

# SPORTS TOURIST DESTINATION BRANDS. THE CASE OF GREECE

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## Abstract

### Introduction

Beerli and Martin (2004), indicate that: (1) motivations influence the affective component of image; (2) the experience of vacation travel has a significant relationship with cognitive and affective images, and (3) the socio-demographic characteristics influence the cognitive and affective assessment of image. The tourists' level of experience of vacation travel has a positive and significant relationship with the cognitive image among first-time tourists to the destination and with the affective dimension of the image among repeat tourists. Konecnik and Gartner (2007) included awareness, image, quality, and loyalty dimensions in the model, they applied the brand concept in the extension line of destination image studies. That is, the generally accepted three image types (i.e., cognitive, affective, and conative) were elaborated in creating brand equity for a destination brand in their study. They support the importance of an image dimension in the brand equity model. Boo et al. (2009), support the important role of image in the brand equity model, in that destination brand image was identified as a key correlate of destination brand loyalty in the proposed model. The aim of the present study was to reveal the components for sports tourist destination branding.

### Methodology

#### Sample

Data consisted of a stratified sample by age and gender of 1675 tourists (773 men and 845 women, m.v. 57) from fifty countries who visited Greece in summer 2007. The range of age was from 17 years old to 80 years old (Mean=36 years). Roughly half were married (45.1%), while singles/never married were (43.7%). The majority were employed full time (61.9%), while 18.9% were students. As far as education is concerned, the majority were graduates of university or a 4-year college (32%). Annual family income varied from 20.000-60.000 euros for 48.1% of the

participants.

### Measurement tools

The questionnaire is based on the "Tourist Roles Preference Scale" and translated in Greek, German and Russian, with control of cross-cultural validity. Having the questionnaire in four languages covered the majority of tourists visiting the region. The questionnaire included 89 Likert Questions or closed-ended questions that recorded: (1) a description of tourist's activities, (2) a description of characteristics of tourist destination, (3) an examination of major human needs, (4) demographical and personal data.

### Procedure

The questionnaires were distributed at the two main airports in Greece: Eleftherios Venizelos at the city of Athens and Macedonia airport at the city of Thessaloniki. The questionnaires were distributed to the foreign tourists after check in at the airport when departing from Greece, and for Greek tourists in transit to their final destination in Greece after their vacation.

### Results

Principal Component Analysis (PCA) and Multidimensional Scaling Analysis (MDS) verified the 15 tourist roles of Gibson and Yiannakis (2002) and Sports tourism is defined by 3 out of 15 roles: Explorer (outdoor sports), Thrill Seeker (extreme sports) and Active Sport Tourist. For the examination of predicting sports' tourist role, binary logistic regression was used according to gender, age and 22 psychological needs by step wise method. Crosstab analysis between the 3 sports tourist roles and the 23 statements that indicated the degree (6-5-4-3-2-1) to which each of the following pairs of words best describe the vacation destination showed the destination characteristics that each sports tourist role prefers. All three sports tourist roles have the same preferences at destination characteristics, that is undeveloped, inland, novel, inexpensive, quiet, cold, exclusive, foreign, calming, familiar destination, adult oriented, risky, close to home, indoors/hotel, urban, passive, artificial environment, deserted, man made place, primitive, inaccessible.

### Discussion-Conclusion

This research revealed the suitable components of sports tourist destination brands: roles, needs, destination characteristics, sports tourist profile. Cai et al. (2009), assert that academic research in destination branding has used the concept of image formation as synonymous with branding. Accordingly, image formation encapsulated by slogans is an operational approach to destination promotion whereas destination branding is a strategic management process. The research could help the managers to design better sports tourist destinations that cover tourists' needs. Also, Greece has a multiple landscape and is in the middle of Europe and Asia, so this could help to create new sports destinations and to gain new target groups.

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