Abstract: As tourism is the largest and most profitable industry in Greece, attempts have been made in recent years to develop new types of alternative tourism that may further fulfill traveller's needs for quality, new activities and advanced experiences. Wellness tourism is a novel and attractive activity, as it reflects a more active lifestyle and focuses on well living, stress management, relaxation and meditation. The maintenance of physical health and the introduction of proper nutrition and healthy lifestyle are the primary goals of wellness tourism, followed by mental development activities in an environmental-friendly accommodation.

To investigate the prospects of wellness tourism in urban areas in Greece, we used a questionnaire addressed to people attending and organizing the “holistic Festival” of Syros Island, Greece, that took place on July 2017. Overall 53 questionnaires were obtained, 50 from participants and three from organizers.

Wellness tourism seems to be a unique experience for the tourist, as it is both therapeutic-healing and entertaining, especially in an attractive environment. The study revealed that the development of wellness tourism can result in important economic benefits for a destination and may lead to viable growth of wellness tourism in many urban destinations in Greece, if a targeted strategy is adopted. This strategy should take into account developmental policy and strategy issues, management of entrepreneurship issues, financial limitations and advertisement/promotion and time-scheduling issues of the destination.

Key words: Tourism product, alternative tourism, wellness tourism

BACKGROUND

Tourism represents 30% of Greece’s gross national product and 26% of employment, with mass tourism being the leading model for tourism development in Greece for many years (SETE 2019). Since the 80’s new forms were adopted, mainly ecotourism, sports tourism and maritime tourism (Hardy et al, 2002). Wellness tourism (Steiner & Reisinger, 2006), also known as Holistic tourism (Smith, 2003), has only recently being adopted in Greece aiming to further develop the tourism product that the country offers to tourists. Wellness tourism can achieve balance between the mind, the body and the spirit (Smith & Puczko, 2009) using a variety of activities that combine mind development, body exercise, novel therapies application and spiritual experiences to reconcile the body in a holistic way (Smith & Kelly, 2006; Hartwell, 2014, Holladay & Ponder, 2012).

Wellness tourism also adopts the principles of sustainable tourism and contributes to the preservation of the country’s culture and heritage, leading to specific benefits such as economic growth, differentiation of the tourism product, tourism period expansion, job creation, landscape preservation and environment protection (Smith & Kelly, 2006, Hartwell, 2014, Holladay & Ponder, 2012, Romao, 2017).

Despite its long history of therapeutic tourism (thermal springs have been visited in the country since antiquity), Greece is far from being considered a wellness tourism destination (ISPA, 2008). Certain investments in SpA facilities, therapeutic massage, thalassotherapy, mud therapy and aromatherapy in recent years do provide a differentiated, competitive and enriched tourism product (Vasileiou & Tsartas, 2009, VisitGreece, 2017) but this is not a well coordinated effort, as no uniform regulations exists for a certain resort to be declared as a wellness spot.

In recent years several holistic festivals have been organized in Corfu Island, Athens and Syros Island to promote wellness tourism in Greece. The latter was organized in 2017, aiming to promote a holistic and healthy way of life in an island with excellent local products, culture and quality of service (Cyclades24, 2017). Several activities were organized, including running, bicycle riding, walking, local cuisine testing, dancing, self defense, children workshops and well living seminars, aiming to introduce visitors to an alternative way of exercise, healing and living.

Aim:

The aim of this study was to investigate the future prospects of wellness tourism in urban areas in Greece.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

For this, we used a structured questionnaire addressed to the visitors of the festival and also conducted interviews of selected organizers, using targeted open questions. Fifty visitors completed the questionnaire, expressing their opinion on the level of satisfaction from their participation to the festival, the meaning that they give to wellness tourism, the relation between wellness tourism and the sea-and-sun model, the cost-benefit ratio, the time they stayed on the island and their view on the the ability of island tourism resources to support wellness tourism development.
Results were analyzed using the SPSS 2.0 package (Panopoulou, 2018).

Furthermore, three major organizers were interviewed using an open answer questionnaire, in order to gather information on the current tourism status of the island, the ability to develop wellness tourism, the appeal of the festival to visitors and the local community and the possibility to organize similar events in other destinations throughout Greece.

