



Mountain Tourism in Greece. Possibilities and Prospects of Tourist Season Extension throughout the Year

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Abstract: Mountains have constituted for man a place of mystery and the residence of gods since ancient times. That is a remaining fact even today due to the lack of easy access, the climate, the clean air, the special flora and fauna, the mountains' unique geomorphology, their water resources, their sole aesthetics and their particular natural and cultural environment. The related history and mythology have turned them into appealing tourist destinations. Mountain visitors seek both the contact with the natural and social environment but at the same time try to satisfy their need for escape from the daily routine. They also satisfy social and learning needs.

Greece is characterized mountainous as it possesses interesting mountains rich in vegetation and water resources with significant mythological and historical heritage. However, as tourist destinations they function seasonally and do not manage to attract a large number of visitors during the summer months. The reason is that Greece has always been identified with the triptych sun, sea, and beach.

With the aim to investigate the visitors' motives of the mountain tourism centers in Greece, a quantity survey has been conducted with the distribution of a structured questionnaire. The survey was conducted from 27/10/2016 to 27/12/2016 via internet and the questionnaire was filled in by 1.127 people.

From the survey it can be clearly concluded that the mountain tourism centers are required to provide many more activities and services apart from the sports skiing ones. The possibility to extend their operation beyond the winter and summer period exists, having as a result significant profits for the economy of the mountain regions.

Keywords: Mountain Tourism, Mountain Tourism Centers, Ski Centers.

1. MOUNTAIN TOURISM

Mountains occupy approximately 27% of the earth's surface and are inhabited by 22% of the earth's population (WMF, 2016). Since ancient times, it has been considered that mountains were the gods' residence due to the fact that there has always been mystery around them, they weren't easily accessible and that they presented unique aesthetics. More characteristically, Olympus was the place where gods took their form, according to Greek mythology. According to Homer, the Earth was a large disc which was surrounded by the big river called "Ocean". In the middle of the Earth lied Greece and in the centre of Greece there was Olympus, whose high peaks penetrated the sky (Uranus), thus making Olympus Uranus (Μπούμπας, 2000). The highest peak of Olympus was inhabited by Zeus, the king of gods and the rest of them inhabited the other peaks. According to Mythology, the nine Muses, goddesses who protected the Arts, daughters of Zeus and the Titan Mnemosyne, inhabited the eastern tops of Olympus, in the area of Pieria. Ancient Greeks built temples on other gods' mountain-residences. For instance, according to Ragavis¹, there was a temple of Apollo on the mountain of Taygetus.

All around the world, mountains are considered to be sacred. Ararat is considered to be sacred because Noah's ark had stood on it. Mountain Sinai is related to the reception of the Ten Commandments by Moses. In Pakistan, K2 (8.611m) is also called Zeus' mountain. According to

¹ Alexander Ragavis was a Greek scholar, author, romantic poet, professor of archeology and diplomat (1809-1892)

tradition, it was the mountain of Knowledge and the place where gods found peace and quiet, a place nobody approached so that gods would not be disturbed. In Tibet, on the Himalayas, there is a mountain called Kailash (6.714m) also known as Apollo's mountain. It is considered the symbol of four different religions. Even to the present day, the mountain Fuji in Japan constitutes a religious symbol as the country's mountainous morphology greatly influences the locals' religious life. (Μοίρα, 2009:56).

Mountain regions stimulate the imagination and the senses, reinforce spiritual clarity of the mind and add a dynamic dimension to human abilities. Nowadays, mountains have turned into attractive resources and constitute significant tourist destinations because they present unique climate, clean air, special flora and fauna, unique geology, water resources, vegetation, unique aesthetics, particular natural and cultural environment, history and mythology, despite, of course, the fact that they cannot be easily accessed. According to a UNEP study (Charters & Saxon, 2007:11), mountain regions rank second in attractiveness as tourist destinations, following coastal and island zones. They attract 15-20% of global tourism (Mountain Agenda, 1999). Thus, a particular form of tourism is established, known as "mountain tourism".

