

THE CONTRIBUTION OF PUBLIC AND PRIVATE INVESTMENTS TO THE GROWTH OF CONFERENCE TOURISM IN GREECE

Vasiliki DELITHEOU¹, Maria VINIERATOU², Maria TOURI²

¹ University of Central Greece, Labrou Katsoni Square, 32 100, Levadeia, Greece, vdelith@hua.gr

² Harokopeio University, 70 El. Venizelou, 17671, Athens, Greece, mvinieratou@mnec.gr,

³ ING Life Insurance Company S.A., 198, Syngrou Av., 17671, Athens Greece, mtouri@ing.gr

Abstract

The classic model of the Greek tourism product, sun, sea, ancient ruins, is no longer sufficient nor in all probability sustainable. Rival countries have a similar tourist market. This is why diversification of the tourism product and restructuring of supply are needed to face two considerable challenges: those of growing competition and of the chronic structural problem of Greek tourism, which is seasonality.

Recently moves have been made to promote Greece as a tourist destination. Promoting Greece as a country for conference tourism is though something completely different. It is directed at a different kind of public and promotes different strong points of the country.

That is why both the public and private sector play a key role in developing and promoting Greece as a conference destination.

Keywords: Conference tourism, Private Investments, Public Investments.

1. INTRODUCTION

Since the Olympic Games in 2004 Greece has earned recognition as a safe, modern country. It inherited transport, athletic, conference and technological infrastructure, and gained valuable knowledge about organizing global events, managing and applying new technology and about communication and advertising.

Conference tourism is a special kind of tourism as it is based on focused enterprises and activities. It is not too greatly affected by fluctuations in the global economy. Based on this assumption, its growth prospects are relatively stable in comparison with other forms of tourism (Karavitis,1992).

Organizing conferences is a challenge as the length of stay is relatively short and the demands for quality of services are of very high and specific standard. The basic factors for attracting conferences include good conference infrastructure, easy accessibility to the place of destination and high-quality hotel infrastructure. These however must be supported by other important elements of the tourism product, such as gastronomy, museums, nightlife, together with other forms of tourism, such as winter, cultural or marine, etc.

2. CONFERENCE TOURISM INTERNATIONALLY AND IN GREECE

According to data from the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), every third business trip in Europe involves a conference. Over the last five years, more than 60 million people have travelled each year from one country to another for a conference and stayed there for about 3 days. Once there they spend an average of 3000-4000 euros of which approximately $\frac{3}{4}$ on hotels, agents and organizers, and $\frac{1}{4}$ is channeled into the market and commercial activity in the location of the conference. Conference tourism comes under those kinds of tourism involving visitors of a high economic, educational and social level and by extension it can bring significant inflows into a country (Chon and Weber, 2002).

Conferences are recurring, usually organized annually. 74% of conferences take place in spring and autumn while only 21% are held in summer and 5% in winter. As far as the length of conferences is concerned, global statistics show that 9% last one day, 39% 2 – 3 days, 42% last 4 – 5 days and 10% 6 – 8 days. As regards frequency, it has been estimated that 40% of conferences are held annually, 25% are held each year, 25% are held every 3, 4 or 5 years and 10% are held once and are not repeated. Half of all international conferences (40-45%) are held in conference centres, 36% in hotels and 19% in universities. As regards the object of conferences, medical, scientific and technological conferences prevail (www.iccaworld.com).

According to statistics from ICCA, the continent that hosts the most international conferences each year is Europe. The country organizing the most conferences is the USA where every year 20,000 conferences of various types are held, attended by 10 million people (Encarta Encyclopedia 99, entry «Convention»), while the city of Barcelona is the most popular conference destination.

Large European countries possessing international self-contained conference centres are the following: Italy 5, Spain 3, Portugal 2, France 5, Germany 6, Switzerland 3, Holland 2, Austria 2, Great Britain 6, Sweden 1, and Denmark 1.

