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DIPLOMA THESIS:

“Archaeological tourism in Greece: an analysis of quantitative data, determining factors and prospects”

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Abstract

. For many decades now, Greece has invested a lot in tourism which can undoubtedly be considered the country's most valuable asset and "heavy industry". The country is gifted with a rich and diverse history, represented by a variety of cultural heritage sites which create an ideal setting for this particular type of tourism. Moreover, the variations in Greece's landscape, cultural tradition and agricultural activity favor the development and promotion of most types of alternative types of tourism, such as agro-tourism, religious, sports and medicinal tourism.

However, according to quantitative data from the Hellenic Statistical Authority, despite the large number of visitors recorded in state-run cultural heritage sites every year, the distribution pattern of visitors presents large variations per prefecture. A careful examination of this data shows that tourist flows tend to concentrate in certain prefectures, while others enjoy little to no visitor preference.

The main factors behind this phenomenon include the number and importance of cultural heritage sites and the state of local and national infrastructure, which determines the accessibility of sites. An effective analysis of these deficiencies is vital in order to determine solutions in order to encourage the flow of visitors to the more "neglected" areas.

The present thesis attempts an in-depth analysis of cultural tourism in Greece and the factors affecting it. Using GIS software, quantitative data were analyzed, visualized and interpreted. The most popular prefectures are, in most cases, those that present a large number of cultural heritage sites open to the public. Moreover, visitor preferences seem to concentrate in sites included in the World Heritage List by UNESCO. Also, the most visited prefectures enjoy a high level of accessibility by airplane, road or railroad.

On the contrary, the least visited sites present either a shortage of available archaeological sites and museums, or are difficult to access. Most interesting are the cases of prefectures featuring a large number of open cultural heritage sites, but a low number of visitors, like the prefecture of Aitolokarnania. For these cases, the possible solutions include the planning of mixed touristic packages, which combine visits to the sites with alternative activities, according to the potential of each prefecture.

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1. Introduction

1.1. Aims

The aim of the present thesis is to attempt an in-depth analysis of cultural tourism in Greece and the factors affecting it. Tourism has been the country's most valuable asset for many decades, since Greece enjoys the unique advantage of combining natural beauty with significant cultural heritage spanning all historical periods. The large number and variety of cultural heritage sites, including urban remains, religious monuments, ancient infrastructure, as well as museums dedicated to all periods and aspects of history, create an ideal setting for this particular type of tourism. Moreover, the diverse nature of Greece's landscape, the different cultural traditions and also the various types of agricultural activity have been incorporated in touristic planning in order to promote alternative types of tourism, such as agro-tourism, religious tourism, medicinal tourism etc.

However, the quantitative data on cultural tourism show that, even though archaeological sites and museums throughout the country recorded about 15 million visits last year, the distribution of visitors in the different prefectures is far from homogeneous. While certain prefectures attracted hundreds of thousands, or even millions of visitors, others presented very little or no data. Although this phenomenon is understandable and expected to a large degree, it is important to examine all possible factors behind this differentiation, in order to search for the best possible solutions which will help manage even the more "neglected" areas in a way that will allow them to promote their cultural heritage and contribute further to the domain of unlimited potential, which is cultural tourism.

1.2. Methodology

The following study will be divided in three parts; firstly, there will be a comprehensive analysis of the quantitative data on visitor flows in the country's archaeological sites and museums. All quantitative data were provided by the databases of the Hellenic Statistical Authority (ELSTAT) (ELSTAT, 2014). The data include accurate numbers for visitors at

museums and archaeological sites per prefecture for the entire Hellenic territory. It is important to note, however, that this data corresponds to visitors in general; unfortunately there was no distinction by ELSTAT between domestic and foreign visitors. Although this detail would have been ideal for the creation of a whole new debate, i.e. the criteria followed by the two types of visitors and possible differences in preferences, the limitations of the current thesis do not allow us to explore this parameter.

The original data, classified by ELSTAT per month and national prefecture, were imported in QGIS software (see Methodology) firstly in totals for the year 2015 and then separately for the winter (November – March) and summer seasons (April – October). The quantitative data were then organized into 5 categories and then color-coding was used in order to create a map which would provide an effective comparison between the different prefectures of Greece in terms of visitor flows. Herein lies the value of Geographical Information Systems (GIS) in these types of studies; it provides the possibility of managing quantitative data effectively and easily and finally visualizing them on interactive maps.

The distribution of visitors per season as well as prefecture can provide useful insights on an important factor affecting visitor preferences for cultural heritage sites; seasonality. No study of this type could be considered as complete without examining the potential differences in visitor preferences between the winter and summer seasons. Should significant variations according to seasonality occur, then it would mean we could be dealing with expected fluctuations mainly between the island and the mainland areas, which would not necessarily indicate permanent problems in the management of cultural heritage assets. However, should the general picture remain the same between the summer and winter seasons then one can reach the conclusion that certain areas are generally more privileged than others and any efforts should, therefore, be focused on the promotion of the least privileged ones.

The second part will be dedicated to the analysis of the factors affecting visitor flows. On the one hand, there will be a presentation of the advantages of the most popular prefectures, in terms of cultural heritage site availability, as well as the presence of basic infrastructure, like airports, ports and also road and railroad network. On the other hand, there will be a presentation of the problems identified in the least visited areas in the same fields.

After the identification of the problems, the study will move to its third part, which will be the presentation of some ideas to help enhance touristic movement to the more neglected areas

by combining cultural tourism with sites of alternative activities like agro-tourism, hiking, skiing, medical tourism and visits to sites of religious importance. The question of national infrastructure will not be mentioned at this point, since there exist inherent difficulties, mainly due to the particular landscape of certain areas; besides this would require a whole new different type of study, which is beyond the scope and limits of the present thesis.

As far as the technical details are concerned, all GIS-related work has been performed on QGIS (version 2.14.3), which is an open-source Geographic Information System (GIS) licensed under the GNU General Public License and an official project of the Open Source Geospatial Foundation (OSGeo) (QGIS, 2016). A legitimate and free version of this software was downloaded by the QGIS website (QGIS, 2016). Although of somewhat limited capabilities compared to the original ArcMap software, QGIS has adequate possibilities and functions for a project of this level. Moreover, it is less demanding on computer hardware and its free license makes it easily accessible.

The quantitative data concerning visitor flows to museums and archaeological sites derive from the website of the Hellenic Statistical Authority (ELSTAT) (ELSTAT, 2016).

All basic shapefiles have been downloaded from GEODATA.gov.gr (GEOdata.gov.gr, 2016) which is a national catalogue of geographical data and services. GEODATA.gov.gr has been designed, developed and is maintained by the Institute for the Management of Information Systems (IMIS) (IMIS, 2016), which is part of the “Athena” Research and Innovation Centre in Information, Communication and Knowledge Technologies (ATHENA, 2016).

All other data, namely the locations of museums and guarded archaeological sites, as well as the various points of interest and features of infrastructure, such as airports and ports, have been input manually using geographical information provided by GoogleMaps (Google, 2016). Close to 400 map elements have been input for the needs of this thesis (**Figure 1**). The categorization and visualization of all quantitative data on the featured maps, as well as the creation of all map layouts for the final version of this essay have also been performed manually by the author.



Figure 1. Map of Greece including archaeological sites and museums.

1.3. Research background

The ever growing preference of the public towards cultural tourism has attracted the attention of several studies over the past years. According to Richards, it is now maybe the most desirable type of touristic activity, on both national and local scales. The type of visitor it attracts is mainly cultural-driven, cultivated and high spending, which means a higher income for national and local economies, as well as positive “side-effects” for the cultural heritage property as well. More specifically, cultural tourism can increase economic development and employment, as well assist in the proper exhibition and preservation of heritage sites (Richards G. , 2015). On a worldwide scale, cultural tourism now comprises about 40% of touristic activity (Richards, 2015, p. 2). A growing trend now concerns the integration of cultural touristic activity with alternatives kinds of tourism, such as religious and gastronomic tourism (Richards, 2015 from Smith, 2009).

A certain study has given a new perspective towards cultural tourism. According to Richards and Wilson (Richards & Wilson, 2007), it should be defined as “creative tourism”, since it is a part of more diverse visiting activities, rather than providing motivation in itself. The term “creative” is used to imply that its purpose is to motivate visitors to engage in various creative or “educational” activities which are characteristic of the visiting destination.

According to a study published in 2013, the traditional form of tourism is gradually being replaced during the last years in favor of different types of tourism, which respond to needs and interests other than simple change of scenery and entertainment (Karikis & Tsamantanis, 2013). Concerning the municipality of Fokida, despite the high numbers achieved due to the archaeological site and museum of Delphi, there have been suggestions regarding the incorporation of visits to the famous site to a wider schedule, which will include visits to other cultural heritage sites, such as museums of folk art and traditional houses and villages (Karikis & Tsamantanis, 2013). This activity will also aim to familiarize participants with traditional types of production activities thus touching the field of agro-tourism. The latter is only one of the alternative types of tourism to be promoted by this initiative. Others include agro-tourism, winter tourism, marine tourism (which incorporates cruises and sea-sports, as well as sailing), professional tourism (corporate activities, conferences and exhibitions), religious tourism, eco-tourism, geo-tourism (aiming at visitors with an interest in geology and mining activity) and, also, sports and adventure tourism (camping, mountain-biking, para-gliding, hunting etc) (Karikis & Tsamantanis, 2013).

Lastly, various studies have been dedicated to the use of Geographical Information Systems for sustainable touristic development (Jovanovic & Njegus, 2008). This software’s ability to store, manipulate and display large amounts of diverse types of quantitative and qualitative data have long been acknowledged and it has been used increasingly in touristic planning and flow assessment studies. More specifically, its applications include evaluating environmental conditions and exploring the potential of specific sites in touristic development (Bahaire & Elliott -White, 1999).

2. Quantitative data analysis

What follows is the analysis of the quantitative data drawn from the Hellenic Statistical Authority (ELSTAT). The numbers represent visitor flows at archaeological sites and museums throughout the country. However, the reader must take into consideration the fact that these numbers do not present a full picture of cultural tourism in Greece, since there are plenty of sites of cultural interest which do not provide official measurable data. These are mainly churches, monasteries and other sites of religious interest, traces of ancient infrastructure, e.g. bridges and aqueducts and also private collections and museums, which either offer free admission or do not provide visitor numbers to national statistical authorities. Finally, since the data for 2016 are not yet available, only those for 2015 were used.

ELSTAT provides the recorded number of visitors per month and archaeological site/museum for each of the country's prefectures. However, for the purposes of this thesis, the corresponding numbers were manipulated in a way that they represent the flows for the whole year, as well as for the winter (November-March) and summer (April-October) semesters. The reason behind that is that the representation of flows for each month of the year would be too confusing and needless. On the contrary, it could be more fruitful to estimate these numbers in total and per semester, so as to decide which areas enjoy a large amount of tourism and which of these appear more "neglected" and also to assess the influence of the seasonal factor behind this phenomenon.

