

# THE EFFICACY OF ALTERNATIVE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT TO OVERCOME CURRENT CRISIS: AN EXPLORATION OF THE VIEWS OF THE STAKEHOLDERS OF THE PREFECTURE OF KORINTHIA

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*Our aim was to record the views of the stakeholders of the prefecture of Korinthia on the alternative forms of tourism suitable to develop in this destination and capable to meet current crisis. We found that they all think that new alternative forms of tourism are definitely needed but they disagree on the specific form(s) that should be developed in the area. Considerable differentiation and ambiguity was also observed on various other issues, including infrastructure development, while no co-ordination exists. We conclude that a new vector (a participation of the various parties involved) is needed to accurately record the current situation, coordinate specific actions needed (meetings, congresses, participation in expeditions, education, etc.) and help developing a comprehensive master plan for local and regional tourism development.*

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**Keywords:** Prefecture of Korinthia, local tourism stakeholders, alternative tourism

JEL Classification: *L83, M1, O1*

## INTRODUCTION

In Greece tourism development is based on funding, marketing, promotion and infrastructure development that is almost exclusively provided by the state; the role of the stakeholders of a tourism destination in most cases is consultative and non-institutionalized, in contrast to the

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current literature conception on the subject (Dredge, 2006, Stavrinoudis and Parthenis, 2009, Ahmad et al, 2012, Tuohino and Konu, 2014). There is also no coordination between the various parties involved (Stavrinoudis and Parthenis, 2009, Apostolakis, 2008), despite current crisis, making it difficult to propose a local tourism development strategy based on the knowledge and experience of local stakeholders.

## **AIM**

The aim of this study was a. to investigate the attitudes of tourism stakeholders of the prefecture of Corithia on both existing tourism practice and development prospects, b. to record their views on alternative forms of tourism that are most suitable to develop in this destination and capable to meet current crisis and c. to identify the degree of co-operation and co-ordination between these institutions and also with the Ministry of Tourism.

## **MATERIAL AND METHODS**

To meet the aims of this study we used a properly structured questionnaire, based on empirical studies (Javeau, Morgan 2007, Seetanah et al, 2011). Such a questionnaire can help recording the views of Korithia stakeholders (tourism professionals, public authorities and groups, as defined by WTO, 1998) involved in, or affected (positively or negatively) by tourism in the area. Individuals who completed the questionnaire were selected by the responding institution, professional association or group. The study was contacted in March and April 2014 and the time to complete the questionnaire ranged from 8 to 15 minutes, depending on necessary clarifications and also the qualifications of the individual answering these questions. From the ten stakeholders involved in tourism development in the area three did not respond: overall, seven completed questionnaires were obtained.

## **RESULTS**

The results of this study are shown in tables 1-9.

**Table 1.** Which of the following affects tourism-related businesses that are under your supervision (or belong to your professional association)? Please state its magnitude.

	Yes	No	No data
a. Reduction in turnover	42.857%	0%	57.143%
b. Decrease in revenue	42.857%	0%	57.143%
c. Staff reductions	14.286%	28.571%	57.143%
d. Business closures	71.429%	0%	28.571%
e. Business relocation	0%	28.571%	71.429%

In answer a, all individuals reported a 30% reduction. In b, reported rates ranged between 25 and 60%. In c, reported percentage was 50% and in d, reported rates ranged between 10 and 50%.

**Table 2.** How did you meet current crisis?

**Table 2.1.** Did your institution/affiliation take any actions to meet current crisis?

Yes	0%
No	100%

**Table 2.2.** Did you take/develop any collaborated actions with other stakeholders? (Record your level of satisfaction -fair, good or excellent- from this joint action/s)\*.

<u>Collaborations</u>			
a. with other local organizations or institutions involved in tourism development			
Yes	28.571%	No	71.429%
b. with other stakeholders within the region of Peloponnese involved in tourism development			
Yes	42.857%	No	57.143%
c. with the corresponding supervisory authority			
Yes	14.285%	No	85.175
d. with the corresponding tertiary association			
Yes	14.285%	No	85.175
e. with the ministry of tourism			

Yes	0%	No	100%
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*\*In all positive cases (yes) responders stated that the level of collaboration was excellent.*

**Table 3.** What actions should have been taken at a local, regional or national level to meet the current crisis and have not yet been taken?\*

- New forms of marketing, tourism restructuring, infrastructure development, new tourism programs
- Actions initially at local level, development of alternative forms of tourism
- Actions initially at local level, development of specific alternative forms of tourism
- New investment projects
- Tourism Planning and Restructuring
- Actions initially at local level, development of alternative forms of tourism (particularly sports and cycling tourism)
- Actions initially at local level, development of alternative forms of tourism (especially sports and mountain tourism)

