

TRADE FAIRS, TOURISM AND CITY: THESSALONIKI INTERNATIONAL FAIR AND THE CONCEPT OF HONOURED COUNTRIES

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Trade Fairs, throughout their long history, have always interacted with their host cities on multiple levels. The significant contribution of trade fairs to the tourism development of their host cities was and still remains undisputed. The city of Thessaloniki has recorded a long and remarkable historical tradition in the

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organisation of trade fairs. This paper attempts to examine the concept of the 'Honoured Country' within the framework of the International Fair of Thessaloniki, historically, and to explore its multifaceted role. The central hypothesis of this paper concerns the exploration of the multi-aspect role of the 'Honoured Country' concept during TIF and the highlighting of its impact on the city's tourism development. This exploration will take place both over time – through the study of the historical archives of TIF-HELEXPO – as well as through the case study of the 82nd TIF, during which China was be the 'Honoured Country'.

Keywords: *Trade Fairs, Tourism, City, Thessaloniki International Fair, 'Honoured Country', China.*

INTRODUCTION-METHODOLOGY

Throughout their long history Trade Fairs have always interacted with their host cities on many levels. The significant contribution of trade fairs to the tourism development of their host cities was – and still remains – undisputed. Furthermore, this contribution is so important that it has become one of the strongest motives for local authorities, leading them to adopt the strategy of organising trade fairs in the direction of tourism development.

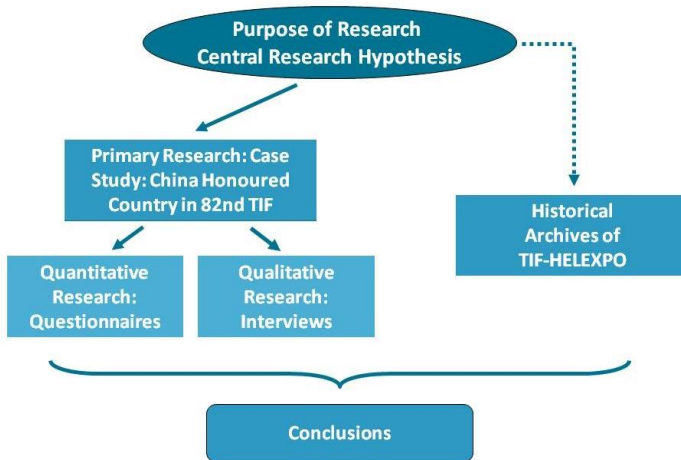
The city of Thessaloniki with Thessaloniki International Fair (TIF) has a long and remarkable historical tradition in organising trade fairs. From 1926, when the first TIF was organised in Thessaloniki, to this day, the Exhibition and the City have been on parallel courses, capturing the particularities and historical events of each period. The international character of trade fair activity in Thessaloniki, that of TIF in particular, has always been significant. The international character of exhibitions in Thessaloniki was expressed in the 50s, 60s and 70s, with the national participation of high profile and financially powerful countries at special national pavilions, like, for example, the American Pavilion or the USSR pavilion, etc. After a period of decline in national participations and the emergence of trade exhibitions, national trends and developments in trade fairs imposed the need for a new strategy at TIF; thus the

concept of the ‘Honoured Country’ is into practice. So, on many occasions an ‘Honoured Country’ that presented its important achievements, (economic, cultural, etc.) as well as its most important businesses, was the focal point of Thessaloniki International Fair. This concept had started to fade in recent decades, while over the last few years an attempt has been made towards its revival, with the selection of three geopolitically powerful countries – and potentially important economic partners for Greece – as honoured countries; namely Russia in 2016, China in 2017, and the USA in 2018.

This paper attempts to examine the concept of the ‘Honoured Country’ within the framework of Thessaloniki International Fair historically and to explore its multifaceted role – especially in tourism sector. The central hypothesis of this paper concerns the exploration of the multi-aspect role of the concept of the ‘Honoured Country’ during TIF, and the highlighting of its impact on the city’s tourism development. The exploration will take place both over time – through the study of the historical archives of TIF-HELEXPO – as well as through the case study of the 82nd TIF, where China was the ‘Honoured Country’.