Greece holds 19th place in the world conference market, according to data from the International Congress and Convention Association, hosting in 2006 111 conferences to ICCA standards. 55 conferences were held in the capital placing Athens 20th out of 352 conference destinations.

On the basis of conferences announced, according to ICCA, the overall picture of those booked up to 2016 is as follows: the USA and Germany are ranked first and second respectively on the list of leading countries due to hold future conferences between 2009 and 2016. Greece is in 17th place. Copenhagen is the city with the highest number of conferences in 2016, followed by Barcelona. Athens follows Istanbul in 16th place, together with Lisbon.

Greece has an excellent climate and a multitude of attractions, and few places have its history, heritage and tradition. This in itself is an important motive for holding conferences, as apart from the organization of the

actual conference, care is taken to provide the delegates with recreation and entertainment, an essential part of the conference product or package (Loukis, 2002).

In Greece according to Statistics, up to September 2004, 1,121 hotels were in operation all over the country, of which 806 have conference halls, 202 have a conference centre as well and 13 have only a conference centre. Apart from the afore-mentioned conference infrastructure in hotels, there are also 15 independent conference centres (not in hotels) with a total capacity of 14,000 delegates. 27 conference halls must also be added to these, again not in hotels, that can accommodate 13,000 delegates. It is estimated that the construction of large conference centres will attract a greater number of conferences and will make Greece's conference product competitive in relation to other European destinations (Lazana, 2003).

The typical Greek conference has an average length of 3-4 days, involves about 250 participants and is composed of approximately 25% foreigners and 75% Greeks. In Greece 12,000 – 15,000 of every type of conference events are held annually. Athens attracts about 40% of total conference activity, while Crete, the Dodecanese and Macedonia have significant shares. Those cities with the highest number of conference centres in hotels are Athens, Rhodes, Thessaloniki, Irakleio and Mykonos (Griba, Zaharatos, Lagos and Tsartas, 2002).

Conference tourism activates a wide range of enterprises related directly or indirectly to the tourist industry, that is, tourist agencies, airlines, hotel businesses, offices renting audio-visual equipment, etc. which contribute to the growth of tourism. A main feature of the growth of conference tourism is the awakening of interest both on the part of state bodies as well as private initiative, and investments in infrastructure projects related in general to professional tourism, such as the establishment of conference and exhibition centres, the improvement of already existing audio-visual equipment, etc.

3. INVESTMENTS

It is generally accepted that growth is the product of multi-lateral procedures which is not limited only to the private sector and to business initiatives, but also presupposes the appropriate support and policy from the different levels of the public sector and its various agencies. Investment is a type of development policy that supports conference tourism.

Investment is the outlay made at a certain time to produce capital goods, that is machines, buildings, factories, etc. or to increase stocks of raw materials, consumer goods, etc.

The cost of investments is divided according to the investment agency into private and public. Private investments are those made by the private sector of the economy, that is, individuals and mainly enterprises. Public investments are those made by the public sector. According to the kind of investment, we divide them

into investments in constructions and equipment and investments in stock, and according to the sector of economic activity, we divide them into tourist, industrial, agricultural etc. investments (www.users.teilam.gr).

Investments in the tourist sector are a mixture of private and public resources which creates difficulties in evaluating the economic effects on tourist development and in drawing up a suitable strategy for its financial planning. Investments in infrastructure are of particular importance. Knowledge of their features makes an essential contribution to better planning and programming tourist development. The creation of a network of tourist infrastructure differentiates the tourism product, improves the tourist image of the country or of the destination area and promotes the process of tourist development.

Improving the quality of infrastructures and services in the tourist sector and diversifying the tourism product offered constitute basic guidelines for tourist policy in Greece and have been implemented over the last few years mainly by means of the Second Community Support Framework, that is the Operational Programme «Tourism - Culture», with the Sub-programme «Tourism», as well as the ROP/2nd CSF and the 3rd CSF, whose actions and resources for tourism were incorporated into the Operational Programme «COMPETITIVENESS» (EPAN) (www.gnto.gr).

