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TOURISM, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND CULTURE IN GREECE AND BULGARIA: APPROACHES IN THESSALONIKI AND PLOVDIV

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Abstract

In the era of globalization, competition between cities is commonplace/frequent phenomenon, although economic theories believed that only businesses compete with each other. Nowadays, in order to attract visitors, residents and investments, the cities are turning to a search for policies and tools for reconstruction and upgrading of their characteristics. For this reason, cities' competitiveness plays a central role in local government and urban development policies. The present paper aims at studying the strategies between two different cities concerning the touristic development process. The two cities were chosen because of the fact that they are the second-largest cities of Greece and Bulgaria, additionally with rich cultural heritage and cultural diversity. Primary data was collected through semi-structured interviews, which are defined by a set of predefined questions and were based on open-ended questions. A comparison was made between the two cities taking into account the data collected resulting to specific conclusions about the current situation, while at the same time it is of particular interest to repeat the research in the long run.

Introduction

Cultural tourism is one of the most popular kinds of tourism since 17th century. Different definitions of Cultural Tourism further support the complexity of the phenomenon covering a range of relative activities such as historic tourism, fine arts related tourism etc. Controversial options regarding the impact of this phenomenon conclude that tourism policy is crucial in order to increase the positive results and to reduce the negative. In the context of Tourism policy, a set of regulations and rules provide a framework that directly affects long-term tourism development in a specific area.

In order to further investigate the differences of Policy and Planning within these cities, comparative study took place. The present paper aims at studying the strategies between two different cities concerning the touristic development process. The two cities were chosen because of the fact that they are the second-largest cities of Greece and Bulgaria, additionally with rich cultural heritage and cultural diversity.

Primary data was collected through semi-structured interviews, which are defined by a set of predefined questions and were based on open-ended questions. The research is qualitative. Particularly, it is a combination of descriptive and conclusive research. Using deliberate sampling, representatives of local authorities have been selected that play a crucial role in development of local tourism strategy in Thessaloniki and Plovdiv in 2016.

Presentation of the objectives of the tourism strategy, the advantages and disadvantages and action priorities for each city are further high-lighted. The importance of cultural events, cooperation bodies and the involvement of the local community as a part of the development processes are analyzed. The projection and promotion of destinations within and outside borders is being investigated.

In Conclusion to estimate the tourist development of the two cities, are presented the total number of overnight stays, the visiting rate of domestic and foreign tourists and the tourism performance of the year 2016, as reported by the Thessaloniki Hoteliers Association and the National Statistical Institute of Bulgaria. Finally, a comparison is made between the two cities taking into account the above data and making some conclusions about the current situation, while at the same time it is of particular interest to repeat the research in the long run.

Key words: culture, tourism development, tourist policy, planning

2. Literature review
2.1 Definition of Cultural Tourism

Cultural tourism has been one of the most popular types of tourism since the 17th century, however the interest of scientific attention for this type of tourism was focused in the late 1980s and early 1990s (Chatzigeorgiou & Christou, 2016; Balcar & Peace,1996). Since then, the tourist literature has demonstrated a wide range of semantic delineation, with different results that are used in research studies on cultural tourism and its fields (City Tourism and Culture – The European Experience, 2005).

As McKercher and Du Cros (2002) respond to the question: "What is cultural tourism? This seemingly simple question is very difficult to answer because there are just as many definitions of cultural tourism as cultural tourists

The same scholars have classified the definitions of cultural tourism into four categories:

a) definitions based on the theory of tourism; b) definitions based on motivation c) definitions based on experience and d) functional definitions.

Richards (1996) points out: "As with tourism in general, the conceptual definitions of cultural tourism attempt to describe the motives and concepts that are associated with cultural tourism activity."

McIntosh and Goeldner (1986) consider that cultural tourism includes all aspects of travel, where travelers learn about the history and heritage of others or about their modern ways of life. Konsola's (1993) approach describes cultural tourism as a means of protecting cultural heritage as well as an educational tool for acquiring knowledge about the historical, artistic and intellectual heritage of a particular region

The "broad definition" of cultural tourism adopted by the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO 1985; Chatzigeorgiou et al., 2017) covers all people's activities, including educational visits, visits of special interest, festivals and cultural events, visits to monuments, museums, archaeological and historical sites, excursions to the study of the natural environment, monitoring of various forms of art and folk culture and participation in religious cults and pilgrimages

The different approaches prove that cultural tourism is a complex phenomenon, as it covers a wide range of activities such as historical tourism, tourism focusing on the fine arts, industrial tourism, etc. However, most attempts to define cultural tourism agree that it consists of the consumption of culture by tourists (Christou & Kassianidis, 2002; Richards, 1996).

