



Research Article

The Development, Nomination and Viability of Agrotourism in Greece, with the Contribution of Internet. A Field Research: The Case of Agrafta

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
<p>Article No.: 101613904 DOI: 10.15580/GJAS.2013.12.101613904</p>	<p>Nowadays the degree of gravity in Greece's tertiary sector imposes the activation of high technology-Internet. This must be based on the sovereign doctrine of the Internet's use for agro-touristic activities, depending on the requirements of the local people and the visitors of each agro-touristic region. In this paper the contribution of Internet is nominated in the development, elevation and viability of regions with agro-touristic activities in Greece as catalytic. A small- scale field research is figured out, so that via the information by the "protagonists", leads to useful conclusions about agro-tourism.</p>
<p>Submitted: 16/10/2013 Accepted: 22/12/2013 Published: 29/12/2013</p>	
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Keywords:

East Argithea, Regional Development, Agro-tourism, Internet

1. INTRODUCTION

The rapid progress taking place in the last fifty years in Greece's touristic sector was a fact, which can be certified by the positive developments of a group of indicators (Karagiannis, 2006), directly related to the overall procedures and changes of our national economy.

The domination of Greece's natural and cultural resources, the relative advantages of the Greek landscape in comparison with that of other countries around the world, the rich archaeological, historical and cultural heritage of the Greek land and of its people, the mild climate conditions with the "long Greek summer", the interesting fauna and flora etc. (Karagiannis, 2006) are the main "growth factors of all kinds of Greek tourism".

Within a few years Greece has transitioned from the margin of the international touristic market to the strong touristic economies and held a high place in the global touristic demand board until 2009. Moreover, some regions such as Halkidiki, Rhodes, Crete, Corfu and the Cyclades are nowadays thought of as a pole of attraction and have already been characterized as "touristically saturated destinations". Other Greek regions are thought to possess "large reserves" for touristic exploitation and have not yet been conquered by mass tourism, as the aforementioned areas.

These non-widely known areas are those which will guarantee the future agro-touristic course, and in order for that to happen, there should be a re-definition and re-shaping of the national touristic policy (Exarchos and Karagiannis, 2004). Taking into consideration the unfavourable consequences in areas, where the tourism of the Greek touristic industry was developed chaotically, namely the change of the terms of the international touristic current after the sovereignty of "globalization", the consequences upon the Greek tourism since the accession of our country in the Economic and Monetary Union (EMU), and the search for growth strategies and economic policies, so as to secure a "viable agro-touristic growth". The estimate, that agro-tourism can constitute a major growth lever for the Greek periphery, has been supported by many, for as long as these areas combine entertainment and education and can ensure the connection of the trip with products – services and experiences in the field of agriculture (Giannopoulou, 2004). And the main concern is planning and organizing everything rationally and on a new basis, always with the help of high technology – Internet.

A specific and scientifically documented point of view is introduced for the course that the agro-tourism of the area in question should follow, so as to correspond fully to the expectations of the Greek state and periphery, in a time of intense international competition in the global agro-touristic market.

These thoughts are also based on earlier scientific research and field studies, aiming at permanent and "viable" results for the environment, the local communities and economy. The writers' constant objective is the permanent research of the local agro-touristic market, since the tourism, especially for the geographical area and periphery in question is nonexistent. On the other hand the area in question faces serious isolation problems and is not the only one. These problems occur due to the difficult access to the region because of the decreasing population, the adverse socio-economic structure and the low developmental performance of the areas trying to remain popular as touristic destinations.

This paper focuses on the area of Agrafa (Ethnos, 2010) and specifically in eastern Argithea, where the field research has been conducted. It is worth mentioning that the sample consists exclusively of inhabitants of the mountainous settlements of Agrafa, pointing out that the agro-touristic model will be based on the technological mechanisms and the methodology required, so as to be able to distinguish the area as an agro-touristic destination. In the next two sections the Investigated Area is being presented as well as the identity of the research and the results. The results and conclusions are discussed in the 4th and last section of this paper.

2. INVESTIGATED AREA: MUNICIPAL UNITY OF EASTERN ARGITHEA

The municipality of Argithea is a municipality of the region of Thessaly and its capital is called Anthiro. The size of the municipality is 372,837 km² and its population is 6,084 inhabitants according to the census of 2001. Nowadays after the census of 2011 its inhabitants amount to 3450, which means that there is a decrease in population in the order of 47%. Not many people reach the municipality of Argithea because most of the visitors stop at the nearby Plastira Lake, fascinated by the sparkle of the water and the provision of luxurious accommodation. The visitors are indifferent to the enchanting microcosm of the tens of settlements of eastern Argithea, which is the area in question.