The diversification of the tourism product with the main aim of lengthening the tourist period can be included among the principal objectives of tourist policy. As a result the creation of infrastructure for special-thematic forms of tourism is classed as being of primary importance on the basis of resources available.

We will now record the development of investment in conference hall infrastructure, through the two sources financing projects of this scale, the public and the private sector.

3.1. Public investments:

The Operational Programme «Culture» in the 3rd CSF does not include anywhere the actions in which the Overall Development Strategy for the Culture Sector in Greece is analyzed, yet it is one of the most important tools in their implementation. Alongside the Operational Programme «Culture», projects and actions are carried out, which were incorporated into Regional Operational Programmes, into the Operational Programme «Information Society», into INTERREG and other Initiatives, into the Cohesion Fund and the competitive programmes of the European Union.

The Operational Programme «Culture» is constructed of three Priorities and seven Measures. Measures 2.1 and 2.2 specify respectively the General and Specific Objectives of the Priority «Development of Contemporary Culture». More specifically, the actions in Measure 2.1 implement projects-activities for upgrading infrastructure and services provided in the sector of Contemporary Culture, while Measure 2.2 complements and supports Measure 2.1, as it concerns the completion of the Thessaloniki Conference and

Cultural Centre, the construction of which was funded by the 2nd CSF (Community Support Framework 2000-2006, Operational Programme CULTURE).

Measure 2.1 includes actions concerning the development both of infrastructure as well as services provided and goods in the Contemporary Culture sector. More specifically, the measure includes projects and actions concerning on the one hand the modernization of existing building infrastructure, by improving their basic and special operational equipment, as well as the creation of new infrastructure to safeguard their complex cultural, educational and social role. Within this framework projects and actions are also included which concern the improvement of services provided to contemporary society and have as their object the organization of conferences and educational programmes on specialized themes for different categories of the public, the promotion of networks of international synergy and exchange, as well as the realization of concurrent events that can support major communications events or constitute self-contained unities.

The trend towards accumulating Contemporary Culture infrastructure in Greece's Metropolises is clear. If we consider that the agencies in the metropolises now have by inference the most significant building infrastructure, then the gap with regional agencies becomes even greater.

Consequently the objective is to do away with regional inequality and meet the needs for infrastructure and contemporary cultural activities in those areas showing a lack. This gap must be filled by constructing new or improving existing specialized Cultural-Conference Infrastructure.

As part of the Sub-programme «Culture» in the Operational Programme «Tourism-Culture» in the 2nd CSF, the Measure «National Cultural Network of Cities» was designed with the aim of creating Cultural Infrastructure in cities other than Athens and Thessaloniki. The actions in this Measure included construction-renovation interventions in buildings of cultural use, such as the Cultural and Conference Centre in Veria, which has already been completed and put into operation, and the remodelling, modernization and equipping of the Mytilini theatre and its conversion into a conference and cultural centre.

The budget for the total cost of Measure 2.1 and the separate costs of the community and public expenditure is as in Table 1:

TABLE 1 - TOTAL COST OF MEASURE 2.1

	AMOUNT	PERCENTAGE OF MEASURE IN PE	PERCENTAGE OF PRIORITY AXIS IN TC	PERCENTAGE OF PROGRAMME OUT OF TC
Total cost (TC)	141.809.479			22%
Public Expenditure (PE)	141.809.479		84%	22%
Community Participation	102.245.819	72%	89%	21%
National Public Expenditure	39.573.660	28%	75%	24%
Private Participation	0		-	-
Loans	0		-	-

Source: Operational Programme CULTURE

Certain projects included in the programme are presented in Table 2.

