

## The future of sustainable tourism development for the Greek enterprises that provide sport tourism

**Authors:** Georgia Yfantidou (1), Elena Spyridopoulou (1), Michela Matarazzo (2), Panagiota Balaska

**Institutions:**

1. Democritus University of Thrace, Department of Physical Education and Sport Science, 69100 Komotini, Greece
2. Marconi University, Department of Economic and Business Sciences, Via Plinio, 44-00193 Roma, Italy

**E-mail:** gifantid@phyed.duth.gr

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**Abstract**

The term "green tourism" is often used in conjunction with the desire for a balanced approach to tourism planning. "Green tourism" is defined as tourism that enhances the local cultural elements, operating under the control of local communities, providing employment and maintains the economic benefits within the local communities. In fact, many times the above definition poorly attested, since there are times when the economic benefits escape from local communities. From its part the tourist industry uses the term "green tourism" as a message to tourists on energy saving, avoid coastal pollution etc. Sometimes the same tourist businesses are accused because they use the term or label "green" primarily for marketing purposes. Although it is a fact that the tourism industry is starting to respond to the changing values of tourists regarding environmental issues. The goal of this research is to find if there is a future for sustainable tourism development at the enterprises that provide sport tourism in Greece.

**Aim of the paper**

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**Literature review**

Tourism is one of the most important industries for the world economy. Facts demonstrate that it can also bring benefits in terms of environmental protection and socio-cultural conservation. Its share in the world's progress is so fundamental that any efforts to reach sustainable development globally or locally are doomed to fail without considering tourism's implication and ensuring that tourism activities are fully integrated within sustainable development policies and procedures. Due to its beneficial aspects, tourism is being strongly encouraged in most countries and is expected to continue growing. At the same time, there is an increasing recognition that tourism in its extensive developments has potentially damaging effects on nature, societies and cultures. Therefore, concerns for responsible tourism practices should have an equal focus on correcting past mistakes and on preventing future ones from occurring; thus, a clear preventative approach must be embedded into current tourism policies and strategies at all levels, if tourism is to help society make progress towards sustainability. The understanding of sustainable tourism has progressed from the early conservationist or environmental conceptions to more holistic approaches which see it as a tool for economic development,

population welfare and environmental conservation. This change of mentality has affected tourism policies and institutional initiatives at all territorial levels, spreading the concept and giving it meaning and value (Torres-Delgado & Palomeque, 2012).

Encouraging sustainable business initiatives continues to be the focus of considerable academic interest and practical importance, as evidenced in this article. The literature reveals a range of issues that are relevant to sustainable certification schemes, with marketing benefit often a key incentive. Additional considerations include opportunities for financial savings and the motivating role of personal moral responsibility in operating a sustainable business (Jarvis, Weeden & Simcock, 2010). As Gibson, Kaplanidou & Kang (2012) refer in terms of the economic dimension of sustainability, it appears that the work of the Gainesville Sports Commission (GSC) and their focus on small scale sport tourism provide positive economic benefit for the community in terms of hotel room nights and expenditures on other goods and services at times when there are few other tourists in the community. Even when over or underestimation is taken into consideration, the cost-benefit of hosting these events for the community is still positive on the economic dimension.

**Methodology**

**Sample:** The sample consists of 62 companies that provide sport tourism in Greece. The sample is 62 enterprises and is selected from a population of companies that offer sport tourism in Greece. The total number of these enterprises is small (under 350) because of economic crisis in Greece and the continuously closing of businesses. So the number of the sample is according to the population.

**Questionnaire:** The questionnaire is based on the scale of sustainable tourism of Kilipiris (2006) and it has 63 questions. It has five parts: the first part includes questions related to the profile of the enterprise, the second part is about changes that they made and are towards to sustainability, the third part is about the promotion of sports, the fourth part includes questions related to environmental issues and how they may impact their activity and the fifth part is about the profile of the person who is answering the questionnaire.

**Procedure:** The questionnaire was designed in Google forms and was sent to enterprises through mail, Facebook or their webpage.

**Data analysis:** For the results we used descriptive analysis, frequency analysis, reliability analysis and one way ANOVA has been used between the size of enterprise, sustainable actions, attitude of the company towards sustainability and their preference about the media that could better inform about the protection of the natural environment. Also ANOVA was used to test if there is a strategic planning for the enterprise compared with the type of enterprise.

**Results**

The questionnaire was proved reliable for the measures of attitudes and behaviors of enterprises in relation to sustainable development and Cronbach a was used to test it  $\alpha=0.84$ . The results have shown that the companies in Greece do not differ because of size and have a positive position towards sustainability, would like to be informed and already take action about these issues. There is only a difference between small ( $M=2.59$ ) and medium ( $M=3.50$ ) enterprises about their belief of the environmental risks from increased numbers of visitors

because of the attractiveness of a tourist destination  $F(2,50)=3.752, p=0.31<0.05$ . Most of them do not have a green certification because they don't have a motive, the knowledge and the money to support it. Also they are developed through own funds and a quarter of them joined the Corporate Pact for Development Framework (ESPA 2007-2013). The sport activities which are most provided are: horse riding 66.7%, cycling 77.4%, trekking 90.7% and climbing 66%.

### Discussion and conclusions

The focus of this research is mainly on the definition of sustainable tourism actions that greek enterprises follow and how tourism and sport tourism can be developed in a sustainable way. Sustainability has three strands: economic, social and environmental. From economic aspect there is an interest from all enterprises to implement the following actions: replacing energy-intensive lamps with new technology ones, recycling waste, landscape restoration, use of "green" cleaners, use of organic products, provide and promote traditional foods and drinks, use of photovoltaic, building insulation etc, because there is a reduction of their costs and also simultaneously benefit thereby the environment and furthermore have a social profile "environmental friendly" which is an incentive for some tourists for their choice. This research investigated the attitudes and the behavior of small, medium and large sport tourism enterprises (SME) as regards to sustainable development. As a global industry dependent on high quality natural environments for its attractiveness, tourism cannot hide from its responsibility to promote more sustainable business practices. The fundamental idea of the selective marketing approach is to attract a certain kind of tourists to the destination, those who behave in an environmentally friendly manner. The model for sustainable tourism development in Greece relates to ecological change brought by tourist activity, infrastructure development and through sport.

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