The selective sums of data were input into a GIS generated georeferenced map and were categorized and visualised in order to project visitor flows in a color-coded fashion. The areas which attract more tourism appear in hues of green, while the more "problematic" areas are represented by hues of orange and red.

Firstly, there will be a discussion on touristic flows for the whole year. Taking a quick look at the color-coded map (**Figure 2**), it is obvious that the "healthier" areas are those that constitute popular destinations in general; specifically, the islands of the Aegean as a whole and especially the Cyclades, Crete and the Dodecanese, the coastal prefectures of the Peloponnese, Attica and the prefectures of Thessaloniki, Chalkidiki, Imathia, Pieria, Pella, Serres and Kavala in northern Greece.

The results are hardly surprising, since most of these areas are common destinations, especially during the high-season (April – October). Furthermore, among the highly visited

prefectures, there are certain ones which exceed the mean rate of some tens of thousands of visitors per year and reach numbers totalling hundreds of thousands or even millions or tourists each year. These are the prefectures of Attica (6.5 mil.), the Dodecanese (1.5 mil.), Iraklion (1.1 mil.) and Argolid (1.1 mil.). Following immediately after them are the Cyclades (620.000), as well as the prefectures of Lasithi (630,000), Ilia (630,000), Fokis (530,000), Thessaloniki (480,000), Kerkira (275,000), Imathia (220,000), Corinth (175,000), Lakonia (135,000) and Messinia (105,000).

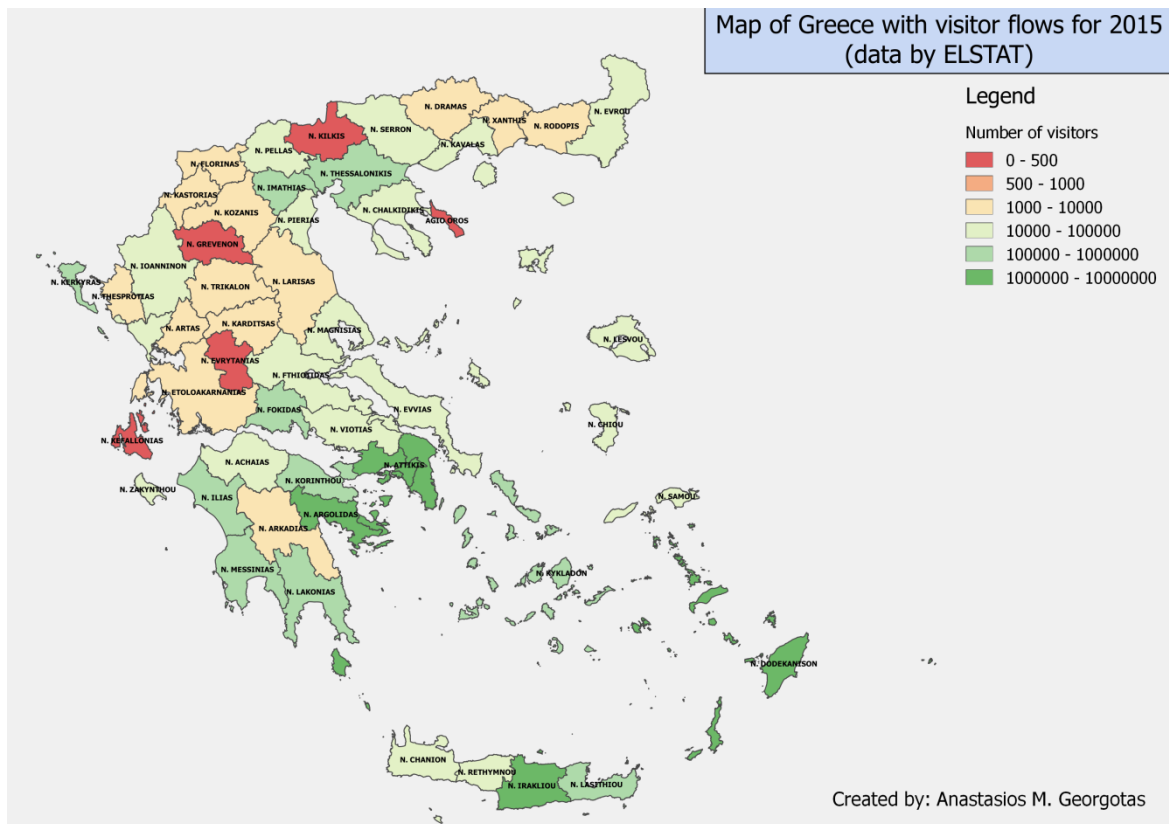


Figure 2. Map of Greece with visitor flows for 2015 (whole year) (data by ELSTAT).

On the contrary, among the most “neglected” areas are the inland prefectures of central Greece, Thessaly and Ipiros, namely those of Trikala, Larissa, Karditsa, Arta, Aitolokarnania and Thesprotia and also those of western Macedonia, i.e. Florina, Kastoria and Kozani. Finally, low visitor rates are observed in the prefectures of eastern Macedonia and Thrace (Drama, Xanthi and Rodopi) and, finally, the prefectures of Arkadia and Kefalonia. Among those, the areas of Kefalonia, Evrytania, Grevena and Kilikis, present the lowest numbers of visitors per

year. Especially concerning Kefhalonia, Evrytania and Grevena, we have absolutely no statistics from cultural heritage sites. The reasons behind this phenomenon will be analysed in a later section of this chapter.

A special note has to be made at this point for the area of Athos in Chalkidiki, represented on the maps as “Agion Oros”. Although Athos receives a large number of visitors throughout the whole year, it is presented here as having no visitor flows. This is due to the fact analysed earlier, i.e. the difficulty of gathering quantitative data from religious sites, which are usually of free entrance and which comprise the totality of cultural heritage sites in the area. For this reason, as well the unique character of the area which does not allow for alternative suggestions for touristic activity, it will not be analysed further in this study.

After having determined the situation in the domain of cultural tourism for the duration of 2015, the next step is to make an estimation for each of the winter and summer semesters, in order to determine whether visitor flows are determined by seasonal tourism attraction, thus reaching conclusions as to the degree at which seasonality affects cultural tourism in Greece. Regarding the winter semester, there are few changes as to the degree of “popularity” among the various prefectures (**Figure 3**). Once again, Attica, Crete and the coastal areas of the Peloponnese, along with Corfu and the coastal parts of central Macedonia present the strongest flows. However, it can be observed that there is a tendency for preference towards the islands of the southern Aegean, especially Crete and the Cyclades, while numbers drop significantly in the northern part of the Aegean and Samos. Also, the prefectures of Attica, the Argolid and Thessaloniki are now the prevalent ones. Finally, there is a general drop in visitor rates throughout the country.

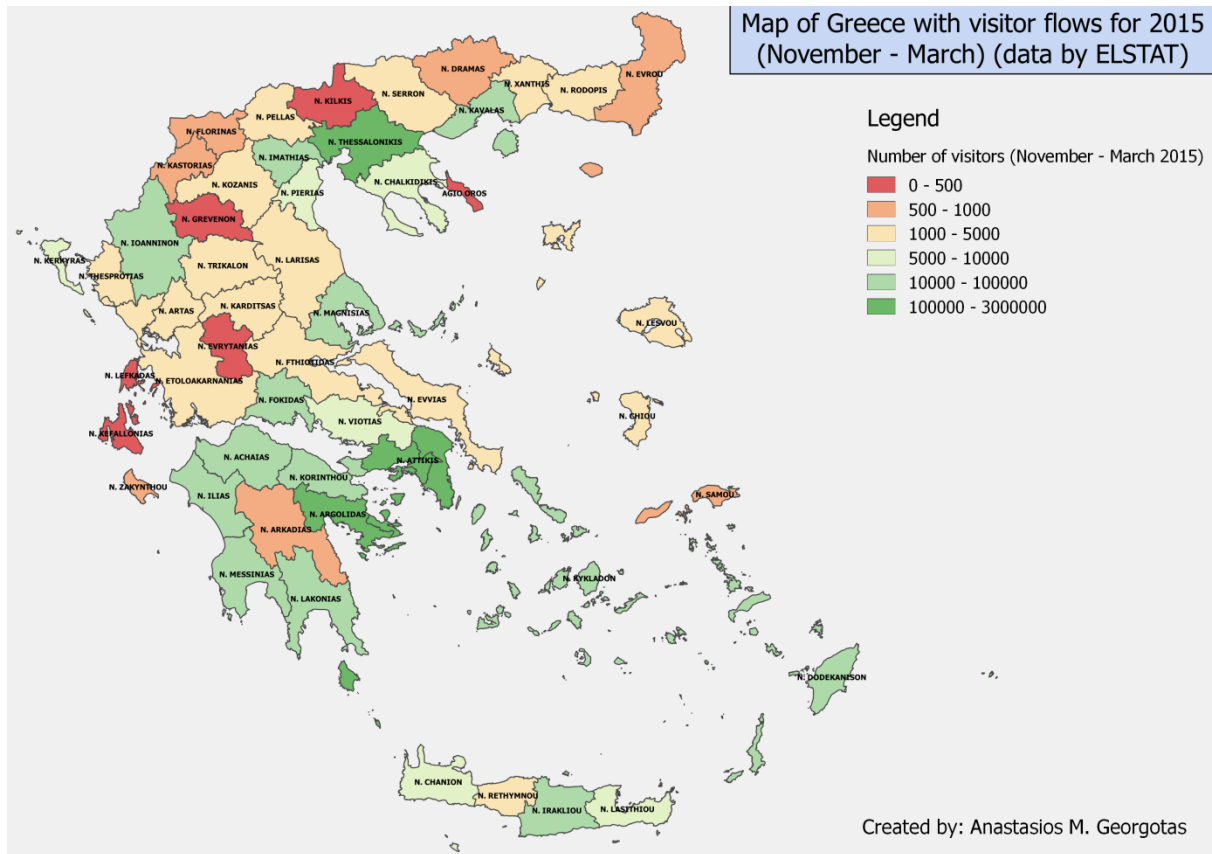


Figure 3. Map of Greece with visitor flows for 2015 (November-March) (data by ELSTAT).

Turning to the summer season, the most immediate observation is the obvious increase in tourist numbers for all prefectures (**Figure 4**). There are no apparent changes regarding the hierarchy among the prefectures in terms of visitor preference. The Aegean, namely the Cyclades, the Dodecanese and Crete are now prevalent destinations, along with Attica, most of the Peloponnese, excluding Arkadia, Corfu (Kerkira) and central Macedonia, especially Thessaloniki and Imathia. Once again, the lowest numbers are encountered in the prefectures of Kephallonia, Grevena, Evrytania and Kilkis. The reason is mainly the lack of official cultural heritage sites and will be analysed later on.