RESULTS

Table 1: Satisfaction from participation to the festival

| Satisfaction from participation | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|--------------------------------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Extremely satisfied            | 33        | 66,0    | 66,0          | 66,0               |
| Very satisfied                 | 5         | 10,0    | 10,0          | 76,0               |
| Fairly satisfied               | 7         | 14,0    | 14,0          | 90,0               |
| Limited satisfied              | 3         | 6,0     | 6,0           | 96,0               |
| Not satisfied                  | 2         | 4,0     | 4,0           | 100,0              |
| Total                          | 50        | 100,0   | 100,0         |                    |

Table 2: Reasons for attending the festival

| Reason for attendance | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-----------------------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Recreation            | 8         | 16,0    | 16,0          | 16,0               |
| Healing               | 21        | 42,0    | 42,0          | 58,0               |
| Recreation and healing| 21        | 42,0    | 42,0          | 100,0              |
| Total                 | 50        | 100,0   | 100,0         |                    |

Table 3: The responders’ view on the meaning of Wellness tourism

| Meaning of Wellness Tourism  | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|------------------------------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Revitalization               | 8         | 16,0    | 16,0          | 16,0               |
| Quality of life              | 16        | 32,0    | 32,0          | 48,0               |
| Recreation                   | 9         | 18,0    | 18,0          | 66,0               |
| Experience                   | 10        | 20,0    | 20,0          | 86,0               |
| Healing                      | 7         | 14,0    | 14,0          | 100,0              |
| Total                        | 50        | 100,0   | 100,0         |                    |

Furthermore, 60% of responders stated that they prefer to combine wellness tourism with the sea-and-sun model, while 76% would surely or definitely suggest this form of tourism to others. However, only 42% of responders would like to undergo training on wellness issues.

Wellness tourism is considered to be an expensive form of tourism: 76% of responders think that the quality-price ratio was not satisfactory, while 58% stated that they could not cover the complete festival program. Responders also think that certain activities should be included to the program (as shown in Table 4) using the infrastructure and the natural resources of the destination.

Table 4: Activities that should be included to the program

| Activity                                    | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|---------------------------------------------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Local products-local cuisine                 | 13        | 26,0    | 26,0          | 26,0               |
| Organized tours                             | 22        | 44,0    | 44,0          | 70,0               |
| Activities in the natural environment of the area | 15        | 30,0    | 30,0          | 100,0              |
| Total                                       | 50        | 100,0   | 100,0         |                    |

Responders also think that the development of wellness tourism is extremely important for a destination, as it may (among other positive effects) attract more tourists, enhance the reputation of the destination and contribute to the preservation of local heritage and enhancement of the local economy (Table 5), while 54% of them state that Greece has the natural resources to support this form of tourism.

Finally, the main sectors that should be improved in a destination in order to develop wellness tourism are transportation, infrastructure, the local environment (good condition of the streets, lighting, cleanliness and safety),
local restaurants and local products quality and packaging (Table 6).

**Table 5: Effects of Wellness tourism development in a destination**

| Effects of Wellness tourism development in a destination | Extremely beneficial | Very beneficial | Fairly beneficial | Poor | No |
|---------------------------------------------------------|----------------------|----------------|-------------------|------|----|
| Further Tourism Attraction                              | 18                   | 30             | 2                 | 0    | 0  |
|                                                        | 36,0%                | 60,0%          | 4,0%              | 0,0% | 0,0% |
| Upgrading of the local tourist product                  | 24                   | 24             | 2                 | 0    | 0  |
|                                                        | 48,0%                | 48,0%          | 4,0%              | 0,0% | 0,0% |
| Enhancement of destination reputation                   | 18                   | 22             | 7                 | 1    | 0  |
|                                                        | 37,5%                | 45,8%          | 14,6%             | 2,1% | 0,0% |
| Prolongation of the tourist season                      | 22                   | 26             | 2                 | 0    | 0  |
|                                                        | 44,0%                | 52,0%          | 4,0%              | 0,0% | 0,0% |
| Enhancement of local economy                           | 32                   | 14             | 2                 | 0    | 0  |
|                                                        | 66,7%                | 29,2%          | 4,2%              | 0,0% | 0,0% |
| Preservation of local traditions and cultural heritage  | 10                   | 32             | 6                 | 2    | 0  |
|                                                        | 20,0%                | 64,0%          | 12,0%             | 4,0% | 0,0% |
| Promote collaborations between members of the local community | 10                   | 31             | 9                 | 0    | 0  |
|                                                        | 20,0%                | 62,0%          | 18,0%             | 0,0% | 0,0% |
| Promotion of local products                            | 24                   | 18             | 7                 | 1    | 0  |
|                                                        | 48,0%                | 36,0%          | 14,0%             | 2,0% | 0,0% |