Despite the great interest in mountain regions, it is worth noticing that there is not a generally accepted term for mountain tourism in bibliography. For instance, only the activities taking place in mountain regions are mentioned in the UNEP study for mountain tourism, without, though, defining the special characteristics of this form of tourism. In addition, the inability to define the term of the mountain is pointed out in this study due to the diversity of the mountain masses. Nevertheless, a definition is formulated as following:

"Using very general terms, a mountain usually includes a mountain, a subalpine and an alpine zone. Every zone tends to include a unique variety of animal and plant species, many of which can be endemic in a specific location" (UNEP, 2007:7).

In the Encyclopedia of Tourism published in 2003 (Jafari, 2003) there was no such term as "mountain tourism". However, in the most recent version of 2016, the term "mountain tourism" is mentioned and the mountain's environment is described without again though clearly defining the concept of it (Cousquer, 2016). Also, the term "alpine tourism" is often used (Weiermair and Bayer, 2016) referring to the sporting- tourist activities taking place in the Alps (e.g. skiing, hiking). Additionally, the term "skiing tourism" is used (Hull, 2016) which is part of sports tourism and is defined as the trip which aims at participating in a snow activity with the use of skis.

The World Tourism Organization comprehended the significance of mountain tourism and as a result, organized in 1988 with the cooperation of Andorra, the World Congress on Snow and Mountain Tourism. In reality, it is about mountain tourism, in which tourists engage in activities relating to the mountain i.e. skiing, climbing, mountaineering, hiking, mountain biking etc taking place both during the winter and the summer period. The multiple dimensions of the definition of mountain tourism are also clarified since they often interfere with the terms of sports tourism or health tourism as far as maintaining health and well-being are concerned (e.g. mountain hiking, staying in wellness centers etc).

There is a rising interest in activities which take place in mountains by both national and international bodies due to increasing tourist movement (Godde, Price and Zimmermann, 2000). In Agenda 21 (Rio Earth Summit, 1992; UNCED, 1992:104) and especially in chapter 13 titled "Management of Vulnerable Ecosystems, Mountain sustainable management", governments are encouraged to differentiate the economy of the mountain regions in cooperation with international and peripheral organizations. Among others, the creation and the reinforcement of tourism is pointed out in accordance with the integrated management of the mountain regions.

What was particularly crucial to the development of mountain tourism was the 1995 conference which led to the creation of the Mountain Forum. The action plan, which is also known as "Mountain Agenda", was the result of the cooperation between leaders and non-profit organization representatives from 40 countries. The plan gave priority to the issue of mountain regions sustainability (WMF, 2016). In an attempt to put emphasis on the sustainable development of mountain regions, 2002 was proclaimed International Year of Mountains (FAO, 2002). The same year was also proclaimed International Year of Ecotourism.

2. THE MOTIVES OF THE VISITORS OF MOUNTAIN REGIONS

What urges someone to visit an area is very important as it affects the decision-making process in choosing a destination (Crompton and McKay, 1997). According to scientific research, individuals are socially and psychologically motivated when it comes to deciding where to travel (Sirakaya and Woodside, 2005). Additionally, tourists' motives vary depending on the type and place of destination. (Andreu et al., 2005:3).

The natural environment, the climate, the infrastructure and the tourist facilities constitute basic components of an area's attractiveness (Gearing, Swart and Var, 1974). According to Sirakaya, McLellan & Uysal, (1996:60-61), the factors that affect the decision on choosing a destination are natural (e.g. landscape, climate, sea/beaches, infrastructure, hyper structure), socio-psychological (e.g. locals' behavior, cultural events, nightlife and entertainment options, innovative destination, accessibility, food, etc) and external (e.g. political and social environment, terrorism, epidemics, etc). Also, scholars tend to believe that the cost in time and money constitute factors that play a significant role in choosing a destination.

