services offered at the hotel. On the other hand there are spas where the spa experience is the central aspect of the operation. The purpose of this operation is the spa experience itself and it can be called a spa resort (or destination spa). Destination spas are entities unto themselves and create environments that reinforce their specific missions. Their purpose is to set guests on a healthier path for life and serve healthy spa cuisine, provide education on lifestyle improvement, offer fitness activities that built self-esteem while motivating take-home habits and future bodywork and pampering therapies that complement wellness programmes (McNeil and Ragins, 2005). The two kinds of spas have much in common operationally. Both offer: healthful food choices, exercise classes, spa services (e.g. baths, massages), and educational seminars. Where the two operations diverge is in how customers use the facilities. In the destination spa, guests usually come specifically for a program that includes activities from each spa component. In a resort spa, on the other hand, guests come for a full range of activities and choose as much or as little of the spa regimen as they please (Montson and Singer, 1992)

Several demographic, economic, and lifestyle factors are driving such tourism. There may be several reasons for this trend but the following factors play crucial part (García-Altés, 2005):

Population Ageing: The postwar baby-boom cohort is approaching the age of highest disposable income and highest propensity to travel. They may be less price conscious and also more sensitive to other aspects of the marketing mix (location, destinations, confidentiality, quality, etc.)

Lifestyle Changes: Demographics and lifestyles of these target markets will mean a marked increase in demand for cosmetic surgery, spas, retirement communities, fitness centres, and addiction treatment centres.

Tourism Alternatives: Today's consumers are already well traveled and look for something new and different in a holiday experience.

As there will be an increasing demand for spiritual products based on inner experiences a current boom for health and spa products is expected. Health products will also increasingly be added to other tourism and leisure products and accommodation operations will develop more combined products in the areas of health and creative tourism. For many countries the health/wellness tourism market is one of the fastest growing sector i.e. Taiwan, Japan, Australia (Cheng-Fei and Brian, 2008)

WELLNESS TOURISM IN GREECE

Visiting Greece has been set out as a vision for Greek tourism industry but on the other hand this vision is mainly for sea-sun-sand tourism among with the cultural amenities. Differentiating and enriching Greek tourism product is one of the objectives of Greek tourism policy as this can contribute not only to reinforce the image of the country in its markets but also to increase demand during off-peak periods. As health and wellness tourism is regarded as an alternative for the off season and a product diversification for new or mature destinations the development of this form of tourism can improve the competitiveness of the Greek tourism industry.

Apart from the rare landscapes and special natural beauties, Greece has many mineral springs, scattered all over the country, with different chemical characteristics and the presence of rare drastic components with important therapeutic properties. As defined by Greek National Tourist Organization, there are 16 spa centers operating in Mineral Water Sources of national importance and 40 spa centers operating in Mineral Water Sources of local importance. For many years the health tourism product of these centres was focused on "cure" spas but as their traditional clients

were gradually being lost as they aged, many efforts were taken to renovate these properties and to enrich the composition of their product in order to tap the needs of health and wellness tourism market. Today apart from the services offered at these centres many hotels and resorts considering the excellent prospect of wellness tourism market, as individuals emphasize on improving and maintaining personal wellbeing, offer various spa services and activities.

The main objective of this study was to consider 5 prefectures (Ahaia, Arkadia, Ilia, Korinthia, Messinia in the region of Peloponnese for ratting them as a suitable destination for placing a spa resort/hotel. Peloponnese has many capabilities (extended coastline, good climatic conditions, vibrant landscape, and many archaeological sites) for tourism development and a series of different forms of tourism can be developed so as to contribute to regional development. The development of new forms of tourism can enhance sustainable development without neglecting that no type of tourism can be sustainable in the absence of appropriate planning, monitoring, evaluation, and management. The good infrastructure plays a significant role in the tourism development of any region, so investments for hotels of highly quality facilities (Deluxe or Class A) is necessary for further growth of tourism especially in the market of wellness tourism where the demand is mainly in the form of the exclusive. The proximity to Athens and the easy accessibility by car can also be considered as positive factors for future tourism development. Halloway (2006) notes that all destinations share certain characteristics but heir success in attracting tourists will depend upon the quality of essential benefits that they offer: attractions, facilities, accessibility and climate.

