

“Athens as an international tourism destination: An empirical investigation to the city’s imagery and the role of local DMO’s.”

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The aim of this project was to identify the role of DMOs in promoting Athens as a tourist destination, as well as to evaluate their effectiveness in terms of marketing and managing the tourist product of Athens, its popularity and imagery.

“ Travel makes one modest. You see what a tiny place you occupy in the world.”

Gustave Flaubert

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

As it is indicated in the title, this chapter includes the research methodology of the dissertation. In more details, in this part the author outlines the research strategy, the research method, the research approach, the methods of data collection, the selection of the sample, the research process, the type of data analysis, the ethical considerations and the research limitations of the project.

3.2 Research strategy

The research held with respect to this dissertation was an applied one, but not new. Rather, numerous pieces of previous academic research exist regarding the role of DMOs in promoting and managing tourist destinations, not only for Athens in specific, but also for other tourist destinations in Greece and other places of the world. As such, the proposed research took the form of a new research but on an existing research subject.

3.3 Research method – Qualitative versus Quantitative techniques

In order to satisfy the objectives of the dissertation, a qualitative research was held. The main characteristic of qualitative research is that it is mostly appropriate for small samples, while its outcomes are not measurable and quantifiable (see *table 3.1*). Its basic advantage, which also constitutes its basic difference with quantitative research, is that it offers a complete description and analysis of a research subject, without limiting the scope of the research and the nature of participant's responses (Collis & Hussey, 2003).

However, the effectiveness of qualitative research is heavily based on the skills and abilities of researchers, while the outcomes may not be perceived as reliable, because they mostly come from researcher's personal judgments and interpretations. Because it is more appropriate for small samples, it is also risky for the results of qualitative research to be perceived as reflecting the opinions of a wider population (Bell, 2005).

Table 3.1: Features of Qualitative & Quantitative Research

Qualitative research	Quantitative Research
The aim is a complete, detailed description.	The aim is to classify features, count them, and construct statistical models in an attempt to explain what is observed.
Researcher may only know roughly in advance what he/she is looking for.	Researcher knows clearly in advance what he/she is looking for.
Recommended during earlier phases of research projects.	Recommended during latter phases of research projects.
The design emerges as the study unfolds.	All aspects of the study are carefully designed before data is collected.
Researcher is the data gathering instrument.	Researcher uses tools, such as questionnaires or equipment to collect numerical data.
Data is in the form of words, pictures or objects.	Data is in the form of numbers and statistics.
Subjective – individuals interpretation of events is important ,e.g., uses participant observation, in-depth interviews etc.	Objective: seeks precise measurement & analysis of target concepts, e.g., uses surveys, questionnaires etc.
Qualitative data is more 'rich', time consuming, and less able to be generalized.	Quantitative data is more efficient, able to test hypotheses, but may miss contextual detail.
Researcher tends to become subjectively immersed in the subject matter.	Researcher tends to remain objectively separated from the subject matter.

3.4 Research approach

The research approach that was followed for the purposes of this research was the inductive one. According to this approach, researchers begin with specific observation, which are used to produce generalized theories and conclusions drawn from the research. The reasons for occupying the inductive approach was that it takes into account the context where research effort is active, while it is also most appropriate for small samples that produce qualitative data. However, the main weakness of the inductive approach is that it produces generalized theories and conclusions based only on a small number of observations, thereby the reliability of research results being under question (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

3.5 Data collection method and tools

For the purposes of this research, in depth interviews were used. In depth interviews are personal and unstructured interviews, whose aim is to identify participant's emotions, feelings, and opinions regarding a particular research subject. The main advantage of personal interviews is that they involve personal and direct contact between interviewers and interviewees, as well as eliminate non-response rates, but interviewers need to have developed the necessary skills to successfully carry an interview (Fisher, 2005, Wilson, 2003). What is more, unstructured interviews offer flexibility in terms of the flow of the interview, thereby leaving room for the generation of conclusions that were not initially meant to be derived regarding a research subject. However, there is the risk that the interview may deviate from the pre-specified research aims and objectives (Gill & Johnson, 2002).

As far as data collection tools were concerned, the conduction of the research involved the use of semi-structured questionnaire, which was used as an interview guide for the researcher. Some certain questions were prepared, so as for the researcher to guide the interview towards the satisfaction of research objectives, but additional questions were made encountered during the interviews.

Some sample questions that were included in the semi-structured questionnaire were the following:

Question 1: What do you think about the popularity of Greece as a tourist destination?

Question 2: What do you think about the popularity of Athens as a tourist destination?