Another factor that affects the selection of a destination is the search for adventure in the sense that someone might seek unusual and exotic places, try to live new experiences, enjoy the unique environment and test their skills (Tran and Ralston, 2006 cited in Fyall, et al, 2009:2-8).

The landscape of a mountain holds an important position among the attractive natural resources since natural beauty and wildlife can provide the possibility to develop various entertainment activities both during the summer and the winter periods. The plethora of entertaining activities on mountains attracts large numbers of tourists to such an extent that reference can be made about mountain tourism. Mountain tourism is considered to be an alternative form of tourism, an activity through which individuals wish to satisfy the need for contact with nature, the acquaintance with the local population and culture as well as the reinforcement of the social prestige. According to Smith & Eadington (1995), mountain tourists seek to come in contact both with the natural and the social environment, which means getting to know the lifestyle of the mountain communities.

The entertaining activities taking place on the mountains satisfy the need to escape from daily routine offering a sense of enthusiasm, adventure and an adrenaline rush. Additionally, mountain regions satisfy social and learning needs. Thus, according to Baloglu and McCleary (1999), the motive that leads tourists to mountain regions is the wish for acquaintance with different individuals, cultures and lifestyles. The motive becomes even more intense when the differences between locals and tourists are wider. Since tourists seek to find the authentic, mountain regions present a culture and a way of life totally different from their own. Also, mountain regions offer knowledge and true human relations (McCool, 2002).

Lastly, another motive to visit mountains is the prestige the visitor acquires. Often visiting an area which is not easily accessible reinforces the visitor's social prestige, increases their social status and is often considered a way of self-realization.

3. MOUNTAIN TOURISM IN GREECE

Greece is characterized as mountainous since 70% of its surface is covered by mountains. Pindos' mountain range, Agrafa, Tymfristos, Panaitolikon, Oiti, Vardousia, Parnassus, Giona in central and Northern Greece as well as Panahaiko, Erymanthos, Aroania, Killini, Mainalo, Parnonas and Taygetus in Peloponnesus run through the country from NNW to SSE and separate it into two regions which have unique climate and plant geography. Additionally, mountains in the Greek eastern mainland (Vermio, Pieria, Olympus, Pelion, Ossa, Mavrovounio) have a direction from the North to the South. On those ranges, the eastern slopes are richer in vegetation as they receive more rain. Mountains in northern Greece (Voras, Jena, Paiko, Beles, Agistro, Falakro, Rodopi) extend from the west to the east and protect the areas from the cold northern winds (Μοίρα, 2005:18-19).

Greek flora includes Mediterranean, Mid-European and Iranian-Caspian elements. The plant species recorded are above 6.000 and the endemic species are numerous in comparison with the size of the country and because of the high level of isolation of the mountains and islands. The fauna of the country includes a rich mixture of European, Asian and African species (EKBY, 2017).

Nowadays, 20 ski centers operate on the mountains of the country in an altitude of 1.400 to 2.400 m. The ski centers function as facilities with special tourist infrastructure (Μυλωνόπουλος, 2016:247-259), are characterized as seasonal as they operate during the winter period and present winter sports and activities (TABLE 1). More specifically, the ski tracks which are 181 km long are served by 106 lifts (30 of which are aerial) with a transferring capacity of 74.000 individuals per hour. The ticket sale in the ski centers goes over 400.000 annually. Their management is mainly applied by state institutions (a municipality, a periphery, a state corporation or the Greek Mountaineering Club).

