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Desk Research Report

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KA2 - Cooperation for innovation and the exchange of good practices Partnerships for creativity



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1. Introduction

On the grounds of Heritage Tourism acting as a fundamental part of cultural heritage and sustainable tourism making up almost 40% of tourism revenues globally, a wide list of digital initiatives have been taken during the last few years. In particular, advanced technologies (such as 360° photo, Augmented Reality, 3D scanning, etc.) in conjunction with hybrid skills (i.e. technical and non-technical) of businesses' digital transformation have been providing endless possibilities in the field of cultural tourism towards enriching tourists' experiences based on cultural heritage. Indeed, there are several examples revealing that heritage tourism is increasingly moving towards a new digital era. However, the COVID-19 crisis has a massive impact on the tourism-related cultural sector, having shone a light both on the challenges endured by people working in the sector and on how cultural life is weakened by the global lockdown (Compendium of Cultural Policies & Trends, 2020). In fact, the pandemic crisis jeopardizes the most crucial parts of cultural tourism (UNESCO, 2020). With almost 13% of museums being under the threat of never re-opening, more than 80% of UNESCO World Heritage properties being locked and most people working on tourism-related jobs being currently unemployed, the need to move towards digitization becomes even more urgent. To that end, new skills are being required among the professional profiles of culture and tourism. It is thus rational for young people seeking job opportunities in the heritage tourism sector to be more equipped with digital competences to form a more resilient tourism workforce (UNWTO, 2020).

1.1 Project Objectives

The project aims at empowering young people in promoting Heritage Tourism resources through the development of their own skills in Digital Design for the digital transformation of heritage tourism. Moving towards a totally new era in cultural tourism that integrates the concept of digital heritage tourism into cultural life, young job seekers should be equipped with competences that allow them to differentiate themselves among a close and yet competitive industry. After the project completion, participants will be able to put their creativity into action being in position to map out digital content that promotes local culture and manage the tones of resources that cultural life offers (museum exhibits, local products, places to visit, local food, etc.) in an intuitive manner. Recent research has shown that the tourism sector has been turning into digitalised solutions towards the establishment of Smart Tourism. The objective is to lead creativity and innovation in tourism, while contributing to new destination configurations (Dredge, et. Al., 2018). In fact, the Digital Heritage Tourist definition has recently appeared under the scope of tourists visiting a place (museum, location, etc.) virtually instead of physically, having the entire tourist experience in a digital manner.



However, after COVID-19 outbreak, global tourism is brought to a standstill, with millions of people looking for cultural experiences from their homes and with professionals being rather unprepared for the lockdown and with their hands tied in the context of a travel-less world. On the other hand, youth play a significant role in all action plans to limit the impact of the crisis, while they are among the most vulnerable groups being the main victims of the aftereffect of the pandemic (Rojo, 2020). Therefore, with youth unemployment being increased by 0.8% within the first month of the crisis (March-April 2020) and with Heritage Tourism being at stake and turning to digital solutions to survive, there is an urgent to equip young people with digital competences in order to overcome unemployment and support heritage sustainable development.

1.2 Project Target group

The main target groups of this project are:

- Young adults that already have working experience in heritage tourism or are interested in promoting heritage tourism
- Young adults that are interested in improving their digital competences
- Youth workers
- Youth training organizations
- Tourism organizations
- Organisations related to the creative/cultural industry
- NGOs or other organizations/authorities taking initiatives towards sustainable development
- Digital designers/Digital design/e-Learning companies
- Policy makers

2. National Report

National Reports are the official documents by which countries report information and research data useful to the development and delivery of a project. Used collectively, National Reports can draw the picture of the overall context of the project.

2.1 The objectives of the Report

The main objective of the reporting phase of the project is to cumulate research data and useful information about the partners' countries, in order to draw the picture of the overall context of the project. This phase can help making clear the general objectives of the project and what are the needs, trends, and issues to be considered during the whole project development.



In this case, the aspects to be considered during the research phase, that will then be used as research questions for the national report writing, are: the unemployment statistics in the partners countries in the tourism sector; the number of people who have actually conducted tourism and cultural heritage studies in the country; data of employed people in the tourism and cultural heritage sector; what study programmes the country offers in the tourism sector; what issues concern this field nowadays and the people involved in it; how the Covid context has affected the tourism sector and the people involved.