TABLE 2 - PROJECT INCLUDED IN THE PROGRAMME

Cultural Multi-Centre in the Municipality of Orestiada	1.189.78
Creation of General Cultural Centre in the Municipality of Alexandroupolis	1.438.28
Conference and Cultural Centre in Komotini	14.600.00
Maintenance-Completion-Equipment of Cultural Centre in the Municipality of Kilkis	201.68
Support for infrastructure and major communications events at the Development Centre for Culture and Applied Sports (KAPPA) 2000	4.500.00
Renovation of hall in Cultural Centre in Florina	886.49
Development of Multi-Purpose Hall in the Municipality of Paramithias	243.22
Organization of a Multi-Activity Centre in the Old Government House in Paramithias	150.00
Cultural Centre in Leonidio Street Lamia (3 rd phase) Centre of Mediterranean Music	1.000.00
New Cultural Centre of the Mihalis Kakogiannis foundation at 206 Peiraios Street.	11.606.07
THEATRE, A General Cultural Complex	29.934.63
Study on Completion of Building Complex containing National Gallery and Alexander Soutsou Museum	2.800.00
Creation of Benaki Museum Cultural Centre at 138 Peiraios Street	20.281.72
Restoration of Surrounding Infrastructure and Creation of Visual Arts Centre in New Generation Square replacing a building destroyed in the earthquake.	1.068.49
Restoration of a Listed Building, the Koutoupi Villa in Kifissia	2.336.29
Restoration of Historical-Cultural Complex of Industrial Buildings OT 150 in the Municipality of Nea Ionia	2.597.21
Reconstruction of Cultural Building «Maria - Elena» and Surrounding Area	3.649.39
Conversion of Building in Metaxourgeio into a Multi-Purpose Cultural Centre	6.630.97
Dance Hall in Kalamata	12.700.00
Conference and Cultural Centre in Irakleio	16.324.85
Development of Cultural Centre in parts of the Walls – Southeast and Northwest Low Bethlehem Square in the city of Irakleio	74.76

Source: Integrated Information System. Data entered in IIS up to 05-02-2009.

The infrastructure in Contemporary Culture can operate either as specialized metropolitan units to promote specific themes in Contemporary Culture, or as cultural centres covering a wide range of cultural uses, so the presentation of different kinds of art (prose theatre, musical theatre, concerts, etc) can be combined with other activities, such as conferences, seminars, etc. The afore-mentioned features constitute a model which must be used in the attempt to develop regional infrastructure for Contemporary Culture.

Measure 2.2 includes the project on the Completion of the Conference and Cultural Centre in Thessaloniki, providing for the study, construction and equipping of Building B of the Conference and Cultural Centre in Thessaloniki, car-parks, landscaping the surrounding area, etc. On its completion, the centre will effectively operate as a hub in the overall cultural network of the country, contributing in this way to general cultural development in the centre as well as regionally.

This measure aims at strengthening the Cultural and Tourist Infrastructure and as a result improving the «Cultural and Tourism Product» provided in Thessaloniki.

The budget for the total cost of Measure 2.2 and the separate costs of the community and public expenditure are presented in Table 2

TABLE 2 - TOTAL COST OF MEASURE 2.2

	AMOUNT	PERCENTAGE OF MEASURE IN PE	PERCENTAGE OF PRIORITY AXIS IN TC	PERCENTAGE OF PROGRAMME IN TC
Total Cost (TC)	26.412.328			4%
Public Expenditure (PE)	26.412.328		16%	4%
Community Participation	13.206.164	50%	11%	3%
National Public Expenditure	13.206.164	50%	25%	8%
Private Participation	0		-	-
Loans	0		-	-

Source: Operational Programme CULTURE

Having carried out the work necessary for the Completion of the Thessaloniki Conference and Cultural Centre, this project will provide the Thessaloniki Concert Hall (OMMTH) with the opportunity to contribute to the success of one of the tourist policy's main objectives, which is to promote Thessaloniki as a major Tourist and Cultural «Focal Point» for international and domestic tourism. The impact resulting from the exploitation of this infrastructure will be geographically far-reaching.