Methodologically, in this paper we are moving on two axes: first of all, we will study the archives of TIF-HELEXPO, examining the multifaceted role of TIF from its institution to this day, while we will then study the strategy of the ‘Honoured Country’ concept at TIF and its role in each historical period. Secondly, our investigation will focus on the case study of the 82nd TIF and China’s participation in it. During the 82nd TIF, a primary quantitative survey will be carried out with the use of a questionnaire, while a qualitative survey will follow, including semi-directed exploratory interviews with representatives of the Chinese businesses and organisations participating in the 82nd TIF. Finally, as a result from this analysis, we arrived at some conclusions related to the Central Research Hypothesis. The methodology followed in the present paper is schematically presented below (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Methodology of the research



LITERATURE REVIEW: TRADE FAIR, CITY AND TOURISM DEVELOPMENT

Trade fairs have a long history that started in antiquity in the form of bazaars. In the late 18th century and early 19th century, exhibitions took on a more developed incarnation, with the appearance of World Fairs, which were presented mainly in France and England, and later in Germany and other countries. Since then, fairs have had a constant presence through history. This presence has grown alongside the development and progress of our societies. During this long history trade fairs have interacted with their host cities significantly and on many levels.

At present trade fairs hold a powerful position as a product on the global tourism market (Kokkosis et al., 2011), while the MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conventions, and Exhibitions) sector in general is one of the most rapidly growing sectors of the tourism industry at the global level (Campiranon & Arcodia, 2007). More

specifically, the exhibition sector has been found to make exceptional contributions and offer tremendous prospects to tourism destinations (Wu & Zhang, 2013). The contribution of exhibitions and other related professional events to tourism has attracted particular interest both from researchers and tourism policy-makers at the global level (Lee et al., 2008).

In fact, the competition that has developed in exhibition organising at present has forced trade fair organisers to broaden their field of activity beyond the borders of the area in which the exhibitions are being held. Thus, exhibition organisers do not simply limit themselves to regulating organisational matters; they offer additional services to exhibitors. One of the main responsibilities undertaken is to attract specialised visitors with whom the exhibitors wish to come into contact. Thus, organising meetings between exhibitors and visitors hosted by the organisers through the Hosted Buyers' Programme has now become an important responsibility of the organisers (Han & Verma, 2014). In fact, opportunities for networking and interaction are often referenced as the most significant benefits for participants in trade fairs (Hultsman, 2001). Therefore, networking opportunities greatly motivate participation in trade fairs, a fact that is one of the main reasons behind the increase of such programmes (Han & Verma, 2014), specifically in Europe. Respectively, Cecil and Sperstad (2015) mention the increase in exhibitor participation and the lowering of participation cost for buyers as the main reasons for the increase in the number of Hosted Buyers' Programmes.

Although hosted buyers are mainly interested in the content of the exhibition and the quality and quantity of the exhibits displayed, they are also interested in the place where the exhibition is being held as a tourism destination with socio-cultural importance and appeal, as this affects their overall experience (Lee & Lee, 2014). Visitor satisfaction with their overall exhibition participation experience is of paramount importance for the success of an exhibition destination, as

this determines their intention to re-visit the destination. Moreover, satisfied visitors can disseminate their positive impressions (word of mouth) to potential tourists, thus contributing towards improving the perception of the place where the exhibition was held as a tourism destination (Zhang et al., 2010). Consequently, exhibitions may encourage visitors to re-visit the destination, as a successful exhibition results in visitor satisfaction and creates the basis for repeat visits (City of Edmonton, 2010; Swarbrooke & Horner, 2001). By hosting such events, cities can be promoted in a number of different potential tourist markets (Richards & Wilson, 2004).

It should be taken into account, however, that trade fair visitors mostly consist of demanding and experienced consumers of exhibition tourism (Seebaluck et al. 2015). For this reason, exhibitions must be innovative in order to offer participants better services, provide them with the information necessary for their work (contacts, meetings, information, etc.) and facilitate their access to the tourism resources of the destination (Rubalcaba-Bermejo & Cuadrado-Roura, 1995).

Jin et al. (2013) explore the characteristics that make exhibition destinations attractive to exhibitors in particular. Among them is the general atmosphere of the destination, regarding the options for entertainment and activities during the available free time. This characteristic includes a tourism aspect, seeing as exhibition participants can evaluate a destination through their participation in recreational and down-time activities. Nonetheless, this aspect has not been explored herein.

