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**Tourists' perspective and nationality impact on destination competitiveness**

Tourism is an important social phenomenon that impels travel to new destinations. The purpose of this paper is to examine destination competitiveness regarding the tourists' perspective in Greece. The guiding principle of this study concerns the tourists' perspective, the overall competitiveness of a destination and whether or not it is dependent upon the perceived quality of tourism experience. A comparative work on a wide range of tourists' behaviour from different nations about destination competitiveness has multiple benefits for tourism stakeholders.

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Key words: destination competitiveness, tourist involvement, motivation, tourist experiences, travel behaviour, nationalities

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## **Introduction**

Tourism is a rapidly developing global economy, which brings together social, cultural, spatial and environmental changes in the structure of modern societies (Yfantidou, Spyridopoulou, Kouthouris, Balaska, Matarazzo, & Costa, 2017). This explains the great difficulties involved in conceptual delimitation and classification of the main elements articulating the concept of “tourism”. The conceptual approaches and definitions of tourism vary depending on the particular context in which they are examined, the context refers to various disciplines (economics, sociology, geography, etc.), and various public and private planners and policy either national or international (Comilis & Vagionis, 1999). Since the early 20th century, many international organizations and experts in tourism, through multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary approaches, tried to define the concepts of tourist and tourism on the basis of certain structural analysis models, expanding different types of tourists (Tsartas, 1996; Varvaressos, 1998).

States with economic systems and tourism sectors that are transitioning, evolving, with time, from being centrally controlled to becoming market-driven, face changes that profoundly affect the countries, their economic systems, and their cultures (Andrades, & Dimanche, 2017). In particular, destination competitiveness in developed countries is sensitive to changes in the business environment, macroenvironment, and general infrastructure (Knežević Cvelbar, Dwyer, Koman, & Mihalič, 2016). A greater emphasis on the productivity-enhancing effects of investment should be made for greater efficiencies in capital expenditure, thus helping to foster destination competitiveness. Furthermore, the tourism sector requires a highly skilled tourism workforce as tourism is a service-oriented sector where labor mainly drives overall tourism productivity growth. Tourism training and education are crucial to enhancing industry productivity (Armenski, Dwyer, & Pavluković, 2017).

## **Destination competitiveness**

Dwyer and Kim (2003) highlight that a competitive destination ought to be more successful than competitors in various aspects of the overall tourist experience. Thus, to be competitive in the global tourism marketplace, destinations have to be innovative, distinctive, and continuously intensifying either the tourist's experience or their satisfaction. The increasing number of tourism destinations with similar tourism supply attributes, promotion efforts, and market segments, means that a clear definition of major brand determinants will become an imperative for maintaining competitiveness in the future. Results indicate that the level of tourist satisfaction is significantly and positively associated with the level of branding process implementation, which is a favorable prerequisite for providing and marketing tourism products adapted to tourist needs and expectations (Miličević, Mihalič, & Sever, 2017).

The natural and cultural resources represent only a comparative advantage of tourist sites; i.e. they are a necessary, but not a sufficient condition to be competitive. This means, destination management organizations should act on the complementary elements of tourist supply to maintain or improve the competitive position because they have a greater weight on the evaluation process of tourists (Cracolici, & Nijkamp, 2009). Concerning the tourism infrastructure, it is also remarkable that variables such as the number of star-rated hotels and the number of natural attractions were found to be good proxies for tourism as an input in a production function. Following this logic, tourism infrastructure may be used as an indicator of the tourism activity in a given territory (Andrades, & Dimanche, 2017). The determinant attributes identified by Crouch (2011) are infrastructure and accessibility. A destination's basic infrastructure provides an important foundation on which tourism and other industries rely. Where infrastructure is poor, a destination's tourism industry is likely to find its

competitive position significantly compromised. This result suggests that, particularly for developing economies like the Greek economy, investment in basic infrastructural improvements is pivotal to enhancing the position of the tourism industry to compete effectively should be to.

Competitive advantage can only be created by improved responsiveness to customer needs and preferences, innovativeness, service quality, price and the so-called non-price factors, etc. Competitiveness indices can provide tourism managers with better insights into the reasons for a destination's success over time (Gomezelj, & Mihalič, 2008). By comparing and evaluating the tourism competitiveness of cities Zhang, Gu, Gu, & Zhang (2011) identified that the evaluation results could help to deduce problems in tourism development and provide solutions for tourism administration. Mendola and Volo (2017) provided an analytical and statistically sound protocol to build composite indicators "CIs" and, an assessment of tourism destination competitiveness "TDC" indicators. Competitiveness is determined by the synergy of interrelations of primary, secondary and tertiary offerings of tourist destinations, the evaluation of competitiveness is based on clearly quantifiable comparative indicators primarily influenced by their prioritization (Pavolová, Bakalár, & Pavol, 2016).

