

THE TOURISM SECTOR IN GREECE: A SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE AND REVIEW

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This paper discusses the tourism sector in Greece from a sociological perspective. More specifically, it attempts to paint an elaborate picture of the socioeconomic and sociocultural factors that influence the tourism sector in Greece. It does so, by focusing on the distribution of tourism activity and hotel accommodation in the country, the tourist overnight stays and the contribution of the tourism sector to the country's economy. The impact of tourism in the labour market as well as the ills and potentials that characterise it, are also examined.

Keywords: *economy, hotel accommodation, labour market, review, tourism sector*



INTRODUCTION

Greece is a Mediterranean country situated between the West and the East. Geographically, it is located at the southernmost part of the Balkan Peninsula, a place that raises questions of whether the country is “a Balkan state in Europe – or a European state in Balkans” (Rasku, 2007: 10). Economically, however, it constitutes part of the Western hemisphere. Historically speaking, Greek ideals and thoughts are considered the foundations of Western civilisation. Conversely, from an ecclesiastical perspective, Greece is opposed to the Latin West (Catholic and Protestant) and holds a pro- Eastern and neo-Orthodox position. As a result, Orthodox Christianity links Greece to Byzantium and brings the country closer to Eastern European culture and heritage (Sapountzis et. al, 2006: 32; Rasku, 2007: 57). It is this intertwined relation of Greece with both the East and the West coupled with the image of a sun-drenched exotic and history-beset location that attracts millions of tourists every year. Also, the country is home to eighteen UNESCO World Heritage Sites along with a plethora of islands, facts that make Greece a popular tourist destination for many. Tourism plays a pivotal role in the country’s economy to the extent that it has significantly contributed to its recovery between the years 2008-2013. Moreover, it contributes to the country’s GDP, employment and the reduction of the payment deficit balance. It is because of its significant role and impact that tourism, its benefits and also its ills are probed in detail and constitute the topic of this article.

A BRIEF HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF THE TOURISM SECTOR UP TO DATE

Organized tourism first appeared in Greece in 1895 with the establishment of a non-profit organization called “Cycling Club”. Since then, an array of clubs has been founded and plenty of organised excursions and short trips have also been planned (Konsolas, 2002).

Tourism in Greece made its appearance in the 1950s as a means of sightseeing. At that time, Greece had almost recovered from the Second World War and the civil war that had tormented it for a considerable time. Tourists used Athens or Thessaloniki as a departure base to visit other areas of archaeological interest or islands of the Saronic Gulf. At the same time, the islands of Mykonos, Corfu and Rhodes began to attract tourist attention. The first foreign tour operators appeared in Corfu and Rhodes (Tsartas, 2010). During the twenty years from 1965 to 1985, tourism is growing, and Greece is beginning to establish itself as a destination for summer holidays with tourists flowing in from Europe and the USA. However, the huge increase in tourism, from 1.6 million in 1970 to 5.2 million in 1980 and 8.9 million in 1990, has led to unprecedented degradation of the landscape and the environment (Kostopoulou, 2017). Cultural tourism goes downhill and starts to give way to the 'sun and sea' model which is strengthened by the increase of tourist destinations in areas such as the Dodecanese, the Sporades and Halkidiki. As a result, tourism infrastructure is also rising; today Greece has 40 airports, out of which 15 are international, and about 10,000 hotels. Despite their large number, these hotels are characterised by poor land-planning and no consideration for environmental protection.

The period from 1985 until today was marked by intensification of tourism and standardization of the tourist product. This is the time when the disadvantages of the tourist development model of Greece has become evident and the need for upgrading the only tourist product of the country becomes clear. Today, for Greek tourism to become a high-end product and to justify its price, modernization is required, namely special identity and character, whereas any resemblance with products of other neighbouring countries, that are currently successfully competing against it, should be avoided.

The paper is structured as follows: the next section focuses on the distribution of hotel accommodation and the tourist activity in Greece and offers in insight into the categorisation method and

criteria of hotels. The section that follows examines the interrelation between overnight stays of incoming tourism and tourist earnings against the backdrop of international events and economic and political developments. Section 4 discusses the extend to which tourism sector contributes to the country’s GDP while section 5 presents the importance of tourism sector with regard to employability and the opening of new vacancies. Having placed emphasis on the tourist sector’s contribution and benefits in the preceding sections, the final section (section 6) briefly touches upon the ills and potential of Greek tourism, namely low tourism expenditure and competitiveness, lack of brand name and short tourism duration.

