

TOURISM PLANNING AND POLICY IN SELECTED MOUNTAINOUS AREAS OF GREECE

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Mountains occupy approximately one/fifth of the total surface of the earth and have been progressively transformed into important tourist destinations. Many developed countries have traced and implemented remarkable state interventions to promote tourism development in their mountain areas. State planning, fundamentally, intervenes in a compensating and balancing way, creating the necessary terms and conditions for the smooth formation of the necessary tourist capital at national, regional and local level. This paper evaluates the effectiveness of the state tourism policy in selected mountain prefectures of Greece (Ioannina, Evritania and Kastoria), according to the mountain zone typology used by UNEP-WCMC. The evaluation of the three entirely mountain prefectures according to selected aspects of the tourism policy implemented and the hotel evolutionary geographical distribution highlights a policy gap as regards tourism development in the Greek mountain areas; such tourism development has been progressively incorporated in the general regionalisation policy adopted of Greek tourism.

Keywords: mountainous, incentives policy, hotel investments.

JEL Classification: *L83, M1, O1*

INTRODUCTION

Greece is the most mountainous country in the Mediterranean and the Balkans with 65% of its surface covered by mountainous areas (according to EU Directive 268/75). These areas are mainly characterised by their

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intense spatial fragmentation and lack of uniformity in the landscapes they form. The development of mountainous areas during the post-war period has been left to its fate, thus provoking a remarkable shrinkage in their population. In 1950 the latter accounted for 14.5% of the total population of the country, while in 2001 it amounted to just 7.6% of the total population.

Since the 1970s tourist development policy in mountainous areas has been incorporated in the general policy for the country's regional development. In that perspective the Greek mountainous areas with complex environmental resources have been gradually promoted as tourist destinations on the basis of three essential motivations: countryside, sports and the environment.

PLANNING & IMPLEMENTATION OF TOURIST POLICY IN MOUNTAINOUS AREAS

Mountains are among the few areas of the world marked by unrivalled beauty, rich biodiversity and a diversity in human civilisations, traditions and lifestyles. However mountainous areas have a common characteristic, namely that of isolation. Since the 1950s they have become problematic and marginal rural zones, labelled as the least-favoured areas due to global economic and social changes (Jansky, et.al., 2002).

Tourism has always been used as a "fundamental tool" for local development, since tourist consumption in the production area is linked in multifaceted ways to all local economic activities (agriculture, fishing, crafts and so on) and has significant effects on the production and social structure. Christaller (1964) is one of the first researchers to have considered tourism an important pole of development describing it as a regional activity. Soon after Freedmann (1966) argued that tourism may be an alternative method of development, particularly for remote areas, such as mountainous areas, which would otherwise face limited prospects of development due to the specialised nature of their resources or location.

The gradual development of tourist incentives has contributed to the activation and later to the accessibility of mountainous tourism for increasing tourist groups (Godde et.al., 2000). Tourism in mountainous areas accounts for a considerable part of the world's tourism industry, as a result of which the current international debate on sustainable development attaches great importance to mountains. Chapter 13 in particular ("Managing Fragile Ecosystems: Sustainable Mountain

Development”) is an important step to promoting the vital role of mountainous areas at global level. Furthermore, 2002 was designated by the United Nations as both “International Year of Ecotourism” and “International Year of Mountains”, which aroused awareness concerning mountain ecosystems and the link between development in the mountainous areas and environment-friendly tourism.

The greatest problem in the development of tourist facilities in remote and particularly mountainous areas remains the high initial investment costs, the thorough knowledge and experience demanded for construction and operation of tourist enterprises and for the consolidation of a particular location as an attractive destination in the world tourism market in general. The state, without detracting from the tourism market and the private sector, offers various development incentives in an effort to develop private tourism investments to a satisfactory level, achieve their suitable distribution at a local level and upgrade the quality of the tourist product.

The interventionist incentive-based spatial planning policy is based on arguments concerning the market’s failure in accordance with which the shaping of tourism development through the market mechanism fails to be compatible with the accomplishment of far-reaching aims, such as environmental protection, safeguard of public goods and the elimination of unfair competition (Wanhill, 1999). The selection of location establishment is a question of paramount importance for a tourist enterprise, since it has an impact not only on the economic stability of the investment plan, but on the natural and human-geographical resources of the area itself. To this effect the state is interventionist in a desire to compensate for the market’s weaknesses and at the same time reinforce the leading role of private enterprises in tourism and general development of the country. Simultaneously the power and success of the incentive policy is directly connected to the increase in efficiency of the tourist enterprises assisted, in order to produce positive effects of expansion within the local society and economy, which is challenging within such a highly competitive market. Therefore investment redistribution initially presupposes the existence of available investments and then the possibility of influencing trends within the various regions and areas by means of the incentive policy. Such trends are independent to a large extent of the specific incentive policy and are shaped according to the various conditions that reign in national and international markets.