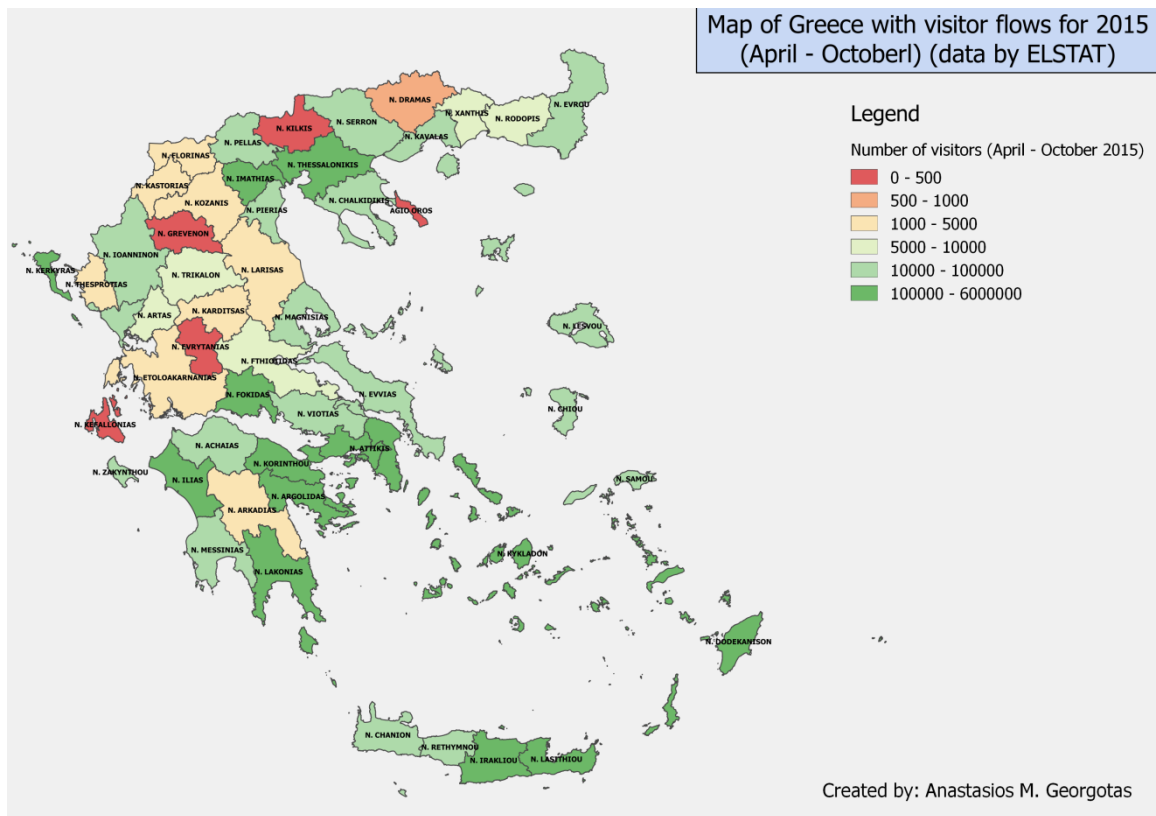


Figure 4. Map of Greece with visitor flows for 2015 (April-October) (data by ELSTAT).

Regarding the seasonal character of cultural tourism for the whole of the country, we can see an obvious preference towards the summer months. Out of 14,700,000 visitors in archaeological sites and museums (both foreign and domestic) throughout the country for the year 2015, 12,380,000 were recorded during the summer season, while only 2,275,000 arrived in winter. In other words, the months between April and October claim 84% of the total tourist flows in the country. If we make a comparison with some general statistics for touristic mobility taken from the Statistical Authority, we can see that the latter form patterns that match perfectly those that concern cultural tourism. The Hellenic Statistical Authority realised a general review of touristic flows of non-domestic visitors for the years 2010-2014. The data was divided per trimester, providing accurate insights regarding the matter of seasonal preference for visitors in in Greece (ELSTAT, 2015). The results show that the two trimesters corresponding to the summer season, i.e. months April-October (the month of October is typically included in the fourth trimester but, in this case, it is considered as part of the high-season) almost monopolize visitation rates, gathering over 13 million visitors from a total of 15 million. In accurate numbers,

this corresponds to about 88% of total visitor flows for the whole year, thus forming a good match for our statistics concerning cultural tourism.

However, besides the obvious preference of visitors towards the summer season, we can see no apparent change in the “hierarchy” of prefectures in terms of popularity. In other words, the prevalent prefectures in the summer season are also the most popular ones in the winter season. The same situation can be observed for the most “neglected” ones, which do not seem to gain any advantage in any of the two seasons. This shows that, although seasonality plays a big role for tourism for the country in general, it does not explain the differences in popularity between the different prefectures; the real reasons behind this phenomenon are rather connected to the peculiarities of each prefecture, which will be examined later.

3. Advantages and problems

3.1. Advantages of popular prefectures

The visualized data have offered a full and comprehensive picture of the potential of separate areas of the country regarding the attraction of visitor flows. At this point, it is important to examine some of the factors that are responsible for this picture. First will be analysed the advantages of the most popular areas, in terms of the quantity, promotion and prestige of their cultural heritage sites, as well as accessibility.

Firstly, the most popular areas gather the biggest number of archaeological sites and museums open to the public. The first in rank is the prefecture of Attica, with at least 22 cultural heritage sites, which partly explains why these are by far the most frequented cultural spaces in the country. The other most visited prefectures, namely, the Cyclades, the Dodecanese, the Argolid, the whole of Crete, Corfu, as well as the prefectures of Thessaloniki, Imathia, Fokis and the coastal prefectures of the Peloponnese, all host 4 or more archaeological sites and museums.

The analogy between the number of sites and that of visitors could be enough to explain this undeniable dominance of the aforementioned areas in the domain of cultural tourism. Also, even if a certain prefecture features a small number of sites, their importance can more than make up for it. The most prominent example is that of the archaeological site at Delphi, which

almost by itself helps its home prefecture to be ranked among the most visited areas in the country, as long as cultural tourism is concerned.

However, we must take into account another factor, which plays a major part in enhancing or inhibiting visitation: the degree of accessibility to these areas, represented by the presence of civilian airports, national and international ports, as well as the state and extent of the road and railroad networks.

A common characteristic between all the popular prefectures is their high degree of accessibility, often by all forms of transportation (**Figure 5**). More specifically, Attica, the Cyclades, the Dodecanese, the island of Corfu (Kerkira Prefecture) and the prefectures of Thessaloniki and Kavala, all have airports and ports. According to a study by the Hellenic Statistical Authority, concerning the means of transportation used by non-domestic visitors to enter the country, the grand majority arrive by plane (ELSTAT, 2014). As far as ports are concerned, they are of major importance mainly for domestic tourism.

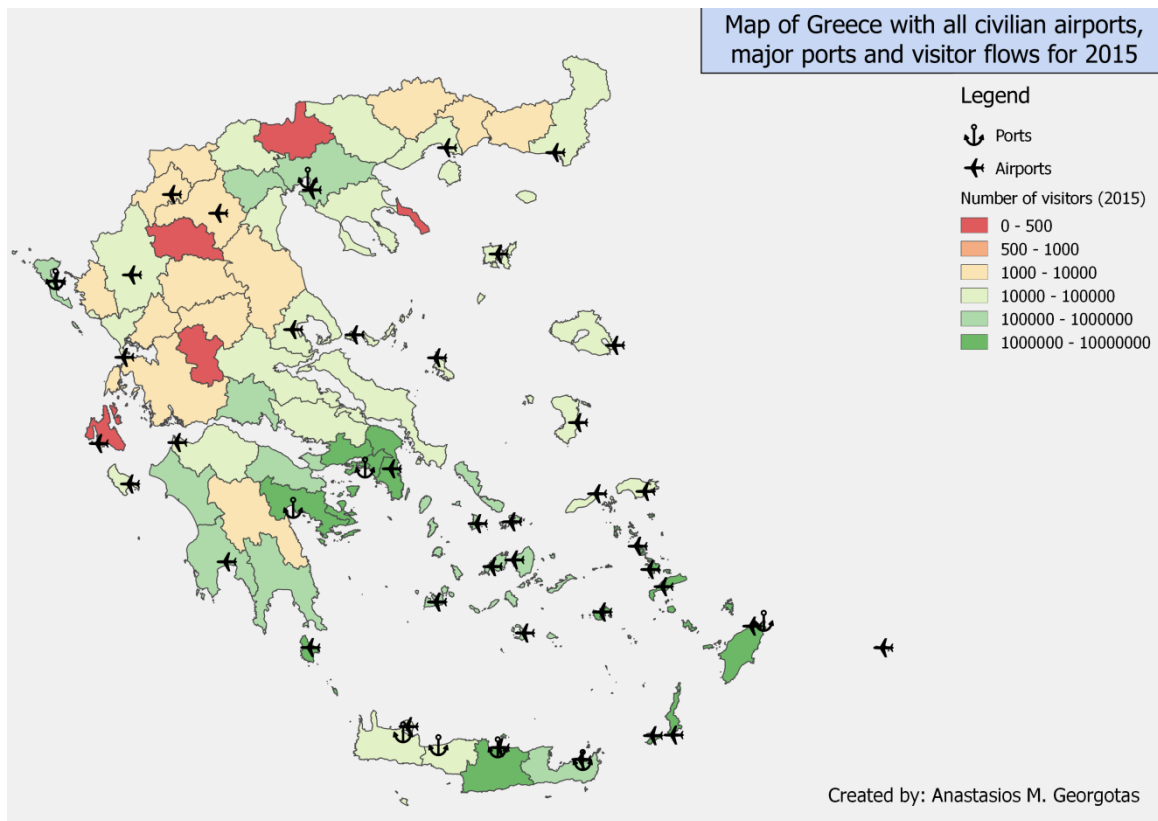


Figure 5. Map of Greece with all civilian airports, major ports and visitor flows for 2015 (whole year).

Connection by the national railroad network is also a common advantage of all inland prefectures with high visitation rates. The Greek railroad network serves the areas of eastern, central and partly western Macedonia and continues south through Thessaly, traversing central Greece and reaching the Peloponnese. Accordingly, the prefectures of Attica, Thessaloniki and Imathia, as well as the coastal prefectures of the Peloponnese, are also connected via railroad, providing a large benefit, mainly to domestic visitation. Finally, almost the same areas, with the inclusion of the coastal parts of western Greece, are also served by the national highway network, which, although incomplete in many parts, specifically the northern Peloponnese, parts of Thessaly and western Greece, undoubtedly does a lot to facilitate transportation in these areas (EDAFOS A.E., 2012). Finally, the largest part of this network comprises also part of the wide International and European Road Network, a very important fact for both domestic and foreign visitor flows.