THE DISTRIBUTION OF HOTEL ACCOMMODATION AND TOURIST ACTIVITY IN GREECE

According to Table 1 that follows there are four ‘groups’ of Greek destinations. In the first group are the islands of the southern Aegean and the Ionian Islands, followed by Thessaly, Peloponnese, Attica and the North Aegean islands in the second group. The third group consists of Epirus, Central Greece, Western Greece and Central Macedonia and in the fourth group Western Macedonia and Eastern Macedonia and Thrace are included. In 2017, the island of Santorini was voted 5th among the top 10 most important islands in the world and 10th among the top 25 tourist destinations in the world. Crete is among the top 25 European destinations in 2018 (Travelandleisure.com, 2017).

Table 1: *Ranking of Greek regions based on average tourist expenditure per visitor*

	Region	Average tourist expenditure (€)
1 st place	Crete	682,2
	Ionian Islands	611,9

	Region	Average tourist expenditure (€)
	Cyclades	600,0
	Dodecanese	600,0
2 nd place	Thessaly	422,0
	Northern Aegean	398,6
	Peloponnese	383,7
	Attica	381,7
3 rd place	Epirus	304,0
	Central Greece	286,7
	Western Greece	283,5
	Central Macedonia	264,0
4 th place	Eastern Macedonia & Thrace	211,5
	Western Macedonia	205,1

Source: Ifantis (2017)

In 2018, the incoming tourism reached three times the Greek population. This could be due to the country being home to 18 UNESCO World Heritage Sites. This upsurge in tourism contributed significantly to the recovery of the Greek economy in the period 2008-2013, a period of vertical decreasing trend in total economic activity.

In Greece there is a plethora of tourist businesses of all kinds. Consequently, there is great competition and small profit margins. However, in the last few years vertical integration instances have occurred (i.e. large tour operators buy hotels, transport companies, etc). This vertical integration, on one hand, results in offering more affordable packages to tourists, but, on the other hand, the quality of the product becomes uniform and the services provided to tourists are not personalised, a characteristic that according to the new trends in tourism is favored.

With regard to the distribution of hotel accommodation, there are 9,730 hotels currently operating in Greece with a total capacity of up to 788,553 people. Table 2 indicates the distribution of Greek hotels, rooms and beds based on star rating hotel categorization. It is evident

that the highest percentage (39.82%) of hotels in Greece falls under the category of 2-star rating. The second largest percentage, that is 25.70%, is the 3-star hotels. Overall, in Greece there is a great variety of hotels, rooms and beds. As shown, luxury hotels are the fewest. Unlike international hotel chains, for example Marriott, which operates 5,700 hotels in more than 110 countries (Fortune, Greece, 2016), in Greece Grecotel - the largest hotel chain which works in collaboration with TUI Group (largest tour operator in Europe, with an annual turnover of 18.5 million in 2017) - operates approximately 30 luxury hotels.

Table 2: *The distribution of hotels and rooms of Greek hotels based on star rating*

Stars	No of hotels	No of rooms	No of beds	Hotel percentage
5*	496	74.884	153.132	5,10%
4*	1.485	107.805	211.064	15,20%
3*	2.515	96.129	186.056	25,70%
2*	3.900	108.383	204.193	39,82%
1*	1.387	26.926	51.600	14,18%
Total:	9.783	414.127	806.045	100%

Source: The Research Institute for Tourism and Forecasts (2018)

Table 3 below provides a further breakdown of hotel distribution based on rooms per hotel unit and the number of beds per unit. This breakdown is described based on the quality of hotels (i.e. star rating system). Therefore, what derives from this table is that the highest the star rating is, the more rooms and beds a hotel has. For example, 5-star hotels have an average of approximately 152 rooms and 309 beds. 4-star hotels have around 74 rooms and 144 beds and hotels with less stars, such as 1 star, have an average of about 19 rooms and 37 beds.

Table 3: *Greek hotel size based on rooms and beds*

Stars	Rooms per unit (number)	Beds per unit (number)
5*	151,8	309,0
4*	74,1	143,9
3*	38,8	75,1

Stars	Rooms per unit (number)	Beds per unit (number)
2*	28,0	52,7
1*	19,3	37,0
Total:	41,8	81,0

Source: Nikolaides (2017)

The information provided in Tables 2 and 3 is supplemented by Table 4 that follows. It becomes apparent that hotel distribution and the star rating is closely interlinked with the region each hotel is located. As it turns out, most five-star hotels (144) are in the South Aegean region. Crete follows with 97 five-star hotels, while Central Macedonia occupies the third place with 48 hotels.