Increasingly, research is focusing on various aspects of consumer satisfaction in tourism and hospitality (Kozak et al., 2000, Lam et.al., 2012) and internet on travel satisfaction (Castañeda et al., 2007; Dwivedi, 2009). As suggested by the theory of expectancy disconfirmation, customers purchase goods and services with prepurchase expectations about anticipated performance. After purchasing and consuming the goods and services, the results are compared to the initial expectations. Disconfirmation only arises if the results do not meet the expectation. Positive disconfirmation occurs when perceptions of real performance are more positive than was expected. Customer satisfaction is therefore

related to positive disconfirmation or confirmation (Barsky, 1992; Hill, 1986; Oliver, 1980). In tourism, destination satisfaction refers to the degree of overall pleasure or contentment felt by the tourists, resulting from the ability of the destination to fulfill their desires, expectations, and needs (Beerli & Martin, 2004a, 2004b; Lama, Tanb & Ohc, 2014).

Muller, Hallmann and Brother (2016) investigate the relationship between the perceived destination competitiveness and tourist satisfaction on the one hand and the relationship between the perceived destination competitiveness and satisfaction with the tourism service from suppliers' perspective on the other. There are differences regarding the interdependencies of destination competitiveness and satisfaction as perceived by different stakeholders. Different dimensions foster satisfaction for the different stakeholders. Interestingly, there was a negative effect of policy on satisfaction in the tourist sample. Furthermore, sports tourists were more satisfied with destination performance compared to suppliers.

There is potential for suppliers to re-consider some policy strategies to be more positively perceived in the future. The tourist destination is the principal component of the functional tourism system. In the current competitive tourism market, competitiveness has been increasingly seen as a critical influence on the performance of tourism destinations. A growing body of literature is being established regarding tourism destination marketing, management, and competitiveness issues. A successful tourism destination must embrace an integrated approach towards many components of the tourism system (Jones & Haven-Tang, 2005; Ritchie & Crouch, 2003). The major players in the tourism system – the government, tourism enterprises, tourists, and local communities – may have very different approaches to destination competitiveness. To date, most studies have evaluated destination competitiveness from the industry practitioners' perspective, generally considered a supply-

side approach. The existing literature rarely examined the competitiveness of tourism destination from the demand side, i.e., the tourists' perspective.

Novais, Ruhanen and Arcodia (2018) present three qualitatively different conceptions of destination competitiveness. Conception one, the perception of a destination, has a narrower approach and focus and destination competitiveness is delimited to a composite of several separate destination attributes or elements. The scope of competitiveness is expanded in conception two, performance, with an increased focus on the ability of the destination to achieve identifiable outcomes. In conception three, a long-term process, the degree of complexity and sophistication is further extended as the competitiveness of a destination involves a time dimension where vision and strategic orientation are fundamental. In addition, this last conception subsumes each of the lower-ordered understandings.

### **Tourist perspective**

The tourist perspective analyses co-creation as it happens in the tourist sphere, encompassing the behavior and psychology involved in experiences, before, during and after the travel. The following sections identify and discuss the key dimensions found in the literature. The tourist contributes to some aspect, phase or the overall tourism experience. Co-creation involves processes of interrelated interactions and activities that connect the tourist and other actors before travel (before consumption), during a stay at the destination (during consumption) and/or after the travel (after consumption). The tourist actively participates in on-site experience activities. Travel to visit attractions and destinations involves participation in entertainment-focused or learning-based activities that are perceived as stimulating, different from everyday routines and potentially meaningful. This participation generates the tourist's interest and purpose while in situ and consequently confers meaning to the travel holiday. The tourist interacts with others during the on-site experience. On-site co-creation

experiences engage the individual physically, emotionally, and intellectually, while connecting tourists, their relatives and friends, other tourists, locals, staff, and diverse types of suppliers in the experience space or environment (Campos, Mendes, Valle & Scott, 2018).

Karl (2018) concluded that the application of a tourist and destination perspective allows further understanding about the decreasing deviation between tourist types from hypothetical to realistic destination choices. But, some factors that have been integrated into the tourist typology are influenced by nationality or cultural background of the respondents and therefore the limitation of his study is the transferability and generalization of these results. The results of Prayag and Ryan (2011) enable common cognitive images to be identified as well as nationality-based differences in image perceptions. For this reason, they presented text analysis programme “CatPac” which is particularly suited for the identification of positive and negative images of a destination and differences by tourists’ characteristics such as nationality. Some tourist motives differed between nationalities and place visited (Kozac, 2002), as such nationality tends to be a common variable used in understanding differences in place perceptions.