2.2 Tourist Policy &Tourist Planning

Over the last 20 years, there has been universal acceptance that the access and consumption of cultural resources is important to successful urban development strategies (Christou & Sigala, 2001, 2002; Psarrou, 2011).

Culture is directly linked to economic, social, cultural, educational and political benefits while acting as a lever for the reduction of inter-regional imbalances.

The development of cultural tourism must be part of the general tourist policy of the place, because tourism policy is the conscious promotion and shaping of tourism, which is achieved through the influence between public, private bodies and various interest groups (Kaspar, 1982; Christou et al., 2004; Gretzel at al., 2012).

The aim of the tourism policy is to integrate economic, political, cultural and intellectual benefits into countries and destinations in order to improve the quality of life of people, which is the basis for world peace and prosperity (Edgell, 1990; Nella et al., 2000)

The Policy and planning are two concepts inextricably linked to the tourism development of a region. The product of tourism policy is a general strategy (Ritchie & Crouch, 2003; Christou, 2006) that deals with current principles and general objectives and forms the basis for the planning process.

In its practical form, tourism planning is related to the organization and control of tourism development according to the policies of each destination (Page, 2006).

There is a common acceptance that planning is a set of processes rather than a theoretical framework of organization of the socio-economic space, and a set of alternative or changing strategies (Komilis & Vagionis, 1999).

This practically means that planning is an ordered sequence of functions, designed to achieve the goals and the balance between them (Murphy, 1985)

Several writers agree that the most important feature of any kind of planning, including tourism planning, is its forward-looking (Hall, 2000; Sigala & Christou, 2006; Triantafyllou et al, 2011).

Gunn (1979) considers that tourism planning is a tool for the development of the destination and the way for assessing its needs. He also suggests that tourism planning should be directed towards four main objectives: sustainable use of resources, increased visitor satisfaction, integration of the local community, improvement of the economy and business success (Gunn, 2002; Valachis et al., 2009).

Therefore, in countries where tourism is not developed, planning can provide the necessary guidelines for its development. On the other hand, for developed destinations, where tourism is established, the planning is often required to revitalize it and preserve its future viability (World Tourism Organization, 1994).

3. Methods
3.1 Research Framework

The case study is the research methodology of this paper. Porter (1991) argues that issues of management and implementation of development strategies require the use of case studies. Thus, in the present study, the city of Thessaloniki and the city of Plovdiv were selected as case studies. The cities were a field of research as they have rich cultural heritage and cultural diversity. At the same time, they are two twinned towns since 1984.

In an effort to achieve a holistic understanding of the process of tourism development in Thessaloniki and Plovdiv, is presented an empirical social research. The type of Research is a combination of descriptive and conclusive research. the Descriptive research aims at capturing the current situation. it describes the methods, where two towns adopt of the tourism development (Thessaloniki - Plovdiv). The conclusive research is based on the findings of the survey as they emerged from the analysis of the qualitative data.

The survey data were collected primarily through indepth interviews (Pappas, 2002). The type of interview was semi-structured interview, which is characterized by a set of predefined questions (Iosefides, 2008). The survey is qualitative and was based on open-ended questions. The selection of the participants in the survey was based on the technique of deliberate sampling. Therefore, the interview was conducted with representatives, who have an important role in the development of local tourism development strategies in Thessaloniki and Plovdiv.

4. Case studies
4.1 Case study: Thessaloniki

Thessaloniki is the second largest city in Greece in population and geographic area.

The influences of the great empires (Roman, Byzantine, Ottoman), as well as various ethnic groups and religious groups (Greeks of Asia Minor, Armenians, Jews, etc.) contributed to the formation of its history and culture.

Temples, monuments, architectural buildings, archaeological sites and museums shape its multicultural and cosmopolitan identity. Thessaloniki connected with Mount Olympus, Vergina, Dion, Pella and Halkidiki.