Table 4: Distribution of hotels (based on star rating) in Greek regions

	5*	4*	3*	2*	1*	TOTAL (in region)
Eastern Macedonia & Trace	11	29	96	168	75	379
Attica	34	103	136	267	109	649
Northern Aegean	6	32	125	177	42	382
Western Greece	4	40	95	105	25	269
Western Macedonia	3	18	65	36	4	126

	5*	4*	3*	2*	1*	TOTAL (in region)
Epirus	11	89	149	133	29	411
Thessaly	26	117	132	216	77	568
Ionian Islands	28	117	221	490	74	930
Central Macedonia	48	100	269	361	417	1.195
Crete	97	249	361	656	205	1.568
Southern Aegean	144	356	484	870	214	2.068
Peloponnese	22	120	210	233	75	660
Central Greece	10	42	129	278	66	525
TOTAL (in the country)	444	1.412	2.472	3.990	1.412	9.730

Source: Nikolaides (2017)

The view that distribution of hotels is strongly connected with the region, and especially coastal areas, is supported by data drawn from Eurostat (2019). This data indicates that most hotels in Greece, regardless of the region they are situated, have been built close to sea. In island regions, as is expected, this percentage reaches 100%. In other areas, the proportion of coastal hotels is at least 60%. For

example, in Epirus 62% of hotels are in a coastal area and 38% in a mountainous area.

Figure 1, which is found below, provides further details on the size of the hotels based on the number of rooms. Specifically, it displays gradations of five sizes: Very small hotels with up to 25 rooms, some larger hotels with 25 to 99 rooms. The third category is cumulative and measures the rate of hotels with more than 100 rooms. Category number four is also included in there with 100 to 249 rooms. The last category includes the larger hotels with more than 250 rooms.

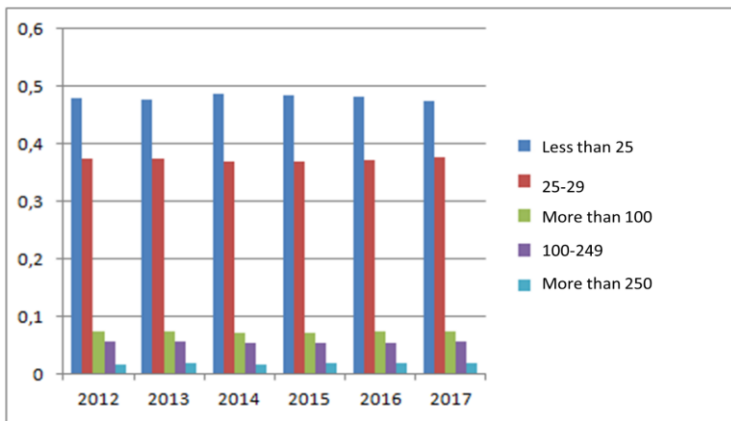


Figure 1: Hotel distribution based on the number of rooms for the period 2012-2017

Source: Eurostat (2018)

According to Eurostat (2018), hotels with a capacity of more than 100 rooms are less than 10% of all hotels in Greece. On the contrary, almost half of hotels have less than 25 rooms. What derives from this is that most hotels in Greece are small, family-run businesses. Comparing Greece to other European tourist destinations, data suggests that Greece has 5% of the total number of tourist accommodation in Europe, while Italy, Croatia, Spain and Germany have 31%, 15% and 8% respectively. Greece shows an equal rate of accommodation with France (Eurostat, 2019).

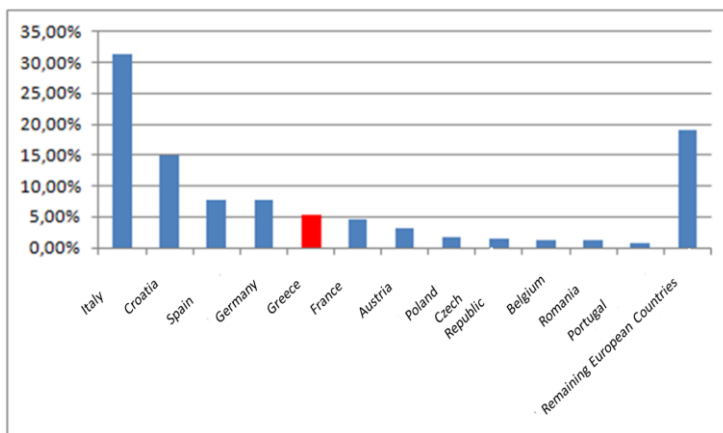


Figure 2: Tourist accommodation rate of Greece in relation to other European countries Source: Eurostat (2019)

Overnight Stays Of Incoming Tourists In Greece

Greek tourism is characterized by intense seasonality, leaving the capacity of tourist businesses during the winter months untapped. As is presented in the following figure (Figure 3), the overnight stays in Greek hotels show a peak in August, while their upward trend starts in March and the downward trend in October each year. It is noteworthy, however, that over the past 5 years, the number of tourist overnight stays has been steadily rising each month compared to the same month of the previous year.