### **The aim of the study**

The purpose of this paper was to examine the destination’s competitiveness from the tourists’ perspective in Greece based on previous research conducted in Virginia USA (Meng, 2006). The guiding principle of this study is that the overall competitiveness of a destination depends on the perception of the quality of the tourist experience with a specific destination. The research seeks to identify factors that are likely to affect tourist perception of the competitiveness of destinations. A theoretical model for exploring the concepts of quality of tourist experience and the perception of tourists on the competitiveness of a destination is suggested. Furthermore, this paper will provide an overview of travel behavior of different

nationalities, including preferred outdoor recreational activities. Monitoring tourist experience is crucial for the competitiveness of a destination. From a scientific perspective, this research examines the validity of the questionnaire used in a prior study with American citizens (Meng, 2006). The study utilizes factor analysis to discover the underlying dimensions and for this reason, a large sample was used to verify factors. For this research, the questionnaires were translated from English to Greek, German, Polish and Bulgarian languages and culturally adapted to approach foreign tourists coming to the destinations in Greece.

## **Methodology**

### ***Sample***

For the purposes of this research 4,000 questionnaires were surveyed by using random sampling to tourists who visited the region of Eastern Macedonia and Trace in Greece. 3637 were returned and 3070 which were totally completed were evaluated. The number of men in the survey was 1596 while the women were 1302. There were 172 people who did not answer this question. There were three age groups divided the survey sample. The first was from 17-39 years (original maturity), the second from 40-59 years (middle adulthood) and the third 60 years and over (final maturity) (Gibson, 1994).

### ***Questionnaire***

Meng's (2006) scale of Destination Competitiveness from the Tourists' Perspective was used in this research. The theoretical concepts of the research were four. First the Quality of vacation Experience (with 4 phases): Pre-trip planning, En-Route Experience, Destination On-site and After-trip. Second the Perceived Destination Competitiveness, third the Tourist Involvement and fourth Motivation.

The first theoretical concept of the research was the Quality of vacation Experience which had 4 phases. Pre-trip Planning Phase with 4 questions, the En-route Experience Phase with 6 questions, the Destination On-site Phase with 10 questions and the After-trip Phase with 5 questions. The second theoretical concept of the research was the Perceived Destination Competitiveness with 21 questions. The third theoretical concept of the research was the Tourist Involvement with 11 questions based on two scales for the involvement: Personal Involvement Inventory (PII) and Consumer Involvement Profile (CIP). The fourth theoretical concept of the research was the Motivation of tourists with 12 questions. Finally, the questionnaire had five questions regarding general travel behavior of tourists and at the last page there were 7 questions for the description of their holidays, 1 question about the area of the 13 regions of the country where they usually go on vacation and 1 question about the sport activities they choose to perform in the vacation area. The last part contained 10 questions about demographic characteristics such as residence place, gender, age of participants, marital status, number of people included in the family, the number of children and their ages, educational level, annual income, and occupation.

The questionnaires were in English and translated in Greek, German, Polish and Bulgarian. The procedure of double translation for each of the languages was followed and afterward the questionnaire was translated from English (original) to Greek and adapted to the needs of the research. The Romanian participants in the research completed questionnaires which were in English.

Popular sporting outdoor recreation activities were included in the questionnaire and divided into two categories a) moderate activities: canoeing on lakes, rivers and sea, archery, sport shooting, orientation & hiking and intense activities, b) vigorous: rafting, diving, M.T.B. (Mountain bike), climbing - rappel, Flying-fox (rope games), mountain hiking, water sports, paragliding, motorsports and other. All the questionnaire responses were given in

5point scale of Likert from 1 "not at all important" to 5 "very important". In the case of the tourist involvement on vacation, the 5point scale of Likert was from 1 "absolutely disagree" to 5 "totally agree".

### ***Process***

The survey was conducted in the 13th Region of the country, Eastern Macedonia and Thrace, including five prefectures with a total area of 14,157 km<sup>2</sup> (GNTO, 2003). The total population of the region is 608,182 inhabitants (census 2011) (Hellenic Statistical Authority, 2017). The prefectures of the region are the prefecture of Drama, the prefecture of Kavala, the prefecture of Xanthi, the prefecture of Rodopi and the prefecture of Evros. The capital of the region is the city of Komotini, the capital of the Rodopi prefecture. There are two islands in the area, the island of Thassos, which administratively belongs to the prefecture of Kavala and the island of Samothraki, which administratively belongs to the prefecture of Evros.

In the south, the region is washed by the sea in four of the five prefectures, the Thracian Sea. The northern borders of the region are covered by the mountain range of Rodopi with the highest mountain Mount Falakro (2,229 meters) in the prefecture of Drama. The eastern point of the region is the country's border with Turkey, divided for the most part by the river Evros, the second largest river in the Balkans (Hellenic Statistical Authority, 2017). The western border is the prefecture of Serres. The survey was conducted in northeastern Greece in the region of Eastern Macedonia and Thrace. This region is a large tourist destination in northern Greece. Furthermore, the area is famous for its incredible natural beauty, with areas protected by the international convention RAMSAR (Ramsar Convention, 2018) and the European treaty NATURA 2000 (European Union, 2009).

