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**EXPLORING THE VIEWS OF THE STAKEHOLDERS OF THE  
PREFECTURE OF MESSINIA ON THE IMPACT OF CURRENT  
CRISIS ON LOCAL AND REGIONAL TOURISM AND THE ACTS  
NEEDED TO OVERCOME IT**

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**Introduction**

Sustainable tourism development in certain areas requires the collaboration of all the various parties involved, including state, regional and local officials, local communities, local and regional unions, clubs and organizations and the private sector<sup>1</sup>. All these parties, along with national and international bodies, tourist operators, tourism associations, residents of the region and (wherever applicable) organized tourists, are the *tourism stakeholders*, as defined by the World Tourism Organization and other researchers<sup>2</sup>. Stakeholders can contribute to tourism development by offering their expertise and resources in a collaboration that must not be circumstantial, but part of a developmental plan: indeed, if the role of each participant is not clear from the beginning, increased complexity in decision making may occur<sup>3</sup>. It is therefore apparent that the views of the stakeholders of a destination are extremely important, especially in crisis situations as the present ones.

**Aim**

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<sup>1</sup> Borges, 2011.

<sup>2</sup> WTO, 1994; Gartner, 1996; Williams, 1998.

<sup>3</sup> Borges, 2011.

The aim of the present study was to record

the understanding of the stakeholders of the prefecture of Messinia on the impact of current crisis on local and regional tourism

acts taken to meet current crisis and estimated results

future acts needed to overcome current crisis.

### **Material and method**

To meet the aims of this study we used a questionnaire that was distributed to 10 primary active stakeholders of the prefecture of Messinia, of which 8 (rate 80.0%) responded. They were the Port Authority of Messinia, the Kalamata Marina Authority, the Association of Travel Agencies of Messinia, the Hotel Owners Association of Messinia, the Hotel Owners Association of Trifyllia, the Tourism Organization of the Region of Peloponnese, the Culture and Tourism Development Office of the Municipality of Kalamata and the Messinian Chamber of Commerce. The research was quantitative and, despite the small number of participants, their nature as primary stakeholders of the area was thought to be able to provide both an accurate view of the current situation and also adequate proposals for future acts.

For the statistical analysis we used the SPSS 20.0 statistical package that offers predictive tools which help analytical research<sup>4</sup>. Descriptive statistics were also used for the analysis of the questionnaires.

### **Results**

On answering the first line of questions (what is their view on the reduction in turnover of tourism enterprises in the prefecture of Messinia), 37.5% of the participants stated that it was true, 12.5% opposed and 50% did not answer due to lack of data. The estimated mean percentage of reduction was 50%. Interestingly, only 12.5% of participants stated that the tourism industry income was reduced, estimating it around 25%; again, 62.5% of all responders stated that their answer was not accurate, as there is no official data to support their claim. The same was true for staff reduction (estimated to be around 50%) and business close down (50%), while there is

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<sup>4</sup> Pallant, 2007.

absolutely no knowledge as for business relocation. All these answers reflect the poor tourism data recording system of the area.

The second line of questions was on acts and measures taken to overcome current crisis. It is interesting that 6 stakeholders stated that they actually *did* try to do something on their own: indeed, one participated in various exhibitions, another send memos to state officials on various financial problems affecting the local and regional tourism industry, two did not state the exact nature of their action, a fifth participated in marketing actions along with other state officials and the sixth (the Kalamata Port Authority) reduced costs, allowed debt settlements and reconstructed parts of the sea front of the area. Two were not pleased while four stated that they were very pleased by the results of their actions: all stakeholders however requested a closer collaboration with local governors and state officials to improve outcome.

Participants were also asked about their collaboration with regional authorities and other stakeholders: apart from any mandatory collaboration with the regional and state supervisory authority (for instance, the Kalamata Port Authority with the Maritime Ministry), there were only poor efforts to collaborate with other parties, as shown in Table 1. The results were not promising.

Table 1. Collaborating parties and results.

Collaborating parties	Result*
The Culture and Tourism Development Office of the Municipality of Kalamata with various Culture associations and clubs and the Tourism Organization of the Region of Peloponnese	Modest
The Kalamata Marina Authority with nearby Municipalities, Marinas and Port Authorities	Modest
The Hotel Owners Association of Messinia with various developmental organizations, various Municipalities and the Region of Peloponnese	Modest
The Kalamata Port Authority with the tourism development office of the Municipality of Kalamata,	Modest
The Tourism Organization of the Region of Peloponnese with various stakeholders within the area of Peloponnese	Modest
The Hotel Owners Association of Trifyllia with the Municipality of Trifyllia and the Region of Peloponnese	Good
The Messinia Chamber of Commerce with the Region of Peloponnese	Good

\*recorded as good, modest or poor.