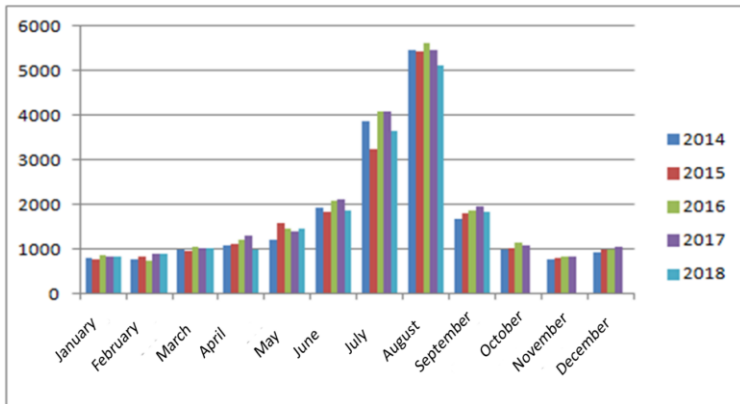


Figure 3: Monthly data of tourist overnight stays in the last 5 years (2014-2018).
Source: Eurostat (2019c)

The majority of tourism in Greece (almost 77%) is inbound, a fact that shows the dependency of Greek tourism industry on international events and developments (economic, politics, etc.).

Due to the close proximity of Greece to countries like Turkey and others in the Middle East, and also its vicinity to politically and economically unstable countries, Greece is a point of entry to a major refugee and migratory stream with Europe and other countries of the western world as a final destination. Immigrant waves have a negative effect on the tourist image of the regions that receive them. On the other hand, when Greece faces political and economic instability, tourists seek substitutes of the tourist product in neighbouring markets like Turkey due to lower prices.

According to the Hellenic Statistical Authority, a staggering 92% of incoming tourists in Greece come from Europe, 3% from America, 4% from Asia and Oceania while the percentage of tourists visiting from Africa is nil (2015). 66% of arrivals in our country are made by air, 30% by road and only 4% by sea (SETE, 2018). Figure 4 follows with a detailed analysis of the countries (and tourist earnings) where

tourists come from in Greece for the periods 2005-2011 and 2012-2016. While there is a decrease in tourist earnings from these countries between the two time periods, mainly due to the economic crisis in Europe, there is an evident growth from countries like France and Russia, while less growth is observed in countries such as Switzerland, Australia, Romania and Albania.

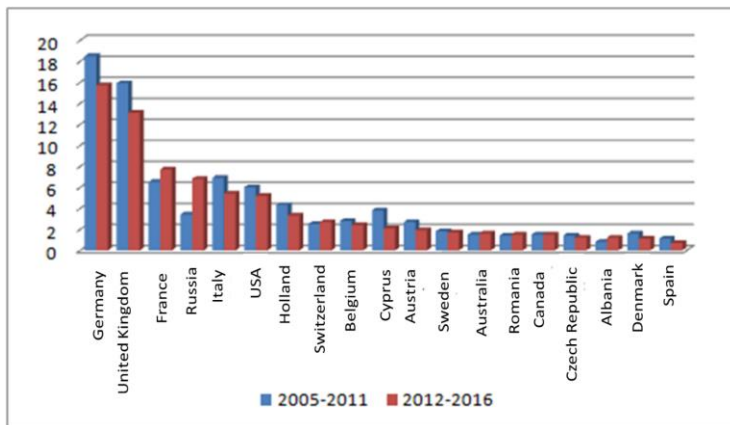


Figure 4: Percentage participation of major countries of origin (based on tourism earnings in the periods 2005-2011 and 2012-2016)
 Source: Nicolaidis (2017)

Due to the uncertainty of the exchange rate of the British pound as a consequence of BREXIT, there may be an additional future decline in the British incoming tourist flow to Greece. There is a significant increase in arrivals from central Europe and Balkan countries since one can easily visit Greece by road because of the geographical proximity. Despite the contrary information deriving from Figure 4, which concerns until 2016, the following year saw a decrease of incoming tourism from Russia due to Ruble devaluation. Generally, the international arrivals and, as a consequence, the tourism earnings seem to be directly influenced by the exchange rates and the economic situation of the countries of origin, fuel prices and

other socio-political conditions (political stability, terrorism, wars, diseases etc.).

In Greece, not only there is an unbalanced tourist development of geographic areas (as shown in Tables 1, 2a-2d), but also a shortage of qualified staff, which has led to the establishment of a significant number of new university tourism departments and postgraduate programs in the last years (2015-2018) as well as distance learning programs. Such is the need for specialization that 70% of the unemployed who found employment in the tourist industry, at least until 2006, came from non-tourism professional backgrounds (Mavrodontis and Bonarou, 2006). Indicative of the great availability of job opportunities in the tourism sector is the matching of workers and beds: For every 100 hotel beds, there are 16 jobs.

Further to the detailed presentation of the nationalities of the incoming tourists in Greece, a longitudinal monitoring of the duration of stay for the last twelve years is shown below (Figure 5).