3.2 Private Investments:

The Operational Programme «Competitiveness» (EPAN) is one of the most important tools for supporting competitiveness and developing the Greek economy. It contains a range of Actions strategically aimed at improving competitiveness and achieving the social and economic convergence of Greece with the other developed countries in the European Union.

It was co-funded by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) with 1,826 million € and the European Social Fund (ESF) with 151 million €. Due to the international economic crisis, the Programme was postponed for six months in December 2008 in all member states on the initiative of the European Union.

Private investments in conference infrastructure are carried out mainly through action 5.1.1 in priority axis 5 of EPAN, which concerns the diversification of the tourism product and the promotion of Greece as a tourist destination, and are financed by development laws (2601/98, and 3299/04).

More specifically, measure 5.1 finances private investment in special tourist infrastructure facilities to develop thematic forms of tourism (marinas, conference centres, golf courses, thalassotherapy centres, spas, ski centres, athletic training centre tourism, etc.), as well as private investment in Integrated Tourist Development Areas (POTA). The measure came into effect on 01.01.2000 with implementation all over the country. Particular emphasis is placed on increased observation and control of development results and re-orientation of enterprises (Programming Period 2007 – 2013. Operational Programme COMPETITIVENESS AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP).

The budget for the total cost of Measure 5.1 and the separate costs of the community, public and private participation are presented in Table 3.

TABLE 3 - TOTAL COST OF MEASURE 5.1

	Amount (millions of euros)	Percentage of Measure in PE %	Percentage in Priority Axis		Percentage in the Programme	
			% TC	% PE	% TC	% PE.
Total Cost (TC)	102,83		62,15		1,70	
Public Expenditure (PE)	38,03		22,99	40,86	0,63	1,26
Community Participation	27,70	72,85	16,74	29,77	0,46	0,92
National Public Expenditure	10,33	27,15	6,24	11,10	0,17	0,34
Private Participation	64,80		39,16		1,07	

Source: Operational Programme COMPETITIVENESS Programming Supplement Technical Bulletin for Measure 5.1

Through the Development Laws 21 private investments were made in specific tourist infrastructure, such as moorings, conference centres, golf courses, thalassotherapy centres, ski centres, athletic training centre tourism, etc. which enrich the tourism product Greece has to offer by making it even more attractive.

Progress made in the implementation of Measure 5.1 that began on 01.01.2000, with 5 integrated projects and 23 sub-projects is shown in the Table 4.

TABLE 4 - PROGRESS MADE IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF MEASURE 5.1

Measure	Projects	Sub-projects	Budget for Measure	Integration	Legal Commitments	Expenses 19/03/09	Estimations of Public Cost of Completion
5.1	5	23	38.031.606	41.532.333	43.490.919	37.952.450	41.953.019

Source: Progress Report by EPAN Monitoring Committee

The types of facilities are included in the sectoral programme, on the one hand as they are costly investments of mainly national importance, and on the other hand, as the procedures for bringing them under the

Development Law are the responsibility of the Central Services in co-responsible agencies. The conference centres have specialized and statutory specifications regarding siting and the composition of space-function.

The Measure is implemented, as previously mentioned, through the provision of financial incentives in development law 2601/98 and law 3299/04. Certain implementations of the measure concerning the establishment of conference centres are given in the Table 5