3.1.1. The role of UNESCO

Apart from the factors concerning national policies, infrastructure and promotion, the data point to another decisive parameter which influences the popularity of certain monuments/areas. That parameter is the achievement of worldwide recognition through the actions of international organizations, the most prevalent one being, of course, the UNESCO World Heritage Centre. Since the early 1960s UNESCO has engaged in actions concerning the preservation of cultural heritage sites, while these activities were sanctioned by the World Heritage Convention in 1972 (UNESCO, 1992-2016) The inclusion of sites of cultural significance or natural beauty in the World Heritage List of UNESCO has been proven to provide important benefits to the sites themselves, as well as to the countries and local communities. Firstly, the listed monuments, due to the attention they receive, often enjoy the benefits of international cooperation, a fact which improves the possibility of ensuring funds from various sources. Moreover, they are eligible for additional funding from the World Heritage Fund, although such help is designated mainly for developing countries and monuments which qualify as “Heritage at Risk” (UNESCO, 1992-2016). Also, a side-benefit is that the national authorities charged with the management of cultural heritage are required to submit reports on the monuments’ preservation state and the actions taken to ensure their safety (UNESCO, 1992-2016). However, the most important fact in terms of site popularity and visitation rates is that the prestige enjoyed by the title of World

Cultural Heritage Site plays a major role in promoting their importance and reputation (UNESCO, 1992-2016). A characteristic proof of this claim is the case of the Old Town of Corfu, one of the latest Greek sites to be enlisted, in 2007. According to the Statistical Authority, two years prior to its declaration as a World Heritage Site, the total number of visitors to the prefecture's officially recorded cultural heritage sites was close to 146,000, while in 2007, this number reached over 213,000. In other words there was an increase of 46% for the totality of cultural heritage sites on the island. This increase was even more impressive for the city's Old Fortress, the most emblematic monument of the city complex, which reached 73% .

Now let us examine the possible connection between the recognition of greek sites by UNESCO and the actual visitation rates for the whole country. In all, 18 monuments and sites of cultural or natural significance have, up to this moment, been included in the World Heritage List. It is interesting to note that all the prefectures which enjoy visitation rates of hundreds of thousands and even millions of visitors contain at least one monument awarded the title of world cultural heritage monument. In deeper analysis, in Attica, visited by well over 6 million tourists in 2015, can be found the Acropolis and the Dafni Monastery, which were enlisted in 1987 and 1990 accordingly. The second place in this rating is held by the Dodecanese and specifically the islands of Rhodes and Patmos. The Medieval Town of Rhodes and the town of Patmos, with Monastery of Ag. Ioannis Theologos and the Cave of the Apocalypse, enlisted in 1988 and 1999 respectively, have rendered the island complex one of the most important sites of the Eastern Mediterranean, in terms of cultural, religious and historic significance, earning them the preference of 1.5 million visitors the previous year.

Next comes the Argolid which hosts the Mycenaean citadels of Mycenae and Tiryns (listed in 1999), two of the most significant sites of European prehistory, as well as the Sanctuary of Asclepius in the town of Epidaurus (listed in 1988). In 2015, the Argolid was visited by 1.1 million tourists. Similar numbers were recorded for the prefecture of Ilia, also in the Peloponnese. Ilia is the home of two more UNESCO heritage monuments, the site of ancient Olympia and the temple of Apollo Epicurius at Bassae. The latter was the first greek monument to gain this title in 1986, while ancient Olympia made the list three years later, in 1989.

The homonymous archaeological site on the island of Delos in the Cyclades, on the organization's list since 1990, gathered more than 134,000 visitors in 2015, second only to the prehistoric town of Thera, contributing largely to the total number of over 620,000 visitors in the

whole complex. Let it be noted that ancient Thera, although it is the most celebrated site in the Cyclades and among the most known in the Aegean, is still in UNESCO's tentative list. Perhaps further increase can be expected when it is finally officially recognised as a World Heritage Site.

The archaeological complex of Delphi, included on the World Heritage list in 1987 and the 10th century Monastery of Hosios Loukas (on the list since 1990) are the predominant sites in the prefecture of Fokis, which attracted more than half a million visitors last year. Another complex of monuments sanctioned by UNESCO is in Thessaloniki and it includes some 16 Early Christian and Byzantine monuments scattered throughout the city. These sites were selected in 1988, however their immediate contribution to visitor frequency cannot be documented since none of them provide quantitative data to ELSTAT. However, it is possible that their elevated status has influenced touristic movement in the city in general, thus contributing to the numbers accomplished by those sites which actually provide us with data, like the Roman Agora and the city's museums.

The example of the Old Town of Corfu was analysed above. The abrupt and obvious change in visitation rates on the year of registration by UNESCO points towards a connection. Finally, the three last prefecture containing UNESCO monuments are those of Imathia in central Macedonia, Laconia in the Peloponnese and Kavala in East Macedonia. The palace and tumuli at the site of Aigai (modern name Vergina) attracted 211,000 visitors out of a total of 220,000 for the whole prefecture in 2015. Concerning the last two entries, the Byzantine fortified settlement of Mystras (inscription in 1989) gathered the grand majority of visitors in 2015, reaching numbers quite similar to those reached by the previously mentioned site of Aigai. Finally, with regard to the newly registered site of ancient Philippoi in the prefecture of Kavala, no estimation can be made yet, since it was included in the World Heritage List only this year, thus we do not have adequate quantitative data in order to make a comparison with previous years (UNESCO, 1992-2016).

In addition to greek sites already included in the UNESCO catalogues, 14 sites of cultural, natural or mixed importance are on the organization's tentative lists. Many of these are located in less "frequented" areas, in terms of visitors, namely the prefectures of Arcadia in the Peloponnese, Pieria and Larissa in Thessaly, Aitoloakarnania, Preveza in Epirus, Rodopi and Evros in East Macedonia and Thrace and, finally, Florina in West Macedonia (UNESCO, 1992-2016). According to data from other cases, as the one mentioned above, it can only be expected

that the final approval of the suggested sites by UNESCO will have palpable effects in domestic and foreign visitation flows in those areas.

As a conclusion to this argument, the effect that being enlisted as a World Heritage site has on visitation rates to sites cannot be determined without a questionnaire-based research targeted to the visitors themselves. There are, of course, several factors affecting visitor preferences. For this reason, the “UNESCO factor” is examined complementarily to the availability of cultural heritage sites and accessibility.

3.2. Problems

The real causes behind the “neglect” observed for some areas in comparison to others are not easy to identify and analyse. There is always the simple truth that certain archaeological sites of worldwide and national fame will always be the most frequented ones. Especially regarding flows from abroad, these is not easy to divert from the typically popular destinations, namely the islands, to the areas of the mainland, which do not embody the traditional image of the sun and the sea, which has been used to promote tourism in Greece for the past decades. Also, turning to the “seasonality” of visitor preferences it is perfectly logical that the summer months, when most of the working population in Greece and other countries have more time for travelling, will gather more visitors than the winter months. Moreover, the weather factor, which is a deterrent for winter travelling, especially for the Aegean, should also be taken into account.

However, if we are to design viable solutions with the aim of enhancing the appeal of alternative destinations, it is vital that certain problems that effectively or potentially affect this phenomenon are highlighted.

The most obvious issue is, of course, the actual availability of cultural heritage sites. The prefectures of Evrytania and Grevena are the most outstanding examples of this problem. None of the two prefectures have provided the Statistical Authority with data on visitor flows. That means that archaeological sites are either closed to the public, a ticket is not required which is indeed the case for site of religious importance and miscellaneous attractions, like medieval bridges, present throughout the mainland, or that they are absent altogether. Especially regarding Grevena, no archaeological sites available to visitors are recorded by the local Ephorate of Antiquities and it is stated that available cultural sites are restricted mainly to churches,

monasteries and bridges (Ministry of Culture and Sports, 1995-2016). However, there are several sites which have not yet been made accessible to the public, even though relevant discussions have been taking place for almost a decade (Gefiri.gr, 2007).

The situation is even worse in the case of Evrytania; according to information from the local Ephorate of Prehistoric and Classical Antiquities and the Ephorate of Byzantine Antiquities, no sites are officially available in the area, other than the medieval monasteries of Proussos and Tatarna (Ministry of Culture and Sports, 1995-2016). No information could be found on archaeological sites or museums which could potentially be used to create the basis for cultural tourism in this area.

However, it is not enough for archaeological sites to be present in an area; they have to be properly managed, preserved and open to the public. Indeed, the problem regarding the availability of many archaeological sites falls into the general category of issues which concern the country as a whole and are due to malfunctions of state legislation and financial difficulty. One of the most serious issues and factors responsible for low visitor rates in archaeological sites and museums in Greece is the fact that, despite having been sufficiently excavated and displayed, they do not receive adequate funding for personnel, maintenance and conservation.

Another obvious problem, often analyzed when dealing with similar issues is accessibility. As it has already been mentioned above, the most successful prefectures in terms of touristic preference are, in almost all cases, those which also guarantee easy access and feature airports, harbors serving as national and sometimes international nodes and are connected with the national railway system and/or the national and international highway network. However, as we are about to analyze, the prefectures which present low visitation rates lack one or more of these advantages. Firstly, a common issue with these areas is the lack of airports (**Figure 5**). Only the prefecture of Kefalonia has its own airport. Evrytania is a long distance from any civilian airports, while Grevena and Kilkis are served by the airports of the neighboring prefectures of Kozani and Thessaloniki accordingly. Secondly, accessibility issues become more serious by the fact that certain prefectures of mainland Greece are cut off from the country's railroad network. This problem concerns mainly the areas of Grevena and Evrytania, which, as it can be observed on the map (**Figure 6**), are not attainable by the current railroad system. On the contrary, in the case of Kilkis there is adequate railroad coverage, improving accessibility to this area.