Hankinson (2005) studied brand images of destinations from the perspective of tourists visiting a destination for business meetings, incentive events, conferences and exhibitions, and examined their relationship with perceived quality and commercial criteria for selection a business destinations. The analysis carried out resulted in three key factors that play a crucial role for the brand image of a destination: the overall attractiveness of the destination, the functionality (more facilities, professional tourism infrastructure,

accessibility, etc.), and the ambience (events beyond the reason for the visit, variety of activities, tourism areas, destination identity, etc.). While all three factors were correlated with perceived quality, the commercial criteria for the selection of a business destination were found to be dominated by a destination's functional – rather than its ambience-related – attributes.

Similarly, Jin et al. (2010) studied the factors that influence and motivate exhibitors and visitors to participate in trade fairs, which included certain important factors related to tourism. According to the results, visitors and exhibitors have similar views concerning most of the factors that may influence their decision to participate in a trade fair. Professionalism, services and the organiser's reputation were the top three criteria that both groups considered to be of paramount importance. As regards the destination's factors in particular, safety and a positive image of the city were considered particularly important factors for the visitors' decision to participate in an exhibition. Additionally, both groups report factors relating to the entertainment capabilities of the destination (climate, high-quality accommodation, sights, tours and entertainment/night-life), as well as cost. The importance of a destination in the decision of visitors to participate in a trade fair is also stressed in the study by Rittichainuwat and Mair (2012). More specifically, the researchers found that the host destination of an exhibition is the second most important factor - following the factor of special offers - influencing the decision of visitors to participate in an exhibition. Consequently, visitors attach great importance to the destination where the exhibition is being held.

Moreover, although the approach by Boo et al. (2008) focuses on the case of convention tourism, it is still of particular interest, as it confirms the hypothesis that the attractiveness of a destination is linked to the behaviour of visitors during their stay. The research results showed that different groups of people with diverse behaviours during their visit, evaluate cities hosting convention

tourism in a different manner. Therefore, according to Boo et al. (2008), visitor behaviour is an important factor determining the appeal of a destination.

Through this brief review of the bibliography, the important role that trade fairs can play – as regards tourism for host cities – becomes apparent. Naturally, this is the reason that this subject has attracted the interest of the research community.

In the case of Thessaloniki, TIF-HELEXPO seems to have adopted a combined strategy that involves the internationalisation of its exhibition activities and the attraction of foreign visitors to the city. On the one hand it adopts the strategy of attracting and hosting foreign buyers to trade fairs through its hosted buyers' programme. At the same time, the organization of fam trips is internationally applied for the promotion of tourist destinations and, in the case of the exhibition industry, expresses the postmodern model. In the Greek case, we spoke of a hybrid model that combines postmodern with modern elements but also with practices of attracting and displaying tourist sites of Greece. Thus, the international social capital of the exhibition is strengthened through the cultural capital of local tourist attractiveness (Kourkouridis et al., 2017a; Kourkouridis et al., 2017b). On the other hand, TIF-HELEXPO devised the institution of the 'Honoured Country' at Thessaloniki International Fair as a further tool to supply prestige to its exhibition activity. This institution originates from a previous modernist period of International – Global Exhibitions, adapted to present standards.

Consequently, the strategy mentioned above, combines the cultural aspects of development and the notions of the “social capital”, “trust” and “reciprocity” between entrepreneurs, employees and local institutions. TIF-HELEXPO's strategy seems to attribute, following the track of cultural turn, pursuing economic development through local cultural strategies such as those achieved in Silicon Valley, California and elsewhere in the world (Papadimitriou and Frangopoulos, 2018).

THESSALONIKI INTERNATIONAL FAIR AND THE CONCEPT OF THE 'HONOURED COUNTRY'

The city of Thessaloniki, as mentioned in the introduction, has a long exhibition tradition. Thus, the historical development of the city has progressed alongside the development of exhibition activity.

The first references to the early form of exhibition activity (bazaars) come from the Byzantine Era, specifically the 11th century AD, with the bazaars that were held every October in the framework of the celebrations for the city's patron saint, Saint Demetrius (Hekimoglou, 2005).

During the times of the Ottoman Empire this event continued. The continuation of this institution is also related to the significant commercial role played by Thessaloniki at the time, seeing as an important portion of goods in the Balkan region were transported through a network of local bazaars, the most important of these being the event in Thessaloniki.