*\* This was an open question.*

**Table 4.** State the three main local advantages capable to meet current crisis

<u>First choice</u>	
Natural environment	71.428%
Cultural heritage	14.286%
Infrastructure and services	14.286%
<u>Second choice</u>	
Access to destination	71.428%
Infrastructure and services	28.572%
<u>Third choice</u>	
Existing alternative forms of tourism	57.142%
Cultural heritage	28.572%
Infrastructure and services	14.286%

**Table 5.** Which alternative form of tourism is the most suitable to be developed in this area in your opinion?\*

Alternative form of tourism	Area
Religious tourism	All over the prefecture
Gastronomy tourism	Major hotels and resorts
Congress tourism	The town of Loutraki
Cultural tourism	All over the prefecture
Cruises	Corinth port
Bike tourism	All over the prefecture
Climbing and walking tourism	Ziria mountain

\* *This was an open question.*

**Table 6.** Does the prefecture have the appropriate infrastructure to extend tourist period throughout the year?

Yes	14.285%
No	85.175%

**Table 7.** Has casino tourism been satisfactory developed in your area?

Yes	14.285%
No	85.175%

**Table 8.** What is your opinion on cruise tourism development at the port of Corinth? Please briefly explain your answer

	Reason/requirement
Positive 42.857%	Proper infrastructure development
Negative 57.143%	Lack of infrastructure

**Table 9.** Who in your opinion should coordinate the development of an adequate local tourism strategy?

Local tourism authority's	14.285%
Regional government	0
The state (ministry of tourism)	0
A coordinating committee of all of the above	85.175%

## DISCUSSION

At first we were surprised by the small number of tourism stakeholders operating in the area and also of the unwillingness to participate. The small number of participants is clearly a limitation to our study: however, as the total number of stakeholders is small anyway and there are no similar post-crisis studies in Greece, our important findings can be used at least as reference points.

From the answers to the first question shown in Table 1, a reduction of 30% in turnover is estimated; this is a significant percentage, showing the depth of the crisis. Most stakeholders however do not have a clear picture due to lack of data: this is constantly observed in this study and represents a major impediment for developmental planning, since no adequate scientific analysis can be performed without proper information.

The decrease in the revenues of tourism enterprises is reported to be between 25 and 60%; this wide range is again based on estimations, as there is no solid evidence. The same is true for staff reduction (reported to be around 50%), but relies on the answer of only one stakeholder. Even so, however, these reductions are extremely high.

For businesses closed, the reported rate ranges between 10 and 50% depending on the economic field, location and specialization of services (i.e. hiking or bicycling businesses, who suffer the most) of each stakeholder. Finally, there appears to be no evidence of business relocation outside the prefecture as, from the businessman point of view, this is meaningless. We must note however that, if the Korinthia Chamber of Commerce had participated, we could have had a more accurate picture.

Table 2 gives a disappointing picture of the overall response to the crisis. No stakeholder independently took any action, while no intention for collaboration was seen, despite the fact that they silently admit that they can do nothing alone (Table 2.1) and seek collaborations in a later answer (Table 9). There is also no proposal as for the establishment of a coordinating body (possibly a convention bureau), that is, however, absolutely necessary for local tourism development (Papageorgiou, 2010).

For active stakeholders within the area of Peloponnese (the part of Greece that includes the prefecture of Korinthia), Table 2.2. shows that there appears to be only one real partnership (between the local tourism development body and the Korinth chamber of commerce), since the second recorded collaboration was between sports clubs: reported results however seems to be extremely positive. Finally, regarding the

cooperation between stakeholders and the relevant supervisory authority or union, only the Corinth Port Authority had such activities (a mandatory obligation, however): the most striking finding of this study, however, was that no stakeholder operating in the prefecture of Korinthia had any kind of collaboration with the ministry of tourism.

Table 3 records the answers to the third question, showing that the majority of participants believe that any initiative must start at the local level based on restructuring, investment and infrastructure development, while new guidelines and priorities for local tourism should be established. The majority of responders (57.1%) believe that the development of alternative forms of tourism is necessary to meet current crisis. Table 4 shows that the main local advantages for tourism development are the natural environment, the easy access from other areas (mainly Attica) and also the existing infrastructure and the existing alternative forms of tourism.

As for the most appropriate form of alternative tourism to be developed in the region (Table 5), opinions vary depending on the occupation and field of each vector: religious tourism, gastronomy tourism, congress tourism, cultural tourism, cruises, cycling tourism, mountaineering and trekking were proposed. Obviously this wide reported range is not helpful for strategic planning, especially as there is no evidence that these opinions are based on research and data analysis.

All but one participants think that, at present, the tourism period cannot be extended throughout the year (Table 6), merely due to insufficient existing infrastructure: all but one also believes that casino tourism is not yet fully developed (Table 7). Furthermore, participants seem to agree on cruise development, although they express opposing views: three responders consider that it is possible if proper infrastructure is developed, three others think that it is not possible, as no infrastructure exists, while the seventh feels that all efforts tending towards tourism development should be welcomed (Table 8).