Table1. *Ski Centers in Greece*

o/n	Ski center	Annual attendance average	Owner/manager lessor	Division	Nearest city/town	Mountain	Minimum altitude	Maximum altitude	Total of lifts	Total lift transferring capacity person/hour	Track length km
1	GNTO/GTP SA	130.000	PUBLIC PROPERTIES COMPANY SA	Central Greece	Amphissa/Livadeia	Parnassus	1.700	2.300	17	16.500	35
2	Kalavryta	55.000	MUNICIPALITY OF KALAVRYTA	Peloponnese	Kalavryta	Helmos	1.700	2.340	8	6.000	20
3	3-5 Pigadia	25.000	MUNICIPALITY OF NAOUSSA	Macedonia	Naoussa	Vermion	1.430	2.005	5	4.500	9
4	Vassilitsa	25.000	GENERAL SECRETARIAT OF SPORTS (GSS)	Macedonia	Grevena	Pindos	1.646	2.115	8	4.000	16
5	Seli	20.000	GENERAL SECRETARIAT OF SPORTS (GSS)	Macedonia	Veroia	Vermion	1.500	1.874	11	6.200	16
6	Kaimaktsalan	20.000	PUBLIC PROPERTIES COMPANY SA	Macedonia	Edessa	Vorras/Kaimaktsalan	2.020	2.480	6	3.551	11
7	Tripoli-Ostrakina plateau	20.000	MUNICIPALITY OF LEVIDIO/TRIPOLI MOUNTAIN CLIMBING CLUB	Peloponnese	Tripoli	Mainalo	1.550	1.770	3	2.000	4
8	Karpenissi	18.000	PERIPHERAL UNIT OF EURYTANIA	Central Greece	Karpenissi	Velouchi/Tymphrestos	1.750	2.100	6	5.150	8
9	Agriolefkes	18.000	PERIPHERAL UNIT OF MAGNESIA/VOLOS MOUNTAIN CLIMBING CLUB	Thessaly	Volos	Pelion	1.170	1.471	5	3.500	5
10	Vigla/Piso-deri	18.000	PERIPHERAL UNIT OF FLORINA	Macedonia	Florina	Vitsi/Verno	1.650	1.970	5	3.000	13
11	Falakro	12.000	PERIPHERAL UNIT OF DRAMA	Macedonia	Drama	Falakro	1.620	2.232	8	5.620	20
12	Elatochori	10.000	ELATOCHORIS/C SA/FOREST INSPECTION OFFICE	Macedonia/Pref. of Pieria	Katerini	Pieria	1.400	1.800	5	3.000	7
13	Metsovo/Anilio	10.000	PERIPHERAL UNIT OF EPIRUS	Epirus	Metsovo	Pindos	1.680	1.840	3	2.600	2,5
14	Pertouli	8.000	MUNICIPALITY OF	Thessaly	Trikala	Pindos	1.170	1.340	3	2.500	1,8

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15	Metsovo / Zigos/ Politsies	5.000	MUNICIPALITY OF METSOVO	Epirus	Metsovo	Pindos	1.680	1.840	2	1.000	2
16	Vitsi	5.000	KASTORIA MOUNTAIN CLIMBING CLUB	Macedonia	Kastoria	Vitsi/Verano	1.610	1.875	3	1.800	4
17	Serres Lailias	2.000	SERRES MOUNTAIN CLIMBING CLUB	Macedonia	Serres	Vrontous	1.600	1.847	3	1.000	1,5
18	Zireia	1.500	ZIREIA SA /LOCAL AUTHORITY	Peloponnese	Xilokastro	Zireia	1.500	1.550	2	1.200	
19	Elassonavrisopoules	1.000	ARMY	Macedonia		Olumpus	1.800	2.450	2		3
20	Metsovo Karakoli	1.000	TOSITSAS FOUNDATION	Epirus	Metsovo	Pindos	1.340	1.520	1	1.000	2,2
	TOTAL	404.500					1.576	1.936	106	74.121	181

Source: P. Drivas, 2017

4. METHODOLOGY AND AIM OF THE SURVEY

A survey was conducted with the distribution of a structured questionnaire in order to investigate the characteristics and the motives of the Greeks visiting the country's mountains. The questionnaire was formulated upon a Google form application and was online for a period of two months², from 27/10/2016 to 27/12/2016. It was also forwarded to various related websites such as www.meteo.gr, www.snowclub.gr, www.snowreport.gr, as well as all mountaineering clubs, professional mountain guides and to the management bodies of the Mountain Tourism Centers of Greece.