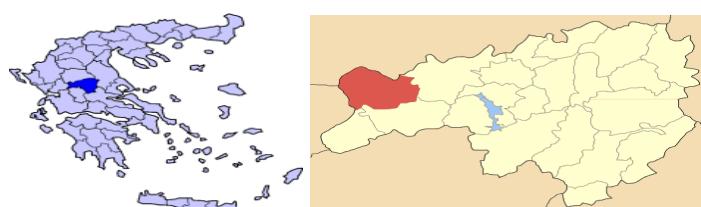


Fig. 1: Karditsa, Greece - Eastern Argithea Region

The municipal unity of eastern Argithea consists of tens of villages and settlements. Most of them are inhabited during the summer, some of them are in ruins and few of them have inhabitants all year long. The town of Mouzaki is considered to be the "entrance" to eastern Argithea, as it is a significant junction between Argithea, the Plastira Lake and northern Agrafta. The region has been inhabited since the ancient times, whereas in the latest years it has been associated with influential figures, such as Georgios Karauskakis and Saint Seraphim, bishop of Fanari – Neochori.

Eastern Argithea is a verdant area, with many well tended stone houses. It is worth walking on the paving path that reaches the stone bridge of Argithea (the only road to communicate between Drakotripa and Mouzaki) (Prefectural Self-government of Karditsa, 2010).

The municipal unity of eastern Argithea is located at the west of the prefecture of Karditsa. It stretches 135.070 km² and its population is 1.767 citizens. The population data come from the press release announcing the 2011 census results for the permanent population of the country. The former community functioned from 1999 until 2010 and its capital was Petrilo. Most of the road network is paved with asphalt. The rest of the road network that is unpaved poses great difficulties especially during the winter. Parts of this municipal unity are: Petrilo, Vlasi, Drosato, Kabouriana, Leontito, Petrochori, Stefaniada, Fountoto and many other settlements, such as the local communities and settlements on an altitude of 800-1250 m, such as Petrilo at 1150m, Livadia at 1250m, Kamboureika, Argyreika, Mageiros, Krania or Charis, Vasiliades and Chalkiopoulos at 1100m, Rossis at 1050m and Vlasi at 1150m. Drosato is located at 1100m and finally Fountoto at an altitude of 800m. The touristic infrastructure of the area is constantly improving. Taverns and hostels mainly for hunters function almost all year long at Livadia, Charis, Leontito, Mantzoureika and Ragadia (on the road to the Cave monastery). On the course from Karditsa to eastern Argithea one passes through Peukofito (12km away from Mousaki) which is built on a verdant ridge. The trip from Peukofito until the pass of Saint Nikolaos (1500m) lasts for almost 25 minutes and is fascinating, as it goes through a thick fir tree forest, a beech forest and also many shadeless plains where one can gaze in awe at the depth of the gorge. The international E4 path goes through the pass of Saint Nikolaos. Here is where the meeting of the

inhabitants of Argithea takes place on the first Sunday of July. This meeting includes various activities.

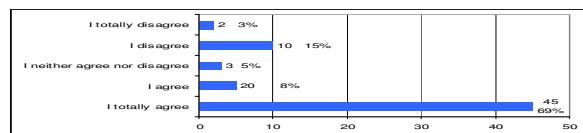
In eastern Argithea there is the crater of an old volcano at the area of "Voutsikaki" in the area of Lakkos at Petrilo. There are also many historical pathways, historical trees, chasms, caves, small gorges but also arable land. Furthermore there are many hideouts of the men-at-arms and thieves during the uprising of 1821, for example Georgios Karauskakis was in the area with 500 men-at-arms in 1823. Later on there is the hideout of G.Tsonga in 1854 in the area. Many temples, such as the church of "Christ", have a great religious and cultural value.

3. THE IDENTITY OF THE RESEARCH - RESULTS

Based on the Market Research technique, the authors has observed the code of conduct in order to carry out the research. Research duration: January – March 2013. Area of research: Schimatari, Chalkida, Athens and Mouzaki. Sample population: 48 men and 17 women. Technique for the collection of data: Random sampling. The methodology background is based on a series of visits, discussions and meetings with inhabitants of the areas of research. In the anonymous questionnaire the sample population was given a concise definition of agro-tourism with the reassurance that their answers will be strictly confidential and in no way will they be made known or will be the subject of any criticism. The questionnaire consists of 28 questions.

