

ALTERNATIVE TOURIST ACTIVITIES IN THE FRAMEWORK OF SMALL MANAGEMENT INTERVENTIONS IN PELION MOUNTAIN (GREECE)

OLGA G. CHRISTOPOULOU (*)

ABSTRACT

The massive touristic development in Greece is responsible for many problems as environmental (pollution, disturbance of biotopes), cultural (alteration of cultural identity) and social (increase of life cost, diminution of agricultural land etc.). Other types of tourism are needed, which will be absolutely compatible with the environmental and cultural conservation. In this paper the possibilities of the development of new forms of sustainable tourism on mountain Pelion are examined.

This development consists of activities such as environmental education at a Centre of Environmental Education or in the nature, Museum of Natural Resources, religious tourism, climbing, study of nature, development of forest recreation facilities, sea side touristic activities (some of Pelion's villages are near the sea), equine tourism etc. under the controlled management of touristic flow and the creation of necessary infrastructures as roads, telecommunications etc.

RÉSUMÉ

Le développement touristique de masse, est responsable de beaucoup de problèmes environnementaux (pollution, destruction des biotopes), culturels (altération de l'identité culturelle), sociaux (augmentation du coût de vie, diminution de la terre cultivable etc.) et spatiaux (pression sur l'utilisation du sol).

Alors, le développement d'autres types de tourisme, compatibles avec la conservation environnementale et culturelle, apparaît nécessaire.

Dans cet article nous examinons les possibilités de développement de nouveaux types de tourisme durable dans la montagne de Pélion.

Ces possibilités sont liés aux activités qui concernent l'éducation environnementale, comme un Centre de l'Éducation Environnementale, ou la nature (Musée des Ressources Naturelles), le tourisme religieux, l'étude de la nature, la mise en place de petites infrastructures pour la récréation forestière, des activités touristiques maritimes (assez de villages de Pélion sont près de la mer), équitation, escalade etc. sous la régulation contrôlée de flux de tourisme à travers de petites infrastructures nécessaires comme le réseau routier, les télécommunications etc.

It is probable that the touristic development of a country or of a region, contributes considerably to its economic reinforcement.

(De Kadt 1979, Logothetis 1982, Davies 1986, Iakovidou 1988, Tsartas 1989, Smeral 1989, Christopoulou 1991).

The tourism (internal and external) is a phenomenon as economic as cultural. It is a "derivation" of revenues in local, regional and national level, but it has simultaneously social and economic importance as its influence in social, instructive and civilizational sectors. Particular emphasis should be given to lessening of economic inequality between the centre and the region, to increased employment opportunities both directly related to tourism (hotels, restaurants etc.), and indirectly (commerce, communication etc).

Also tourism contributes to the region's development by creating a substructure (Iakovidou 1988, Tsartas 1989, Christopoulou 1991).

In Greece, increased tourist development is a reality. The feature which defines it, is the growth of tourist concentration at the beaches (Margaris et al., 1982). This and perhaps the incoherently touristic development, was accompanied by violent interruptions to nature (Daskalakis, 1986), alterations to the natural and cultural environment and considerable changes in the life-styles of the indigenous population.

This touristic development is responsible for many

problems environmental (pollution, fire, disturbance of biotopes) as cultural (alteration of traditional architecture, "adoption" of consumptional models of life, increase of life-cost and of the price of land, diminution of the agricultural land etc. (Tsartas 1989 and Christopoulou 1993).

Therefore, it is probable that what is needed is another, soft touristic development according to the principle of "sustainability" (Van den Bergen and Nijkamp 1994, Lorch and Bausch 1995).

Ecotourism is a "soft" type of tourism which is characterized by respect for and conservation of the natural and cultural inheritance. Ecotourism is a form of sustainable tourism, or better is a "style" or "philosophy" of travel which is characterized by respect and protection of the natural and cultural heritage, of "sustainable development" and it

aims to acquaint the tourists with nature. The definition of ecotourism depends on who you talk to. Tour group operators, government officials, business owners and conservationists have spent a great deal of time trying to agree on a common definition, but have failed to do so. Some people feel that nature tourism, adventure tourism, culture tourism, educational tourism and historical tourism are all parts of ecotourism; others believe that ecotourism is a separate category. Also, activities as for example birdwatching, trekking, canoeing activities are in the frame of ecotourism. However we will define ecotourism as "a concept that describes a form of development that respects tradition and culture, protects and preserves the environment, and educates and welcomes visitors." In addition ecotourism should be economically sustainable over the long-term.