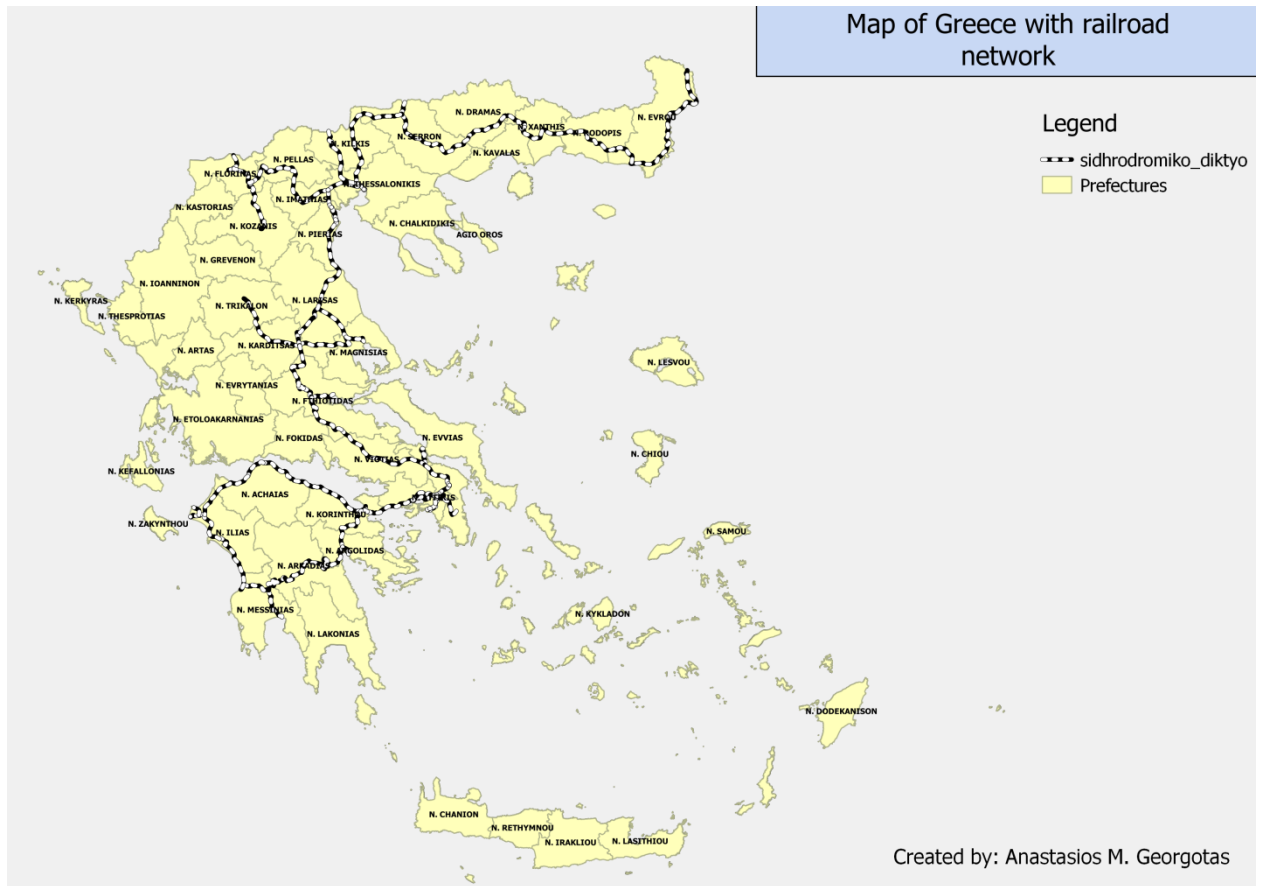


Figure 6. Map of Greece depicting the national railroad network.

The third parameter regarding accessibility is the existence and current state of a national and international road network. Of major importance is the possibility of direct access via parts of the International E-road network (OpenStreetMap, 2016). The part of the network which connects Greece with the Balkans and the rest of the continent and traverses the country's southward axis is, incomplete in many parts. However, the plans show that even the complete network leaves outside a large part of central and northern Greece, especially Evrytania and Grevena (Egnatia Odos A.E., 2007-2016) (**Figure 7**). Concerning the major national highway network (A-network) although it serves the greatest part of the northern and eastern mainland, the coastal western part and a large section of the Peloponnese, it still does not traverse Evrytania and Grevena, making these two prefectures two of the least accessible in the country. It is easy to understand how important accessibility by railroad and road networks is for areas of the mainland. This fact is highlighted by the data from another study by the Greek Statistical

Authority on non-domestic touristic flows for the 1st semester of 2014 (ELSTAT, 2014), according to which, the road network is the second most favorite means of reaching the country.



Figure 7. Map of Greece including the international road network. Source: Egnatia Odos A.E., 2007 – 2016.

4. Solutions

Even if it is not readily possible to drastically redirect visitor flows towards less popular destinations, there are choices which will make it possible to enhance cultural tourism in the more neglected areas. First and foremost, that can be accomplished by opening and promoting cultural heritage sites which are not yet available to the public. No matter the possible solutions presented here, the most urgent and, after all, effective way to enhance cultural tourism in these area involves the undertaking of immediate action on behalf of national and local authorities for the preservation of archaeological sites, the creation of appropriate infrastructure for its protection and the acquisition of the necessary personnel for the sites to be operational and accessible to visitors.

Secondly, cultural tourism can be enhanced through improvements on the national and local infrastructure and, thirdly, by taking advantage of each area's inherent benefits in order to incorporate cultural tourism to a wider plan including different types of activities.

One of the alternative types of tourism suggested is religious tourism, which is one of the oldest and most common types in Greece. The strong orthodox tradition attracts thousands of domestic and foreign visitors each year. Apart from Mount Athos, with its worldwide fame as a centre of orthodox religious tradition, there are important points of attraction around the country, with the most famous ones located at Patmos, Meteora and Tinos. (Ministry of Tourism, 2014).

Thermal tourism is also becoming quite popular and northern Greece has a lot to offer due to its many thermal springs. It has been reported that the specific type of tourist activity has the important advantage of being year-round. Also, it can contribute largely to the economic development of more isolated areas, since the thermal springs and various care centres are usually located far from large urban locations (WordPress.com, 2014).

Eco-tourism offers important environmental, social and financial benefits. Firstly, being focused on the sustainable exploitation of natural sites, it promotes the respect towards the environment and encourages participants to engage in preservation projects. Concerning the social aspects, since it often includes small, remote societies, it offers the possibility of community and individual involvement in the planning and realization of projects. Finally, ecotourism provides "neglected" areas with immediate revenue and boosts local businesses.

Agrotourism is a relatively new type of activity which is closely related to ecotourism and aims to give visitors the opportunity of experiencing agricultural activity first hand. It is growing ever popular, as smaller communities, which do not necessarily benefit from any major tourist centres and attractions, realize the benefits to be had in sustainable development (EcoTour Directory, 2007). Especially concerning northern Greece a special initiative has taken place a few years ago. Its name "The Wine Roads" describes clearly its nature (Wines of Northern Greece, 2016). It aims to offers visitors with travelling suggestions which will provide them the opportunity to become acquainted with the procedures and techniques of wine-making and also sample the products from local businesses, by passing through some of the country's most famous wine-producing areas (Ministry of Tourism, 2014). This form of agrotourism, known as wine-tourism, is especially suited to northern Greece and especially Western Macedonia, where there is great potential for wine production.

4.1. Grevena and Kozani prefectures

The whole area of Western Macedonia is highlighted as an ideal destination for different types of tourism as it features a wide variety of activities and amusement. The area incorporates a combination of sites of cultural and natural interest; however, there is a tendency for investments on the natural assets. It has already been mentioned that, although the area of Grevena has potential for cultural tourism due to the presence of archaeological sites of significant importance, these sites, have not yet been made available to the public (Gefiri.gr, 2007). Once this prerequisite has been met, then these sites can form part of various touristic projects, incorporating the many alternative distractions in the area (**Figure 8**).



Figure 8. Map of Grevena and Kozani prefectures with points of interest.

In 2012, the Greek National Tourism Organization (GNTO – EOT) (GNTO, 2012) organized a tour around points of interest in the lesser known areas of western Macedonia in order to “advertise” their potential in terms of tourism attraction (GEPOET, 2016). Members of the General Pan-Hellenic Federation of Tourism Enterprises (GEPOET – ΓΕΠΟΕΤ) (GNTO, 2012) participated in this initiative.

This action focused on the attractions of the prefectures of Grevena and Kozani among others. These prefectures are presented together, due to their proximity and the fact that all cultural heritage sites are under the supervision of a single authority, the Ephorate of Antiquities of Kozani. The wider area of Grevena and Kozani features at least 30 byzantine churches and monasteries which have been characterised as monuments, thus creating an ideal location for both cultural and religious tourism, targeted mainly to visitors from countries with Orthodox tradition or those where the Orthodox element is strong, namely Russia and certain Balkan states.

Moreover, the mountainous landscape provides the perfect basis for popular activities, namely hiking and skiing. Specifically, in the area of Grevena there are two hiking lodges at the area of Vasilitsa (Vasilitsa and Gomara lodges) and one more at Deskati (Vounassa lodge) which offer accommodation and all basic services. Concerning ski resorts, the only one in the prefecture lies also at Vasilitsa (Lambrakis Press Group, 2016). Both hiking lodges and ski resorts are ran and maintained by the Skiing and Hiking Club of Grevena. Finally, the two hiking lodges at Vasilitsa, as well as the ski centre are located within the boundaries of the National Park of Pindos.

Concerning the neighbouring Kozani, hiking is quite developed and highly active, with plenty of hiking lodges. The most popular ones are located at the area of Pieria, specifically at the sites of Lagomana and Giourtia and also on the mountains of Askio and Vourinos. (Region of Western Macedonia, 2016). The lodge in Askio is located near two wildlife reserves, that Lambanitsa and Anthotopos – Skiti. The one at Vourinos lies just west of the wilidlife reserve of Tseverna-Bourinos. Finally, in the area of Pieria lie also the natural reserves of Avouziani – St. Varvara Monastery – Blasia and Meseo – Lapoudi – Grizos to the north-east.

Turning to thermal tourism in the area of Grevena, there is a thermal spring near the village of Kivotos, to the north-east of the National Park, whereas in Kozani, the spring of Loutsas – Heibeli is a popular destination for fans of thermal tourism (Tourism Organisation of Western Macedonia, 2016).

Grevena has a lot to offer concerning the field of wine-tourism. There are at least five major wineries in the area, located at the villages of Trikomo, Elefthero, Sindendro and Emilianos, as well as in the city of Grevena (WineSurveyor, 2009-2016). Even more promising is the prefecture of Kozani with numerous wineries and wine cellars, with most celebrated located at the sites of Siatista, Velvento and Servia (WineSurveyor, 2009-2016). Both Grevena and Kozani are part of the Wine Route of the Lakes, an initiative which is part of “The Wine Roads” projects (Wines of Greece, 2016).

All of the above attractions can be combined in order to provide supplementary activities which can be combined with and incorporate visits to cultural heritage sites in the area. This will have a double-sided effect; visitations to archaeological sites and museums will thus increase and expand to the least known of these sites and, also, there is bound to be a boost on the local economy. It is important to keep in mind that, while initiatives like the Wine Roads already exist, they serve more as suggestions, rather than actual organized activities and are also not combined with visits to archaeological sites.

4.2. Evritania Prefecture

The prefecture of Evritania, which lies in central Greece, presents a special case, since there are no official data from the Statistical Authority concerning visitor flows in sites of cultural heritage. According to the 24th Ephorate of Byzantine Antiquities, whose jurisdiction covers the prefecture of Fthiotida, Eyritania and Fokida, the grand majority of archaeological sites are gathered in the prefecture of Fthiotida and Fokida (Hellenic Ministry of Culture, Education and Religious Affairs, 1995-2016). However, there are at least two such sites in Evritania, which can attract visitors interested in both cultural and religious tourism. In the first place, there is the monastery of Proussos, built possibly in the 12th century, which lies near the village of Proussos (**Figure 9**). The other one is the 16th century monastery of Tatarna or Tetarna, close to the villages of Tripotamo to the east and Vrekeika to the south (HotelsLine, 2000-2012). The two monasteries are known to attract a large number of domestic visitors each year, as they are considered important pilgrimage centres (HotelsLine, 2000-2012).