Thus, there are 4 of the 11 areas of the country protected by the Ramsar Convention, the delta of the River Evros, Lake Ismarides, Lake Vistonida and the delta of the Nestos

River. Of the 24 areas protected by the European treaty NATURA in the region there are 4: Dadia-Lefkimmi-Soufliou Forest National Park, Evros Delta National Park, Eastern Macedonia and Thrace National Park (Nestos, Vistonida, Ismarida) and National Park Rodopi mountain range. The district has 638 different categories of accommodation (from 5-star hotels to ecotourist hostels) (EMT, 2018).

The survey sample was comprised of tourists and visitors found in the research area between 1-1-2015 to 31-12-2015. The questionnaire was distributed at the hotel Thraki Palace in Alexandroupolis, the hotel Agriani in Xanthi, on ships (ferry boat schedules Keramoti - Limenas Thasos Alexandroupolis - Samothrace line), at beaches (the island of Thasos and Samothrace, in Xanthi and Alexandroupolis), at destinations where outdoor recreational activities took place (in different points of the river Nestos delta Evros river, the canyon of the river Aggitis, in Vistonida lake in Livaditi waterfall in Xanthi, the narrow river Nestos, the ski center of Falakro Drama), and at the city centers of Drama, Kavala, Xanthi, Komotini and Alexandroupoli or outdoor in the suburban forest of Xanthi, the monasteries of Xanthi, in Nymfaia area in Komotini, in St. Barbara park in Drama, at the Kavala castle in Dadia forest.

## **Results**

A total of 3070 participants from 7 different countries were surveyed. 1666 were from Greece (873 men and 793 women), 251 were from Great Britain (138 men and 113 women), 233 were from Germany (152 men and 81 women), 156 were from Poland (67 men and 89 women), 461 were from Bulgaria (292 men and 169 women), 67 were from Cyprus (36 men and 31 women) and 64 were from Romania (37 men and 27 women) (missing values 172). The Greek participants resided in 47 of the 51 prefectures. The ages of participants were: 17-39 years 69.8%, 40-59 years 24.7% 60 years and over 1,7% (Gibson, 1994).

To detect scale dimensionality, an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) with a principal component method was conducted for each construct and sub-construct. A separate principal component analysis was conducted for each sub-construct because the items of each sub-construct were pre-determined. Seven-factor analyses through the principal component analysis and the varimax rotation were implemented. For this reason, a large sample was used to verify initial factors. The number of the factors were determined by using the criterion of eigenvalues, which should have been greater than one (>1). Also, the maximum iterations number of convergence should have been equal to .40. The factorial and reliability analysis of the research are presented in the below tables.

**Table 1: Factor analysis for the Pre-Trip Planning Experience.**

<b>Quality of Pre-Trip Planning Experience Factor</b>	<b>Factor Loading</b>	<b>Eigen - value</b>	<b>Variance percentage</b>	<b>Performance percentage</b>	<b>Reliability Coefficient</b>
		1.97	49,33%	49,33%	.627
3. Being able to find plenty of information about my destination.	.78				
2. Having easy access to information about my destination.	.75				
1. Having enough time to plan the trip.	.67				
4. Receiving high-quality services by professionals (travel agents, booking staff in hotels, service staff at visitor centers etc.) when I plan my holidays. (If you do not usually use these services put an X here).	.67				

**Table 2: Factor analysis for the En-Route Experience.**

<b>Quality of En-Route Experience</b>	<b>Factor</b>	<b>Eigen</b>	<b>Explained</b>	<b>Performance</b>	<b>Reliability</b>
<b>Factor</b>	<b>Loading</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>Variance</b>	<b>percentage</b>	<b>Coefficient</b>
		<b>value</b>			
				58.23%	
<b>1<sup>st</sup> Factor</b>		1.78	29.62%		.640
11. Receiving high-quality services on the way to and from the place of my destination.	.79				
7. Having easy access to my destination from my place of residence.	.73				
9. Having convenient transportation to and from the place of my destination.	.69				
<b>2<sup>nd</sup> Factor</b>		1.72	28.61%		.613
8. Having safe transportation to and from the place of my destination.	.82				
10. Receiving clear directions and guidance (either at the airport or driving myself the way etc.).	.76				
12. Having a trouble-free journey to and from the place of my destination.	.58				