MODEL CONSTRUCTION

As tourism industry changes rapidly one must use new tools and techniques in making effective decisions, but the tourism industry has yet to recognize the value that can provide decision support technologies like DSS, and usually refers to demand-oriented systems such as destination management or consumer-oriented travel-counseling systems (Wöber and Gretzel, 2000). A DSS is usually built to support the solution of a certain problem or to evaluate an opportunity. As such it is called a DSS application. A DSS usually uses models and is built (often by end-users) by an interactive and iterative process (Turban et al., 2003). As conceptualized, DSSs support the intellectual resources of human decision makers through the design of computer models and the

simulation of real-life experiences, DSSs continue to improve the quality of decisions by standardizing the process and logic information managers' choices and making the criteria for determining appropriate outcomes systematic (Piccoli and Wagner, 2003).

In the study the main focus of the authors was on suggesting a Decision Support System that takes into account distinct criteria in a decision making process about preliminary ratting destinations to place a spa resort/hotel. A suitable method for selecting competing activities using distinct criteria is the Analytical Hierarchy Process which provides a means of systematizing complex problems (Turban, Aronson and Liang 2005). The criteria can be quantitative or qualitative in nature, and even quantitative criteria are handled by a decision maker's preference structure rather than numerically.

The criteria that authors pay significant role in ratting destinations for the construction of a spa resort/hotel are: climate regime, existing tourism development and attractions. As tourism is closely linked to the environment the natural environment and climate conditions are very important in determining the variability and attractiveness of a region as a tourist destination. Two other factors play also an important role: the accessibility and the subsidy one can receive for the construction of the operation (Didaskalou, Nastos & Matzarakis, 2007), but as these factors are in general the same for the region of Peloponesse, the authors did not take them into account in the model, but for other areas or districts where the differences are significant, these factors must be considered. Also an asset is the presence of a hot/mineral spring.

After the criteria has been established, from the authors through literature review, the DSS tool which will be used for constructing the model is the software Web-HIPRE which is on-line available from Helsinki University of Technology at http://www.hipre.hut.fi/. Web-HIPRE is a Java-applet for multiple criteria decision making based on the decision support software HIPRE 3+. In Web-HIPRE the problem is structured hierarchically to form a value tree. In this value tree each criterion is divided to its subcriteria, which are weighted by their importance to the decision maker (on the lowest level criteria the alternatives are weighted). The total weights of the alternatives are calculated from these local weights. The resulting model is called a value tree or a hierarchy of criteria and objectives depending on the tradition referred to. Table 1 and Figure 2 give the construction of the value tree of the study and the weighting methods.. The data for the 5 destinations are given in Table 2.

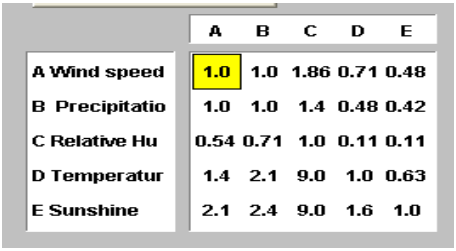
Table 1. The evaluation framework

Goal		Dimension	Weights	Criteria
Destination	1*	Climate	**	Temperature (°C)
				Relative humidity (%)
				Sunshine (hours)
				Wind speed (knotts)
				Precipitation (days)
	2*	Development	2***	5* Hotels
			1***	Index Defert
	3*	Attractions	1****	Nature (% of protected areas in km^2)
			2****	Archaeological sites (number)
			3****	Museums (number

* SWING-technique. In SWING-technique you are firstly asked to give 100 points to the most important attribute change from the worst criterion level to the best level. Then you are asked to give points (<100) to reflect the importance of the attribute change from the worst criterion level to the best level relative to the most important attribute change.

**Pairwise comparisons (AHP). In AHP you are asked to compare pairwise each possible pair of attributes. In each pair you must decide which attribute is more important and how much more important. These comparisons are saved in comparisons matrix and the ultimate weights of attributes are derived by the eigenvector of this matrix. For the comparisons a balanced scale was used, where 1.0 means equally preferred. The comparison matrix of climate subcriteria is given in Figure 1.