(*) Lecturer in Development of Rural and Less Favoured Areas. Dep. of Planning and Regional Development, University of Thessaly. Pedion Areos 38 334 Volos, Greece.

Ecotourism development has been proposed by many (Margaris et al., 1982, Pyrovetsi 1984, Chandrinos and Goutner 1988, Pergantis 1988, A.N.U. 1996, Sfikas 1993) as a possibility for the development of areas with special aesthetic, biological and ecological value. The Greek areas which have been proposed studies for ecotourism development are: the Delta of Nestos, the Dadia forest, the Delta of Evros and generally all national parks, wetlands (Lake Kerkini, Lesvos island, Alonnisos island, Zakynthos island). Since 1980, European travel agencies and more recently Greek ones, include in their programs "ecotourism" activities in Greece, mainly at Crete, Corfu and Peloponnese. But Margaris et al. (1982) emphasize, that the detailed study of the ecotourist development of a region is necessary, because the outcomes of a tourist "invasion" without planning may result in the opposite of the desired effects. Also, according to Kinnaird and O'Brien (1966), although ecotourism may be a valuable tool for the preservation of biodiversity, it can have long term negative effects on reserves, wildlife and local communities.

RESEARCH AREA

Pelion mountain is situated in central - east Greece (**figure 1**). Its maximum altitude is 1600 m and the region's longitude is extended from 22° 49' Greenwich (to the west) to 23° 21' Greenwich (to the east) and its latitude from 39° 05' (southward) to 39° 36' (northward).

The region's area is 90870 Ha and it constitutes the 0.69% of total area of Greece.

On Pelion mountain are situated 24 villages all of which have been characterized as less favoured areas, according to the direction 75/265/EU.

Natural resources

All Pelion's forests have been characterized as "regions with special natural beauty" (order of declaration 652/B/31-5-76). More analytically, there are: forests of beech (*Fagus sylvatica*) at the altitude of 400-1500 m, forests of chestnut (*Castanea sativa*) in East and South Pelion at the altitude of 200-800 m and forests of pine (*Pinus halepensis* and *Pinus brutia*) at the lower altitudes. Also, at the low altitudes there are "maki" vegetation (*Quercus coccifera*, *Quercus ilex*, *Pistacea lentiscus*, *Arbutus unedo*) and vast areas with olive groves. In



Figure 1 - Greece - Magnisia - Pelion.

the region's where closed bushes are not observed, plant communities of brushes are developed.

Characteristics of the region

Tables 1 and **2** give a more comprehensive analysis of the region's physical characteristics. The mean density of habitation is 40.74 inhabitants/km² for the total re-

Table 1 Pelion's type of relief.

Type of relief	Percentage (%)	
	Pelion	Country
Plain	2	23
Semi-mountainous	29	42
Mountainous	69	35

Table 2 Land use in Pelion's region.

Land Use	Percentage (%)
Cultivated areas	27,80
Pasturage	68,82
Waters	0,63
Build areas	2,20
Other	0,27

gion. The senile ratio is high (94 against 44.8 for the country).

The inhabitants are occupied at the primary section (59.2%) at the secondary (28.5%). At the tertiary section are occupied only the 12.3% of the inhabitants.

The basic region's characteristics are:

1. The region's adjacency to the Volos-town which affects it, in most sections such as economy, commerce, occupation, leisure etc.
2. The tourism development – in recent years – because of the considerable natural resources.
3. The specialization of primary section in apple and olive culture.
4. The lack of considerable transformational Units.
5. The mountainous character of the region and the steep inclines.
6. The complicated status in forest property.

Tourism in Pelion

Pelion because of its natural beauty and rich history and culture is a region with considerable touristic concentration in all seasons. The maritime villages of course are more touristic than the mountainous. In **table 3** we can see the touristic distribution in Pelion throughout the year:

It is probable that tourism in Pelion depends on seasonality and with the exception of summer months, it is concentrated mainly on national tourism.