METHODOLOGY

This paper examines the efficiency of tourism planning and policy in selected areas of Greek territory, defined according to the mountainous criteria and particularly the mountain typology adopted by UNEP-WCMC. The aforementioned typology has been formulated by Copus and Price (2002), who attempted to classify the mountainous areas of the EU (and the candidate countries before the enlargement), taking into consideration the common geo-morphological, economic and social characteristics, as follows: partly mountainous regions (areas in which 40-60% of land area is mountainous), predominantly mountainous regions (in which 60-95% of the area is mountainous) and completely mountainous regions (95% or more of land area is mountainous).

In Greece (NUTS III Regions), there are 13 prefectures defined as predominantly mountainous areas, whereas three prefectures are defined as completely mountainous: Ioannina, Evritania and Kastoria. These three human-geographic units are marked by complex resources (in terms of natural and constructed environment) and similarities as to their socioeconomic characteristics. The main hindrance to development of these prefectures is the low population, mainly in terms of active population, due to the existence of mountainous and infertile land, geographic isolation and insufficiency of productive resources (Filippou et.al, 2009).

In the aforementioned areas tourism seems to play an outstanding role in their development, but tourists usually make short visits (usually two-day trips). These areas have organised tourism enclaves and their clients are mainly Greek citizens who make short trips in seasons other than the summer. More specifically the prefecture of Ioannina attracts an increasing number of tourists interested in getting to know its cultural and natural heritage. Tourist traffic and consequently the hotel capacity of the prefecture is concentrated in the city of Ioannina and to a lesser extent in Metsovo, Konitsa and Zagorohoria. As regards the prefecture of Kastoria, domestic tourism is reported as being the main market of tourist influx and is marked by intense seasonality (from October to May). There is low traffic of organised tourist groups and the limited hotel capacity of the prefecture is highly concentrated within or in the environs of the provincial capital. Furthermore the prefecture of Evritania has a limited number of small hotels, most of which are located in Karpenisi.

In an effort to provide an approach and interpretation of the system of financial state intervention for tourism development in these mountainous prefectures, a group of competent bodies collaborated to carry out related

combined empirical research (the Ministry of Economy, the Greek Tourism Organisation, the Hellenic Chamber of Hotels, etc.). The group correlated and analysed various factors such as: (a) the incentive zones shaped under development laws, (b) the data regarding private financially assisted hotel investments and (c) the data concerning the functional formation and generation of hotel capital in the prefectures under consideration spatially and time wise.

THE INCENTIVE POLICY FOR TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN GREEK MOUNTAINOUS AREAS

Momentum of Tourism Development and Mountainous Areas

In the mid 1970s, both in view of the general regional problems faced in Greece and the land-planning and functional problems of tourism development itself, the first significant state intervention was enacted concerning the regionalisation of tourism (Developmental Law 1313/72). This intervention divided national territory into three incentive zones. It also laid the foundations for the development of winter tourism in the years 1972-1978. In particular efforts were made to identify suitable mountainous areas for the development of winter tourism through the establishment of more favourable financial incentives. However the label "mountainous area" was attributed to Greek inland destinations with a medium percentage of mountains that were already quite developed in terms of tourism. At the same time increasing investment activity in the Greek hotel industry developed in the two major urban centres of the country due to the continuous demand for hotel enterprises and the value of land that could cover the guarantees demanded by banks in order to grant long-term loans.

The accession of Greece into the European Union in 1981 and the exercise of the Common Agricultural Policy enabled the implementation of directive 268/75 on "mountainous and less-favoured areas" in the country, in an effort to support agricultural income. However, the development policy for mountainous areas continued to be part of the country's general regional policy. After 1981 the extent of regionalisation of tourism was a direct result of the incentives policy as reflected in the successive development laws.

Law 1262/1982 was the most integrated development policy in tourism with a decisive impact on the provision of the country's tourist services. The main objective of this law and those that followed was the country's regional development by means of the division of the territory

into high, medium and low incentive zones. This move aimed to eliminate territorial inequalities, increase employment through the investment activity in rural areas and so forth. In that perspective, the mountainous prefectures were viewed as areas in decline and the majority were included in the C zone. The exceptions were the border mountainous prefectures on which special emphasis was placed (D zone). This Law provided a favourable framework for the reinforcement of the hotel industry in the three prefectures, which received some of the highest percentages of grants (45%–47%) in the country (Table I).