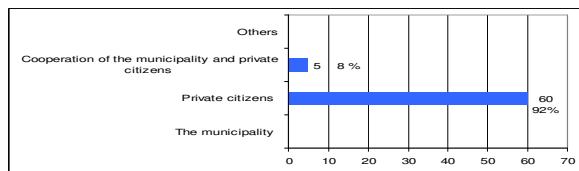
The term agro-tourism is thought of as a multi-dimensional activity, which is not only the tourism based on farms, but it includes vacation in farms in nature and it is combined with eco-tourism, hiking, mountain climbing, adventure tourism, sports, health, dashes and bike riding. Agro-tourism also involves the development of the local cultural heritage without disturbing the natural balance and with the utmost respect to the culture of the local community, at whose growth agro-tourism aims. Based on the above:

1. Do you think that there is a chance of growth of agro-tourism in the wider area of eastern Argithea? YES: 45, NO: 20
2. Will the growth of agro-tourism help eastern Argithea financially?

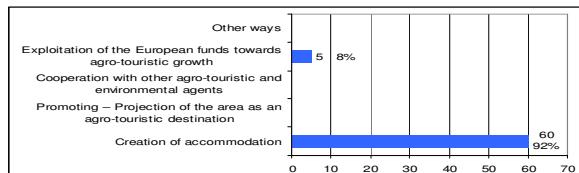


3. Do you believe that there have been steps made until today towards the growth of agro-tourism in the area of Argithea? YES: 20, NO: 45

4. If steps were indeed made, who was in your opinion the leader in this effort?



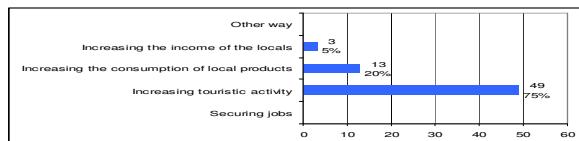
5. In which way did they lead to the growth of agro-tourism?



6. Do you believe that agro-tourism could offer more benefits in the area with the use of clever ways of approaching tourism, such as:

modern technology: Internet or Teletex – Online travel services etc.? YES 59, NO: 6

7. If YES, in which ways?



8. Do you believe that agro-tourism, in the way that we would like it to develop in your area today, should use digital telecommunication combined with information technology? YES: 5, NO: 60

9. Do you think that it is necessary for agro-tourism to establish a touristic website for eastern Argithea: Communication, price-lists, a webpage to present the area's cultural heritage, photos, historic material, itineraries, area maps and navigation maps? YES: 35, NO: 30

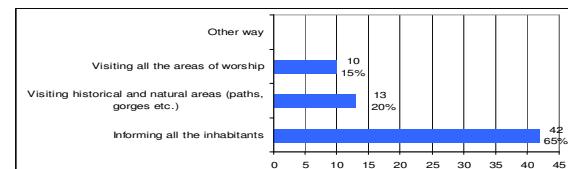
10. Do you know of any areas in eastern Argithea, which are protected by Greek or international law? YES:38, NO: 27

11. Have you ever taken part in a seminar / meeting or any other educational program concerning E-tourism (electronic tourism market)? YES: 0, NO: 65

12. If not, would you like to take part? YES: 44, NO: 21

13. Would you be interested in any way to take part in the effort of our proposal for the growth of eco-tourism in your region? YES: 56, NO: 9

14. If YES, in which way?

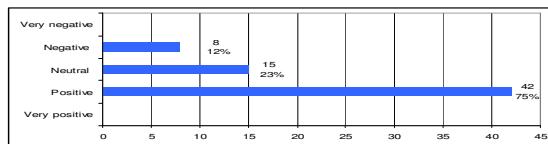


15. Have you been informed by the municipal or other authority about the ways that the local citizens could participate in the procedure towards the growth of the agro-touristic model of your area? YES:3, NO: 62

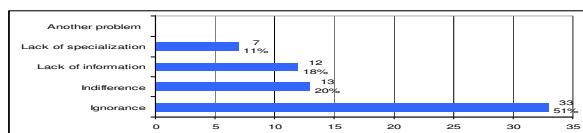
16. Would you like to meet visitors in your area, who will take part in free agro-touristic

activities with the help of online agents – travel agencies: hotels, holiday resorts, room bookings, means of transportation, vacation, car renting, travel adventures? YES: 63, NO: 2

17. Your opinion about this way of attracting visitors is:

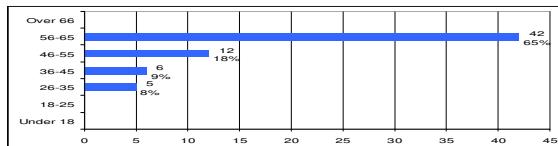


18. Have you been informed about the developmental programs – financing that are carried out, aiming at the growth of agro-tourism in our country? YES: 1, NO: 64
19. Would you be interested in offering volunteer work for the growth of agro-tourism in your area with actions such as: guided tours or something else? YES: 35, NO: 20
20. Would you cultivate local ecological or biological products? YES: 58, NO: 7
21. Are you aware if the farmers in the wider area are using pesticides, fertilizers or spraying for the cultivation of local products? YES: 0, NO: 65
22. Which is the most important problem of the area, which could become an obstacle for further development of agro-tourism in the area?