In Pelion, as in the rest of the country, a conflict between touristic and other activities is observed and the massive tourism has become apparent its negative effects. For this reason, the development of new forms of tourism (especially ecotourism) mainly on the moun-

tainous regions, is the best solution to develop them with a simultaneous conservation of their rich natural and cultural character.

Alternative tourism development projects in Pelion⁽¹⁾

A) *The opening of traditional pedestrian ways between villages of Pelion*

The opening of traditional pedestrian ways between villages in Pelion is necessary for the development of mountain walking or trekking tourism. There are in existence 29 courses, with a total length of 120 km. The budget for this development is 435 million dr. and it is funded by the Enterprising Program: Tourism-Culture, subprogram 1: Tourism Measure: Mountainous Ecological Cultural and Therapeutical Tourism.

The financed developments are: infrastructure, projection material, education of all professions related to this kind of tourism.

B) *Traditional stone paths inside villages*

This initiative concerns re-establishment of traditional stone paths inside Pelion's villages. This development combined with the others can contribute to the development of mountainous walking tourism. Budget: 600 million dr.

C) *Traditional methods of transportation*

This development concerns the restoration of the small traditional rail connection between Volos-Lehonia-Milies. Also, the initiative includes the restoration of 11 trains, restoration of two bridges, small technical works etc. Budget: 900 million dr.

D) *Development of the Ski - Centre in Pelion*

The Ski - Centre can be the main axis for the development of mountainous tourism in Pelion and can help the development of many touristic activities and the local economy of the region (Christopoulou, 1991). The

(¹) Source: Plan for Economic and Social Development of Magnesia.

Regions	January		February		March		April		May		June	
	Arrivals-overnight staying											
	Natives	Foreigners	N	F	N	F	N	F	N	F	N	F
Mountainous	13,974	150	9,949	155	10,288	109	12,818	717	8,416	1,467	8,131	2,084
Maritime	53	9	1,859	3	1,218	6	2,058	241	1,460	2,245	8,975	7,555
Total	14,027	159	11,808	158	11,506	115	14,876	958	9,876	3,712	17,106	9,639
Regions	July		August		September		October		November		December	
	Arrivals-overnight staying											
	Natives	Foreigners	N	F	N	F	N	F	N	F	N	F
Mountainous	15,483	3,287	29,740	3,861	10,671	1,914	15,070	597	13,229	139	12,184	148
Maritime	30,097	33,659	51,622	14,651	4,744	4,996	1,973	89	201	0	1,412	0
Total	45,580	36,946	81,362	18,512	15,415	6,910	17,043	686	13,430	139	13,596	148

Source: National Organization of Tourism.

initiatives actions concern the amelioration of installation and services. Budget: 250 million dr.

REGISTRATION OF PELION'S TOURIST RESOURCES

Historical elements

Traditional architecture

Pelion was uninhabited in ancient times. However on the coast there were some considerable cities such as Pagasses, Iolkos, Dimitriada. Generally, in the Byzantine times, Pelion was a monastic mountain and the assemblance of communities was limited. During the period of Turkish domination there was repulsion of the people to the mountain and the result was the creation of a great number of new communities.

In Pelion there are three types of community planning:

a) The simple type which consists of a nucleus with a centre, where the religious, commercial and recreational life of the village is concentrated (ex. Makrinitisa, Katochori, Portaria, Argalasti etc.).

b) The composite type which consists of four joined nuclei which have separate centre of social life (ex. Zagora, Tsagarada, Ano Volos etc.).

c) The harbour which serves the commercial needs of mountainous villages. The criterion of the selection of the harbour was the existence of a natural bay.

The buildings and the houses of Pelion express the economic and civilising development of the villages and are distinguished as:

1) Two or three story mansions with a towerlike construction, the traditional Pelion roof, the rich interior decoration mainly with carved and painted ceilings and wood sculptured doors, wall painting etc. (ex. Vizitsa, Pinakates, Makrinitisa, Agios Lavrentios, Ano Lehonía, Afetes).

2) Rural houses, small two story buildings with a ground level which serves as a store or as stable for the domestic animals and with a second level (with an external staircase) which serves as residence.

3) Pelion's water fountains: there are a great number of water fountains all over Pelion of many different types.