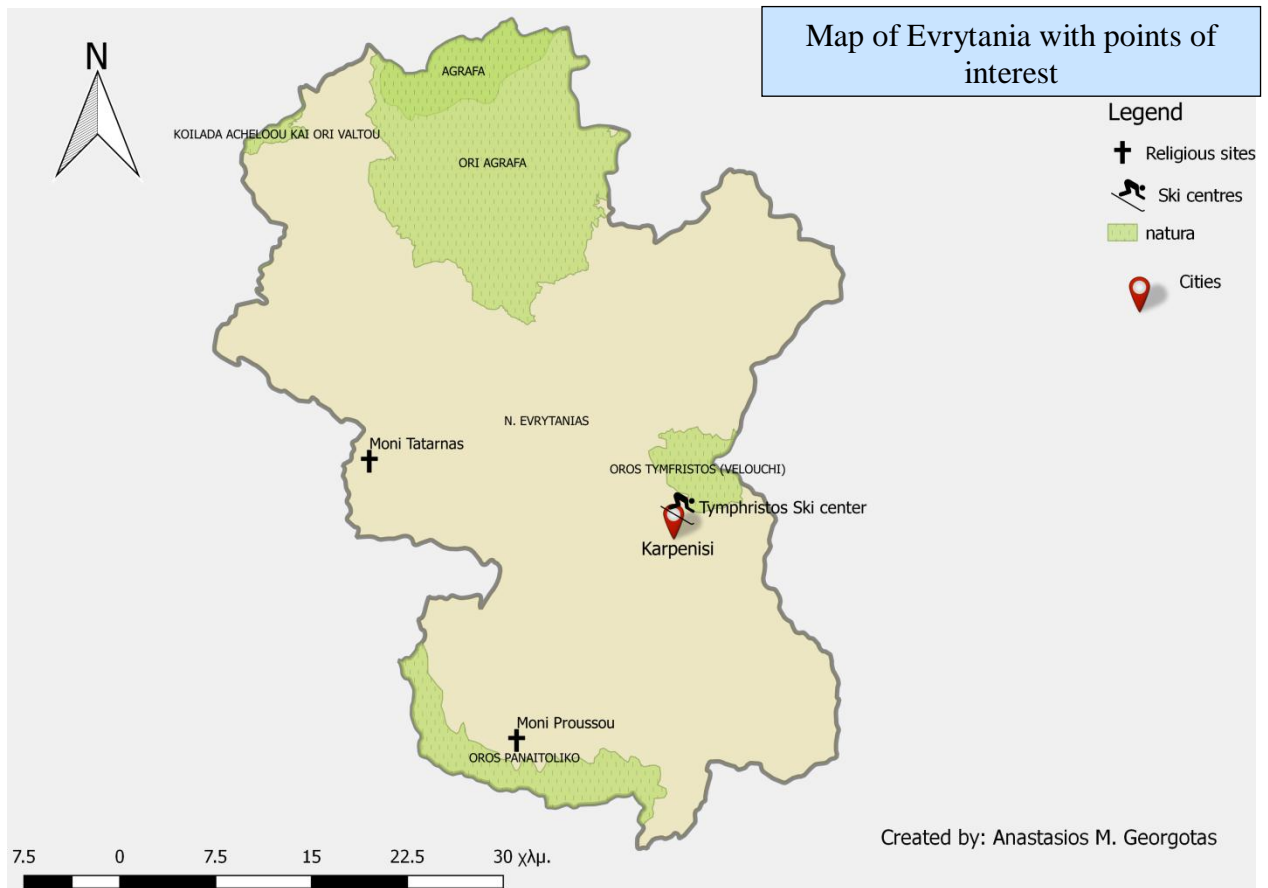


Figure 9. Map of Evrytania with points of interest.

However, the lack of archaeological sites and state-run museums in the region is covered by the large number and variety of sites of historical, natural and religious importance. More than 100 churches, monasteries, medieval bridges, caves and caverns, sites of historical occurrences and sites of natural beauty are properly advertised on travelling sites (HotelsLine, 2000-2012). Unfortunately, since visitor flows in all of these destinations are difficult or impossible to record and assess, it is not plausible to estimate their importance and economic impact on local communities, within the limits of the present thesis.

The abovementioned attractions, especially those which can be defined as cultural sites, namely the churches and monasteries, can be combined with tours which will make use of the diverse distractions offered by the landscape of the region.

Regarding winter activities, a well-known skiing resort is operational and located 11 km north of the prefecture's capital, Karpenisi, at the site of Diavolotopos, on the mountain of

Timfristos (HotelsLine, 2000-2012). It is worth noting that the mountain is part of a wide area which comprises the wildlife reserve of Velouhi. Apart from skiing, however, the whole area of Velouhi offers a variety of activities, ideal for the attraction of sustainable all-year-round tourism, including hiking, rappelling, archery or mountain biking.

4.3. Kilkis Prefecture

The prefecture of Kilkis presents another “obscure” area regarding quantitative data about cultural tourism. As in the case of Evritania and Grevena, most of the recorded archaeological sites and museums are located in the neighbouring prefecture of Chalkidiki and Thessaloniki. However, the common problem of cultural heritage sites being closed to the public is a prominent problem in this part of Greece. Supposedly, the reason behind this is the lack of guarding personnel and appointed guides (Eidisis.gr, 2009-2014). It is impressive that, although there are at least 7 such sites which are suitable for visits, none was officially in operation in 2015.

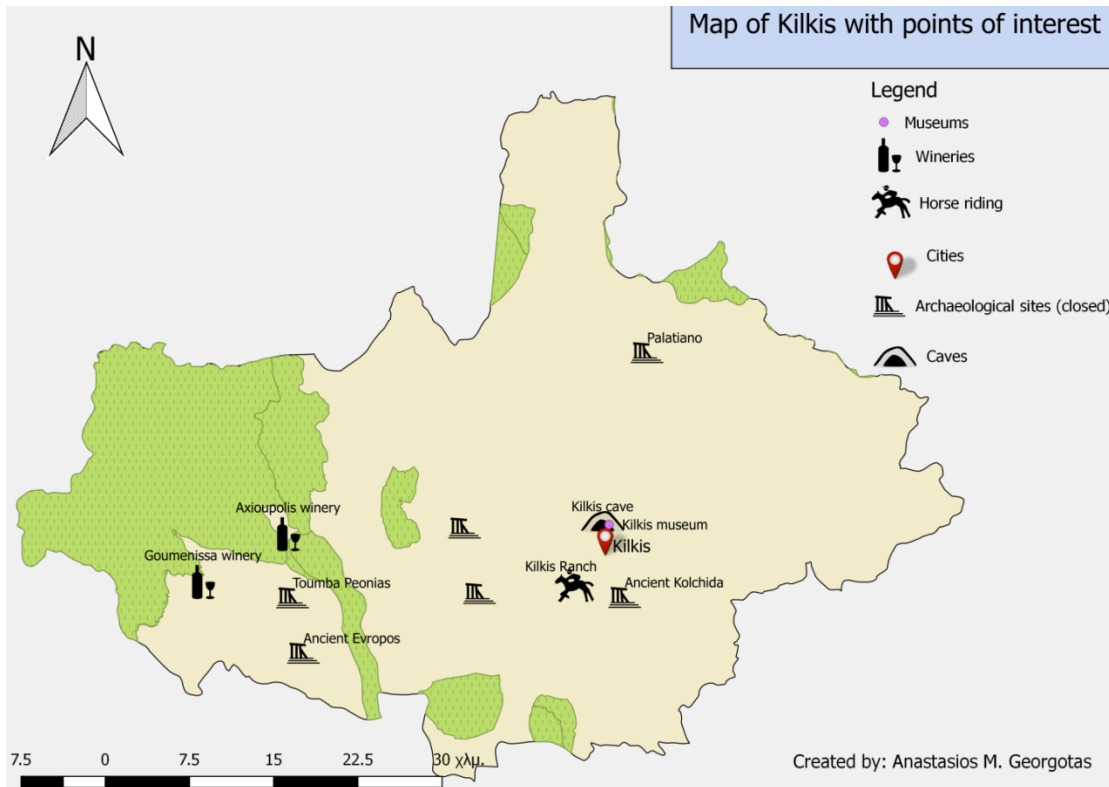


Figure 10. Map of Kilkis with points of interest.

These are the settlement and tombs at Toumba Peonias in the wider area of Axioupoli, the site of ancient Evropos, dated to the 6th century B.C., the site of ancient Kolchis (4th century B.C.), the Hellenistic and roman site at Palatiano, the Iron Age cemetery at Old Ginekokastro and the Prehistoric settlement of Chorygi (EnjoyKilkis, 2014) (**Figure 10**). Finally, about 15km west of Kilkis lies the castle of Ginekokastro, which dates to the Byzantine era (Ministry of Culture and Sports, 2012).

Although we only possess solid data from the archaeological museum of the city, there are various sites of archaeological, paleontological or natural importance, as well as activities and destinations for alternative tourism, to make the area a popular year-round destination.

The lake of Doirani has been declared a fresh water habitat, since it provides shelter for numerous species of fish and birds (TopikosOdigos.gr, 2013). Also, the village of Doirani houses the Museum of Lake Doirani, dedicated to the exhibition of the local fauna and flora, as well as the local environment and culture (Ethnos, 2016).

National and local authorities have recognised the potential of Kilkis in hosting various areas of alternative tourism. The Ministry of Education has established a Centre of Environmental Education based in a facility which encompasses activities such as horse-riding, archery, hiking and the organization of volunteer groups for environmental actions (RanchoKilkis, 2016).

As with most regions of northern Greece, the field of agrotourism is promising in Kilkis. There are at least 7 major wineries open to visits, which are located in the wine-making areas of Axioupoli and Goumenissa (EnjoyKilkis, 2014). Moreover, apart from wine-making, there are educational programs aiming to educate on other types of agricultural activities, like bee-keeping and crop-growing/harvesting, with projects like “The bee and the honey” and “The cycle of bread” (EnjoyKilkis, 2014).

4.4. Kefalonia Prefecture

Although one of the most popular destinations during the summer season, the prefecture of Kefalonia (**Figure 11**) provided no numbers regarding visitor flows for the year 2015. However, although cultural tourism seems to be currently on a standstill, there are numerous

activities for visitors to engage with and which can form the major elements of an inclusive package, part of which will be the appreciation of cultural heritage.