2.2 The methodology (open for partners to fill in)

In order to complete the report, Club for UNESCO of Pireus and Islands used three sources of data and Information: The Greek Ministry of Tourism, officially published statistics from Eurostat and Its Greek counterpart, Elstat, and finally a small field research, by talking to tourism stakeholders, a VET provider who provides tourism curricula and staff at Harokopio University, a public Greek university with multiple courses on tourism. The Greek government is currently still Implementing changes to balance the COVID-19 pandemic and its effects on tourism, so some of the following data and practices may be subject to change.

2.3 The results (questions)

1. What are the main areas that tourism-related training programmes/curricula that your country focus on?

There are multiple public and private universities and VET providers that offer courses on Tourism. Most focus on business management and finances, preparing people who will either manage or work for tourism-related businesses, such as hotels, travel agencies, and guides. Effectively, most education providers focus on traditional forms tourism. More specifically, curricula focus on tourists that:

1. Visit Greece for either sightseeing or seaside leisure vacation.
2. Prefer to stay at hotels of varying price-ranges. Some education providers now offer management models for people looking to run AirBnB-related businesses.
3. Want to eat at local traditional restaurants
4. Often look to Island-hop.

Over the last few years, however, some universities have started offering postgraduate programs focusing on thematic tourism, sustainable tourism and technology-assisted tourism. These still require an existing degree in a related field.



2. Are there any training programmes that promote digital upskilling in the Tourism sector in your country? If so, please describe (title, provider, objectives, focus areas).

The University of Patras has incorporated a module in their general Tourism studies curriculum about technology and its application in modern tourism. The objective is to teach students how to use technology in order to reach more consumers/clients and promote their businesses and products.

Ionian University: Postgraduate, Tourism and Technology. The objective is to provide an in-depth understanding of pre-trip, in-trip and post-trip technological applications to facilitate the consumer, create new experiences, and reach more people.

It covers a very broad spectrum of subjects, from communication, to gamification and digital payment methods.

Harokopio University, Postgraduate course on Sustainable Tourism Development: Heritage, Environment, Society. The course focuses on new technologies that facilitate sustainable tourism, such as green modes of local transportation, thematic digital trails, sustainable heritage sites etc.

3. What are the main problems of the tourism sector in your country?

After studying the announcements and guidelines of the Greek Ministry of Tourism, and speaking to a diverse group of educators and stakeholders from the field of tourism, we identified 5 main problems with tourism in Greece:

A. Tourism has traditionally been highly centralized around specific hubs (i.e. famous islands and monuments, while other areas of Greece that could have a touristic presence are left behind. This creates a feedback loop, in which the advanced touristic areas receive the majority of touristic income, allowing them to further improve their amenities, while the areas that are left fall further behind.

B. Domestic tourism, which was always a major means of wealth redistribution from urban to rural areas has been greatly affected by the financial crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic, and less Greek people are able to spend significant amounts of money on tourism. This has created the double problem of lacking wealth redistribution and a social issue in which people cannot go on holiday without some sort of financial support.

C. Sustainable Tourism. The sustainability of tourism in Greece is an emerging issue with troubling statistics. In the island of Crete alone, a recent study found that each foreign visitor accounts for 488.77kg annual CO₂ emissions by visiting the island (Vourdoubas 2019). Recently, UNESCO has shifted a lot of focus on the sustainable development of heritage sites, due to the increasing environmental damage caused by mass tourism. New modes of transport, sustainable energy usage and heritage site protection are necessary in order to ensure sustainability in tourism.

D. The COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic did not only hurt tourism but has also created uncertainty for the future. Assisting the businesses involved in tourism to



recover financially is only the first step, and arguably the easiest. The real challenge is predicting and reacting to the new status quo that will follow after the pandemic.

E. The seasonality of tourism. Greece is predominantly a summertime destination. While during the summer, tourism is one of the most profitable sectors for the country, it is significantly weakened during the rest of the year. This is especially applicable to islands, which suffer the greatest drop in arrivals.

4. Do young people in the tourism sector face any challenges or obstacles when looking for a job?

The tourism sector is relatively more accessible than other sectors, due to the fact that it is one of the most profitable industries in Greece. In general, young people can find entry-level jobs rather easily, although that only occurs during the summer season. During the rest of the year, access to the tourism sector is significantly reduced.