Table I Private Hotel Investments Granted by L. 1262/1982

Geographical Determination	Incentive Zones	Average Grant (%)	Private Hotel Investments Realised					Average Growth Rate of Hotel Capacity 1981-1989
			Establishment of Hotel		Modernisation of Hotel		New Job Positions	
			Units	Beds	Units	Beds		
Ioannina	D	47.56	13	361	4	414	48	1,22
Evritania	C	45.25	2	146	0	0	39	4,35
Kastoria	D	45.59	1	39	1	66	29	1,70
Total Country		33.80	1260	102080	181	18371	10797	4,43

Source: Vlami, 2008

This incentive policy contributed to the establishment of 3* and 2* hotel units in Ioannina. It is remarkable that in Evritania the high grant awarded – raised by 15% – to the Velouchi Ski Centre SA for the two investments made led to a very high average bed cost. Nevertheless a limited number of investments were reported in the majority of the inland prefectures, including the prefectures under study and the sole objective of these investments was to establish small hotels operating all year round. This policy led to the uncontrolled establishment of small hotel units in the coastal and insular zones. Consequently, a new state intervention of a spatial nature was called for, with the introduction of the concept of “saturated areas” which aimed at the increased turnover in hotel rooms in developed areas. The measures taken during this period aroused severe criticism of the summer holiday mass tourism model and the gradual promotion of certain areas (mountainous and semi-mountainous) as tourist destinations for domestic visitors and tourists with special interests.

Stability of Tourism Development and Reorientation of Tourism Policy

The policy exercised in the 1990s discouraged, or rather prevented, investments into the set up of medium and low class hotels, by focusing on investments for the modernisation of the existing ones, the conversion of old buildings into hotels and the creation of a specialised tourism infrastructure. Moreover, the foundation or expansion of hotel units used for winter tourism and located in Areas B and C enjoyed the grants earmarked for Area D (as Evritania) (Table II).

Table II Private Hotel Investments Granted by L. 1892/1990

Geographical Determination	Incentive Zones	Average Grant (%)	Private Hotel Investments Realised				Average Growth Rate of Hotel Capacity 1990-1997	
			Establishment of Hotel		Modernisation of Hotel			New Job Positions
			Units	Beds	Units	Beds		
Ioannina	D	27.47	10	623	0	0	98	2,12
Evritania	D	27.47	2	136	3	380	55	1,06
Kastoria	D	30.86	5	194	1	77	32	2,36
Total Country		28.57	239	21214	303	53895	5102	4,08

Source: Vlami, 2008

The impact of L. 1892/1990 on the geographical restructuring of the productive potential of Greek tourism was limited due to the low number of investments made into the establishment of hotel units (mainly A and B class). Furthermore those that were made concentrated mainly in the insular regions of the Southern Aegean and Crete. Therefore, very few investments targeted the three mountainous prefectures in question during said period (Table III). On the other hand it is worth mentioning that although minimal investment plans were implemented for the setting up of new hotels in the prefectures of Evritania and Kastoria, these areas recorded some of the highest average bed costs as the investments made concerned high-class units. Two hotel units were set up in Evritania in the municipalities of Karpenisi and Megalo Horio with wide-ranging services. Furthermore, Evritania presented the second highest average cost per modernised bed and three existing hotels in the area upgraded their services. On the other hand 10 hotel building investment plans were carried out in the prefecture of Ioannina for an overall capacity of 623 beds at an extremely low cost per bed.

The incentive policy adopted during the period 1998-2004, in accordance with Law 2601/1998, further reduced grants, providing

financial assistance only to new bodies. The geographical diversification of incentives was considered secondary. The four designated incentive-zones remained albeit not very clearly defined: zone C was redefined every two years absorbing parts of zone B which showed a decline in development, while zone D included the border zone of 20 km and small islands. However, inclusion criteria for zone C did not take effect and most mountainous prefectures were included in zone C for the entire validity period of the law.

This policy mainly activated investments for the modernisation of hotels (68.2% of total investments, Table IV), which, as expected, were carried out in regions with a high hotel potential. It also promoted a substantial number of plans for the conversion of listed buildings into hotels (24.5%). These investment plans created a small hotel unit network in the traditional settlements of the country, which attract an ever increasing number of domestic tourists for short trips.