**Table 3: Factor analysis for the On-Site Instrumental Experience.**

<b>Quality of On-Site Instrumental Experience Factor</b>	<b>Factor Loading</b>	<b>Eigen - value</b>	<b>Explained Variance</b>	<b>Performance percentage</b>	<b>Reliability Coefficient</b>
				57.03%	
<b>1<sup>st</sup> Factor</b>		2.05	20.52%		.687
15. High-quality accommodation at the place of destination.	.83				
17. High-quality food at the place of destination.	.72				
16. Good facilities at the accommodation place.	.71				
20. To receive high-quality services at the place of destination.	.52				
<b>2<sup>nd</sup> Factor</b>		1.93	19.31%		.686
22. Pleasant relationships/communication with local people at the place of destination.	.82				
23. Friendly guidance/information at the place destination.	.74				
25. Pleasant relationships/communication with the customer service staff at the place of destination.	.68				
<b>3<sup>rd</sup> Factor</b>		1.72	17.20%		.527
21. Clean environment at the place	.76				

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of destination.	
24. My safety to be assured at the place of destination.	.66
19. Reasonable prices, in general, at the place of destination.	.60

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**Table 4: Factor analysis for the After-Trip Reflection.**

<b>After-Trip Reflection Factor</b>	<b>Factor Loading</b>	<b>Eigen - value</b>	<b>Explained Variance</b>	<b>Performance percentage</b>	<b>Reliability Coefficient</b>
		2.29	45.78%	45.78%	.701
31. Having the feeling that my life was "enriched" by my holidays.	.77				
32. Having a sense of personal reward after my holidays.	.75				
28. Having experienced a sense of freedom during the holidays.	.66				
29. Feeling well-rested and refreshed after the holidays.	.63				
30. Having the feeling that I have spent quality time with my family and friends.	.55				

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**Table 5: Factor analysis for the Perceived Destination Competitiveness.**

<b>Perceived Destination Competitiveness Factor</b>	<b>Factor Loading</b>	<b>Eigen - value</b>	<b>Explained Variance</b>	<b>Performance percentage</b>	<b>Reliability Coefficient</b>
				48.59%	
<b>1<sup>st</sup> Factor: Destination management and marketing</b>		3.09	14.70%		.780
19. The price - quality ratio is good for the overall travel experience.	.70				
14. The overall stay experience at the place of destination 'fits' the visitor's needs.	.64				
18. The dedication of the place of destination to provide an adequate holiday experience.	.58				
12. Competitive prices for the whole package holidays in relation to competing destinations.	.56				
16. The nature of the location of the destination helps guests to work with comfort in their daily activities (exchange money, knowledge of the language of the visitor, ease in bookings, etc.).	.52				
20. The constant dedication of	.50				

destination to the continuous improvement and development of quality benefits.

13. The dedication of the place destination to promoting its positive image. .48

**2<sup>nd</sup> Factor: Accessibility and Information Availability**

2.33 11.09% .719

1. Easy access to the place of destination (frequency/possibility of transferring). .78

2. Smooth journey to and from the place of destination. .71

4. Travel arrangements according to the place of destination without experiencing any problems. .60

3. Easy access to important information about the destination before traveling. .55

7. High-quality tourism infrastructure (accommodation, restaurants, local transportation network, telecommunications systems, provision of health services, etc.). .40

**3<sup>rd</sup> Factor: Tourism attributes**

2.60 12.38% .743

21. The overall favorable image that the destination has in the global community. .78

22. The alliance/connection of the place of destination with intermediaries in the tourism sector (travel agents, airlines, hotel chains, .75

etc.).

9. A satisfactory variety of activities offered to tourists at the place of destination (festivals, entertainment, nightlife, etc.). .57

15. Easy access to important information about the destination before traveling. .48

17. Political instructions favorable to tourists (low or no tax on tourist services, access to public facilities such as museums and public buildings, etc.). .42

**4<sup>th</sup> Factor: Price and value** 2.19 10,42% .662

8. The dedication to the preservation of the environment of the place of destination. .70

6. Unique tourist sights (natural environment, historical/cultural/world heritage sights, local culture, customs, etc.). .64

10. Friendliness and hospitality of local people. .59

11. High-quality services/facilities at the place of destination. .50

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**Table 6: Factor analysis for the tourists' involvement.**

<b>Tourists' involvement factor</b>	<b>Factor Loading</b>	<b>Eigen - value</b>	<b>Explained Variance</b>	<b>Performance percentage</b>	<b>Reliability Coefficient</b>
				60.60	
<b>1<sup>st</sup> Factor: Interest/Pleasure</b>		1.92	17.48%		.653
1. I attach great importance to the holidays.	.80				
11. I am quite interested in holidays.	.73				
3. It gives me pleasure to buy a vacation package.	.61				
2. The holidays that I buy 'say' something about me.	.56				
<b>2<sup>nd</sup> Factor: Sign</b>		1.85	16.84%		.716
7. You can tell a lot about a person by the vacation he/she chooses.	.82				
14. The vacation I buy gives a glimpse at the type of person I am.	.80				
<b>3<sup>rd</sup> Factor: Risk Probability</b>		2.89	26.28%		.804
12. When someone buys a vacation package, she/he is never sure for her/his choice.	.78				
6. When someone buys holidays, she/he can never be sure if they were that had to be purchased.	.77				
5. Buying holidays is complicated.	.70				
8. When I buy holidays, it is not very important if I am wrong.	.67				
10. When confronted with a variety of options for holidays, I always feel "lost" to make my choice.	.67				

