

Chapter 21

Smart Tourism Development: The Case of Halkidiki

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ABSTRACT

Halkidiki is a district embedded in Central Macedonia, Greece where tourism has been the most significant pillar of development; however, the sharply declining economic performance of the recent years, clearly indicates the need for structural changes and the development of an ambitious long term regional strategy plan, in order to face economic challenges, explore new market opportunities and robust the existing regional competitive advantages. The purpose of the chapter is to introduce smart tourism development model, which is based on three distinctive development tools: 1) Smart Specialization Strategy Methodology, as the pillar to determine and support specific priorities; 2) Quality Policies, as a pillar of stakeholders commitment to provide superior quality products and services, mostly through Local Quality Agreements; and 3) Social economy entrepreneurship, as the third pillar upon which local population and social entities will be engaged and involved. Smart tourism development model aims to establish a new tourism development perception, closely linked to the existing local market opportunities and simultaneously contributing to the enhancement of the competitive advantages of as many as possible of the other sectors of the regional economy.

INTRODUCTION

At a time when a significant number of the European Union member-states are dealing with the detrimental effects of the ongoing economic recession and the refugees' issue, the E.U. has defined, in the Europe 2020 Strategy Framework, a new "smart" vision for a social market economy, deeply rooted within the three interconnected priorities of Smart, Sustainable and Inclusive Development.

Defining "smart", we need to delve into the EU Strategy for regional development, as it was referenced in the Europe 2020 declaration. According to that definition, the actual meaning of the term is

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the intention of the European Union to enhance development by activating and customizing all possible strengths of EU regions, towards a feasible, mature and focused productive goal in order to enhance significantly the level of competitiveness in the global market (Gomez & Nunez, 2014).

Focusing on the area of interest, Halkidiki is a district embedded in Central Macedonia, Greece where tourism has been the most significant pillar of development at least during the last three decades; however statistical data regarding the period 2008-2014, issued from the Greek Tourism Confederation, bring out that earnings, employment ratings along with income and investment multipliers are sharply declining, indicating the need for structural changes (SETE, 2015).

Given the fact that Smart Specialization Strategy (3S) is the leading benchmark for development in Europe, the purpose of the study is not merely to highlight the alignment of a smart specialization strategy within the tourism sector, but to elaborate a holistic *smart tourism development model* in the region of Halkidiki Greece, using three distinctively functioning, nevertheless conceptually cooperating, development tools: (i) Smart Specialization Strategy Methodology, (ii) Quality Policies, and (iii) Social economy entrepreneurship. The expected final outcome of a smart tourism development model is twofold: to contribute to the establishment of a new tourism development perception, closely linked to the existing local market opportunities, and simultaneously to contribute to the enhancement of the competitive advantages of as many as possible of the other sectors of the regional economy, using in parallel as catalysts, the notion of quality and the initiative of social entrepreneurship in order to gain active involvement of local communities and stakeholders.

BACKGROUND

First Development Tool: Smart Specialization

The concept of Smart Specialization was developed at the end of the previous decade by a group of experts-academics as a new approach for increasing the efficiency of European investment in research, innovation and entrepreneurship (Forey, 2014). The concept is based on the understanding that it is not possible for all regions to perform equally well in all areas of science and innovation, as they do not have the necessary critical mass of basic factors, such as enterprises, knowledge and research centers. In fact, more often than not, regions do not have sufficient prerequisites to ensure an effective collaboration between innovation factors, which are necessary for gaining larger market shares at a global competitiveness level. Smart Strategy is a regional initiative seeking to explore and discover existing and potential technological and market advantages in order to establish a robust competitive opportunity, upon which related development policies will be conceptually based and implemented (Forey & Goenega, 2013).

Hereby, it is important to clarify that Smart Strategy is not a doctrine that requires a region to specialize in a particular set of industries. Instead, the strategy espouses the element of “vertical and non-neutral” intervention, implying a bottom-up, multidimensional and broad development mechanism of economic transformation, able to support the European Commission vision of “smart, sustainable and inclusive growth” (Avdimiotis et al., 2015).

Under this outline and in terms of strategy implementation, the European Commission requests regions to join forces and resources in order to support specific priorities, instead of diffusing their investments in a wide range of economic activities. Therefore, each region is encouraged to establish a set

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