The Administration of the Municipality of Thessaloniki and the Tourism Organization of Thessaloniki are the public authorities for the tourism development.

Necessary condition for Thessaloniki to develop tourism was the change of narrative. The brand name: Thessaloniki, Many Stories, One Heart built by the Thessaloniki Tourism Organization was an important part of the narrative strategy, which aimed at highlighting the multicultural background of Thessaloniki. The administration of the Municipality based on narrative strategy shaped the strategy of "Diplomacy of the Cities. Among these, development strategies include: brand name, city diplomacy, placement of Thessaloniki on the world tourist map, attract visitors, community participation, presentation of advantages, improving infrastructure, improving tourism management, establishment of new self-financing bodies.

There many advantages of Thessaloniki. First of all location, monumental wealth, atmosphere of the city, young profile, walkable character, leisure opportunities

The disadvantages are mainly identified in infrastructure (for example, the railway service is not the best and traffic flows are also problematic. A major disadvantage is lack of international hospitality companies.

Collaboration and participation in decision making process is a necessity in the tourist development of the destination. Thus, the city of Thessaloniki cooperates with airlines such as Ryanair, Turkish Airlines, Aegean and Fraport, with other municipalities in the area (e.g. municipality of Kalamaria), with local businesses, interest groups (Thessaloniki Hotels Association) and local community. In addition, there is cooperation abroad with City Marketing Organizations in Europe, World Tourism Cities Federation

The marketing and promotion of the city in Greece and abroad by Municipality administration is carried out through policy approach and management policies.

As for that, the Thessaloniki Tourism Organization is the main mission. Therefore, in general terms the marketing and promotion of the city is realized through City diplomacy, B2B meetings, funds and press trips, Aegean, Fraport, social media, digital applications, forms and other information materials. Also, important is participation of Thessaloniki in international conferences and tourism exhibitions.

One of Thessaloniki's strategies includes the establishment of international and local events and festivals. Cultural events with international titles such as the Biennale (2011) or World Music Expo WOMEX (2012), the European Youth Capital (2014) and sporting events are some efforts of promotion of the city. However, there are events that are not known abroad. Dimitria, a local event of exceptional importance, has not gained international reputation. In recent years, an effort has also been made to host events of the modern era, such as FESTIVAL MEDIAMIIX, WEBIT FESTIVAL, the Open Knowledge Festival that are global and can contribute to the internationalization of the city.

According to statistics by Thessaloniki Hotels Association the city begins to acquire a new identity. Completeness in the city's hotels reached 70% in 2016. The percentage of tourist participation of the city in the tourist product of the country increased by 10%.

Most overnight stays were made by Greek citizens, with the percentage reaching 53%, while the number of foreigners was 47%. The largest percentage of visitors to the city is for recreational and business purposes. At the same time, travelers are satisfied with the facilities and the price.

For Thessaloniki, the main foreign countries are:

Cyprus with 13%. Followed by Turkey (8%), the US (7%) and Germany (6%). Romania, Russia, Bulgaria, Serbia and Montenegro and Italy account for 5%. While the United Kingdom is 4%.

The main reason that tourists visit Thessaloniki is the city's personality. Of particular interest are gastronomy, archaeological sites and the cultural background of the city

In conclusion, the city has indeed a multicultural character with distinct areas that emphasize its particular identity.

Cultural activities and centers of culture and recreation are important elements for attracting visitors and new residents, with the expected rise of the local economy.

Therefore, culture has a leading role in tourism development, through which other sectors of tourism emerge (gastronomic, touristic, athletic etc.). The actions of the Municipality of Thessaloniki and the Tourism Organization of Thessaloniki demonstrate the decentralization of tourism development by the central administration. The organizations may differ in some aspects of strategy and goals, but their vision is common. The collaboration of actors and stakeholders with timeless consistency and authentic ability can establish Thessaloniki in the world tourist map, as a unique and competitive destination.

4.2 Case study: Plovdiv

Plovdiv is the second largest city in Bulgaria. Since ancient times, Plovdiv is situated in a central point not only in Bulgaria, but also in the Balkans and Europe. The city has been influenced by various civilizations: Thracian, Macedonian, Roman, Byzantine, Old Bulgarian, Ottoman, Renaissance and modern.