Question 3: What have you done as an organization to promote Athens as a Tourist destination? Were your activities efficient? (Please discuss)

Question 4: Do you think that Athens can become a more popular destination in the near future? How it can enhance its brand name as a tourist destination?

Question 5: What are the main problems and Challenges of Athens as a Tourist destination? What are the key advantages? What are these problems causing? Are they affecting their activities for promoting Athens as a destination?

Question 6: What activities your organization applies for addressing the problems that Athens faces as a tourist destination?

Question 7: In your view, which are the improvements that your organization should made in order to increase its efficiency and for promoting tourism more effectively?

Question 8: What do you think about the role of Greek DMOs in promoting the tourism in Greece? Do you have any recommendation for improvement?

Question 9: Do you have experience of DMOs in other countries? How they operate? What can we learn from them?

Question 10: How do you manage the tourist product of Athens, except for marketing? Do you pay attention to sustainable tourism issues? How do the city and residents of Athens benefit from your management practices?

Question 11: Marketing and Destination Marketing can help Athens and Greece to develop their touristic offer more efficiently? With what actions and programs?

(A detailed form of the interview guide is presented in Appendixes A)

3.6 Sample selection

The method of purposive sampling was used to develop the sample of the research under discussion. According to this method, which belongs to the category of non-probability sampling techniques, sample members are selected on the basis of their knowledge, relationships and expertise regarding a research subject (Freedman *et al.*, 2007). In the current study, the sample members who were selected had special relationship with the phenomenon under investigation, sufficient and relevant work experience in the field of tourism, active involvement in several tourism initiatives and partnerships, as well as proven research background and understanding of raw data concerning destinations. Within this context, the participants of this study were executives of 6 famous DMOs operating both generally in Greece and specifically in Athens, namely:

- 1) Greek National Tourism Organization (**G.N.T.O**)
- 2) City of Athens Convention and Visitors Bureau (**ACVB**)
- 3) Athens Development and Destination Management Agency (**ADDMA**)
- 4) Athens Hotel Association - Attica (**EXAA**)
- 5) Athens Chamber of Commerce and Industry (**ICCI**)
- 6) Association of Greek Tourism Enterprises (**SETE**)

3.7 Research process

Meetings were held during April and June of 2014 with the executives of the DMOs mentioned above, so as to gain acceptance of their participation in the research. More specifically, the researcher came in touch with and asked them to participate in the research after explaining the nature and the scope of the study. In general terms the respondents were willing to participate in the research and the interviews were conducted between May and June of 2014. The discussions took place at the offices of the executives and lasted approximately 20 to 25 minutes. During the interviews were mainly kept notes, in order to help the researcher to analyze the gathered data.

During the conduction of the interview, respondents were free to express their views even in topics which were not included in the discussed areas which were mentioned in paragraph 3.5. Finally, it should be noted that the conversations flowed smoothly and pleasantly.

3.8. Data analysis

Content analysis was used to analyze the data which was gathered from personal interviews. According to Moore & McCabe (2005), this is the type of research whereby data gathered is categorized in themes and sub-themes, so as to be able to be comparable. A main advantage of content analysis is that it helps in data collected being reduced and simplified, while at the same time producing results that may then measured using quantitative techniques. Moreover, content analysis gives the ability to researchers to structure the qualitative data collected in a way that satisfies the accomplishment of research objectives. However, human error is highly involved in content analysis, since there is the risk for researchers to misinterpret the data gathered, thereby generating false and unreliable conclusions (Krippendorff & Bock, 2008).

3.9 Ethical considerations

The current study was subject to certain ethical issues. As it was mentioned earlier, all participants reported their written acceptance regarding their participation in the research, through a signed Consent and Briefing Letter. At the same time, sample members were asked to sign a Debriefing and Withdrawal Letter. The aim of both letters was to reassure participants that their participation in the research is voluntary and that they were free to withdraw from it at any point and for any reason.

Next to this, participants were fully informed regarding the objectives of the study, while they were reassured that their answers were treated as confidential and used only for academic purposes and only for the purposes of the particular research. Except from the above, participants were not harmed or abused, both physically and psychologically, during the conduction of the research. In contrast, the researcher attempted to create and maintain a climate of comfort.

3.10 Research Limitations

As it is for every study, this dissertation had the following limitations:

- The size of the sample was relatively small - 6 participants. A bigger sample would probably enhance the reliability of the research

- Qualitative research is not allowing the measurement of the examined problems

- The analysis of the role of the DMOs in the promotion of Athens as a tourist destination may be influenced by factors which were not mentioned in this project

- In some cases participants may refused to speak against their organizations