TABLE 5 – IMPLEMENTATION OF MEASURE 5.1

NAME	DESCRIPTION	ELIGIBLE BUDGET	PUBLIC EXPENDITURE
MINOS RAINBOW SA Hotel and Tourist Enterprises and real estate	Creation of a medium-sized conference centre for 529 delegates, inside the existing hotel Arena Sand.	2,905,108.00	1,012,721.00
GALINI ETEE SA	Establishment of a conference centre seating 200	6,726,430.00	2,345,150.00
Hotel enterprises KYPRIOTIS SA	Establishment of a conference centre	12,431,157.00	4,461,431.76
LOUTRA KYLLINIS SA hotel and tourist enterprises	Establishment of thalassotherapy centre and conference centre holding 800 persons.	14,640,693.00	5,103,740.00
AKS PORTO HELI Conference, dining and natural beauty centre SA	Establishment of self-contained medium-sized conference centre holding 500 persons.	6,500,000.00	2,589,600.00
Greek tourist, construction and hotel enterprises SA	Establishment of conference centre seating 222.	4,220,170.00	1,681,315.00
Sounio Enterprises AXTE	Establishment of conference centre seating 259.	1,967,742.00	685,955.00
Hotel and tourist enterprises PINEIOS SA	Establishment of a 225-place conference centre, inside the hotel complex under construction belonging to the same company.	2,397,000.00	960,932.00

Source: EPAN Management Authority

The institution of POTA (article 29 in Law 2545/97) is also a form of private investment through the development law. At the moment there is 1 POTA in Greece, in Messinia. Each section of POTA includes tourist facilities, special tourism infrastructure facilities and additional facilities for recreation, sports and spending free time (Prefectural Administration of Messinia, 1997).

The POTA Investment in Messinia, according to the provisions of Laws 2601/98 & 3299/2004, is being developed on two coastal expanses, each with a frontage of over 1000m. facing the coast (Sfaktiria Gulf, Ionian Sea), in the areas of Pylos and Romanos in Messinia respectively. As far as conference infrastructure is concerned, it includes the following projects (Greek Tourist Organization, «Study of Tourist Development

in the Region of the Peloponnese» 2002, & Data from the Ministry of Economy and Finance, Dept. of Private Investments).

- A) Area of Romanos, (Municipalities of Gargaliani and Nestor), covering a total area of approximately 325 acres:
 - 1) Conference Centre seating 1200.
- B) Area of Pylos, (Municipality of Pylos), covering a total area of approximately 362 acres:
 - 1. luxury hotel with 119 rooms, that is 298 beds according to EOT, with conference facilities and hydrotherapy facilities (North Hotel - Banyan Tree).
 - 1. luxury hotel with 226 rooms, that is 570 beds according to EOT, with conference facilities and spa (South Hotel - Kempinski).

Finally the 2nd Phase provides for the organization of a third area (Area of Rizomylos in the Municipality of Petalidio on the Messinian Gulf), on a total coastal area of approximately 319 acres, which will include class AA luxury hotel complexes with a total of 3,000 beds (corresponding to about 1,200 rooms), a Conference Centre, Thalassotherapy Centre, golf course & technical infrastructure facilities, as well as facilities not purely for tourists (summer residence) with a total area of 25,000 m².

The Region of the Peloponnese in the Prefecture of Messinia has received one of the largest private investments in Greece in the tourism sector and is the only statutory Integrated Tourist Development Area (POTA). This particular investment has reached the stage of implementation and is expected to create a new integrated tourist destination in the greater area, significantly boosting the tourism product in the Peloponnese and local communities and economies (Prefectural Administration of Messinia, 2000).

4. PPP - A FLEXIBLE FIELD BETWEEN THE STATE AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Over recent years, the state's withdrawal from financing major projects has become more and more evident. Construction of infrastructure is carried out either by contract with the private sector or by a partnership between the public and private sectors (PPP). PPP is of crucial importance if one considers the inability of economies to finance major infrastructure projects with public resources. PPP make it possible for the construction, operation and maintenance of infrastructure or a service provider to be financed by private capital and agencies (Osborne, 2000).

PPPs first appeared in the 80's in Great Britain. Countries such as Portugal, Spain, and Holland in Europe, as well as Australia, the USA and Canada, improve their infrastructure and services through PPP (Graeme and Carsten Greve, 2005).

