

The impact of alternative tourism in mountainous regions, specifically in the case of Evrytania, Central Greece

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ABSTRACT: Tourism has been considered as a development tool that may, under certain conditions, serve to grow the local economy, empower society and the community, and alleviate inequalities. A mixed technique ('triangulation') was utilized in this study, which included a review of secondary research material, questionnaire-based empirical research, and semi-structured interviews. The Evrytania Regional Unit (Central Greece) was chosen as a study region since it meets all of the mountain requirements. The research findings include both the impacts documented in the tourist destination in major areas of development such as the economy, society, culture, and the environment, as well as some critical elements that have influenced the expansion of Evrytania's tourism development.

KEYWORDS : *Tourism; mountain tourism; mountain area; Evrytania; impacts; soft-alternative tourism; local development; inequalities*

I. INTRODUCTION

Since the 1970s, mass tourism has been the dominant form of tourism in Greece (Lolos et al., 2021). It is thriving in the country's coastal areas and on the country's numerous islands (Polyzos and Tsiotas, 2012; Vlami, 2020). Coastal and island regions quickly integrated tourism into their local economies, and tourism is now, if not the only, certainly the dominant economic activity in many of them. In spite of this, rural and mountainous areas did not see the same level of tourism development because the resources they could offer did not appeal to the type of international tourism which the country was attracting (Iakovidou et al., 2002). As a result, tourism was limited only to visitors who had a special reason to choose them because they were interested in a specific activity that they could only find there (Georgakopoulou and Delitheou, 2020). In this sense, where tourism is not the dominant actor, a wide range of activities related to the natural environment and the unique characteristics and resources of each area are developed.

Mountain tourism is a comprehensive form of activity manifested in a plethora of ways, including agro and eco-tourism, snow skiing, adventure, cultural tourism, and so on. These activities could be considered the basic events of tourism, which is generally referred to as alternative or soft tourism. As such, it has been established in the context of Greek tourism products over the last two decades as a unique and distinct activity linked to regions that promote similar development options.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

i. Changes in Tourism. Significant changes have occurred since 1980 as a result of 'globalization', which Campbell et al. (2010: 4) define as a "complex web of social processes that intensify and expand worldwide economic, cultural, political, and technological exchanges and connections". Globalization has had an impact on tourism in a variety of ways, including global mobility and travel facilities; it has also influenced demographic trends, safety and security concerns, and increased interest in new destinations, as well as efforts to alleviate poverty in developing countries. These changes have had an impact on consumer and tourist preferences in developed societies as follows: (a) many people may have the financial means for holidays but they lack the time for long vacations; (b) they desire flexible travel options tailored to their specific individual needs, and desires; (c) they would like to experience genuine pleasure and joy; and (d) they expect quality products and services, etc. (Dwyer, 2015).

In view of the above evidence, people search for experiences that will revitalize their health and well-being in an environment of clean and fresh air, diverse topography, beautiful landscapes; in addition, exposure to cultural experience, entertainment and fun are "some of the special features on which is based the mountain tourism" (Marković and Petrović, 2013: 82-83).

Succeeding the new pattern, a differentiated tourism development model is proposed that would be based on different aspects of the tourist experience and is dominated by four letters, not 's' but 'e', which correspond to the pattern's four 'building blocks' (Oh et al., 2007), namely:

- environment and scenic beauty,
- educational tourism, culture, and history
- events and mega-events
- entertainment and pleasure

ii. Sustainability. The awareness of the negative effects of development and the extensive consumption of resources that resulted in their depletion led to the adoption of concepts and, later, practices aimed at protecting these resources. The World Commission on Environment and Development Report first introduced the idea of sustainable development in 1987, defining it as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (Our Common Future, 1987). This concept was recently included in the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (2016), which state that they should "promote prosperity while protecting the planet."

Following the publication of the preceding text of 1987, the concepts of sustainability and sustainable development were applied to various sectors of the economy, including tourism (Jurigová & Lencséssová, 2015), where resource exhaustion and environmental degradation prompted by tourist activities caused serious problems for the destinations (Neto, 2003). Butler (1980: 11) asserts that "tourist attractions are not infinite and timeless but should be viewed and treated as finite and possibly non-renewable resources." As a consequence, they should be treated as what they are: limited and possibly non-renewable, ensuring their protection and long-term management.

