

## A four-phase planning of a trip to an outdoor activity destination

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### Introduction

In order for a destination site to pursue a competitive market share, it must comprehend the different components and processes involved in tourist decision-making. And although the concept of recreation as a multi-phase experience (Clawson & Knetsch, 1966; Van Raaij & Francken, 1984) has been widely accepted, such a systematic, holistic approach to tourist decision-making factors, supported by direct empirical evidence, has not been applied widely and thoroughly in Greece. The study was carried out in the context of outdoor recreation which conceptually involves any environmental, athletic, recreational activity of social awareness in the form of a simple exercise or structured program which takes place in natural environments (Kouthouris, 2009). Moreover, it is a four-phase investigation, not inclusive of the 'recollection' phase of Clawson and Knetsch's (1966) framework.

This study aims to contribute to a knowledge base that supports the understanding of the tourists' multi-phase engagement and, thus provide useful results for destination marketers.

In an effort to generate sufficient empirical data, researchers investigated the social, emotional moods as well as the civic and economic status of the visitors and results appear to be influenced by gender and age group differences (Costa, 1998; Yfantidou, Costa & Michalopoulos, 2008).

The results link back to the overall aim of the study which is to better inform destination marketers' decisions on a more efficient use of their potential and resources.

### Methodology

The research was conducted in the region of Eastern Macedonia and Thrace, in the North - East of Greece, and comprised 3070 participants. This particular area is widely known for its natural beauty providing for a range of outdoor activity possibilities across islands and mountain chains. The participants were both Greek and foreign tourists visiting the area. Greeks came from the 47 out of the 51 prefectures of the country, while foreign tourists were from England, Germany, Poland, Bulgaria, Cyprus and Romania. Tourists completed the questionnaire while visiting different destinations, such as outdoor activity sites, ski resorts, hotels, and ships. The questionnaire was translated in the native languages of the tourists. Only Romanian tourists used the questionnaires in English. The questionnaire comprised 6 questions covering the planning phase of the trip, 6 questions covering the phase of the route to the place of destination and back to the place of residence, 13 questions investigating the on-the -site experience and 7 questions calling for evaluation of the experience.

Participants were divided in three different age groups, 17-39 years of age, 40-59 and 60 and above. The questionnaire used the 5 Lickert -scale, ranging from 1 (not important at all) to 5 (very important).

### Results

The multi-variable MANOVA fluctuation analysis showed that there was statistically significant influence between the "sex" variable and the "age" variable, with the 32 questions on the different phases of the trip being the dependent variables. Pillai's trace test showed  $F(2,2626) = 2.328$  και  $sig = .001$ . For each and every distinct phase of the trip, there was also statistically significant interface, with the Pillai's trace test showing  $F(2,2719) = 2.159$  και  $sig = .011$  "for the planning phase of the trip". For the phase "of the route to the place of destination and back to the place of residence", the Pillai's trace test produced  $F(2,2762) = 3.031$  και  $sig = .001$ , while for "the on-site-experience", the Pillai's trace test showed  $F(2,2730) = 2.707$  και  $sig = .001$ . Finally, for the phase of "the evaluation of the experience", the Pillai's trace test presented  $F(2,2766) = 1.961$  και  $sig = .017$ .

### Conclusions-discussion

The results of the research indicated that tourists pay special attention to the planning of their trip across all its phases. Analyses showed that both the different sexes and the different age groups approach the matter in diverse ways. The destination sites as well as the outdoor activities chosen also affected the produced results.

This 4 phase trip planning study is the first to have been conducted, not only as referred to the particular area, but also nation - wide. Future studies will be needed to cover limitations of this research, including the recollection phase as well.

### References

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