Table IV Private Hotel Investments Granted by L. 2601/1998

Geographical Determination	Incentive Zones	Average Grant (%)	Private Hotel Investments Realised							Average Growth Rate of Hotel Capacity 1998 - 2004
			Establishment of Hotel		Modernisation of Hotel		Conversion of Traditional Buildings into Hotels		New Job Positions	
			Units	Beds	Units	Beds	Units	Beds		
Ioannina	C	41.61	1	39	2	60	25	375	100	3,19
Evritania	C	38.08	0	0	1	0	2	10	5	1,89
Kastoria	C	25.00	1	68	1	85	0	0	21	4,83
Total Country		26.99	63	5043	649	80649	231	4849	5556	2,48

Source: Vlami, 2008

The majority of such investments and resources were absorbed by the prefecture of Ioannina, which attracted a substantial grant (41%). Thus the rate of increase as regards the prefecture's hotel units was considerably accelerated (7%), while that related to beds remained low (3.2%), since the hotel units had an average capacity of 15 beds. As a consequence the prefecture's participation in the country's annual tourism consumption was not enhanced (indeed it accounted for just 1.62%).

Necessary Changes in Tourism Development in Mountainous Areas

The rationale of the incentive policy in the five-year period 2005-2010 changed, as dictated by Law 3299/2004. Unlike the policy adopted for the past fifteen years which encouraged investments for the modernisation of existing units, the new policy is expansionist and aims at accelerating the rate of creation of new hotel beds. As a result, significantly more investment plans have been submitted for the reduction of capital cost. Specifically 1,784 investments have been approved within this incentive system, by which: 142,022 hotel beds have been modernised, 64,100 new beds created, 4,515 new beds resulted from the conversion of traditional buildings and 14,742 new jobs have emerged.

The implementation of this development law has led to a substantial number of investments in the creation of new hotel beds. Due to the significant financial support and the increasing domestic tourist flow in the territory, mainly during winter, some prefectures of mainland Greece that have traditionally lagged behind in terms of investment plans report intense investment activity. The investment plans for new hotels that are being carried out in mainland Greece mainly concern new small to medium size hotel units. Considerable resources have been earmarked in the territory of the prefecture of Ioannina for the construction of 42 mainly 3* (B Class) units with an average capacity of 46 beds. A relative enhancement of investments is apparent in Evritania and Kastoria, where the setting up of 9 and 6 mainly 4* and 3* small and medium sized hotel units respectively has been approved (Table IV). There is also marked interest in investments aiming at converting traditional and listed buildings into hotels in the developing domestic tourism destinations with rich cultural and architectural heritage. The prefecture of Ioannina in particular has attracted 15% of such approved plans at national level. These hotel units are mainly very small size 4* hotels, most of which are located in the capital city of the prefecture. Likewise in Kastoria, and particularly in the urban centre, the conversion of 7 old buildings into 4* hotels with an average capacity of 18 beds has been approved.

Table IV Private Hotel Investments Granted by L. 3299/2004

Geographical Determination	Incentive Zones	Average Grant (%)	Private Hotel Investments Realised							Average Growth Rate of Hotel Capacity 1998 - 2004
			Establishment of Hotel		Modernisation of Hotel		Conversion of Traditional Buildings into Hotels		New Job Positions	
			Units	Beds	Units	Beds	Units	Beds		
Ioannina	C	50.24	42	1965	9	759	40	632	334	21,34
Evritania	B	38.22	9	238	0	0	1	18	43	5,13
Kastoria	B	50.59	6	263	3	315	7	124	67	13,23
Total Country		43.28	704	64100	813	142022	267	4515	14742	3,62

Source: Vlami, 2008

It should be noted that during the validity term of the law Ioannina, Kastoria and Evritania present increasing rates of enhancement of their hotel potential (21.34%, 13.23% and 5.13% respectively). Assuming that all 3,240 new beds (2,466 new ones and 774 following alteration) belonging to the grant regime in accordance with Law 3299/04 are to be created, the hotel potential of the three prefectures above will be further augmented. In particular hotel beds in the prefecture of Ioannina are expected to increase by 35.52%, in Kastoria by 16.96% and in Evritania by 12.61%. Obviously such an assumption carries an element of uncertainty, since it is possible that not all investment plans will be carried out due to the difficult economic situation. Yet substantial amounts have already been earmarked for environmental, architectural studies, time has been spent for the necessary approvals (more than 6 months at least) and investors have guaranteed their participation in capital for the implementation. As a consequence a large part of those investments will be delivered, maybe to a lesser extent and at a reduced budget, since the most appropriate solution in the current circumstances is to invest the available capital, as long as it concerns deposits and not shares, rather than to deposit it in bank.