From the answers shown in Tables 3, 5, 6 and 8, it is apparent that the issue of infrastructure is foggy. In Tables 4 and 5 existing local infrastructure seems to be an advantage to meet current crisis: in Tables 6 and 8 however, on both holiday period expansion and cruise development answers, participants think that the current infrastructure is insufficient. The understanding of quality, quantity and specification of infrastructure needed for local tourism development, apparently seems unclear.

Finally, despite the reported lack of cooperation, the answers recorded in Table 9 are extremely promising: 85.71% of stakeholders believe that the local authorities, the regional government and the state

should work together to produce an adequate developmental strategy and make the structural changes needed to meet current crisis. It remains striking, however, that these responders, who appear to favor cooperation as the only solution to overcome the crisis, have no contact with the ministry of tourism that sets the national strategy for tourism development in Greece.

International experience shows that the role of tourism stakeholders in tourism development, particularly for the development of special and alternative forms of tourism, is very important, ranging from the management and exploitation of tourism resources to research and contribution to tourism strategy development (Dredge, 2006, Stavrinoudis and Parthenis, 2009, Apostolakis, 2008, Derrett R., 2001, WTO, 1994, Gunn and Var, 2002, Mason, 2008, Ahmad et al, 2012, Tuohino and Konu, 2014). The World Tourism Organization (WTO, 1994) indicates that, although the design, the adoption and the development of certain special and alternative forms of tourism is the responsibility of national tourism bodies, this activity must include representatives of local and national agencies, associations and enterprises, since their local knowledge will actively contribute (through consultation processes) to the definition of the main axes of the local and regional tourism development (Stavrinoudis and Parthenis, 2009).

The role of the local and regional tourism stakeholders is also related to research and guidance of tourism development in three key areas: the tourism markets (both existing and potential), the strategic planning of tourism and the attempt to link the needs of the tourism market to the conditions and restrictions set by tourism planning (Apostolakis, 2008, Gunn and Var, 2002, Ahmad et al, 2012, Tuohino and Konu, 2014). Their intermediate role is also crucial in cases of specific and alternative forms of tourism, for the development of which there might be a conflict with local or private interests (Apostolakis, 2008, Mason, 2008).

Local and regional stakeholders can also manage community resources related to the development of specific and alternative forms of tourism, taking actions to allow diversification of the tourism product, making it attractive for tourists (Venetsanopoulou, 2006, Ahmad et al, 2012). Also, in cases of specialized products, stakeholders can also act as the administrators of the infrastructure: for example, they could act as managers and maintainers of thematic tourism establishments, such as protected areas and specialized museums (Gunn and Var, 2002).

Finally, their role can be also important on issues related to human resources, a point missed by the participants of this study. However, by providing specialized and targeted tourism education and training, local

and regional organizations can help local workers to develop specific skills (Tuohino and Konu, 2014): in Spain, for example, regional tourism authorities are allowed to operate schools for tourism hospitality and catering (Newton, 1996).

## **CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS**

This study leads to a number of important conclusions:

- There is a complete lack of will among the stakeholders of Corinthia for taking own actions to overcome current crisis.
- There is a complete lack of cooperation between these stakeholders and the ministry of tourism.
- There is no record on any parameter of local tourism, making tourism planning impossible.
- There is a strong local view, as stakeholders think that tourism development must begin at the local level, not showing any interest on any form of collaboration at a regional or national level.
- While all stakeholders think that the development of alternative forms of tourism will contribute to financial growth and tourism market expansion, there is a considerable disagreement on the specific forms that should be developed in the area.
- Considerable differentiation and ambiguity was also observed on important issues, such as the further development of casino and cruise tourism, indicating that the local stakeholders have a rather narrow view, reflecting the aforementioned lack of cooperation.
- Infrastructure development remains unspecified, while important issues such as the structural changes needed remain dim, unclarified and probably not well understood.
- It is very important however that cooperation seems to be the only way for tourism development and overcoming of current crisis.

It is apparent that only coordinated efforts can lead to adequate developmental strategies. Basic acts include:

- The establishment of high-level tourism standards

- The utilization of all available resources of the region, for the development of the most appropriate specific and alternative forms of tourism that could also help expanding tourism period and local employment .
- The establishment of a new vector (a participation of the local government, the Prefecture of Korinthia, the Municipality of Korinthia and the Chamber of Commerce of Corinth) to a. record the current situation, b. coordinate specific actions (meetings, congresses, participation in expeditions, education etc) and c. develop a comprehensive master plan for local and regional tourism development.

The stakeholders of the prefecture of Korinthia, with their knowledge and experience could contribute greatly to the national effort to overcome the current crisis and also achieve local and regional tourism development.

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