The most pressing issue confronting the tourism industry worldwide is sustainability. It is an "all-embracing umbrella term that now affects all aspects of human activity" related to concerns about the future of the planet's resources and ability to support life (UNWTO, 2011: 38). Economic growth, social cohesion, and environmental conditions are the three pillars of sustainability (Romão, 2018). In terms of tourism, it is associated with: forms of small-scale tourism that ensure the protection and preservation of environmentally sensitive areas; the highlighting of the natural and political elements of the destination; the authenticity of experiences; the participation of the local community; the positive social and economic contribution; and the empowerment of local societies (Romão, 2018).

Mountain tourism has the potential to exploit a wide range of ecological and cultural characteristics while also integrating these regions into the international tourism circuit (Nepal & Chipeniuk, 2005). Alternative or soft forms of tourism are best suited to mountainous areas because they can ensure the sustainability of their environmental and cultural elements under certain conditions. These are tourist activities "oriented to the special characteristics of the attractions, related to the special interests of specific segments of the market" (Anastasiou & Alexiou, 2001: 48).

iii. Mountain tourism initiatives in Greece. For Greece, the decade of the 1980's is a "milestone" since it gradually developed general and special tourist infrastructure in mountainous areas implemented by the use of European Union development and financial tools (Integrated Mediterranean Programmes, Leader I, II, + community initiatives, but also national resources) (Apostolopoulos et al., 2020). Based on this, new conditions, production structures, and economic activities were created and defined, resulting in the emergence of mountain tourism as a distinct and "self-sufficient" product, differentiating and enriching the regional tourism offer. Furthermore, changes in mountainous areas have prompted residents to seek alternative means of increasing production factor yields and improving their quality of life. In these areas, a variety of tourist activities can be developed that, if certain conditions are met, are compatible with the natural, social, and cultural environment of the area. The most interesting types of these activities are agritourism, ecotourism, adventure tourism, and winter tourism (Theodoropoulou et al., 2008). Even so, reservations have been expressed about skiing because of the "heavy" building structures required, the environmental impact it brings, and the limited duration (seasonality).

Another aspect of mountain tourism is related to women's roles, as it provides opportunities for them to start and operate a tourist business, providing an additional source of revenue for their families. Many interesting examples of women's agro-tourism cooperatives have been evidenced in Greece, including Ampelakia (Iakovidou, 1997), Petra Lesvos (Spilanis, 2000), Lake Kerkini (Svoronou et al., 2000), and Dadia (Andriotis, 2008). Such initiatives help to strengthen local efforts for long-term (sustainable) development.

III. RESEARCH AREA

Greece is one of the group countries with a mountainous percentage of more than 50%, specifically 65% (Regato and Salman, 2008). At the Regional Unit (RU) level, the percentage of mountains ranges from 13.7% (Corfu) to 100%. Mountains comprise 100% of the land in Evrytania, 99.3% in Ioannina, and 95.1% in Kastoria (Copus, Price, 2002: 59). Evrytania is one of five RUs of the Central Greece Region, the others being Boeotia (43.6% mountainous lands), Evia (37.7%), Fthiotida (63.7%), and Fokis (86.7%). The RU of Evrytania (Fig. 1)

was chosen as the study region in this case because it possesses all of the characteristics required for the specific research. It is a rural and mountainous region that has seen increased tourism activity in the last 30 years or so, allowing for the development of reliable results.



Fig. 1: Regional Unit (RU) of Evrytania, Region of Central Greece
Source: <https://el.wikipedia.org/wiki>; Own processing

3.1 Population

Evrytania has a total area of 1,869.72 km², a population of 17,461 people, and two municipal governments: Karpenissi (11,477 residents) and Agrafa (5,984 residents) (H.S.A., 2022). Karpenissi, located 288.2 kilometers north of Athens, acts as both the administrative capital of the RU and the municipality, whilst Kerassochori serves as the administrative seat of the Municipality of Agrafa. The average population density is 9.34 people per km², whereas it is 12.10 in Karpenissi and 6.50 in Agrafa. When the two municipalities are compared, the first is more populated and active than the second. Furthermore, both have a significant number of senior citizens, 35.8%, the highest in Greece and the European Union (European Union, 2019: 26). Since 2011, the population of Evrytania has decreased from 20,081 to 17,461 people (a 13% decrease compared to -3.5% for the country and -7.7% for the Region of Central Greece) (H.S.A., 2022).

3.2 Economy

Evrytania has a weak economic foundation, with the primary sector accounting for 4.04% of the RU's GDP, the secondary sector 15.3%, and the tertiary sector accounting for 82.9%, mainly tourism, commerce, and others (H.S.A., 2022). It is widely regarded as an RU with a lack of development on all fronts, poor economic performance, aging populations, and low levels of education and technology (Polyzos, 2019). As a consequence, implementing productive activities is essential to reviving the area, preserving the population in their communities, and increasing the region's productive base. As a strategy that might produce the required results, tourism was chosen.