**Table 6: Sectors that need improvement**

| Sectors that need improvement | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------------------------------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Local environment             | 8         | 16,0    | 16,0          | 16,0               |
| Services                      | 3         | 6,0     | 6,0           | 22,0               |
| Local cuisine and local products | 5         | 10,0    | 10,0          | 32,0               |
| Infrastructure                | 10        | 20,0    | 20,0          | 52,0               |
| Transport                     | 11        | 22,0    | 22,0          | 74,0               |
| Sports                        | 4         | 8,0     | 8,0           | 82,0               |
| All the above                 | 9         | 18,0    | 18,0          | 100,0              |

The organizers of the festival were interviewed using a questionnaire that contained open questions on festival organizing issues (including managing and promotion problems and resources used), local community help and acceptance, customer satisfaction and also their view on wellness tourism development in certain destinations. From their answers certain suggestions emerged focusing in properly organizing, financing and promoting holistic festivals; they also suggested that the use of local products, the promotion and use of local traditions, as well as the exploitation of local and regional resources, may turn certain urban areas into important welfare tourism destinations.

**DISCUSSION**

Wellness tourism is defined as travel associated with the pursuit of maintaining or enhancing the traveler’s personal wellbeing; this definition however has been heavily criticized, as wellness has nowadays moved from a “trendy” individual travel to a mass and powerful tourism (Hoheb, 2018). Indeed, wellness tourism is increasingly popular, as global health, wellbeing and fitness have become more and more important issues for people, while consumers seem to have the income to afford it (Romao, 2017). This kind of travel offers, among other activities, quiet rooms for meditation, reflexology, massage chairs, yoga classes, seasonal and healthy snack choices, indoor green spaces, indoor walking tracks, extra hydration opportunities and organic restaurants for healthy eating (Global Wellness Institute, 2018, Table 7).

**Table 7: Main modalities of wellness tourism**

| Main contents-offers of wellness tourism | Nutritional Counseling | Pilates | Relaxation Therapy | Sauna Spa | Sleep Therapy | Smoking Cessation | Stress Management | Tai Chi | Traditional Chinese Medicine | Weight Loss | Workplace Wellness | Yoga |
|-----------------------------------------|------------------------|--------|--------------------|-----------|---------------|-------------------|-------------------|--------|-----------------------------|-------------|---------------------|------|
| Acupressure                             |                        |        |                    |           |               |                   |                   |        |                             |             |                     |      |
| Acupuncture                             |                        |        |                    |           |               |                   |                   |        |                             |             |                     |      |
| Aromatherapy                            |                        |        |                    |           |               |                   |                   |        |                             |             |                     |      |
| Ayurveda                                |                        |        |                    |           |               |                   |                   |        |                             |             |                     |      |
| Biofeedback                              |                        |        |                    |           |               |                   |                   |        |                             |             |                     |      |
| Chiropractic                            |                        |        |                    |           |               |                   |                   |        |                             |             |                     |      |
| Exercise                                |                        |        |                    |           |               |                   |                   |        |                             |             |                     |      |
| Healthy Eating                          |                        |        |                    |           |               |                   |                   |        |                             |             |                     |      |
| Hydrotherapy                            |                        |        |                    |           |               |                   |                   |        |                             |             |                     |      |
| Manual Lymph Drainage                   |                        |        |                    |           |               |                   |                   |        |                             |             |                     |      |
| Massage                                 |                        |        |                    |           |               |                   |                   |        |                             |             |                     |      |
| Meditation                              |                        |        |                    |           |               |                   |                   |        |                             |             |                     |      |
| Music Therapy                           |                        |        |                    |           |               |                   |                   |        |                             |             |                     |      |