The law defining the legal nature and operation of PPP is 3389/2005PPP, which establishes two new bodies, the PPP Interministerial Committee and the PPP Special Secretariat. It also divides the projects to be constructed by PPP into contributory or non-contributory. It lays down the procedure for assessment and approval of PPP projects. It also defines tendering procedures and ensures healthy and fair competition. Community provisions complete the legal framework. Although no direct reference is made to PPP, the Treaty on European Union applies (articles 43-49) which concern the freedom of establishment and the free provision of services. It has been recognized at a European level that the use of PPP could contribute to the implementation of a trans-European transport network (Ministry of Economy and Finance, Report : Experts's Special Committee on Public Works, 2004).

Alongside PPPs, Private Agreements drawn up the State or by Local Authorities are still in force and the programme of public investments continues but with greatly reduced resources (Greek and community) due to financial problems (www.lawyer-aridaia.blogspot.com).

The object of the Agreements comes under the responsibility of the State Agency based on provision of the law or based on the agreement or based on its statutes. The Agreement provides for the fact that financing will come wholly or partially from capital or resources obtained by the Private Agency. Activities belonging directly and exclusively to the State according to the Constitution (eg. national defence, police force, etc.) cannot qualify for PPP. Lastly whichever projects exceed, before VAT, the amount of 200 million euros, do not qualify for PPP, on the grounds that PPP is not concerned with large construction companies, but with small and medium companies (Institute of Economic Structures, 2005).

PPP has many advantages. Additional projects and services can be financed, beyond the public investment programme except for concessions that require ratification by law from Parliament. In addition, the risks involved in the construction and operation of infrastructure and services are transferred to the private agencies, the investment climate is improved as companies undertake projects which would not otherwise be carried out, and they can also estimate their profits over a great length of time and achieve long-term economic stability (Lewis, 2002).

The disadvantages are that the mechanism for promoting, assigning and monitoring PPP projects is marked by centralism and there is an obvious lack of adequately staffed and trained Public Administration. The relationship between the Public Investment Programme and the Partnership system is not clear and fears have been expressed that the latter will be implemented at the expense of the former (Bettignies and Ross, 2004).

Finally as far as PPP is concerned, many infrastructure projects are underway, one of which is the conversion of the Faliro Olympic Centre (TAE KWON DO) into an International Conference Centre.

5. CONCLUSIONS:

The demand for conference tourism at an international level is on the increase. The question is how Greece will claim a larger share. It must be said however that through the recent Development Law increased investments for the creation of modern conference centres have been observed.

But what is happening as regards transport and promoting Greece as a conference destination. No substantial progress has been made, which constitutes a competitive disadvantage against other conference destinations. The lack of space organization and promotion of the conference product, which demands synergy between the public and private sector, is all too obvious.

At conference centres we can see infrastructure inside hotels, which is of adequate quantity and quality, and infrastructure in self-contained conference centres. Over the years opinions have been expressed concerning the need for large conference centres in Greece (holding 10,000 delegates or more). Yet more than 90% of international conferences are not attended by more than 2,000 delegates. For this reason maybe it would be better for the Greek market to target this part of the market and compete against other centres located in cities with excellent air links (Drakopoulos, 2008).

Consequently it is not a question of building infrastructure, but mainly of transport and the lack of marketing for the conference product. The lack of a policy on transport and mainly air transport obviously affects the tourist sector as a whole, but it has an even greater effect on the conference side. Unless a transport policy ensuring direct flights to Greece's main conference destinations is drawn up, then in all certainty the development of Conference Tourism will be restricted to Athens and Thessaloniki. Easy and quick access and transport for delegates cannot but go hand in hand with a country's transport network. Therefore, conference tourism cannot develop independently of the communication network and the possibilities for transport and access, which means the completion of the road, rail and shipping networks in Greece.

Marketing in Conference Tourism has up to now been exhausted in various attempts without any support whatsoever. Based on global tourist practice, the operation of agencies that undertake the organization of conferences and events is absolutely essential for the development of conference tourism. In Greece, there are few agencies experienced in planning and organizing conferences. Convention Bureaux should be set up in the biggest Greek cities, which would completely undertake promotion, advertising, creating public awareness of the conference product, sales and in general the professional organization of events (exhibitions, conferences, etc.) in the area they represent.