3.3 Tourism in Evrytania

Attractions. With mountains, forests, rivers, gorges, and waterfalls, Evrytania offers a unique natural environment. It also boasts a rich cultural legacy, traditional communities, and friendly people. In addition to this, the ski and conference centers, the indoor Olympic-sized pool, and the sports and training complex are its strong points. Due to its height, the latter is among the best in all of Europe. Another outstanding asset is Kremasta's artificial lake (Region of Central Greece, 2020). Although there are interesting religious structures in many communities, the Monastery of Panagia (Holy Mother) near Proussos is the most notable and visited due to its popularity and ease of access, attracting thousands of tourists.

Accommodation. In the 1960s, two hotel units marked the beginning of the tourism industry initiatives in the Municipality Units/districts (MU) of Karpenissi and Potamia (Kyritsis, 2001). Six further hotel units were built in the 1970s. From the 1990s onward, tourism in Evrytania has been aided by: (i) local development programs like the Mediterranean Integrated Programs and Leader initiatives, (ii) government financing, and (iii) self-funding. Hotels and other forms of lodging were swiftly constructed and put into service, as Table 1 depicts. 85.7% of them operate in communities of the Municipality of Karpenissi, mostly in Karpenissi and Potamia,

whereas 14.3% operate in the Municipality of Agrafa. The food service industry operates in the same manner and location (Hellenic Chamber of Hotels, 2021; Ministry of Tourism, 2021).

Table 1: Evolution of accommodation units in the RU of Evrytania for the period 1960-2019

Source: Hellenic Chamber of Hotels, 2021; Ministry of Tourism, 2021; Own processing

Decades	MAIN ACCOMMODATION UNITS (HOTELS)			OTHER TYPES OF ACCOMMODATION		
	Units	Rooms	Beds	Units	Rooms	Beds
1960-69	2	108	194	0	0	0
1970-79	6	215	386	0	0	0
1980-89	3	74	140	0	0	0
1990-99	3	178	455	47	266	574
2000-09	18	206	426	51	240	551
2010-19	8	97	182	16	90	215
Total	40	878	1783	114	596	1340
	Units	154	Rooms	1.474	Beds	3.123

Arrivals, nights spent, and the average length of stay (A.L.S.). Evrytania has received from 15,998 (min) to 46,525 (max) tourists during the previous 20 years, who stayed between 33,698 (min) to 124,987 (max) nights, with an average length of stay from 2.0 to 2.7 nights (Table 2). Each year, more than 95% of these visitors are from within the country, and more than 97% of them stay in the communities that make up the Municipality of Karpenissi. Less than 5% of tourists are from abroad. Both localities have a corresponding distribution of overnight stays. As a result, the RU's second municipality (Agrafa) appears to be neglected due to the concentration of tourism activity in practically only one municipality (Karpenissi), which limits the benefits of development within its confines (H.S.A., n/d).

Table 2: Arrivals, nights spent, and the average length of stay in Hotel accommodation in Evrytania (2000-2020)

Source: Hellenic Statistical Authority (H.S.A., n/d), data of the mentioned years; Own processing

Year	Arrivals	Nights spent	A.L.S.	Year	Arrivals	Nights spent	A.L.S.
1999	40,960	110,631	2.7	2010	44,060	106,843	2.4
2000	45,995	124,987	2.7	2011	38,581	85,405	2.2
2001	46,525	112,327	2.4	2012	31,637	74,091	2.3
2002	34,754	89,409	2.6	2013	36,114	82,453	2.3
2003	30,986	70,934	2.3	2014	36,375	81,663	2.2
2004	28,928	69,040	2.4	2015	35,021	77,174	2.2
2005	27,338	54,455	2.0	2016	37,613	81,391	2.2
2006	36,799	74,765	2.0	2017	35,597	88,485	2.5
2007	43,341	96,577	2.2	2018	40,884	92,826	2.3
2008	38,628	88,619	2.3	2019	43,127	97,373	2.3
2009	40,520	100,706	2.5	2020	15,998	33,698	2.1

IV. METHODOLOGY

The multimethod approach is the method of choice for many researchers in modern social research (mixed methods research). In this context, techniques that can provide multiple viewpoints are employed in order to strengthen the research's interpretive potential and increase its validity (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004). According to Denscombe (2014, in Cohen et al., 2018), it can enhance the precision and consistency of the data whilst lowering the research's bias (Cohen et al., 2018) and individual approaches' weaknesses. These research techniques incorporate triangulation (Denzin, 1970 in Thrumond, 2001) that offers a more comprehensive picture than a single approach would when studying a phenomenon. A triangulation of research techniques, such as secondary research (prior relevant research, local statistical and demographic data, etc.), quantitative and qualitative research, and direct observation of researchers at the research site, are among the tools used.