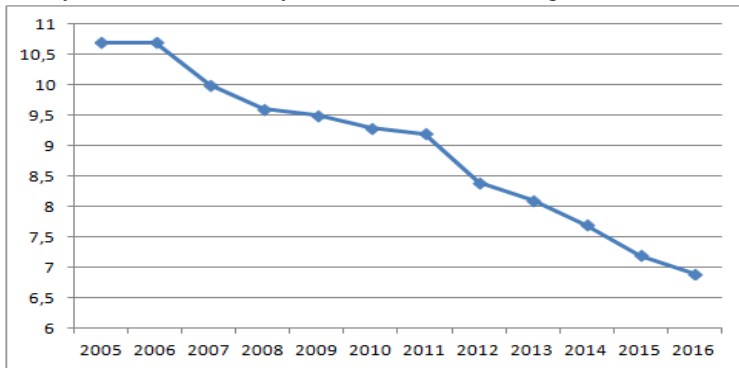


Figure 5: Average daily stay of incoming tourists.

Source: Bank of Greece (2011)

The constant declining to the average length of stay is shown to result in a fictitious increase in daily tourist expenditure per trip. This is due to the total cost being divided by a smaller number of days.

However, that is not the case. The reduction in length of stay in Greece is due both to the international financial crisis that has shrunk consumer purchasing power and to the modern working conditions that allow for shorter holiday periods. Thus, while in 2005 the average length of stay was about 10-11 days, in 2016 this number was reduced to 7 days. What follows next is an analysis of the contribution of tourism to the Greek economy.

THE CONTRIBUTION OF THE TOURISM INDUSTRY TO THE COUNTRY'S ECONOMY

The tourism industry makes a major contribution to the country's overall economic activity. But since 2013, the change in arrivals, overnight stays and revenue do not follow the same trend. Specifically, while arrivals indicate large annual increases, overnight stays show smaller increases, a fact which leads to the conclusion that tourists now go on shorter holidays. What is even more important is that revenue shows a much smaller annual increase, which differs greatly from the increase in arrivals and overnight stays. This reflects the downward trend in the actual income of tourists. The fact, however, is that when arrivals increase without a corresponding increase in revenue, tourism does not contribute substantially to the country, but rather the opposite.

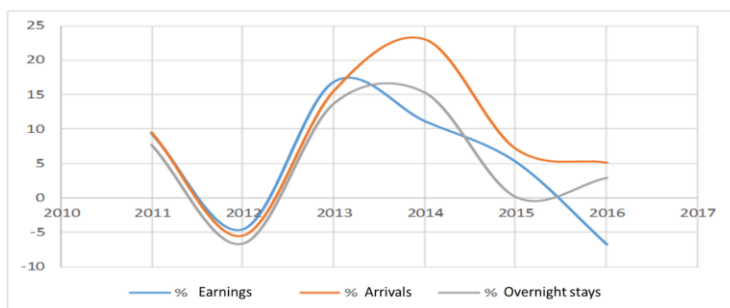


Figure 6: Percentage change in earnings, arrivals and overnight stays in 2010-2016

Source: Etravelnews.gr (2017)

Next, for a comparative reflection of the position of this sector in Greece, it is essential to look at the contribution of tourism to other European countries. Table 5 below shows the ranking based on the participation of the tourism industry in the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of all European countries.

Table 5: Ranking of European countries based on the participation of the tourism industry in the GDP (Statistics 2017).

Ranking	European Country	Tourism Percentage in GDP
1	Ireland	34,6
2	Malta	27,1
3	Albania	26,2
4	Croatia	25
5	Montenegro	23,7
6	Cyprus	22,3
7	Greece	19,7
8	Portugal	17,3
9	Estonia	15,4
10	Spain	14,9
11	Austria	14,8
12	Italy	13
13	Slovenia	11,9
14	Turkey	11,6
15	Bulgaria	11,5
16	Germany	10,7
17	United Kingdom	10,5
18	Bosnia	9,6
19	Latvia	9,2
20	Switzerland	9,1

Ranking	European Country	Tourism Percentage in GDP
21	Norway	9,0
22	France	8,9
23	Finland	8,3
24	Hungary	8
25	Czech Republic	7,8
26	Denmark	7,7
27	Serbia	6,7
28	FYROM	6,6
29	Ireland	5,9
30	Ukraine	5,7
31	Belgium	5,6
32	Holland	5,2
33	Lithuania	4,9
34	Russia	4,8
35	Poland	4,5
36	Luxemburg	4,3

Source: Knoema (2019)