The most disappointing finding, however, when answering the following question (on their collaboration with the ministry of tourism and how they grade it), was that only one out of the five stakeholders who collaborated with the Hellenic ministry of tourism was very pleased. This is annoying, as the ministry of tourism is the heart, mind and pocket of tourism development in Greece. Also, as only one stakeholder stated the exact nature of this collaboration (culture festivals under the auspices of the ministry), one has to assume that their collaboration is probably restricted to the implementation of instructions and suggestions made by the Hellenic Tourism Organization or the central government

The third question was on acts and measures not yet taken at a local, regional and national level, but definitely needed to overcome current crisis. Three stakeholders (37.5%) stated that a better coordination between local, regional and state authorities is needed, while another three (37.5%) stated that infrastructure improvement, the development of local marketing plans and some form of collaboration of all active participants in tourism development (apparently on an agreed strategic plan) is needed; two however (25%) did not answer this important question.

On answering the fourth line of questions (on the main local tourism advantages to overcome current crisis), two (25%) think that the natural environment is the main factor, while four (50%) think that the existing infrastructure can do the job if advertised through a proper marketing plan. Again, two stakeholders (25%) did not answer. The examples given in the questionnaire were cultural heritage, natural environment, easy access, venues, cost of life and friendly locals, while participants could also include a personal answer.

The fifth line of questions was on which level (local, regional or national) the current crisis should be addressed. Two stakeholders think that the most appropriate level is the local, two the regional and two the national one, while two did not answer. This was not a surprise, as each stakeholder is affected by its nature: for instance, the Region of Peloponnese thinks that the level should be national, while the Hotel Owners' local associations think that most problems could be resolved locally. However, when asked who should have the responsibility of tourism strategy planning, three (37.5%) stated that it should be the local authorities, four (50%) think that it should be done at a higher level (region or state) while one did not answer.

Finally, participants were asked to give their suggestions on how the current economic crisis should be tackled. Their answers are presented and discussed below.

## Discussion

In today's globalised era, a destination should not only try to retain, but also to further expand its impact on tourism industry in order to meet competition. For tourism destination development the current national and regional strategic tourism plan should be constantly updated in order to provide certain advantages to the destination. According to the basic statement of the World

Establishing the overall tourism development objectives and policies and how can these aims be achieved.

Developing tourism so that its natural and cultural resources are maintained and conserved for future and present use.

Integrating tourism into the overall regional and national development policies, and establishing linkages between tourism and other economic sectors.

Providing a rational basis for decision-making by both the public and private sectors on tourism development.

Enhancing the coordinated development of all the elements of the tourism sector: tourist attractions, activities, facilities and services.

Optimizing and balancing the economic, environmental and social benefits of tourism.

Providing a physical structure which specifies the location, types and extent of tourism development of attractions, facilities, services and infrastructure.

Establishing the guidelines and standards for preparing plans for specific destinations and types of tourism and for the appropriate design of tourist facilities.

Providing the framework for effective coordination of the public and private sector investments.

Providing a baseline for the continuous monitoring of tourism development plans and projects.

Table 2. Advantages of national and regional tourism planning

Tourism Organization<sup>5</sup>, the advantages of national and regional tourism planning are:

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<sup>5</sup> WTO, 1994.

It is also well known that, since the 1990s, public policy makers established new priorities for tourism development planning<sup>6</sup> which are:

The natural environment should always come first.

All proposed strategies should be able to transform tourism into a competitive and dynamic sector.

Distribution channels should be enhanced.

Tourism development policies, usually made by public organizations, should allow and encourage the development of a dynamic private sector.

It is apparent that there is no universal tourism development plan, as each destination needs to be studied and evaluated independently. The planning process, however, must include certain acts<sup>7</sup> such as:

a complete evaluation of the current status, both within and outside the destination,

knowledge and understanding of future trends,

the use of effective and innovative communication tools,

the best available governance of local and regional tourism,

the involvement and participation of stakeholders in the process,

the collaboration of the private sector, local authorities and all other bodies related to planning for sustainable tourism.

Tourism includes various complementary fields, such as transportation, accommodation, entertainment, infrastructure, commerce, even agriculture<sup>8</sup>. Therefore the development of tourism is influenced not only by the elaboration of specific strategies, but also by the integration of state and regional policies definitely needed for sustainable development. These strategy and action plans must aim both fields, the existing tourism status and the future development of alternative forms of tourism: they should also provide local and regional authorities with efficient

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<sup>6</sup> Poon,1993.

<sup>7</sup> Borges, 2011.

<sup>8</sup> Dragos, 2012.

tools and funding to materialize these plans and encourage the collaboration between state and private stakeholders<sup>9</sup>, as it has been proven that the private sector is the main bearer of tourism development<sup>10</sup>. If such collaboration establishes, then actions can be better coordinated; for instance, once an ecotourism development is decided in a certain area, the state must present an act on land use for the private sector to build farm houses and other facilities according to plan. If there are no land use acts, then no ecotourism development plan can exist. The same is true if structural funds (for maintenance of country roads, for instance) are not available to local and regional authorities.