Figure 1. The comparison matrix of climate subcriteria



***SMARTER-technique. In the SMARTER-technique you are asked to rank the attributes in the order of importance for the attribute changes from their worst level to the best level.

****SMART-technique. In SMART-technique you are first asked to give 10 points to the least important attribute change from the worst criterion level to its best level. Then you are asked to give points (>10) to reflect the importance of the attribute change from the worst criterion level to the best level relative to the least important attribute range.

For assigning weights to each alternative area in research Direct weighting was used. In direct weighting, the weights of subcriteria or alternatives are directly given.

Figure 2. The Value Tree

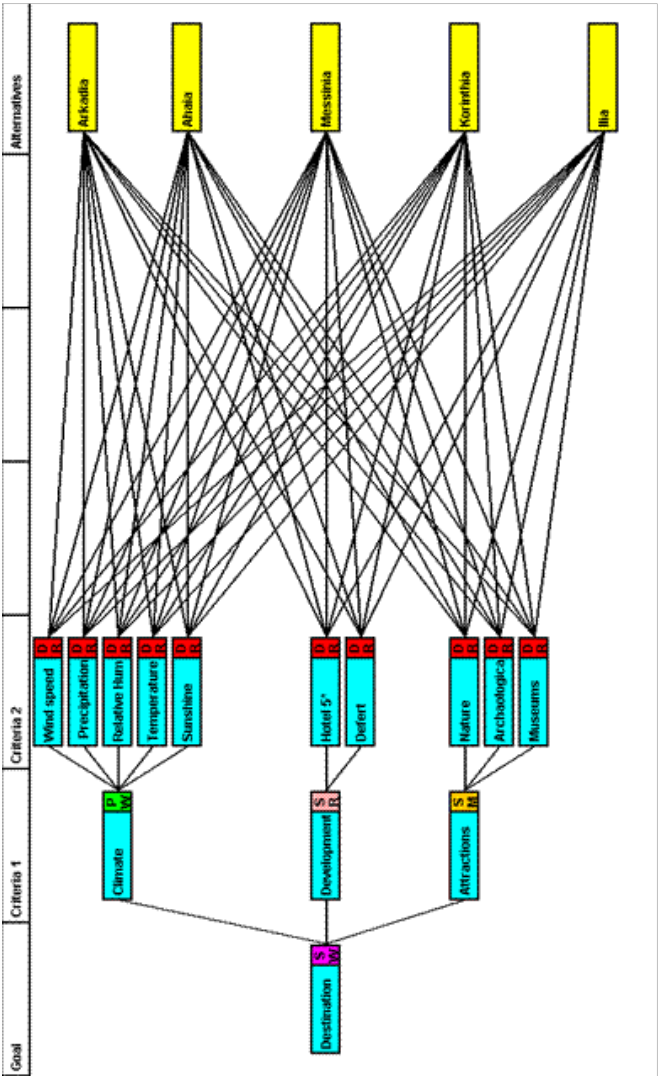


Table 2. Data of Model

		Ahaia	**Arkadia**	**Ilia**	**Korinthia**	**Messinia**
Climate	Temperature	17,9	14,1	17,4	18,2	17,8
	Relative humidity	65,6	63	69	64,4	67,8
	Sunshine	2497,6	2560,4	2766,6	2634	2690,5
	Wind speed	4,6	4,9	4,8	5,2	5,3
	Precipitation	86	116,9	87,9	73,2	76,7
Development	5* Hotels	0	1	2	3	1
	Index Defert	2,85	2,12	4,08	5,93	4,22
Attractions	Nature	22,71 %	19,65 %	16,26 %	17,81%	40,68 %
	Archaeological sites	1	8	11	2	8
	Museums	5	2	4	4	6

The results of the DSS model are presented in Table 3, Figure 3, 4, 5 and 6. Ilia get the maximum score but as it is too close to Messinia, another run of AHP only for Messinia and Ilia, taking into account some other factors, is important for the final rank of the destinations.