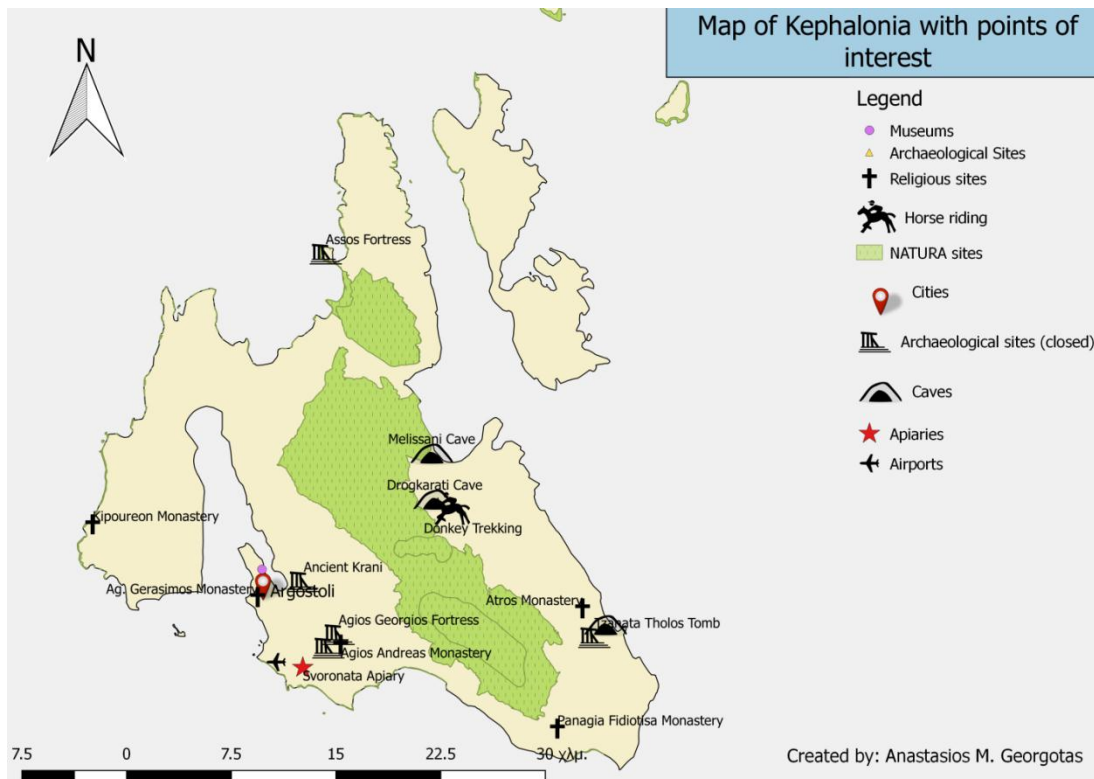


Figure 11. Map of Kefalonia including points of interest.

It is noteworthy that the island has numerous sites of cultural value, which do not provide data because they are either closed to the public, or not under the jurisdiction of the Hellenic Ministry of Culture. Thus, once again, it is difficult to estimate the actual number of adepts to cultural tourism, due to the lack of official data. However it is worthwhile to attempt to make some comments on sites of interest, in terms of location and importance, so as to examine the possibility of the organization of focused tours from which visitation on officially recorded sites can be increased.

Kefalonia presents a diverse collection of archaeological monuments, museums, churches, monasteries, sites of natural beauty, as well as infrastructure for agrotourism and alternative activities. Once again, archaeological/cultural tourism can be promoted within the same frame as religious tourism. Various monasteries, dating to as early as the 13th century,

constitute significant poles of attraction, especially for domestic visitors. One such case is the monastery of Ag. Andreas, which dates to the 13th century and also houses a Christian Byzantine museum (MyGreeceTravel, 2016).

Concerning agrotourism, there are two major centres of wine-making on the island. One begins at Argostoli and continues south, reaching the southern slopes of Mount Ainos. The second one covers the area west of Lixouri, until the village of Mantzavinata to the south. The archaeological museum at Argostoli is recommended as a must-see site on sites promoting this type of activity (WineSurveyor, 2009-2016). Moreover, the apiary at Svoronata is open to tours and visitors and is a significant contribution to agrotourism in Kefhalonia (TripAdvisor LLC, 2016).

On the island are feasible various other activities which take advantage of the area's natural assets. These include, biking, scuba diving, sea-kayaking, fishing, trekking, as well as the common short cruises.

The above attractions can be combined with visits to the aforementioned archaeological sites which are still not formally available for visits. These are the sites of ancient Krani, very close to Argostoli, the fortresses of Agios Georgios and the toms at Mazarakata, at a small distance to the southeast, and the more remote sites of the Tzanata tholos tomb and the fortress of Assos, close to the eastern and the northern side of the island respectively.

4.5. Aitoloakarnania prefecture

The prefecture of Aitoloakarnania (**Figure 12**) is one of the two most characteristic cases, where, despite the relatively large number of officially recorded cultural heritage sites, visitation rates are low. According to ELSTAT, four archaeological sites, specifically those of Inias on the south-western part and Plevron, Kalydon and the Roman thermae of St. Thomas in the southern part are open to visitors. Furthermore, three archaeological museums are open to visitors at Agrinion, Thermos and Thirion. Despite this availability, only 6,543 visitors were recorded for the whole of 2015, showing a low popularity for this region.

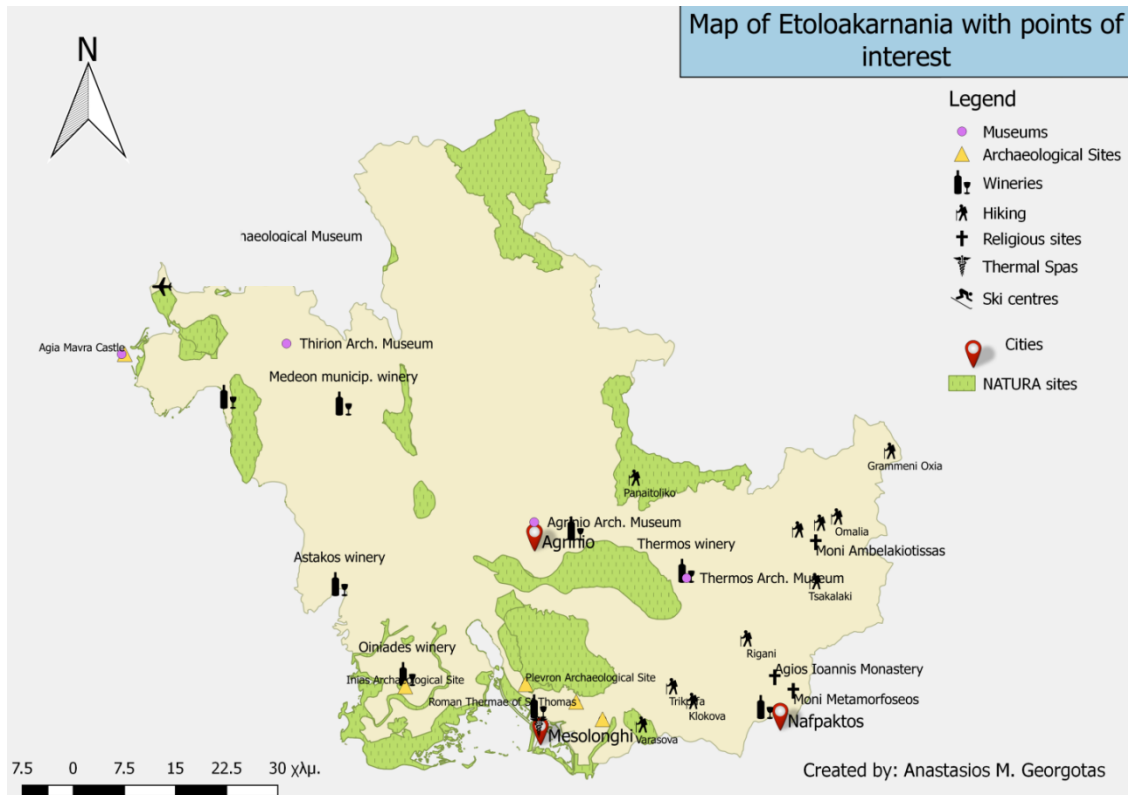


Figure 12. Map of Aitoloakarnania prefecture with points of interest.

As far as hiking and climbing is concerned there is a hiking shelter on the mountain of Panaitolikos, at 1,200 meters. Also climbing activities are organized on the mountain of Varasova, inside the National Park of Mesolonghi (Lambrakis Press Group, 2016). Other popular destinations include the sites of Klokova, Rigani, Tsakalaki, Omalia, Tsekoura, Ardhinis and Trikorfo. Finally, another hiking shelter is located at Grammeni Oxia (Municipality of Nafpaktia, 2011).

The Evinos river, provides a suitable locale for river-activities, such as kayaking and rafting. Finally, the village of Empessos is a popular destination for more extreme activities, namely paragliding (Lambrakis Press Group, 2016).

Mesolonghi can also accommodate healing tourism, as the site of Aghia Triada in the adjacent lagoon is the location of mud baths, the healing value of which has been recognised and established by studies relatively recently (ETHNOS Publications, 2012). The thermal springs at Loutra Stachtis have been exploited to create a centre for this type of tourism, as well as for programs of environmental education, although the latter aims mainly pupils from the local

schools (Municipality of Nafpaktia, 2011). However, this variety of activities is ideal for the creation of a touristic centre offering diverse activities concerning eco-tourism.

Aitoloakarnania is an ideal setting for religious tourism as well, since it hosts at least 5 famous monasteries. These include the monastery of St. John, founded during the times of Ottoman occupation, the convent of Panagia Gorgoepikoos, founded in 1951 (not included on the map), the 15th century monastery of Panagia Ambelakiotissa, the monastery of Metamorphosi, built in 1977 and 11th century monastery of Varnakova (also not included) (Municipality of Nafpaktia, 2011).

Finally, as far as agrotourism is concerned, although the area presents great potential, very little initiative has been taking as of yet. Although there are important wineries located at Astakos, Thermos, Mesolonghi, Nafpaktos, as well as the former municipalities of Thestieis, Medeon and Oiniades, wine tourism has made little progress up to this point (WineSurveyor, 2009-2016).

4.6. Thesprotia

A case much similar to that of Aitoloakarnania is that of Thesprotia (**Figure 13**). Again, although we have a reasonable number of open and operating sites, only 4,704 visitors were recorded for the duration of 2015. Specifically, 5 archaeological sites and 1 museum have provided data to ELSTAT. These are the archaeological sites of Gitana, Doliani, Elea and Dimokastro, the tower of Ragios and the museum of Igoumenitsa.