**Table 7: Factor analysis for the motivation.**

<b>Motivation factor</b>	<b>Factor Loading</b>	<b>Eigen - value</b>	<b>Explained Variance</b>	<b>Performance percentage</b>	<b>Reliability Coefficient</b>
<b>49.98%</b>					
<b>1<sup>st</sup> Factor: The external environment</b>		2.47	20.61%		.749
9. Getting involved in various activities.	.76				
10. Coming closer to nature.	.71				
8. Meeting new people and being social.	.68				
7. Developing my personal interests.	.59				
13. Seeking intellectual enrichment/increasing knowledge.	.56				
4. Visiting new places and experiencing new experiences.	.40				
<b>2<sup>nd</sup> Factor: Love and safety</b>		1.96	16.36%		.536
12. Feeling personally secure.	.65				
3. Enjoy peace and quiet.	.64				
11. Being with family and friends.	.56				
6. Feeling physically and mentally refreshed.	.49				
<b>3<sup>rd</sup> Factor: Self-actualization</b>		1.56	13.01%		.506
2. Having fun and do exciting things.	.75				
1. Having the feeling of freedom and looseness.	.71				

Each scale was tested separately about the reliability and structural validity (table 8).

**Table 8: A comparative table of the results of factorial analysis and reliability analysis of both researches.**

<b>Theoretical Concepts</b>	<b>Factors</b>	<b>Virginia Research – Meng (2006)</b>		<b>Greek research – 2016</b>	
		<b>% of Variance – Reliability</b>		<b>% of Variance - Reliability</b>	
Quality of vacation Experience	Pre-trip planning experience	55.75%	,69	49.33%	.627
Quality of vacation Experience	En-route experience 1	58.76%	,83	29.62%	.640
Quality of vacation Experience	En-route experience 2	-		28.61%	.613
				58.23%	
Quality of vacation Experience	On-site instrumental experience	59.61%	,84	20.52%	.687
Quality of vacation Experience	On-site expressive experience	52.97%	,76	19.31%	.686
Quality of vacation Experience	On-site security	-		17.20%	.527
				57.03%	
Quality of vacation Experience	After-trip reflection	61.45%	,76	45.78%	.701
Perceived Destination Competitiveness	Destination management and marketing	37.11%	,86	14.70%	.780
Perceived Destination Competitiveness	Accessibility and information availability	7.63%	,79	11.09%	.719
Perceived Destination Competitiveness	Tourism attributes	5.88%	,76	12.38	.743
Perceived Destination Competitiveness	Price and value	5.26%	,79	10.42%	.662
		55.88%		48.59%	
Tourist Involvement	Interest/pleasure	25.70%	.795	17.48%	.653
Tourist Involvement	Sign	17.11%	.838	16.84%	.716
Tourist Involvement	Risk probability	11.90%	.690	26.28	.804
Tourist Involvement	Risk importance	8.39%	.631	-	
		63.1%		60.6%	
Motivation	The external	N/A		20.61%	,749

Motivation	environment			
Motivation	Love and safety	N/A	16.36%	,536
Motivation	Self-actualization	N/A	13.01%	,519
			49.98%	

Furthermore, tourists were asked about the sports activities that they participated in or would like to participate in. 14 sports activities were presented in the questionnaire (figure 2).