4) Pelion's stone arched bridges which are constructed by famous craftsmen from Epiros because their construction was difficult and required experience and craftsmanship. In Pelion there are according to records 77 bridges (relatively the largest number of all the greek mountains).

This is explained by the fact that in the past Pelion was densely populated, there were many stone paths and pedestrian ways and well developed trade routes (Charatsis, 1996) Some of them of course require maintenance (5 are already destroyed) to conserve this rare and marvellous treasures of the past.

5) Churches and monasteries: churches with their yard having at the Greek village a role rather than the practise of religious tasks. It is an area of social manifesta-

tions, areas where the annual paternal feasts with dances, songs and good cheer are held and in the past these feasts created magnet for walkers and visitors from all over Greece.

Pelion is dotted with churches (very beautiful basilicas), monasteries and chapels (most of them are monuments of art), architectural masterpieces which preserve, throughout the passage of time, the piety of older and younger generations, as well the traditional colour and style which is known as the type of art in Pelion. Many of these sacred places have wonderful interior decoration with wood-carved icons of great value, with portable Byzantine icons, crosses and devotions which are magnificent. The large number of churches and monasteries gave to Pelion the character of the "Peliorite Holy Mountain" (Sacred Metropolis of Demetrias, 1994).

Traditional jobs

Pelion's inhabitants were occupied professionally with the arts and metal working, weaving, painting of sacred icons, ecclesiastic wood-sculpture, bucolic or domestic wood-sculpture, trade (the oil and olives at South Pelion and fruits were considerable export products). But the product which characterized the export activity of the whole prefecture of Magnisia at the beginning of the century was Pelion silk. Its production was very high giving great profits to the native producers.

Besides the developed trade activity, the Pelion's villagers marked a considerable handicraft activity. The most considerable was the silk industry. Other activities were weaving, spinning, tanning, bronzework. These activities were at their peak from the beginning of the 18th century until the middle of the 19th century, when they began to decline and the hand-working dynamic "turned" to other profitable jobs.

PROPOSALS

For the tourist development of Pelion's region it is necessary to carry out some developments which concern the infrastructure. These developments are:

— The opening of parts of roads which join Pelion's villages.

— The increase in the capacity of the Anchialos Airport mainly during the tourist period.

— Creation of a biological purification at North - East and South - East regions of Pelion.

— Network of draining which is based on separation of fluvial water from sewage.

— Expansion of Centre of Health and improvement of their infrastructure.

Also, for a "soft" tourist development of Pelion wich will respect his natural and cultural fortune, some other activities are necessary such as:

1) Education - Training of local population: Two Eco-tourist Programs of 300 hours are sufficient for those

who are or will be occupied with ecotourism.

2) Creation of multimedia packets: The use of multimedia packets on tourism have many advantages and a big response from the public. The information is complete, with photographs, information reaflets, graphics, sound and video.

3) Activities in the frame of climbing-mountaineering: The aim goal of such activities is the combination of mountaineering and environmental education. Such program can comprise:

Mountain activities

- Mountain hiking
- Running, exercise in the forests
- Mountain cycling
- Climbing low rocks
- Horseback riding

Environmental Education

- Researches within the mountain Natural Environment.
- Study of ecosystem function and protection of mountain nature.
- Birdwatching
- Art and natural environment (photography, painting, play theatre)
- Skiing

The goal of these programs is a nature quest for all who want to know and research the mountainous ecosystems, to find out the human impact on these ecosystems and to discover the relations between man culture and cultural environment. If these relations become comprehensive, it is easier to protect and conserve the cultural and natural environment.

4) Activities in the frame of environmental education: The environmental education introduces a knowledge with different quality which must begin from the preschool age and continue until the University level, to form environmental conscience and exhibit new values and manner of life.

For these reasons it is necessary to create:

A) *A Centre of Environmental Education* at Makrynitsa (a mountain village at 600 m 17 km from Volos, the capital of the Prefecture, **figure 2**). This Centre must aim to:

- Retrain educators for the study of the natural and cultural resources of the region valorising their scientific knowledge.
- The promotion of the precious natural and cultural heritage of Pelion and of the most beautiful regions of the country.