Greece ranks 7th among 36 European countries. It should be acknowledged that countries such as Albania, Croatia and Montenegro cannot be compared with Greece, whose currency is the euro, and faces a different level of price and economic conditions in comparison to the aforementioned emerging economies of the European area. Tourism significantly contributes to the country's GDP and employment. According to the study of Mavrodontis and Bonarou (2006), the researchers concluded that tourism has contributed to an overall improvement in the distribution of regional income over the last thirty years. Tourism also plays a significant part in the reduction of the payment deficit balance and constitutes the first source of foreign exchange in all types of Greek exports. The benefits of tourism can be seen both in income and also employment across the economy. In brief, the contribution of tourism to the Greek economy can be summarised as follows: Direct tourism contribution

to Greek GDP amounted to 10.3% in 2017, an increase of 9.3% compared to 2016. The total tourism's contribution to GDP (including indirect contribution) amounted to 27% in 2017. Especially in southern Aegean, Crete and the Ionian Sea, tourism accounts for almost half of GDP. Since about 90% of tourist activity comes from foreign tourists, tourism is justifiably considered to be a very important export activity covering 80% of the goods balance deficit (SETE, 2018). In terms of employment, in the third quarter of 2017, employment in tourism amounted to 10.4% of total employment, compared to 8.1% in 2013 and 7.5% in 2008 (SETE, 2018b).

It is needless to say that the tourist product is complex and involves many branches of material and intangible production. When tourists visit a country, in addition to the money spent on transportation and housing, souvenirs are bought, local means of transport and medical services are used, money is spent for entertainment, e.g. entrance fee to a festival, an exhibition etc.

Tourism has direct and indirect benefits to the Greek economy. It increases employment in businesses offering consumer services to tourists, accommodation, transport, etc. There is also an increase in demand and employment in services supplying the above sectors, e.g. agriculture, processing etc. (Mavrodontis and Bonarou, 2006). Thus, the increased income generated by many sectors due to tourism, circulates and has multiplying effects.

The direct contribution exclusively relates to tourism activity, while the total contribution also includes the multiplying effect of tourism on the overall economy. According to the most recent SETE estimate (2018), the tourist multiplier is between 2.2 and 2.65. Table 6 shows in detail the multiplier of each tourism sector as well as the percentage distribution of tourist revenues. Conferences have the highest multiplier, followed by trade, travel agencies and transport. Car rental and entertainment appear to have the lowest multiplier.

Table 6: *Percentage distribution of tourist revenues and the tourism activity multiplier per sector in 2017*

	% Distribution of tourism revenues	Multiplier
Accommodation	45,3	2,50
Food services	18,0	2,50
Sea transport	9,0	2,41
Road transport	7,1	3,25
Air transport	5,4	2,98
Trade	4,9	3,69
Entertainment	3,8	1,90
Travel agencies	3,7	3,68
Car rental	1,8	1,39
Conferences	1,0	4,13
Weighted average		2,65

Source: SETE (2018)

As mentioned above, tourism seems to fill a significant gap in the active demand of the Greek economy which is created due to the financial crisis. According to estimates by the World Tourism Organization, tourism's contribution to Greek GDP will amount to 25% by 2028. WTO also predicts that tourism's contribution will continue to grow at a rate of 3.7% each year for the next decade, resulting in 52.8 billion in 2028. (WTO, 2018). The figure below shows the evolution of direct, indirect and induced tourism contribution to GDP from 2008 to 2018 and a forecast for 2028.

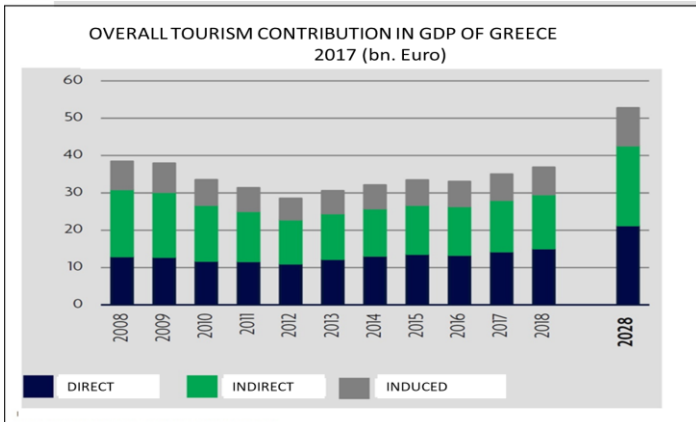


Figure 7: Total tourism contribution to GDP of Greece

Source: World Tourism Organisation (2018)

Having discussed Greece's tourism sector and its contribution to national income, it is now essential to highlight the impact of tourism on the labour market. As a very important factor of the economy, employment is presented in the following section.