A professional guide would also be advisable containing information not only on conference and exhibition centres in the area or country they promote, but also providing other information related to shops, the weather, monuments, museums, operas, theatrical performances, cultural events, etc.

A data base would also be useful, either in printed or electronic form, which would present all the data concerning conferences according to type, country, organizing agency, number of participants, location, etc. This base would be regularly updated and would comprise an essential and user-friendly tool for all those organizing or wanting to take part in conferences and similar events (Griba, Zaharatos, Lagos and Tsartas, 2002).

Attracting large-scale investment programmes involving the construction of specific infrastructure, such as conference centres, is an integral part of tourist development. Their implementation must satisfy the terms of sustainable development, which entail respect for the environment, in combination with promoting and protecting the traditional and cultural features of an area and contribute financial support by creating focal points for tourism and recreation all year round.

REFERENCES

- Bettignies, J. and Ross, Tw. (2004). Public's and Private's sector economy. Canada. Public Policy.
- Chon, K.S. and Weber, K. (2002). Convention tourism: International and Industry Research and Industry Perspectives. Haworth, New York.
- Community Support Framework 2000-2006. Operational Programme CULTURE.
- Drakopoulos, G. (2008). The market sizes in Conference Tourism. 20 Years of Scientific Marketing.
- Emmanouillidis, M. (2009). Public-Private Partnerships: Meanig, functions, procedurs,review and infrastructures. Retrieved July 24, 2009, from <http://www.laywer-aidaia.blogspot.com>.
- Graeme, H. and Carsten G. (2005). The Challenge of Public –Private Partnerships. Learning from International Experience, Cheltenham UK.
- Greek Tourist Organization (2009). Study of Tourist Development in the Region of the Peloponnese, Athens, June 2002, & Data from the, Dept. of Private Investments.
- Griba, E., Zaharatos, G., Lagos, D. and Tsartas, P. (2002). Study of Professional Tourism for the exploitation of the Greek Tourist Organization's (EOT) real estate. ETA SA, Athens.
- Institute of Economic Structures (2005). Planning and implementation of projects via Public – Private Partnerships (P.P.P.), Athens.
- Karavitis, K. (1992). Professional tourism: conferences, incentives, exhibitions, hotel's conference planning. Interbooks Publications, Athens.
- Lazana, F. (2003). Introduction to Professional Tourism. Interbooks Publications, Athens.
- Lewis, M. (2002). Risk management on the Public – Private Partnerships, Working Paper, School of International Business, University of South Australia.
- Loukis, A. A. (2002). Conference tourism in Greece, developments, problems, potential and policy. Institute of Tourist Research and Forecasts (ITEP), Athens.
- Meeting Statistics, ICCA Data & Resources (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://www.iccaworld.com>.
- Ministry of Culture and Tourism, (2006) Greek National Tourism Organisation, European framework, 4th period 2007-2013. Retrieved September 14, 2006, from <http://www.gnto.gr>.

Ministry of Economy and Finance, (2004) Report: « Public – Private Partnerships – self – financing, part-financing plans, concession agreements», Experts's Special Committee on Public Works, Athens.

Osborne, S. (2000). Public – Private Partnerships: Theory and Practice in the International perspective. Routledge, London.

Prefectural Administration of Messinia (1997). «Messinia's development project», Kalamata.

Prefectural Administration of Messinia (2000). «Messinia, Messinia's and South Peloponnese tourist guide» Kalamata.

Programming Period 2007 – 2013 (2007). Operational Programme COMPETITIVENESS AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP, Athens.

Progress in Implementation of Operational Programme (2009). COMPETITIVENESS, EPAN (CSF 2000-2006), 8th Meeting of EPAN Monitoring Committee, Athens.

Vouzas, S. (n.d.) *The meaning of investments*, Retrieved from <http://www.users.teilam.gr/~vouzas>.