The questionnaire included 144 questions mainly closed type and are categorized as following: (a) the relationship of the visitors with the mountain, (b) the relationship of the visitors with the environment and the local society, (c) the relationship of the visitors with the mountain during the winter period and their connection with the Ski Centers, (d) the relationship of the visitors with the specific Ski Center/destination.

The total number of the filled-in questionnaires amounts to 1.127, thus creating a representative sample with reliable results. This fact results from factor analysis which was applied to the questions from 13 to 34 relating to the degree of satisfaction.

4.1. Survey Results

As far as the gender of the respondents is concerned, 78,6% were men (886 individuals) and 20% were women (225 individuals). Clearly, this percentage does not imply that fewer women visit mountain destinations but rather that men became more interested in filling in the questionnaire about visiting mountain destinations. On the contrary, a constant increase in the participation in mountain activities on the part of women is observed. These activities have ceased to be considered a man's privilege and the stereotypical view that wants women to be tomboys when they deal with mountaineering, skiing, mountain climbing and the rest, is being eliminated.

As far as the age of the individuals questioned, the survey has shown that the ages of 35-55 (33%+29%=62%) are mostly involved in activities in mountain tourism centers. According to the survey, the largest percentage belonged to the age group of 35-44, i.e. 369 individuals (33%) and the age group of 45-64 follows with 324 individuals (29%). The age group of 25-34 also participates significantly (206 individuals, 18%).

As far as the marital status is concerned, 59% (669 individuals) are married and 28% (316 individuals) have two children. 44% of the participants (501 individuals) are university graduates and 29% (329 individuals) own a Master's degree or a PhD.

² Available at <https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLScsSCI9gqurq7OF5-6eRvj8xwIh50fuJ2QekVocxaP0JLQhGw/viewform>

As far as the visitors' income is concerned, 34% (385 individuals) said their annual personal income ranges from 10.001-20.000 Euros, 21% (237 individuals) up to 10.000 Euros and 18% (199 individuals) 20.001-30.000 Euros. (TABLE 2).

Table2. *Visitors' Income*

Income	Frequency	%
No income	95	8%
Up to 10.000€	237	21%
10.001-20.000€	385	34%
20.001-30.000€	199	18%
30.001-50.000€	100	9%
50.001€ and up	43	4%
Missing	68	6%
TOTAL	1.127	100%

As far as the profession is concerned, 33% of the respondents (375 individuals) said that they were freelancers or self-employed, 26% (297 individuals) answered they were private employees and 17% (194 individuals) said they were public servants. 5% said they were unemployed and 5% also said they were pensioners (TABLE 3).

Table3. *Professional Status*

Profession	Frequency	%
School/university student	73	6%
Public servant	194	17%
Private employee	297	26%
Freelancer/self-employed	375	33%
Farmer/animal breeder	9	1%
Housework	9	1%
Unemployed	51	5%
Pensioner	60	5%
Working abroad	18	2%
Missing	41	4%
TOTAL	1.127	100%

Also, 26% of the visitors claimed to be members of a mountaineering club, 42% said that they participate in social networks dealing with mountains and 41% said that they do not belong to any kind of club or institution (they move around on their own).

As far as the time of year individuals prefer to visit the mountain is concerned, the participants claimed that they like doing so all year round. 35% (393 individuals) said they prefer to visit the mountain during winter, 22% (243 individuals) in autumn and 21% (242 individuals) in spring. Only 11% (123 individuals) said they like to visit the mountain in summer. These answers allow us to note that the development of mountain tourism in Greece during periods besides winter has a lot of potential.

As far as the initial stimulus that urges individuals to engage in mountain activities is concerned, 44% of the participants in the survey mentioned that it was a mountain visit, 43% (480 individuals) answered that the initial stimulus came from the family, 35% (391 individuals) said that it came from friends, 11% (114 individuals) said because of their participation in scout activities, because of their job, or because of their mountain origin. It is really worth noticing that only 5% mentioned that they were motivated by their school.