Table 3. The scores for the destinations by DSS

	Ahaia	Arkadia	Ilia	Korinthia	Messinia
Climate	0,068	0,056	0,093	0,079	0,084
Development	0,059	0,085	0,099	0,022	0,089
Attractions	0,021	0,052	0,083	0,053	0,075
Overall	0,147	0,193	**0,275**	0,157	0,248

Figure 3. Deciding for the destination using all criteria

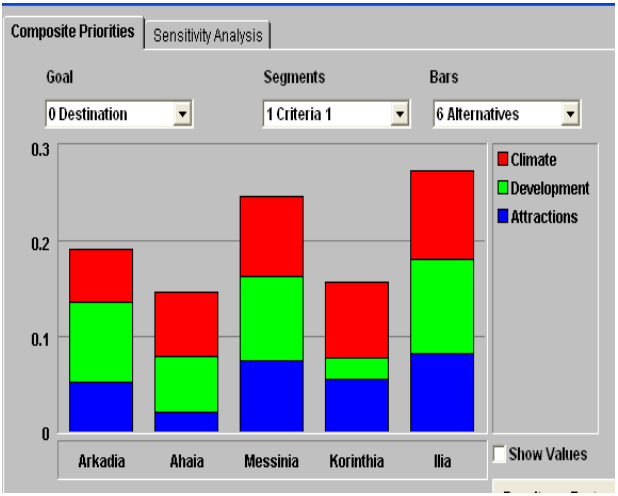


Figure 4. Decision with criterion the climate

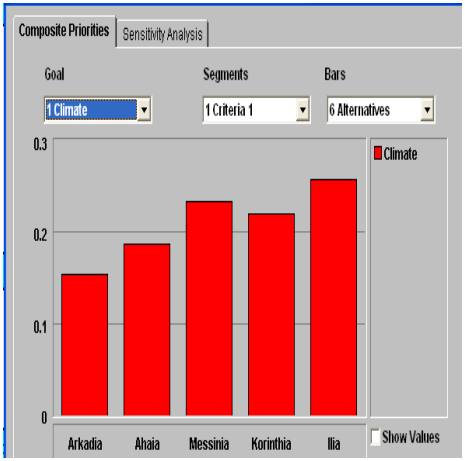


Figure 5. Decision with criterion the development

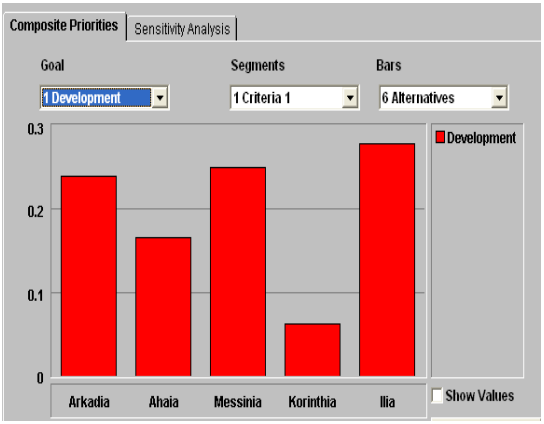
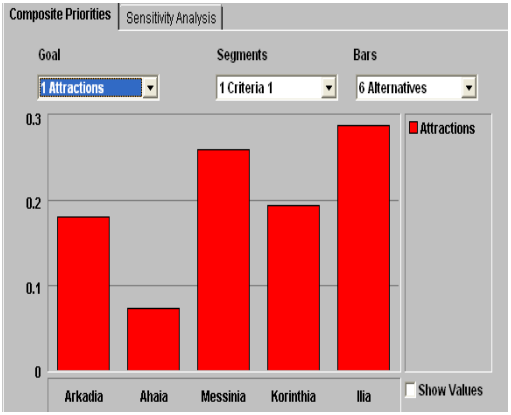


Figure 6. Decision with criterion the attractions



CONCLUSION

The aim of the authors is not to give an overall framework, as special information is needed. The model is of an exploratory nature and needs further consideration. Its main task is to establish a framework capable of providing a guide to planners from private or public sector. The article reports on a case study considering five destinations at prefecture Peloponesse of Greece. The article contributes to the literature by focusing on tools that tourism organizations require for supporting their decision in various fields. The increasing complexity of business operations means that companies must design technologically mediated decision making systems to complement human judgment and standardize decision making in an attempt to create competitive advantage.