The exhibition history of Thessaloniki, in the modern form of trade fairs that we are familiar with, started in 1925. Nikolaos Germanos and a group of entrepreneurs and journalists of Thessaloniki were inspired to create and materialise the idea of organising the first Thessaloniki International Fair (TIF) in 1925. The first ever TIF was held in October 1926 in the Field of Mars area – near the present grounds – where it remained until 1940 (Hekimoglou & Roupa, 2000).

During its first period of events, 1926-1939, TIF played two roles: On the one hand it had an economic character that was expressed through the need for an increase in commercial transactions in the Balkan region and Eastern Europe, and on the other it had a political character, expressed through official state participations that presented their progress and new products (Kourkouridis et al., 2016).

The next TIF was held eleven years after the 1939 event due to World War II and the destruction of the facilities brought about by

the war. The first post-war TIF was organised in 1951 at new facilities located where Thessaloniki's present exhibition centre is (Pozrikidis, 2014). This event – and all those that followed until 1970 – was carried out in the broader framework of the era for the economic – production regeneration of Greece, as well as the Cold War transition period, during which exhibition activities were characterised by national participation of countries with great prestige and financial power, such as the USA and the USSR.







From 1970 onwards exhibition activity gradually took on a new form, through which trade fairs took to the fore. These trade fairs concerned one specific sector and concentrated entrepreneurial interest in that sector. Thus, the importance of the general fair's role gradually faded and that of trade fairs specialising in specific sectors was strengthened (Pozrikidis, 2013).

That specific exhibition form continued until recently (2010), however, in the framework of the financial crisis and the intensification of the need for extroversion in the Greek economy, an effort was made to strengthen the international character of the exhibitions held in Thessaloniki. Thus, a more organised and systematic effort was made to attract foreign commercial visitors (Kourkouridis et al., 2016).

During the 00s, in an effort to stimulate TIF's international role, a new strategy was adopted, which was expressed through the concept of the 'Honoured Country'. Specifically, the institution began in 1998, as an evolution of official state participations, and it has been repeated nine times so far (Table 1.).

Table 1. The concept of the 'Honoured Country' at TIF

| Year | Trade Fair | Date | 'Honoured Country' |
|-------------|-------------------|-------------|---------------------------|
|-------------|-------------------|-------------|---------------------------|

| | | | |
|------|---|---------------------------------------|---------|
| 1998 | <p>63rd TIF</p>  | <p>5 – 14 September 1998</p> | China |
| 2000 | <p>65th TIF</p>  | <p>2 – 11 September 2000</p> | USA |
| 2002 | <p>67th TIF</p>  | <p>7 – 15 September 2002</p> | France |
| 2008 | <p>73rd TIF</p>  | <p>6 – 14 September 2008</p> | Italy |
| 2009 | <p>74th TIF</p>  | <p>5 – 13 September 2009</p> | India |
| 2010 | <p>75th TIF</p>  | <p>11 – 19 September 2010</p> | Hungary |

| | | | |
|------|---|---------------------------------------|--------|
| 2011 | <p>76th TIF</p>  | <p>10 – 18 September 2011</p> | Serbia |
| 2016 | <p>81st TIF</p>  | <p>10 – 18 September 2016</p> | Russia |
| 2017 | <p>82nd TIF</p>  | <p>9 – 17 September 2017</p> | China |
| 2018 | <p>83rd TIF</p>  | <p>8 – 16 September 2018</p> | USA |

Source: HELEXPO www.helexpo.gr

In recent years the institution has been strengthened and at the last three events the honoured countries at TIF have been the three most important geopolitical powers of the planet and potentially significant economic partners of Greece, namely Russia in 2016, China in 2017 and the USA in 2018. This is indicative of the importance and attention paid to the specific institution.