As for the motives to visit the mountain, 68% (769 individuals) mentioned the pleasant sense of the rare "alpine experience" (i.e. fresh air, play in the snow, unique view from the top) and 61% (685 individuals) said they needed to be in contact with the natural environment. What is equally important is also the fact that 58% (651 individuals) answered that "they needed to get away from the urban environment and the contemporary/stressful way of life". From all those answers it can be clearly concluded that the contemporary man needs to approach the mountain surroundings which are characterized by the "inaccessible" and the uniqueness of the snow.

It is also interesting to note that 17% (190 individuals) said that they “needed to exercise”, a fact that points out the need of the contemporary man living in the city to seek out physical exercise in their tourist excursion.

The respondents answered that they visit the mountain with a group of 3-5 individuals (57%, 637 individuals). They travel by car. Visits are paid from 2-5 times a year (34%) 6-10 times a year (22%). A mountain visit does not seem to be something that Greeks would normally or frequently do. The percentage of regular visitors (from 11-20 times annually) amounts to 15% and the percentage of those who visit the mountain more than 21 times a year amounts to 21%.

As for the days individuals visit the mountain, we observe that approximately 70% of the tourists (48% very few and 21% none) visit a mountain region mostly on bank holidays and on official holidays, 18% between weekdays and bank holidays and only 11% visit more on weekdays than on bank holidays. These answers explain the large deviation (10 to 1) that is observed in the attendance in the mountain tourism centers between bank holidays and weekdays. That means that the attendance in a week is divided by 80% during the weekend (40%+40%) and by 20% during the rest of the week (4%+4%+4%+4%+4%).

As for the overnight stays, 68% of the respondents (769 individuals) said that they remain overnight in their mountain destination, whereas 55% stay overnight 1-5 times a year and 22% stay overnight 6-10 times a year. It can be clearly seen that the visitor prefers a trip with an overnight stay (68%) rather than going back home on the same day (31%) despite the financial tightness. However, what is considered a necessary prerequisite for the visitor to be able to stay for one more day is the time they have in their possession (e.g. time off work) and how economic the prices might be. The economic crisis has made the Greek’s budget tight but it has also rationalized the cost in many tourist destinations.

The main options as far as accommodation is concerned are the rented rooms (42%) and the mountain shelters (35%). 51% (566 answers) said that the mountain with shelters they prefer is Olympus and 49% (542 individuals) said that they prefer Parnassus. The following preferences are Pelion (35%), Vassilitsa (35%), Helmos, Tymphi and Parnitha with a percentage of 28%.

As for the activities the visitors engage while being on the mountain are hiking and climbing (73%, 822 individuals), enjoying the view in combination with coffee or other beverage (56%) and skiing (55%). A fact that is also worth noticing is that 47% (514 individuals) claimed to go to the mountain in order to savor the local cuisine (meat, dairy, pasta, wine, honey, tea etc). In fact, more than 90% of the respondents said that they prefer local quality products even if their price is 20% higher. This fact allows us to conclude that gastronomy constitutes a supplementary product that can be properly utilized by the managers of the tourist facilities in the mountain destinations³. Also, other activities were mentioned in lower percentages, such as camping on the mountain and playing with the snow (from 27%), observing the flora and fauna (25%), sports activities and participating in some kind of action (from 24 %), mountain biking (21%) etc. Other activities mentioned are also interesting to note and these involve history/mythology/folklore (22%), rural tourism (16%), and religious tourism (7%) (TABLE 4).