A key consideration for this explanatory study was to open up new dimensions for decision making in tourism industry as it is important to develop tools as a guide from a supply-side perspective. Due to the fact that more and more people are seeking out information for vacations at a spa it is of great importance to offer spa services and facilities to competitive areas. It is believed that in the process of evaluating the destinations, selecting an appropriate decision method is important. In this study, the authors adopted the AHP method as the basis for their analysis. Hence, the framework can be used as a direction to improve planning in the segment of spa/health/wellness tourism in the future.

REFERENCES

Amelung, B., Nicholls, S. & Viner, D. (2007). Implications of Global Climate Change for Tourism Flows and Seasonality. *Journal of Travel Research*, Vol. 45, No.3, pp.285-296.

Cheng-Fei, L. & Brian E.K. (2008). Using the Delphi Method to assess the potential of Taiwan's hot springs tourism Sector. *International Journal of Tourism Research*, Vol. 10, No.4, pp.341-352.

Didaskalou, E.A, Nastos, P.Th & Matzarakis, A. (2007). Spa destination development using a decision support system-the role of climate and bioclimate. In A. Matzarakis, C.R. de Freitas and D. Scott (Eds.) *Developments in Tourism Climatology*, Freiburg: Commision on Climate, Tourism and Recreation, International Society of Biometeorology.

Didaskalou, E.A. & Nastos, P. (2003). The role of climatic and bioclimatic conditions in the development of health tourism product. *Anatolia*, Vol. 14, No.2, pp.107-126.

Holloway, J.C. (2006). *The Business of Tourism*. England, Pearson Education Limited.

García-Altés, A. (2005). The Development of Health Tourism Services. *Annals of Tourism Research*, Vol. 32, No.1, pp.266-268.

Goodrich, N. & Goodrich, E. (1987). Health-care Tourism- an explanatory study. *Tourism Management,* Vol. 8, No.3, pp.217-222.

Kaspar, C. (1990). A new lease of life for spa and health tourism. *Annals of Tourism Research*, Vol. 17, No.2, pp. 298-299.

Lund, J.W. (2000). "Taking the waters": introduction to balneology. *Geo-Heat Center, Quarterly Bulletin*, Vol. 21, No.3, pp.2-5.

McNeil, K.R. & Ragins, E.J. (2005). Staying in the spa marketing game: trends, challenges, strategies and techniques. *Journal of Vacation Marketing*, Vol. 11, No.1, pp.31-39.

Monteson, P.A. & Singer J. (1992). Turn your spa into a winner. *Cornell Hotel and Restaurant Administration Quarterly*, Vol. 33, No.3, pp.37-44.

Mueller, H. & Kaufmann E.L. (2001). Wellness tourism: market analysis of a special health tourism segment and implications for the hotel industry. *Journal of Vacation Marketing*, Vol. 7, No.1, pp.5-17.

Turban, E., Aronson J.E. & Liang T.P. (2005). *Decision Support Systems and Intelligent Systems*. New Jersey, Pearson Education.

Piccoli, G. & Wagner, E.L (2003). The Value of Academic Research. *Cornell Hotel and Restaurant Administration Quarterly,* Vol. 44, No.2, pp.29-38.

Smith, M. & Kelly, C. (2006). Wellness tourism. *Tourism Recreation Research*, Vol. 31, No.1, pp.1-4.

Wöber, K. & Gretzel, U. (2000). Tourism Managers' Adoption of Marketing Decision Support Systems. *Journal of Travel Research*, Vol. 39, No.2, pp.172-181.

SUBMITTED: JULY 2009
REVISION SUBMITTED: SEPTEMBER 2009
ACCEPTED: OCTOBER 2009
REFEREED ANONYMOUSLY

Eleni Didascalou, University of Piraeus, Department of Business Administration, Piraeus, Greece.

Dimitrios Lagos (d.lagos@aegean.gr) is an Associate Professor at the University of the Aegean, Department of Business Administration, Chios, Greece.

Panagiotis Nastos, University of Athens, Laboratory of Climatology and Atmospheric Environment, Athens, Greece.