5. What has been the response of the tourism sector in your country to the Covid-19 travel restrictions?

The tourism sector was slow to adapt to the travel restrictions. Most hotels completely shut down, while few tried to utilise their conference centers and exhibition halls. However, by definition, only larger hotels could do that, meaning that smaller businesses were left behind. While hotels were closed, Airbnb, but with most heritage sites closed, and the weather not allowing for coastal vacation, that too was not widely used.

Restaurants, souvenir shops, traveling agencies, and yachting businesses also suffered losses.

Museums were much more adaptable, as many created digital exhibitions and online guided tours.

The COVID-19 pandemic was an example of how the tourism sector in Greece needs to evolve, as its low level of flexibility was a great detriment during the pandemic.

Digital and innovative solutions are necessary to adapt to the new status quo.

6. What has been the response of the tourism sector in your country to the Covid-19 unemployment?

During the pandemic, the tourism sector was unable to sustain new employees, and there were significant losses of work, although data is not yet available on the numbers. During the summer of 2020 and the summer of 2021 however, the tourism sector has seen a recovery faster than many other sectors, due to its seasonal nature. Despite that, there were no significant steps taken to combat unemployment within the tourism sector. One significant problem that manifested itself due to the pandemic was that many employees in the tourism sector have very temporary employment



contracts with employers, which makes them very susceptible to unemployment during periods like the COVID-19 pandemic, with very few benefits and safeguards. Finally, another significant issue was that many employees were unregistered in the past, meaning many of them could not receive the relief payments and other benefits, which the government did not account for.

On the other hand, unemployment has greatly reduced visitors due to monetary restraints. This is something that many tourist businesses, especially hotels and other lodgings have adapted to, by lowering their prices or having special offers.

7. What is the level of digital knowledge in your country among young people (18-29)? Which digital tools do they use the most and for what purposes?

According to Eurostat, Greek young people have one of the highest digital competencies in Europe, with 92% having basic technological knowledge. (Eurostat, 2020)

Young people in Greece predominantly use social media as their main digital tool. Instagram, TikTok and Facebook are the most widely used, with applications like iMessage, FaceTime, WhatsApp and Snapchat also being widely used for communication.

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8. Please look for examples (practices, projects, tools, etc.) implemented in your country that promote digital solutions for the safeguarding of Heritage Tourism.

Many museums created digital exhibitions and tours. Two examples are the Acropolis Museum and the Averof Floating Naval Museum, which were among the first to digitize their exhibition and create a digital tour of the entire ship.

9. What kinds of thematic tourism are present in your country?

Wellness and Health tourism is present in Greece, especially in areas with hot springs and mountaintops. Loutraki is one prime example of health tourism, where people go to visit the hot springs. Luxury hotels also host health and wellness packages for their guests.

Religious Tourism. Greece is one of the few European countries with significant religious tourism. Mount Athos is visited annually by thousands of people, and there are organized travel experiences in the Peloponnese where people visit monasteries and experience monastic life and food.

Camping tourism. Greece is a prime destination for campers, as many of its islands are isolated and not urbanized.



Heritage tourism is the main thematic tourism in Greece, as many tourists visit to see the ancient heritage sites and monuments around Greece. Of all thematic tourism models, this is the most widely present and the most advanced in Greece.

10. What kinds of thematic tourism could be developed in your country?

Gastronomic tourism can definitely be developed further. It is currently done in certain areas and with certain hotels, but it could be very widespread due to the varying local cuisines and the various ethnic elements of Greece.

Technological Nomads. An emerging touristic field is the accommodation for people who are distance-working, especially for large companies. COVID-19 has accelerated the shift to distance-working and many people are seeking to migrate to warmer and more affordable countries, where they can work from home.

2.4 Conclusions

In terms of education and knowledge, there are options, albeit limited for young people who want to enter the tourism sectors. However, upskilling and gaining expertise are almost entirely reserved for higher education postgraduates, which are not easily accessible to all.

Additionally, while entering the tourism sector is not difficult, the positions are temporary and entry-level, which makes a lot of young people, especially from lower socioeconomic backgrounds unable to advance.

The problems the Greek touristic sector faces largely have to do with the fact that there was an unbroken state of affairs in tourism, a steady profitable practice that had never significantly failed. As such, there were almost no safeguards to deal with the pandemic and its effects. The Greek tourism sector will need to invest resources in developing new services (such as thematic tourism), and to find new ways to cater and attract potential visitors and clients, through digital means.

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