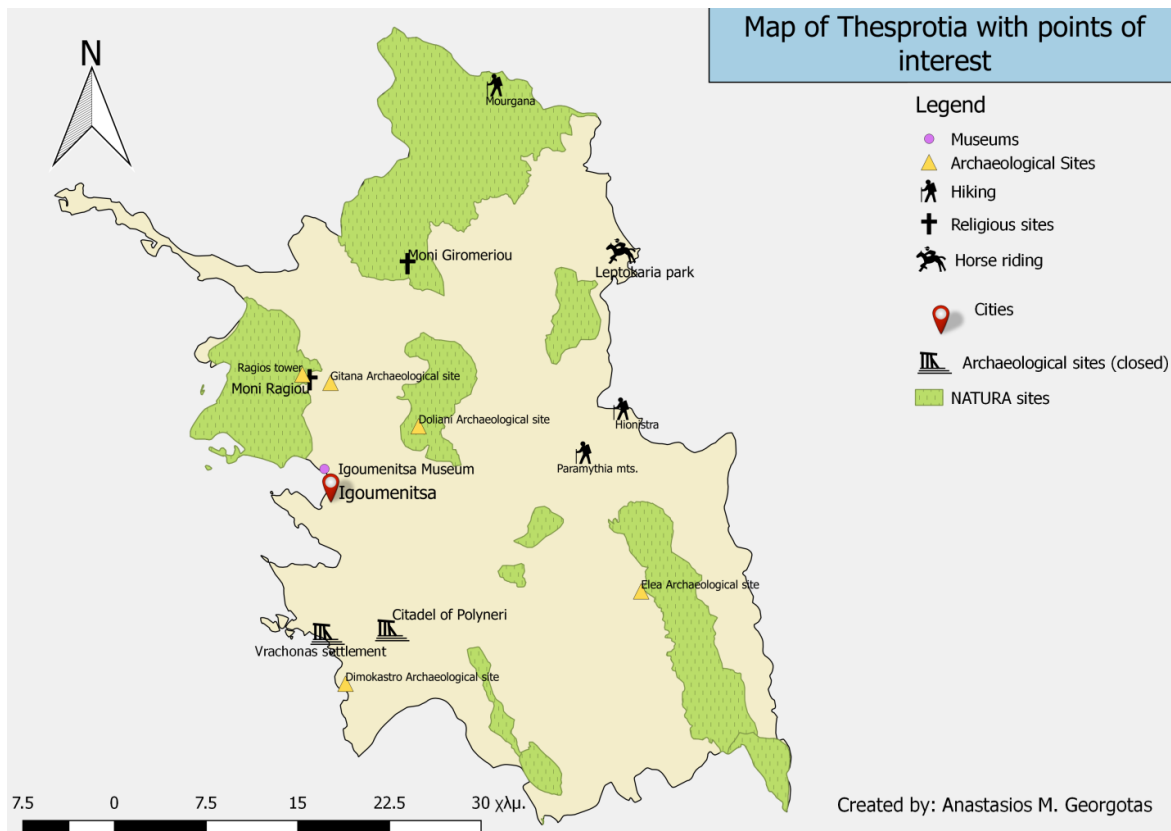


Figure 13. Map of Thesprotia with points of interest.

The landscape of Thesprotia presents a high degree of diversity, thus making it ideal for the implementation of touristic programmes which incorporate a variety of activities. Starting with hiking and mountain-climbing, the three most famous sites in the area are Mourgana, Hionistra and the mountains of Paramythia (Lambrakis Press Group (b), 2016).

Apart from the more “traditional” distractions, Thesprotia presents potential in the domain of alternative and extreme activities, like rafting in the river Acheron and para-gliding in the mountains of Paramythia (deonta.blogspot, 2011). There is also a park for horse-riding at Leptokaria.

The prefecture of Thesprotia also houses two important religious sites, the orthodox monasteries of Giromeri, founded during the 1st half of the 14th century (I.M. Giromeriu, 2008) and of Ragio, built during the 11th century, according to tradition (epirus.org, 1998-2016).

Apart from the known archaeological sites recorded by ELSTAT, there are at least two more sites of archaeological interest in the area. The first one is the citadel of Polyneri, which

possibly dates to the 4th century BC and includes the remains of a byzantine fortification (Papathanasiou, 2012-16). The second is the abandoned village of Vrachonas, with a prehistoric citadel located close-by (Web-Greece.gr, 2015). They are both in close proximity to the operating archaeological site of Dimokastro and can easily be combined to provide a more inclusive visiting experience.

5. Discussion

At this point there will be a short discussion on the importance of the Internet, as far as the promotion of archaeological sites is concerned. It would be rather pointless to elaborate on the effectiveness of the Internet as a widespread and cost-effective means of “advertising” cultural sites. However, the tremendous rise of the social media during the last decade has created more opportunities and a new perspective towards digital promotion. In fact, the latter can be done at zero-cost, via the creation of a profile on the most popular social media platforms, such as Facebook and Instagram. Although a social media profile cannot contain the same amount of information nor have them structured is as an effective way as a website (personal communication with Dr. Aphrodite Kamara), they can offer important promotion to museums and archaeological sites in small communities, which do not receive adequate funds to finance the creation and maintenance of a proper web-site.

However, what has been achieved in this field in Greece? After the investigation of this parameter for each and every archaeological site included in the ELSTAT report, it has been concluded that, out of 122 archaeological sites, only 27 receive immediate promotion through an active web-site, or, much more commonly, a Facebook profile. As far as museums are concerned, this lack is not as profound, as the number of museums which maintain a web-site of Facebook profile is 63, out of a total 152. However, many of them are included in Odysseus, which is the official portal of the Ministry of Culture (Ministry of Culture and Sports, 2012). It is important to note that these numbers do not include archaeological sites or museums which are promoted in a less immediate way, such as sites dedicated to specific communities, municipalities or prefectures, collective sites of archaeological sites for a wide area and, of course, touristic and travelling sites. The reason that this author believes the independent and “personalised” promotion is important is because it provides a sense of organization and

modernization to the potential visitor, whereas a lack might imply neglect. Moreover, the existence of a personal site/social media profile provides opportunities for the communication of specific information to the public, such as the organization of events and enhances interaction between site and visitor, via personal feedback. Also important is the possibility an especially dedicated platform offers for the attraction of additional funding, via the promotion and simplification of personal donations, which can be an important source of income for less visited sites.

An effective way to estimate the importance of this factor in relation to cultural tourism is to somehow quantify the preferences of Internet users towards cultural heritage and tourism in Greece. A useful tool for this purpose is GoogleTrends (GoogleTrends, 2016), which categorizes users' searches on Google search engines and also presents related searches, along with information on the countries in which the searches were performed. After the input of several keywords concerning Greek archaeological sites, cultural tourism and tourism in Greece in general, it was noticed that searches on famous archaeological sites, like the Acropolis and Knossos, are related to searches concerning vacation packages and hotel-booking, thus revealing that culture can indeed be an incentive for touristic movement. Moreover, according to GoogleTrends, alternative tourism, specifically thermal tourism in Greece has known an increase of 190% as a search field over the past 4 years. Lastly, Santorini is amongst the prevalent search fields related to inquiries about Greek archaeology and tourism in general (250% increase over the past 4 years).

6. Conclusions

This thesis has attempted to provide a thorough presentation of available quantitative data concerning cultural tourism in Greece. The main idea was that, through the visualization of this data on a GIS mapping software, it would be possible to create a comprehensive picture of international and domestic visitor flows for each prefecture of the country, with the purpose of assessing the country's strong and weak points with regard to cultural tourism.

The data analysis has shown distinct differentiation between the different prefectures. The strongest visitor flows are observed in those areas that one would expect visitor traffic is most dense, due to general popularity as summer (i.e. the islands of the Aegean, especially the

Cyclades, the Dodecanese and Crete, certain Ionian islands and the coastal prefectures of the Peloponnese) or year-round destinations (the cities of Athens and Thessaloniki and certain prefectures with cultural heritage sites of worldwide renown, such as Fokida and the Argolid). As far as the effect of seasonal preference is concerned, although the grand majority of visitors prefer the summer season (April – October), there is little change in the ranking between the sites themselves, which indicates that there are permanent advantages and disadvantages affecting the popularity of the various areas of the country.

It is an important fact that these differentiations do not always depend on the number of available sites in a prefecture, as one might expect. The availability of sites concerns not only the existence of cultural heritage property, but also of the level of accessibility of the latter and the degree of its enhancement, particularly towards visitors from abroad. However, since there are obvious examples where, despite the existence of sites officially recorded by the Hellenic Statistical Authority, visitor rates were very low, as in the cases of Aitolokarnania and Thesprotia, there are additional factors that need to be explored. One of the most important is *accessibility*; in fact, it has been proven that many of the most “neglected” prefectures are not easily accessible due to the lack of airports, major ports or connection to the national and international railroad and road network. Another inhibiting factor is the lack of proper enhancement via the Internet and social media. The grand majority of archaeological sites and more than half of the country’s museums do not feature an especially dedicated website or social media profile and are either insufficiently promoted by municipal, touristic and unofficial websites or not at all.

On the other hand, the most popular areas enjoy all or most of the benefits regarding cultural heritage site availability and accessibility and also one more advantage; in most cases, they include at least one monument listed as an UNESCO World Heritage Site in their list of attractions. Although the influence of this qualification cannot be quantified at this point (that would probably require a large-scale research via specific questionnaires), so as to be effectively determined, there are data that show significant increase in visitor traffic towards specific sites immediately after their inclusion in the international list.

The solutions to these problems are fairly obvious and involve both national and individual initiative. The responsibility concerning the national and regional authorities is related to the increase of availability of existing sites via the solution of issues such as site conservation and

maintenance or the acquisition of staff in sufficient numbers. The creation of proper infrastructure to enhance accessibility to the remote areas is also a prerequisite. Unfortunately, in the present thesis these issues were not touched in detail, since they require a serious amount of diverse research which surpasses its scientific and practical limitations. However, a few proposals were made with reference to initiatives which can be taken, either by the authorities responsible for the management of the sites in question or even local businesses in order to promote cultural tourism by incorporating it into touristic packages offering diverse activities and which benefit from an area's landscape and touristic character. To this purpose, the potential of specific prefectures was explored with focus on alternative types of tourism, namely eco- and agro-tourism, religious and medical tourism, as well as activities including skiing, hiking and seasonal sports. Furthermore, archaeological sites which are not yet open to the public, but are sufficiently excavated, have also been located and pinpointed on the maps. The ultimate purpose of this was to present all the points of interest in those areas collectively, including cultural heritage sites and other types of touristic activities which could be combined to create travel packages which will incorporate visits to cultural heritage sites.

This research has highlighted some of the most important issues concerning cultural tourism in Greece. Furthermore, it has shown the importance of the visualization of quantitative data and of GIS software in studies including large amounts of diverse data. Finally, it has provided solid evidence on the actual potential of Greece regarding both cultural and alternative touristic activity, which can be further developed to strengthen the country's "heavy industry", which is tourism.

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