Employment In The Country's Tourism Sector

As mentioned above, tourism sector has such a high absorption rate that it also offers employment to workers whose studies are not related to tourism. Eurostat provides a detailed analysis of the workforce and employment in the tourism sector (i.e. the number of employees based on the size of the tourist business, the type of employment (full or part-time), age and education level, the percentage of foreigners employed by tourism enterprises, the duration of employment, the fluctuation of employment based on the variation in the number of overnight stays, the data on labour and wages cost as well as the difference in unemployment rates at national and regional level due to tourism.

Worldwide, 1/10 of jobs are in the tourism sector and 1/5 of net job creation has been in tourism over the last decade (World Tourism Organization, 2018). In Greece in 2017, tourism included 459,000 jobs, or 12.2% of total employment in Greece. This figure was expected to increase by 5.3% in 2018, i.e. to reach 592,000 and to account for 13.3% of total employment. Regarding the total contribution of tourism to employment, which also includes the indirect contribution, it amounted to 934,500 jobs, i.e. 24.8% of total employment. The latter rate was estimated to be 28.5% of the total employment in 2018 (World Tourism Organization, 2018).

Table 7 is of particular interest because it shows that more men are employed in the tourism sector in Greece with the exception of specific sectors such as accommodation and other selected sectors whereas the percentage of women employed exceeds male employment by 51% and 54%, respectively. However, in travel agencies and air transport male participation prevails over women.

Table 7: *Percentage breakdown based on gender of employees in the tourism and other relevant sectors (Figures 2014)*

Sector	Gender	Percentage %
Non-finance sector	Men	65
	Women	32
Services	Men	61
	Women	39
Selected tourism sectors	Men	49
	Women	51
Air transport	Men	66
	Women	34
Accommodation	Men	46
	Women	54
Travel agencies	Men	53
	Women	47

Source: Eurostat (2019)

Having acquired a general picture of the tourist market in Greece in the previous sections, problems, possibilities and prospects are briefly discussed below.

1. Ills And Potentials Of Greek Tourism

According to the study of Mavrodontis and Bonarou (2006), by the year 2000 demand was exhibited for the Greek tourist product from medium or low-income classes. 75% of total demand was managed by tour operators, who provided competitive packages in these classes. To date, Greece has been found to be an outlier on conference tourism. It is also not an ideal destination for a short three-day or four-day holiday because of its remoteness from other European countries and its geographical position on the south-eastern part of Europe. There appears to be room for growth in cruise and sea tourism if international standards are met and there is also a great deal of room for developing alternative forms of tourism, sports tourism, medical tourism, agritourism, religious and cultural tourism, and in line with international trends all these types of tourism can thrive. In a survey on tourism inflows into Greece and the macroeconomic factors that affect it (Agiomirgianakis and Sfakianakis, 2016), researchers identify GDP per capita (Purchasing Power Parities, PPP), the relative prices of Greece and foreign countries, the prices in the main competitive tourist countries, the cost of traveling abroad and the extraordinary circumstances (such as major events hosted by the country or the economic crisis) as important determinants of Greek tourism. What draws attention and urgently needs to be addressed is that the Greek tourist product is currently characterized by several flaws such as a low competitiveness, lack of brand name, seasonality and short tourism duration. These pitfalls are discussed in the following sections.

2. Low Tourist Expenditure And Low Competitiveness

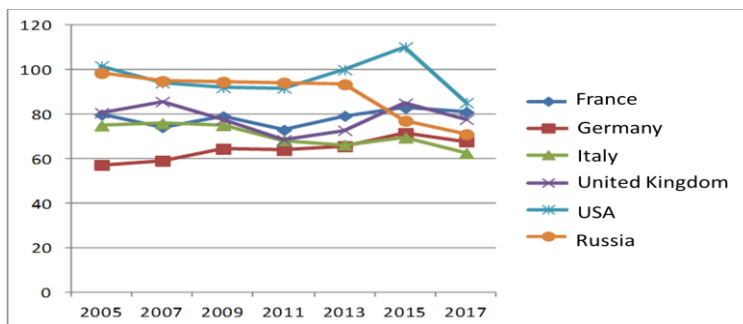


Figure 8: The progress of average tourist expenditure per night of the main tourist countries of origin.

Source: Bank of Greece (2019)

Today, the average tourist spends less money compared to the tourist who visited Greece fifty years ago (Tsartas and Papatheodorou, 2014). Figure 8 summarizes the expenditure trend per night from 2005 to 2017 (every two years) of the main tourist countries of origin. A steady decline in Russian and Italian expenditure is evident, while the other countries show fluctuations with a sharp decline in 2015, which continues until 2017. This downward trend is directly related to the robustness of the economies from which tourists originate, as well as the inability to attract tourists of a higher economic and social class who could spend more. Admittedly, Greek tourism suffers from a lack of competitiveness.