At this point it is worth noting the reference made to the 83rd TIF – at which the USA will be the ‘Honoured Country’ – made by US President Donald Trump during his joint press conference with Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras, immediately following their meeting at the White House on 17 October 2017: *“I am particularly happy*

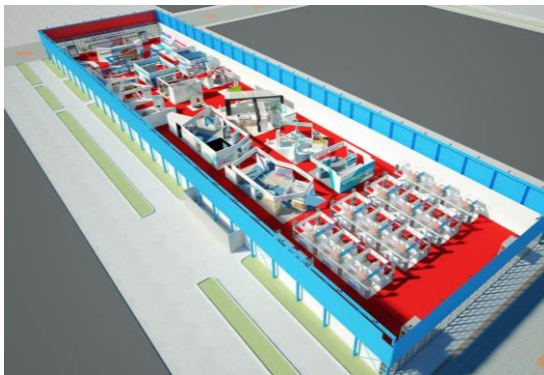
that the US will be the 'Honoured Country' at the Thessaloniki International Fair next year. It is a great opportunity for US enterprises to show their capabilities".

THE CASE STUDY OF CHINA AS 'HONOURED COUNTRY' AT THE 82nd THESSALONIKI INTERNATIONAL FAIR

China had a meaningful presence at the 82nd TIF, hosted at the largest pavilion in the exhibition centre (pavilion 13). The Chinese participation consisted of 167 exclusively Chinese enterprises and organisations represented by 400 individuals, and it covered an area of 6000 square metres (Figure 2). The Chinese exhibition mission represented the most important sectors of the Chinese economy, which attracted the interest of Greek companies, as well as the broader public (HELEXPO: www.helexpo.gr).

Among the 167 Chinese companies and organisations participating in the 82nd TIF were 7 with global activity: China Cosco Shipping Corporation, China Development Bank, Shehua Group Corporation Limited, Huawei Technologies Co. Ltd, Zhongxing Telecommunication Equipment Corporation, State Grid Corporation of China, and Air China.

Figure 2. Design Plan, Pavilion 13: Chinese Participation.



Source: HELEXPO www.helexpo.gr

Furthermore, from the technology sector, apart from the ZTE Company, which is an international power in the telecommunications sector, participants included twenty three smaller high-tech companies from Shanghai. Lastly, as mentioned previously, the Chinese participation included China Development Bank – CDB, one of the largest development finance institutions in the world.

At the same time, in the framework of China being the ‘Honoured Country’ at the 82nd TIF, important one-day meetings were organised aiming towards promoting the prospect of business cooperation between Greece and China. These one-day meetings

provided Greek and Chinese companies with the opportunity to exchange views and to develop a discussion on investment opportunities offered by Greece in the sectors of energy, telecommunications, transports and new technologies in general.

Lastly, it should be mentioned that during the 82nd TIF a series of cultural events were held, such as the Art Troupe of Beijing Sport University (BSU) events, as well as the ‘China at the NTNG’ exhibition organised by the National Theatre of Northern Greece (HELEXPO: www.helexpo.gr).

Therefore, all of the above indicates that the Chinese participation as ‘Honoured Country’ at the 82nd TIF, had geopolitical and cultural dimensions, apart from the obvious financial dimensions.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Framework – Research Identity

The aim of our research, as mentioned above, was to explore the tourism dimension of the ‘Honoured Country’ institution at TIF. This research included two parts, quantitative research on the one hand and qualitative research on the other. The survey sample for both parts of the research included representatives of the 167 Chinese companies participating in the 82nd TIF in the framework of the ‘Honoured Country’ concept, who were approximately 400 in number.

For the needs of the quantitative research a questionnaire was developed with 20 closed questions divided into 4 units, while for the needs of the qualitative research an interview guide was developed with ten open ended questions divided into three units. Our research was carried out from 7 to 17 September 2017. In total 116 questionnaires (response rate $\approx 30\%$) and 20 interviews were collected.

Sample Description

A description of our sample is provided in the first part of our quantitative research. As far as the gender of our sample is concerned, it is split between male (56.9%) and female (43.1%). Most of the respondents are younger people. More specifically, 49,1% of the respondents are between 25 and 35 years of age, 34,5% are 36 to 50 years old, 8,6% are under the age of 25 and, lastly, 7,8% of our respondents are older than 50 years of age.

Furthermore, the biggest percentage of our sample are low-medium staff (60,4%), while 24.3% are directors / managers and 15,3% are top executives.

Finally, it should be mentioned that the business sectors represented by our sample vary greatly, covering a huge range of activities. More specifically, 34.6% of our respondents work in commerce, 18.8% come from the actual production sector, another 18.8% work in the science and technology sector, 14.3% work in the services industry, and, lastly, 13.5% come from various other business sectors.