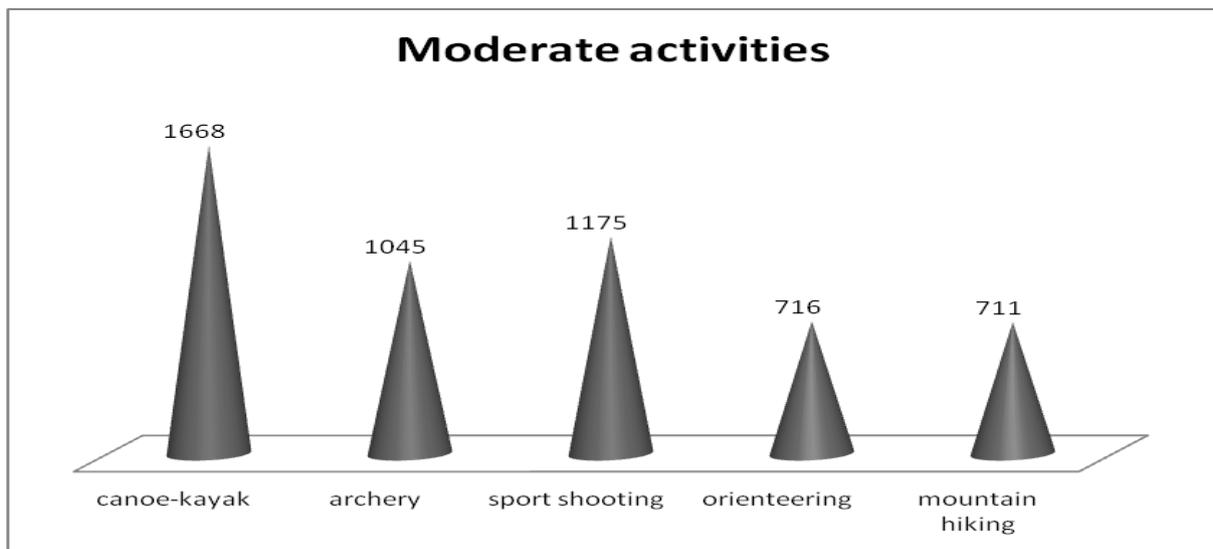


Figure 1: The number of tourists that selected moderate-intensity activities.

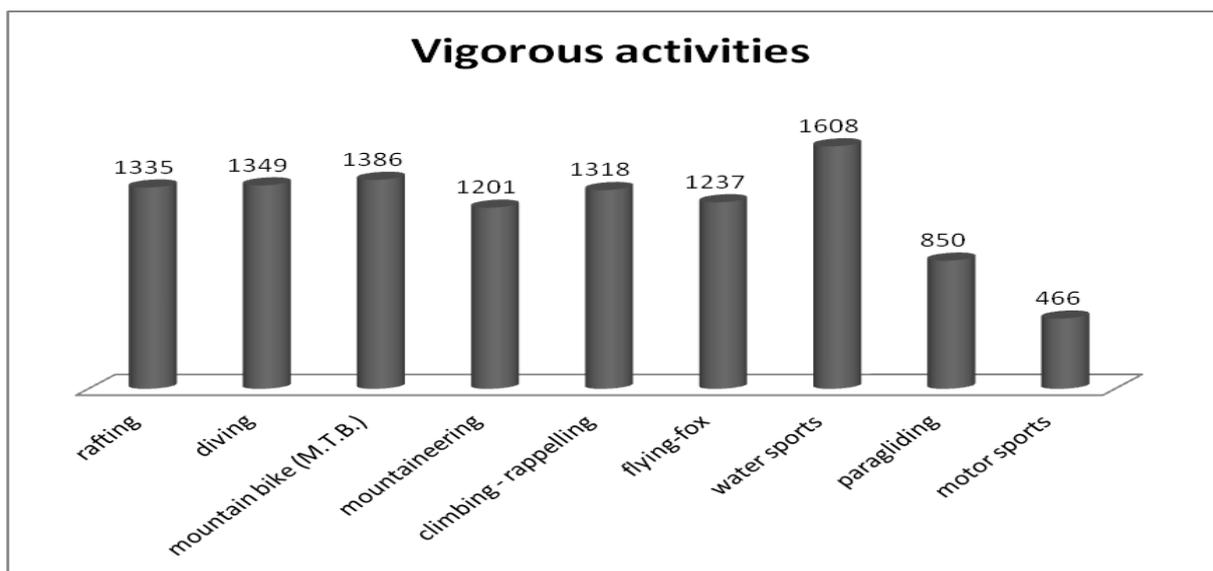


Figure 2: The number of tourists that selected vigorous intensity activities.

Crosstab analyses were run between the above categories of recreational activities and the different nationalities of the tourists. The positive answers and the results according to their nationalities in Table 9.