Global Wellness Institute, 2018
Studies performed by the Global Wellness Institute revealed that wellness tourism grew by 12.7% between 2012 and 2013, which is 40% more than originally forecasted and 74% faster than global tourism overall growth. Wellness tourism reached $678.5 billion in 2017 with 586 million wellness trips per year, constituting the 15% of all global travel and being second only to cultural tourism. Wellness tourism is also responsible for the creation of 11.7 million jobs globally and will reach $392 billion by 2020 only in the US. Europe and North America are currently dominating this market, but new markets will emerge in the near future, mainly in Asia, Latin America and the Middle East. It is also surprising that in 2013 one in every seven dollars spent by tourists went on wellness tourism, as the wellness tourist spends 130% more than the average tourist. Research also showed that most spending was on massage and other forms of treatment, fitness classes, healthy cuisine, beauty therapy and sports activities (Global Wellness Institute Reports, 2015 and 2018).

There seems to be two types of wellness customers, the primary and the secondary wellness tourist. The primary wellness tourist (the minority of wellness tourism travelers) considers wellness as the sole purpose or motivating factor for making his trip and chooses the destination accordingly, while the secondary wellness tourist (the vast majority of wellness tourism travelers) wishes to participate in wellness experiences while taking another type of trip: the tourist will take any opportunity during his visit to experience spa, beauty and fitness offerings, massage and reflexology treatment and also hiking, biking or any other relaxing wellness experience (Global Wellness Institute, 2015).

Wellness tourism has its roots in the ancient civilizations of Greece, Rome and Asia and these historical traditions have largely influenced the modern wellness movement (Global Wellness Institute, xx). With chronic diseases and obesity spreading worldwide and leading to remarkable healthcare costs, governments and world leading scientific institutions (including Harvard, Stanford and Yale Universities, the Karolinska Institute, the Royal London Hospital and others) have largely invested in complementary medicine, wellness and prevention research (Johnson et al. 2011, Global Wellness Institute, 2015) that needs to be materialized in current wellness tourism practice.

From this study it is apparent that the main reason for participating in a wellness festival is healing and experiencing a holistic way of life. Wellness tourism in the minds of participants is synonymous to quality of life, but as a wider field than healing and resuscitation.

Wellness tourism is currently combined with the “sun and sea” form that is prevalent in the Greek islands. Participants stated that certain improvements are needed in facilities and transport, while they would recommend this form of tourism to others, although the staff does not seem to be adequately trained to support a broad development of holistic tourism. Participants also think that holistic tourism has a definite positive impact on tourism development in the region, as it can upgrade the local tourist product, enhance the region's good reputation, extend the tourist season, strengthen the local economy, preserve local cultural heritage, develop collaborations among members of the local community and promote local products.

Organizers highlighted the financial constraints, as well as the high cost of participating in these events. Another disadvantage seems to be the inadequate strategic planning and marketing, due to limited resources, both in human capital and finance. However they think that the development of wellness tourism is feasible in certain Greek urban destinations, with the collaboration of local and regional tourism authorities and enterprises being a sine qua non presupposition for this.

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, certain actions are needed for the development and sustainability of this attractive alternative form of tourism in selected Greek destinations. These, in our view, should include

- Improvement of current infrastructure
- The incorporation of the local culture, local products and other local and regional tourism resources to the wellness tourism package
- The collaboration of local and regional tourism enterprises
- Innovation in wellness tourism infrastructure
- The use of state-of-the-art technology for marketing and promotion
- The development of a wellness-tourism-in-Greece-interactive internet site
- The awareness and support of the local community
- The collaboration with local and regional authorities, as well as the Ministry of Tourism for participating in major tourism exhibitions worldwide.

As wellness tourism has the potential to become a leading form of alternative tourism globally in the near future, Greece has to be prepared in order to benefit the most of its development.

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