It is thus made clear that our sample is indeed representative, as it clearly depicts the features of our research population.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Participation In The 82nd Tif

In the second part of our research an effort is made to examine the opinions and perspectives of the participants in the 82nd Thessaloniki International Fair. Our respondents evaluated the 82nd TIF very positively. More specifically, about sixty two percent (62%) of our respondents were very positive (Figure 3). Our respondents gave almost the same positive reply when asked about the effectiveness of their participation in the 82nd TIF, with 62% positive reactions (Figure 4).

Figure 3. Evaluation of the 82nd TIF

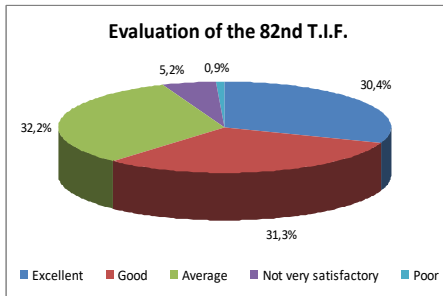
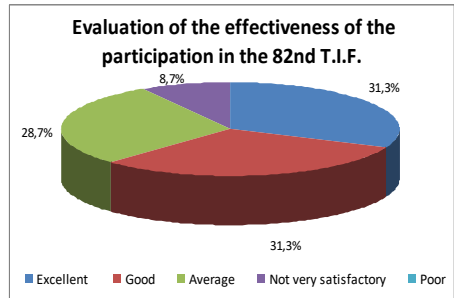


Figure 4. Evaluation of the effectiveness of the participation in the 82nd T.I.F.



As a result of the qualitative research, our respondents pointed out that, “(TIF is) very diversified and a very good platform to communicate with many people”. Most of the respondents appreciated the fact that there were many visitors at the fair, but they did not like that they were not professionals.

Visit To Thessaloniki

In the third part of our research, the participants are asked to express their opinion about the city of Thessaloniki, from a visitor’s point of view. It is interesting to see that a high percentage of our respondents said that they visited either touristic archaeological sites (33%) or restaurants and bars of Thessaloniki and the broader region (24%) during their stay in Thessaloniki. A high percentage, coming to twenty percent (20%), replied that they did some shopping in the area. It should also be noted that many people decided to visit entertainment venues, such as clubs, etc. (10%) (Figure 5).

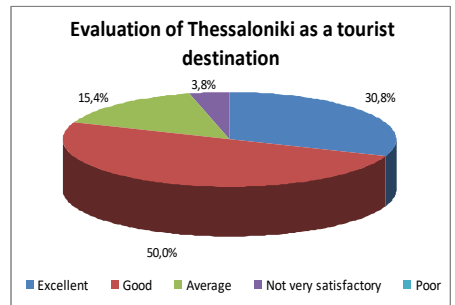
When we asked these people to rate Thessaloniki as a tourist destination, their replies were very positive, as more than eighty one

percent (81%) rated Thessaloniki as a very good or good tourist destination. On the contrary, only 3.8% of respondents made a negative evaluation of the city of Thessaloniki (Figure 6).

Figure 5. Which of the following did you visit/do during your stay in Thessaloniki



Figure 6. Evaluation of Thessaloniki as a tourist destination



The qualitative research showed that almost all of the interviewees appreciated the beautiful scenery and the proximity of the city to the seafront: *“I like the scenery, the seafront and the clean air”*. What’s more, local food, vivid nightlife and archaeological sites are indisputably attractive aspects of the city for Chinese tourists. As one of our respondents pointed out, *“the nightlife is so cool and the food is amazing”*.

We also asked questions with regards to the infrastructure of Thessaloniki and the replies we got were mostly positive. More specifically, all questions on sub-categories in the infrastructure section (Transportation, Accommodation, Entertainment, Tourism Infrastructure, Bars-Restaurants, Shopping, Other Services), acquired positive reactions (good or very good) (Figure 7). The same positive image was given by our respondents with regards to the combination of prices and quality of the products and services in Thessaloniki, which were mostly rated as high or very high and in some cases average (Figure 8).