Thus, it is not clear if all stakeholders have the same level of interest in sustainable tourism development<sup>11</sup>; moreover, certain stakeholders are more important than others in determining successful sustainable tourism development<sup>12</sup> while knowledge and skills (proving their superiority) are thought to be the key factors for their implementation<sup>13</sup>. It is not easy, however, to identify if these stakeholders are entitled to represent the local community<sup>14</sup>.

Unfortunately, local authorities and stakeholders in Messinia do not seem to adopt the views discussed above. Firstly, from this study it is apparent that many of them cannot be regarded as primary stakeholders, while their interest is also questionable. From their answers we can also see that there was neither any wide-range collaboration (between stakeholders and the state and also between the various parties of the tourism industry of the area), nor the will to do so. We think that they either failed to understand the urgency of the current situation, or they were disappointed by their collaboration with tourism authorities, especially the ministry of tourism. Things are slightly better regarding their relationship with the Region of Peloponnese, possibly reflecting a better local understanding. One however would expect stakeholders to desperately seek cooperation with all interested parties (in order to minimize the effects of the current crisis) and not to adopt a passive attitude: Table 1 unfortunately does not show any urgency or understanding, as most stakeholders of the prefecture of Messinia limit their relations within the narrow borders of the area. We also think that the results of these interactions are NOT

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<sup>9</sup> Aas, 2005.

<sup>10</sup> Dragos, 2012..

<sup>11</sup> Dabphet, 2012; Ladkin, 2002; Hall, 2000; Roberts 1999.

<sup>12</sup> Cooper, 2006.

<sup>13</sup> Dabphet, 2012.

<sup>14</sup> Aas, 2005.

promising for three main reasons: a. these stakeholders never had any wide collaboration experience in the past (and they didn't feel the need to do so, despite statements made), b. there is no clear strategic plan involving all parties (that could persuade them on the necessity of working together) and c. all current collaborations were materialized on a voluntary, interpersonal or circumstantial basis that cannot provide adequate results.

There were also no clear or innovative suggestions on acts that should be taken to overcome crisis. Most suggestions were common or vague, reflecting a limited understanding on the matter: however, better coordination between local, regional and state authorities (not clarifying on what basis), infrastructure improvement (not clearly specified or justified) and the development of a local (unspecified) marketing plan (thus, not suggested as part of a wider plan) do not confront the implications of the current crisis. Specific suggestions, made by the tourism office of the Region of Peloponnese, the Messinia Chamber of Commerce and the Hotel Owners Association of the Prefecture of Messinia, were:

Investment facilitations.

More active implementation of the private sector.

Creation of a regional Support Fund<sup>15</sup> to support small and medium sized tourism enterprises.

Various financial solutions on liquidity, loan liabilities' setting and tax facilitations, which could help the local and regional tourism industry.

The development of specific alternative forms of tourism, using the unique local natural resources and the rich culture, history and local heritage of the region (world heritage monuments of UNESCO, remarkable buildings, archaeological sites, historical monuments and traditional settlements).

The formulation and promotion of integrated tourism packages that exploit the comparative advantages of the region and satisfy tourist needs (such as sea excursions, visiting nature landscapes and traditional villages, observing cultural events and festivals -such as the Epidaurus festival and the kalamata international dance festival- and participating to sporting and other events, both at sea or on the mountains).

The expansion of tourist demand through partnerships with traditional industries and local activities (wine and oil «roads», local branded products, catering services and local gastronomy)

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<sup>15</sup> European Commission, 2012.



and the collaboration between the various parties of the local and regional tourism industry, to attract tourists interest.

While the formulation of a national tourism strategy, as well as a central marketing plan, remains a responsibility of the national tourism organization of Greece, the supplementary role of the peripherally operating stakeholders of tourism seems to be extremely important, according to the presented world literature: apart from being the steam engine of tourism development, they could help adopting a local and regional strategy that avoids overlapping and mismanagement of useable resources and probably execute local marketing plans. The development of (uniformly operating) regional Convention and Visitors Bureaus might be very helpful in recording and analyzing the various tourism parameters of the area<sup>16</sup>, since it is apparent from our research that, at present, there are no reliable data for developing an efficient tourism development strategy. Also, by bringing different (occasionally opposite) opinions to the discussion table, stakeholders definitely contribute to optimum decision making. Overall, principal stakeholders could help the strategies of the various destinations to adopt a comprehensive and complementary targeting, being part of a broader strategy for local and regional tourism development.

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<sup>16</sup> Papageorgiou, 2007.

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