However such investment activity does not seem to significantly contribute to the upgrading and enrichment of the hotel product in the prefectures under study, since priority is given to particularly low cost investments for hotel modernisation. In general only 90 hotel units which receive financial assistance will be upgraded to a higher star category after being modernised at a national level, none of which are located in these three prefectures (the grant increment of 5% for such investments is not taken into consideration). This is attributable largely to the demanding and costly procedures of upgrading a hotel to a higher category which

involves environmental licensing through the submission of supplementary plans to be approved by the Greek Tourism Organisation Regional Tourism Services, relevant engineer studies and so on. This procedure remains cumbersome and time consuming despite the modification of the specifications provided for by Presidential Decree 32/02 establishing more flexible upgrading requirements.

Furthermore private investors' interest in investment plans for the addition of complementary facilities in existing hotel units has decreased, along with the interest in building or modernising specialised tourist infrastructure facilities both in the prefectures in question and at national level (in general just 45 and 22 plans respectively have been submitted to the law incentives, despite the high average grants which exceed 35% and 45% respectively). Such a reduced private interest shows the investors' preference for plans concerning building and extension of hotel units and therefore their preference for plans dealing with the creation of new bedrooms, rather than the creation of shared spaces, that would upgrade the services provided: in the case of visitors' overnight stays the income derives essentially from the number of beds. Moreover investors seem to show a preference for the creation of specialised spaces to be used for the supply of additional services as part of the hotel building and extension plans, rather than for the construction of single conference and spa centres, considering such an investment decision more suitable in terms of time, procedure and supporting documents.

CONCLUSIONS

The evaluation of the three completely mountainous prefectures of Greece on a basis of selected aspects of the tourism policy adopted and the evolving geographical distribution of hotels reveals that mountainous areas, having been excluded from the tourism planning policy in the 1970s and 1980s, have progressively become part of a fragmentary policy for the development of alternative forms of tourism from the 1990s to date. The concept of territorial diversification of incentives for tourism development in Greece has required much time be spent on consolidating and implementing as firm practice in the bills passed. However the difference in the volume of incentives offered has not solved the problem of lack of investments in given local units, such as mountainous areas; rather it has slowed down the regional problem. Greek state interventions have further reinforced the existing tourism development poles, although legislative documents and regional development programmes aimed at the opposite outcome. At the same time local bodies and the various interest

groups that have fervently supported the importance of tourism in local development failed to play an essential role in defining and implementing tourism policy.

Even the incentive policy for regional development during the period 1990-2004, which actually discouraged or rather excluded the creation of new hotel beds, did not manage to reverse such a trend. Inland prefectures with significant potential for the development of sightseeing, mountain and winter tourism activities and so on face a lack or shortage of hotel beds. Such prefectures work according to the “small scale” organised mass tourism model and the majority have no particular promotion or advertisement abroad addressing groups of tourists with special interests.

The results of the expansionist incentive policy of the past five-year period in the mountainous prefectures under study, and apparently in mountainous Greece at large, constitute just one dimension of the myth of sustainable development. There are growing concerns that many of the new hotel units which have received financial support are the result of a favourable entrepreneurial opportunity to penetrate a profitable sector, to a large extent supported by the state, rather than the achievement of a targeted policy for the development of a tourism superstructure adapted to meet market demands and the needs of mountainous areas.

The state is called upon to guarantee a basic level of general and special infrastructures (e.g. water supply, sewerage, electric power supply and distribution networks, telecommunications, transport network, recreational services, organised cultural and entertainment activities and so forth) within a clearly outlined tourism and general development policy for mountainous areas, in order to create the necessary conditions to attract private initiatives. Without an integrated framework for tourism and general development of such areas based on the principles of sustainability, all efforts are doomed to be fragmentary and subject to the interpretation provided each time by the interested and participating parties.

Financing and development of small scale superstructure must always be planned based upon detailed market research, respectful of the natural environment and local tradition of mountainous areas and compatible with the needs of domestic tourism, which constitutes an essential part of the Greek mountainous area tourist product. A change in the centralised decision making tradition is needed through the definition of a coordinated policy that shall support the transfer of resources and competences to local authorities. The latter in cooperation with production and scientific bodies shall outline and execute tourism development plans. Moreover regular information campaigns are

necessary at local level with reference to Agenda 21 and the importance of its implementation for the destinations' sustainable development through participatory procedures and consensus.

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SUBMITTED: APR 2011

REVISION SUBMITTED: JUL 2011

ACCEPTED: AUG 2011

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