Indicative of the position and positive evaluation of the Greek tourist product could be its classification: In 2013, the Greek tourism sector was ranked 72 on environmental sustainability issues and 127 (among 130 countries) on price competitiveness (Tsartas and Papatheodorou, 2014). This ranking signified that there were 71 other countries whose tourism industry respects and protects the

environment more than the Greek tourism industry. There are also 126 countries with more competitive prices in the tourist product. 2015 saw the improvement of the competitiveness of Greek tourism, which ranked 31st in the global index of Travel and Tourism Competitiveness (32nd in 2013 and 29th in 2011), which includes a total of 141 countries (Dianeosis, 2015). The overall competitiveness index consists of 14 individual indicators and is published every two years by the World Tourism Organization. These indicators are: 1) hygiene, 2) tourism infrastructure, 3) priority given to tourism, 4) air transport infrastructure, 5) cultural resources, 6) human resources, 7) technology and information technology, 9) road network, 10) ports, 11) safety and security, 12) environmental sustainability, 13) business environment, 14) price competitiveness. Therefore, a country may show progress in one or more sectors and subsequently these sectors may indicate an increase in overall competitiveness or vice versa. Greece ranks in the lowest index places in the business environment and price competitiveness, while it occupies relatively high positions in health and tourism infrastructure (World Economic Forum, 2015). According to a survey by Agiomirgianakis et al. (2013) on the profitability of Greek tourism businesses and the factors determining it in an environment of economic crisis, the age of a business (reliability), the size of a business and the low-cost access to financing from the financial system are in fact factors that can positively and effectively influence the profitability of a business operating in the tourism sector. Also, according to the above survey, the economic crisis seems to have had a significant negative impact on the profitability of the sector's businesses. Therefore, those factors affecting profitability should be considered in the process of decision-making at the enterprise level as well as the measures of the policy-makers aiming to support/stimulate investment activity in the tourism sector. The findings of this research suggest that entrepreneurs should, among other things, adopt appropriate risk avoidance policies by following certain business practices and risk hedging techniques,

such the establishment of long-term contracts with organizations. In addition, the Greek state could support tourism sector businesses, either by providing direct subventions or reducing VAT rates, so that the sector can overcome the recession and remain a factor of growth for the Greek economy.

3. Lack Of Brand Name

Until now the Greek tourist product was mainly based on the "sun and sea" model, without providing a qualitatively integrated tourist service. The majority of hotels are small units either unable to cooperate with each other for geographical reasons or unwilling due to a sense of competition. This results in limited bargaining power over tour operators who offer services at a very low price. Moreover, a lack of effective coordination between the different levels of state government (local, regional and central) leads to each administration level following its own strategy. Sprawling urban construction in most tourist areas has resulted to low-aesthetic appeal of tourist units that appear to have a negative impact and reduce holiday enjoyment and devalue the tourist product.

4. Seasonality And 7-Month Tourism Duration

With regard to the duration of the tourist season, it extends over a short period of time, usually beginning at Easter, continues in the summer months and, depending on the region (mainland of Greece or islands), stops early in the autumn. In 2017, 81.0% of arrivals and 86.0% of revenue were recorded in the second and third quarters of the year (SETE, 2018b). These elements clearly indicate the seasonality that characterizes Greek tourism.

Due to climate change and milder winters, as well as the opening of new markets (such as China's market), there is a possibility of expansion of the tourist activity during the winter season.

The rise of income in developing countries creates a high-income class which, when coupled with low birth rates and an aging population in developed countries, provides developing countries an opportunity to become an important reservoir for international tourism (Zerefos, 2014). Moreover, the tendency of companies to give shorter regular work leave, and the tendency for continuing education (at undergraduate and postgraduate level) leaves little time for long-term holidays, thus increasing the tendency for weekend or three-day vacation. As mentioned above, the location of Greece at the south-eastern end of Europe does not make it a first-choice destination for a three-day holiday. This prospect however can be developed through domestic tourism.

CONCLUSION

This paper reviews the structure of the Greek tourist sector in a descriptive and sociological perspective. It enables tourism specialists interested in the Greek tourism sector to understand quickly the past, the present and conjecture the future of the sector and other similar ones in the broader Mediterranean Sea. When an interested party seeks information about the Greek tourism sector, one usually finds dry numbers and statistics, but finds no background information and explanations that put the reader into a comprehensive understanding framework. This sociological review does exactly this by starting from the roots and past of the Greek tourism and then moves to its geographical allocation throughout the country, the dispersion of hotel potential which is the backbone of tourism in one country and the state-of-the-art of the labor employed in tourism. Last but not least, this review paper ends with a brief but comprehensive explanation of the assets and drawbacks of the Greek tourism and could serve as an understanding tool not only for specialists and policy makers interested in Greek tourism, but also the ones in neighboring countries and the broader Mediterranean Sea countries.

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