There are many museums, galleries and cultural institutions that present the rich ethnic and religious diversity of the city.

In the tourist development of Plovdiv, the public authority with a leading role is the Municipality of Plovdiv

The tourism strategy is mainly connected with the city's resources: natural and cultural resources. If certain points of the Tourism Strategy of Plovdiv need to be highlighted, these would be Open new locations, buildings, accessibility of the city, advertising campaigns, participation in events and conferences of tourist interest, The cultural calendar. A great advantage of Plovdiv is its central location. Apart from the variety of historical sites, there is abundance of leisure and green areas. The region is the biggest wine-producing area in the country. The Rowing canal is the biggest one on the Balkan Peninsula and a venue of international contests, giving preconditions for developments of sports tourism. Also, the variety and abundance of conference halls and business hotels make Plovdiv ideal destination for business and congress tourism. One of the biggest advantages is an important educational center with 9 universities

The main disadvantage results from not making the most of the natural resources, like Maritsa River. One of the biggest disadvantages is the condition of Plovdiv airport – first, there is no direct public transport to it; second, it is currently served only by one company, offering low-cost flights to 4 countries.

The public and private sector collaborate in a few ways in order to meet the objectives. One of the main means of collaboration is establishing Tourism Advisory Council, members of which are managers of public tourism structures, as well as representatives of the branch. Also, annual tourism forums are being organized, the most important of which being the International Meeting of Tourism, which is an annual event gathering together representatives of the branch, like tour operators and journalists. A new platform aiming to increase private initiative and introducing certain objectives is the Annual Tourism Awards

Plovdiv is promoted in various ways according to the annual program, such as: international tourism exhibitions, national tourism exhibitions, international campaigns advertising platforms (pocket guide, arrival Guide) internet (visitplovdiv.com, Facebook, Twitter, etc.) foreign editions and blogging.

Event tourism goes hand in hand with any other kind of tourism of Plovdiv. Most of the big annual festivals are being held in historical venues, such as the Ancient theatre of Plovdiv, the Roman Stadium, etc. The cultural calendar annually consists of over 130 big concerts and festivals, and there are private exhibitions and smaller events, as well. September is the most popular month in terms of events. Some of them are the International Folklore festival in the first week of August, the Young Wine Parade taking place in the Old Town every last week of November, the open-air opera festival 'Opera Open', International Festival of Chamber Music,' etc.

For the year 2016 in the total number of overnight stays the percentage of Bulgarian visitors was 68% while 32% were foreigners. Travelers choose Plovdiv for leisure and business reasons. They said that it is inexpensive city in terms of plant prices and quality of service.

For Plovdiv, the main market is Turkey with 17%. Greece ranks second with 10%, followed by Israel 6%, Germany and Italy are 4% and France 3%. Russia, USA, Spain, United Kingdom account for 1%.

Visitors to Plovdiv are mainly associated with the city's cultural attractions, wine cellars in the area. At the same time, the number of visitors to attend festivals and cultural events has increased considerably.

Although Plovdiv has included cultural tourism very early in its development plans, it has not become an attractive and competitive destination. The long-term procedure of actions in an ever-changing environment, will show the satisfaction of the objectives.

5. Conclusion

In the era of globalization, competition between cities is commonplace/frequent phenomenon, although economic theories believed that only businesses compete with each other.

Nowadays, in order to attract visitors, residents and investments, the cities are turning to a search for policies and tools for reconstruction and upgrading of their characteristics. For this reason, cities' competitiveness plays a central role in local government and urban development policies. The objectives of the case studies strategies are to increase the percentage of overnight stays, to satisfy the visitor and to increase the economic and social benefits of tourism development for the local community

During 2016, the total number of nights spent in Thessaloniki was 2.309.617, twice the number of nights spent in Plovdiv, which reached the number of 1.003.300.

Strategies and actions have shown many common points and some differences,

Their developmental processes are on track. The two cities seem to have a strong vision, with Thessaloniki taking the lead in the field of tourism development.

The two cities should exploit and integrate new tourism trends, such as millennials, adventureTravel, VR technologies, personalized services, green tourism (ecotourism), security, sustainable workforce.

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