Figure 7. Evaluation of the level of the following infrastructure/services

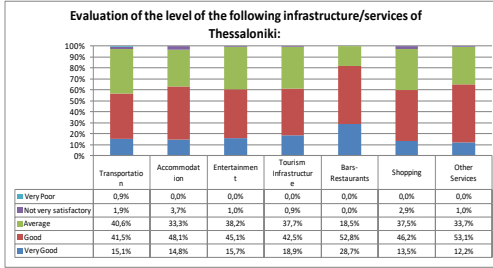
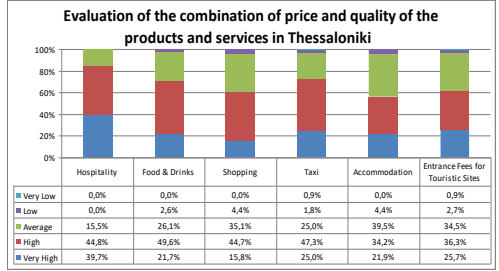


Figure 8. Evaluation of the characteristics of the local residents in Thessaloniki



Our respondents evaluated the accessibility to Thessaloniki from their country as normal with 79% (Figure 9). The conclusion we came to after examining the replies to this particular question was that accessibility for a traveller visiting Greece from such a distant country, i.e. China, is considered normal, regardless of whether they arrive in Greece via some European capital or be it the European capital itself that is being visited. This is usually the case for trips as long as that from China to Europe.

Figure 9. Evaluation of accessibility to Thessaloniki from your country

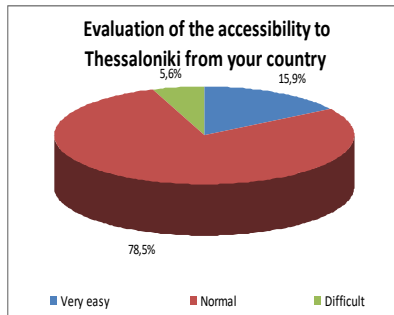
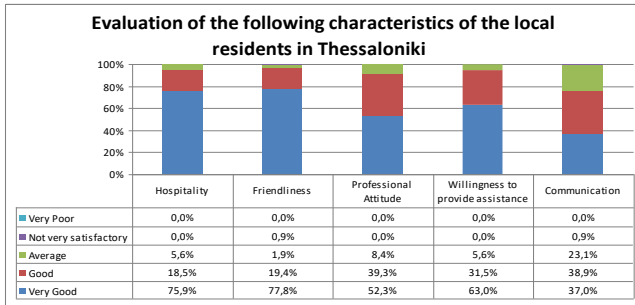


Figure 10. Evaluation of the following characteristics of the local residents in Thessaloniki



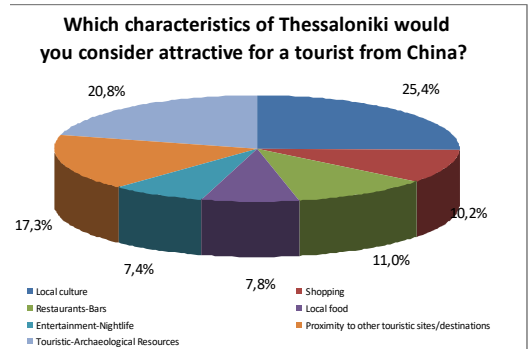
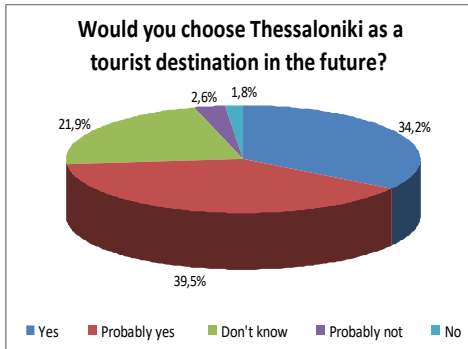
When we asked our visitors to rate the actual local residents of the city of Thessaloniki, most considered the residents of Thessaloniki to be hospitable, friendly and very willing to provide assistance (Figure 10).

Opinion Of Thessaloniki As A Tourist Destination

In the fourth part of our research, the participants are asked about their opinion of Thessaloniki as a destination for tourism. To our question on whether they would choose Thessaloniki as a tourist destination more than 74%, were rather positive (yes and probably yes), while on the other hand the percentage of the respondents providing a negative reply (no and probably no) is less 5% (Figure 11).

Figure 11. Would you choose Thessaloniki as a tourist destination in the future?

Figure 12. Which characteristics of Thessaloniki would you consider attractive for a tourist from China?