**Table 9: Activities that are selected by different nationalities.**

	Greek	British	German	Polish	Bulgarian	Cypriot	Romanian
Canoe-Kayak	794	177	169	61	406	44	17
	47,60%	10,60%	10,10%	3,70%	24,30%	2,60%	1,00%
Rafting	671	143	33	55	380	41	12
	50,30%	10,70%	2,50%	4,10%	28,50%	3,10%	0,90%
Archery	522	105	27	49	302	33	7
	50,00%	10,00%	2,60%	4,70%	28,90%	3,20%	0,70%
Diving	665	123	170	58	277	37	19
	49,30%	9,10%	12,60%	4,30%	20,50%	2,70%	1,40%
Sport shooting	503	116	159	42	308	36	11
	42,80%	9,90%	13,50%	3,60%	26,20%	3,10%	0,90%
Mountain bike (M.T.B.)	620	142	155	45	380	37	7
	44,70%	10,20%	11,20%	3,20%	27,40%	2,70%	0,50%
Mountain hiking	571	127	110	39	299	35	20
	47,50%	10,60%	9,20%	3,20%	24,90%	2,90%	1,70%
Orienteering	323	64	132	34	144	14	5
	50,10%	8,90%	18,40%	4,70%	20,10%	2,00%	0,70%
Climbing-Rappelling	582	135	171	41	326	38	25
	44,20%	10,30%	13,00%	3,10%	24,70%	2,90%	1,90%
Flying-fox	545	121	155	41	329	34	12
	44,10%	9,80%	12,50%	3,30%	26,60%	2,70%	1,00%
Mountaineering	427	56	103	37	59	12	17
	60,10%	7,90%	14,50%	5,20%	8,30%	1,70%	2,40%
Water sports	943	159	154	81	198	44	29
	58,70%	9,90%	9,60%	5,00%	12,30%	2,70%	1,80%

Paragliding	447	85	31	43	201	30	13
	52,60%	10,00%	3,60%	5,10%	23,60%	3,50%	1,50%
Motor sports	263	48	58	23	54	9	11
	56,40%	10,30%	12,40%	4,90%	11,60%	1,90%	2,40%

Recreational activities were most welcomed by Greek, Bulgarian and German tourists.

Below (table 10) it is presented for each nationality the three preferential recreational sports activities.

**Table 10: The recreational sports activities preferences by each nationality.**

Nationalities	Recreational sport activities preferences by each nationality							
	Canoe-Kayak	Water sports	Rafting	Climbing-Rappelling	Diving	Mountain hiking	Mountain bike (M.T.B.)	Flying-fox
Greek	33%	39%	28%					
British	37%	33%	30%					
German	33%			34%	33%			
Polish	31%	40%			29%			
Bulgarian	27%		25%				25%	22%
Cypriot	26%	26%	25%	23%				
Romanian		39%		34%		27%		

## **Discussion and conclusions**

The questionnaire of this survey was first utilised the US (Meng, 2006), only minor changes were made to the questionnaire to measure the choices of tourists on the selection of outdoor leisure activity. Popular outdoor recreation activities were selected divided into two categories, moderate and vigorous, to explore the preferences of tourists and provide the entrepreneurs of the area the necessary information to build their recreation activities programs in a way that is suited to different nationalities.

Water sports were the primary choice for six of the seven nationalities. Water sports may have been preferred because a) close proximity to the sea (Aegean Sea), b) proximity to rivers and lakes, c) there are many activities offered in the area.

The factorial analysis revealed a general agreement between the two questionnaires for the four phases of the tourist experience. Specifically, for the Pre-trip planning both revealed one factor, for the En-Route Experience there was one factor and now two, for the Destination On-site there were two and three accordingly and for the After-trip phase one and one respectively. The destination competitiveness analysis revealed four factors for both research projects. For the tourist involvement, there were four factors in Meng's (2006) research and three in this one.

Destinations compete to attract travellers by emphasizing the experience they should offer (Ritchie & Crouch, 2000, 2003; Dalakis, Yfantidou, Tsitskari, Costa & Tzetzis, 2016). To achieve competitive advantages for a certain tourism destination, the destination must ensure that its overall attractiveness and the tourist experience offered are superior to the visitor's alternative destinations (Dwyer et al., 2004). Therefore, the quality of tourism experiences is the key to the competitive advantages of the destinations. From the tourists' perspective, a quality tourism experience could be considered as the major contributing factor

to their perception of the competitiveness of a specific destination and would influence their decision-making, image, and future behavioural intention toward the destination.

Consequently, there is an integrated link between destination competitiveness and the quality of tourism experience and there is a need to examine this issue from the tourists' perspective. In today's fast growing economic environment, competitiveness has been examined in general terms in the academic fields of economics, marketing and management. The literature presents two perspectives regarding the definition of "competitiveness". From a macro perspective, competitiveness is considered a national concern with its goal to improve real income. Competitiveness, in this case, is a very broad construct engaging all social, cultural, and economic aspects which may influence the performance of a nation in international markets (Ritchie & Crouch, 2003).

To be a competitive destination involves the ability to provide the right product (with the expected quality) at the right time to the right consumer segment. In other words, a destination can be considered competitive if the destination is able to attract and satisfy consumers. This involves high knowledge standards about the destination, entrepreneurs, supplier and tourists (Pechlaner, 1999). Future research could control this scale using adaptations (new factors of motivation, use of outdoor recreational activities, etc.) and could be used in other populations or nations. Therefore, further research can extend the number of nationalities and tourist destinations to be taken into consideration the results of the empirical studies and the findings, where possible.

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