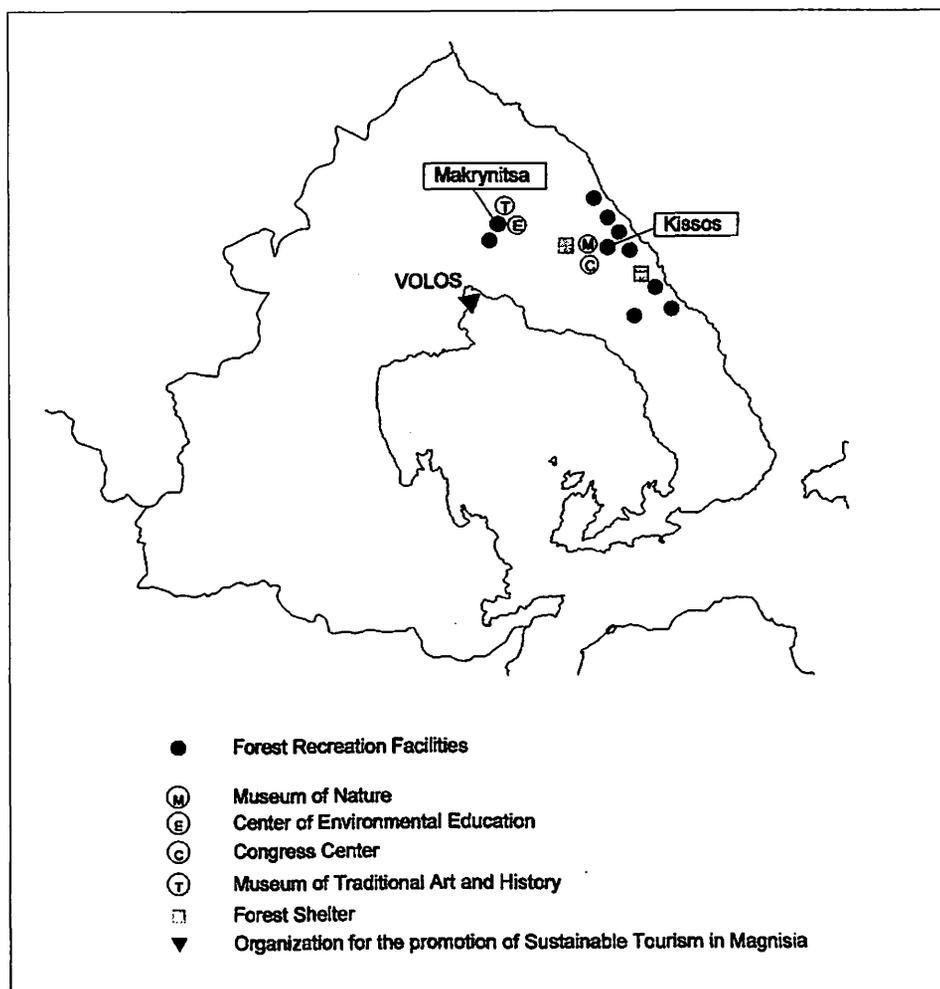


Figure 2 - Map of Works and Installations in Pelion.

- Develop sustainable tourism which will increase job opportunities, local income and reforce the efforts for the protection of the environment.

B) *A Museum of Nature* at Kissos (**figure 2**): The Museums of Nature are spaces where exhibit: collections of living, dry and petrified plants and animals, collections of minerals and fossils, and traditional tools which are connected with the history of land use in this region. This Museum of Nature must be established in a traditional building (which matches with to the environment) and it must comprise exhibition halls, offices, library, research laboratories and room with audio-visual system to inform of the visitors about the geography and history of the region, and its change due to the human impact.

C) *Creation of Congress Centre* at Kissos (**figure 2**): Conference Centre at Pelion would be attractive for high income level tourists. It is proposed that this centre would be small in size and with a capacity 200-500 places.

According to research by National Organization of Tourism in Greece the total cost of a small Conference Centre is calculated about 2.050.000 dr./place.



5) Revival of traditional occupations: technicians that have knowledge of certain occupations and artifact which were in the past basic elements of the economy and social life of the society, could take part in festivals, held every year at highly touristic periods, that would last approximately 20 days.

During those festivals, tourists would get acquainted with occupations that ceased to exist or that are still performed by very few people, but their role was critical and essential for the development and growth of the area and determined its course.