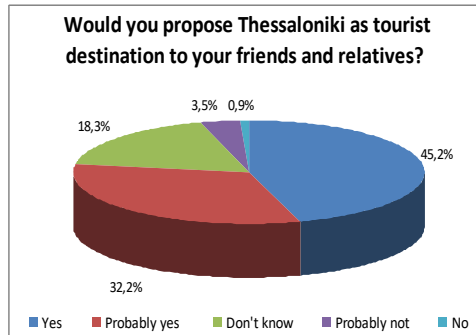
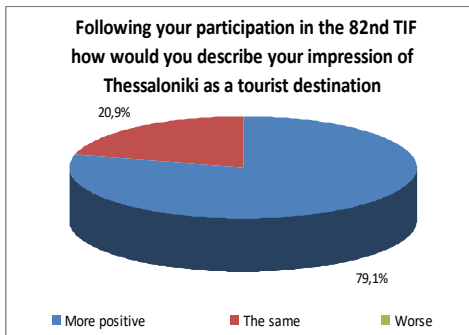


The most attractive characteristics of Thessaloniki for tourists from China are: The local culture, with 25%, the tourism and archaeological resources, with 21%, and the proximity to other tourist sites/destinations, with 17% (Figure 12).

The qualitative research showed that many of the interviewees were very positively disposed towards the idea of visiting Thessaloniki again. As one respondent characteristically highlighted, *“Chinese people only know Athens and Santorini. Thanks to TIF, more and more Chinese people are getting to know Thessaloniki as well”*.

Figure 13. Following your participation in the 82nd TIF, how would you describe Thessaloniki as a tourist destination?

Figure 14. Would you propose Thessaloniki as tourist destination to your friends and relatives?



We asked our Chinese visitors to describe their impression of Thessaloniki as a tourist destination after their participation in the 82nd TIF, and it is interesting to see that more than 79% found Thessaloniki better than they expected (Figure 13). Positive replies exceeded 77% to our question on whether they would recommend Thessaloniki as a tourist destination to their friends and relatives (Figure 14).

Responses were clearly positive to that question, as during our qualitative research respondents informed us that: *“I have already posted many photos of the city on Facebook and my friends are excited about my travel”*. This shows that our respondents had already communicated their personal experience from the city to friends and relatives through social media.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on our central working hypothesis, which concerned the broadening of the multiple roles of the ‘Honoured Country’ concept at TIF, and the broadening of its effect on the tourism development of Thessaloniki, we promoted the multiple aspects of this institution, from its basic financial dimension, to its geopolitical, cultural and tourism dimensions.

To start off with, we should mention that, as we already know, trade fairs have always had, and will continue to have, a significant effect on tourism in their host city. In fact, at present fairs hold a powerful position as a product on the global tourism market, having created the autonomous MICE sector (as it is called).

The MICE sector is one of the most rapidly growing tourism industry sectors on a global level. In fact, the contribution of exhibitions and other related professional events on tourism has attracted international interest, both from researchers, as well as from those responsible for outlining policy in the tourism sector.

The case of Thessaloniki records a grand tradition in organising exhibitions. Exhibition activity in the city has already recorded 90 years of history, as it moves alongside the history of the city itself. In fact, interaction between the Fair and the city is evident on many levels, among which is tourism.

The concept of the ‘Honoured Country’ at Thessaloniki International Fair – a relatively recent institution (it began in 1998), which is an evolution of official state participations – has multiple aspects.

The concept of the ‘Honoured Country’ at the Thessaloniki International Fair can presently have significant tourism impact for the city of Thessaloniki, as, according to the research results:

- 74% of the Chinese participants in the 82nd TIF would choose Thessaloniki as a tourist destination in the future.
- 77% would recommend Thessaloniki as a tourist destination to friends and relatives.

In conclusion, it is safe to say that the concept of the ‘Honoured Country’ at TIF can help Thessaloniki open up to new tourist markets, such as China.

One could say that TIF-HELEXPO’s adoption of an internationalisation strategy as regards exhibition activity, combining the modernist economic – national prestige model (‘Honoured Country’ institution) with the post-modern model encountered in

contemporary international practices (Hosted Buyers' Programme) amidst the financial crisis, has provided results that, in combination, further strengthen the tourism and, ultimately, the financial dynamism of Thessaloniki.

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