Table4. *Desired Activities in the Mountain Tourism Centers*

Which activity would you visit a Mountain Tourism Center for?	Frequency	%
Hiking	822	73%
Enjoying the view/coffee/beverage	624	56%
Ski/snowboard/mountain ski	615	55%
Enjoy local products (meat/dairy, pasta, wine, honey, tea etc)	514	46%
Playing in the snow (snow fight, sleigh etc)	301	27%

³ It is worth mentioning that during a mountain ski race Pierra Creta in Crete, groups of athletes from Norway, Finland, France, Germany, Austria, the USA, Spain walked/raced in the snow of Psiloreitis while enjoying the view of the Libyan Sea. They felt the hospitality of the Cretans, tasted the local gastronomy and sent MMS to their homelands describing how they skied while drinking ‘rakomelo’ and arranging their next visit to Crete the sooner possible, whether in winter or summer. (Δρίβαζ, 2017:221)

Mountain camping	307	27%
Observing flora, fauna	285	25%
Activity with sports interest	264	24%
Participating/watching an event	266	24%
Rafting/ canoe kayak	259	23%
Activity relating to history/mythology/folklor	248	22%
Mountain bike/down hill	241	21%
Mountaineering (via ferrata)	199	18%
Collecting mushrooms	191	17%
Activity relating to health tourism	184	16%
Activity relating to rural tourism (participating in the process of milking, cheese-making, beekeeping etc)	174	16%
Mountain running	171	15%
Horse riding	121	11%
archery	88	8%
Fun park(slide, toboggan etc)	49	4%
Activity relating to religious tourism	82	7%
paragliding	84	7%
Flying fox	45	4%
Other (e.g. hunting)	28	2%
Missing Value	6	1%
TOTAL	1.127	100%

In fact, 60% of the respondents said that they would like both long and short off ski track rides to be offered as an additional service with the help of a mountain guide and 47% would prefer camping and mountain winter survival courses. There was also a request for the possibility of school trips and course attendance on the mountain (37%).

The results above coincide with the statements of the individuals responsible for the management of the ski centers according to whom the attendance of the non-skiers visiting the mountain is approximately 50% (Δρίβας, 2017: 95).

5. CONCLUSION

A large number of individuals visiting both mountain regions of Greece and abroad participated in the survey. 1127 individuals took part, 78.6% men and 20% women, 33% freelancers/self-employed and 26% private employees, aged between 35-55 (62%), married (59%) and mainly university graduates (44%). Their personal income is not particularly high (34% said their annual income amounts to 10.001- 20.000 € and 21% up to 10.000 €). This fact does not prevent the visit and the overnight stay on the mountain (68%), mainly in rented rooms (42%) and mountain shelters (35%). It can be concluded that their job can prevent them from visiting mountain regions on weekdays and as a result, 70% visit the mountain only on bank holidays and days of celebration.

As the primary motives to visit a mountain region are to enjoy the “alpine experience”, to come in contact with nature and to get away from the urban environment and the stressful way of life, there are prospects to extend the tourist period with the aid of proper management and provision of motives to visit the mountain regions.

What is particularly interesting is the fact that the percentage of 47% stated that they visit the mountain in order to taste the local cuisine. This allows us to note that there are prospects to extend the tourist season and also enrich the product provided. Most mountain destinations in Greece are renowned for the quality of their local products e.g. dairy, meat, local pasta, herbs, apples, chestnuts, fruit, compost, jams, olives, olive-oil, honey, wine, tsipouro, legumes and traditional pastry. Thus, the local gastronomy is rendered one of the most interesting components of mountain tourism, whose rational exploitation can lead to the increase of tourism throughout the year. It can be also seen that there are other activities that can be exploited such as agrarian activities, of health tourism, of historical/mythological/ folklore interest etc.

It is clearly concluded that the mountain tourism centers are required to provide other services besides the sports skiing activities. They will probably have to extend and supplement their characteristics from being sports ski facilities to tourist centers which will be able to provide tourist services in a

competitive manner both during the winter and the summer period. In that way, they will limit the element of being seasonal through just “sports like” activities such as skiing. At the same time, they will reinforce their annual operation by providing the tourist with activities such as hiking around the mountain masses e.g. mountain paths, the acquaintance with the local gastronomy which varies depending on the season, the visit to religious cultural sites at a mountain landscape e.g. monasteries, anchorages etc, the participation in cultural and sports events (e.g. festivals, mountain running races) that take place in mountain regions etc.

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