6) Forest Recreational Facilities: it is necessary to develop forest recreational facilities at certain points along the traditional pedestrian ways and also two forest shelters (**figure 2**).

7) Organization for the promotion of sustainable Tourism in Magnisia: the creation of an organization which can deal with the problems of management promotion and generally arranging of the tourist activities in all the prefecture is essential. The creation of an organization for sustainable tourism is proposed which can "arise" from the Region's Councils. It can have a permanent staff of four persons, and in peak seasons 11 and Volos must be its seat (**figure 2**).

The responsibilities of this organization would be:

- The creation, development and the manipulation of multimedia packets.
- Tourist marketing.
- The printing and promotion of promotional material with information about the cultural and folkloric character of the Prefecture. Also within the responsibilities of this organization would be the publication of Ecotourist

maps with information about outdoor recreation, Museums, Centres of Environmental Education etc.

- Collaboration with tour operators to attract high level tourists with special interests in the acquaintance and protection of natural resources for photography, the study of cultural elements etc.

- Responsibility for the valorization of the European Programs which are relative to tourism. ●

REFERENCES

1. A.N.U. (Academiefur Naturund Ummweltschutz Baden-Wurtemberg) (1990) - Wetlands conservation and nature conservation management in the Nestos Delta Northeast Greece. Results of an International Seminar, Stuttgart.
2. Chandrinos G., Goutner V. (1988) - The biotopes of Evros. Delta of Evros, Forest of Dadia Soufli. Athens (in Greek).
3. Charatsis N. (1996) - The stone arched bridges in Pelion. Volos (in Greek).
4. Christopoulou O. (1991) - Evaluation of the demand in the ski-centres of Greece and their contribution at the development of mountain areas. Ph. D. Thessis, 228 p. Thessaloniki (in Greek).
5. Christopoulou O. (1993) - Agritourism: Respect to the environment and the tradition. Congress: Results of the tourism development in a small island. 10/4/1993 Skopelos, Greece (in Greek).
6. Daskalakis G.D. (1986) - Tourism and Environment. Tourism and Economy. Oct.-Dec. 1976, issue 4 (in Greek).
7. Davis E.J.G. (1986) - The enormous contribution of tourism in the economic development. Tourism and Economy, issue 87 (in Greek).
8. De Kadt E. (1979) - Tourism, Passport to Development? New York: Oxford University Press.
9. Iakovidou O. (1998) - The results of the tourist development in the rural community of Chalkidiki. Ph. D. Diss., Thessaloniki (in Greek).
10. Kinnaird M.F., O'Brien T.G. (1996) - "Ecotourism in the Tangoko Duasudara Nature Reserve: Opening Pandora's box?" Oryx 30; 1; 65-73, 23 ref.
11. Logothetis M.I. (1982) - Tourist Policy, Athens (in Greek).
12. Lorch J., Bausch T. (1995) - Sustainable Tourism in Europe. Tourism and the Environment in Europe, DG XXIII.
13. Margaris N.S., Arianoutsou M. and Zafiropoulou S. (1982) - The possibilities of ecotouristic development in Greece. Study in the frame of the Program: Economic and Social Development, 1983-87 Thessaloniki (in Greek).
14. Pergantis F. (1988) - Ecotouristic guide of the region Messologi-Aitoliko-Delta of Acheloos. Athens.
15. Pyrovetsi M.-D. (1984) - Ecodevelopment in Prespa National Park, Greece. Ph. D Diss., Michigan State University.
16. Sacred Metropolis of Demetrias (1994) - Magnisia (in greek).
17. Smeral E. (1989) - The economic impact of travel and tourism in a mountain area: The case of Volarberg (Austria). Revue de Tourisme, No 2/84, 99: 25-29.
18. Tsartas P. (1989) - Social and economic results of the touristic development in the Prefecture of Cyclades and specially in the islands Ios and Siphos during the period 1950-80. C.S.R.G (in greek).
19. Tsounis G. and Sfikas G. (1993) - Ecotouristic guide of Greece. Athens.
20. Van den Bergh J.C.J.M. and Nijkamp P., (1994) - Modelling ecologically sustainable economic development in a Region: a case study in the Netherlands. Ann. Reg. Sci. 28: 7-29.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many thanks are due to Mr E. Damanakis for help in the data collection phase.