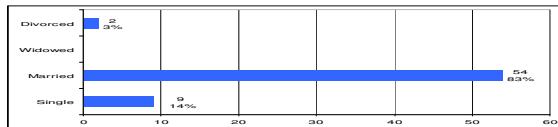


Sex: Men 48, Women 17

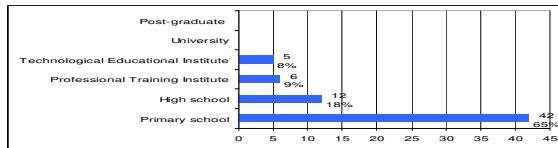
23. Could you specify your age?



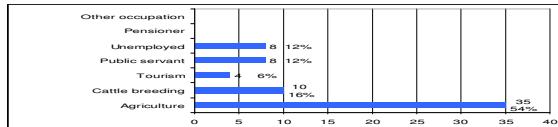
24. What is your family status?



25. What is your level of education?



26. What is the field of your main occupation?



27. Is there any complementary occupation? YES: 6, NO: 59

4. CONCLUSION – DISCUSSION

Every agro-touristic form, in connection with modern technology for achieving agro-touristic goals, can bring significant benefits especially through the economic

activities. The promotion of this touristic model presupposes the close cooperation and the use of technology – Internet on behalf of the touristic and the agricultural enterprises on the basis of a constructive and creative spirit (Andreopoulou, 2010). In any way

that we add up the people, who would use the Internet and the electronic printed media with those that would only use the Internet, we end up to a percentage in the order of 58%. In other words, almost 60% of the population would use the Internet as an exclusive information source for their journey (Zongqing, 2004).

The success of agro-tourism is surrounded and helped by modern technology for as long as there are no negative environmental consequences such as: erosion, wastes, damaging effects on the ecosystem and on man, exhaustion of the natural and water resources, as well as the downgrading of bio-diversity (Lidakis, 1998). The field research results show that almost all the people questioned are willing to work in that direction, so that there will be a perfect cooperation between tourism and the agricultural world, which usually begins with the selective regaining of rural houses and areas, so as to develop agro-touristic activities in them. This way these activities could improve both qualitatively and quantitatively and with high technology, since the majority of the sample believes that agro-tourism could offer more benefits in the region, if smarter ways of approaching tourists are implemented via the use of modern technology: Internet or Teletext – Online travel services. Furthermore, the majority of the sample claims that, although they live on a purely mountainous area, they would like agro-tourism to grow in the area, by using digital telecommunication in combination with information technology (Andreopoulou et al., 2006). They also think that it is necessary for agro-tourism to establish a touristic website for eastern Argithea for: communication, price-lists, and a website to present their cultural heritage, photos, historical material, itineraries, area maps and navigation maps. They accept to attend a seminar / meeting or other educational program about E-tourism (electronic touristic market) although they have never attended one before. And they would also like to meet visitors in their area, who would carry out agro-touristic activities, who would be guided by online agents and on line touristic services to the hospitality enterprises of the area, to the resorts, to room bookings, to transportation means, to renting cars or even to travel adventures.

There are many statistical data that suggest that a great percentage of Europeans and Americans use the Internet for some part of their journey (Nielsen, 2007). This fact presages the compensation and the decrease on the producers' income stemming from agricultural production, with the replacement (of those "lost" incomes) by agro-tourism. Agro-tourism can achieve this in combination with electronic services – Internet.

The traditional settlements are part of a significant cultural and architectural heritage and are so often underrated, because only their true economic value is taken into consideration. We often protest for

their preservation, which only proves that we do not show the appropriate respect to the typology of the existing architecture. Agro-tourism changes the behavior of farmers to the point that they are now actively interested in its protection and in the preservation of the integrity of traditional settlements. This means an increase on the number of agro-tourists and therefore an increase in the incomes created.

It is certain that, in order for organized agro-tourists to reach the villages of eastern Argithea, the locals should promote their areas using advertisements and should provide "a simple but lively welcome". This can be achieved via an e-package of minimal suggestions that would not fall short of (at least) basic facilities, excursion management, itineraries, upgrading of the natural environment and provision of the necessary social and commercial services.

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