The quantitative research was based on two questionnaires, one for lodging owners throughout the municipalities and the other for representatives of local communities. The qualitative research included "in-depth" interviews (Veal, 2018) with representatives of local productive entities, young farmers, sports tourism entities (climbing, adventure tourism, nature worship, walking), naturalist entities, and three academics with ties to the area, as well as a recently retired forester administrator.

4.1 Questionnaires

At the first stage, the 82 local community presidents were initially sent an electronic structured questionnaire as part of the survey process. As far as the proprietors of tourism-related businesses were concerned, the same method was followed. At the second stage, the researchers made an effort to meet with people who hadn't answered the questionnaire in person after a set amount of time so they could finish it. When a face-to-face encounter was not feasible, the researchers got in touch with them and had them complete the survey over the phone. The research period ran from September through October.

Specifically, the following questionnaires were sent:

- (i) 38 (out of 40) to hotels: Returned 16 (42% response rate).
- (ii) 88 (out of 114) to rent rooms, apartments, and villas businesses: Returned 55 (response rate 62.5%).
- (iii) 12 (out of 22) to short-term rental homes: Returned 9 (response rate 75%)
- (iv) 40 (out of 159) to other tourism related businesses: Returned 23 (response rate 57.5%)
- (v) 82 (out of 82) to local council's presidents: Returned 43 (response rate 52.4%).

Some registered firms were not included in the study because they lacked a working e-mail address or were not open when the researchers visited them.

4.2 Interviews

Based on their involvement in the development of alternative tourism in the area and their connection to local tourist phenomena, 25 individuals were chosen for in-person contact using the "opportunistic or emergent sampling" method (Issari and Pourkos, 2015: 83). The majority of the interviews were conducted in-person in the research region, but some had to be conducted over the phone because in-person meetings were not possible.

The collected quantitative data was coded, quantified, and processed using the SPSS21 statistical package, which allows for computer-assisted data analysis. Very important information was obtained from the interviewees' responses (qualitative data), which sheds more light and in greater depth on "why did this particular tourism development happen," from which a number of implications emerged. The responses were coded using the "coded header" method (Everett, Aloudat, 2020: 240–243).

Due to the special conditions of the time because of the Covid-19 restrictions, the work was completed between June 2021 and November 2021.

V. RESULTS

This research is focused on the impacts tourism expansion has induced on a mountainous landlocked region. By selection, the effort to provide a new set of economic activities, soft forms of tourism such as agro-tourism, eco-nature tourism, sport–adventure tourism, and cultural tourism have mainly been promoted. The primary objectives are to: strengthen the local productive base, generate employment and income for the local community, prevent village migration, particularly of young and productive-aged people, and trigger the effect of further regional development through tourism.

The research was based on several research assumptions divided into three areas, such as financial, sociocultural, and ecological nature. Key findings of the research could be grouped as follows:

(i) Tourism industry

- ∨ The primary tourism activity was created along the Karpenissi-Potamia axis, both districts of the Karpenissi municipality.
- ∨ The majority of the lodging units have been developed along this line.
- ∨ The accommodation units are small in size. Comparatively large hotels can be found only in the city of Karpenissi (1 with 140 rooms and 373 beds, 1 with 104 rooms and 193 rooms, and 1 with 72 rooms and 129 rooms).

(ii) Employment and ownership

- ∨ Employment positions were provided to the owners of local family tourism businesses and their families, encouraging them to stay in their communities with their younger family members.
- ∨ Due to the seasonal character of the phenomenon, additional employment possibilities were available, although they were few in number, poor in skills (chambermaid, waiters/waitress, auxiliary personnel, etc.), and not on a full-time basis.
- ∨ Employment opportunities generally available to women, allow them to contribute to the family income while also gaining independence in society.
- ∨ Multiactivity is also noticeable. Employment in agriculture, the private sector, as well as the public sector supplements family income.
- ∨ Local ownership and employment are the norms (85.7%). As a result, it is projected that the majority of revenue will remain in the area.

(iii) Economy aspects

- ↘ Due to the limited productive base developed in the area, tourism has provided minimal benefit to the local productive system, since both the primary and secondary sectors have low activity. However, local authorities and business owners are working to improve the situation.
- ↘ Life standards are improving, but primarily in locations where there are a large number of visitors (Karpenissi-Potamia). However, because of modest or unnoticed tourism activity, the impacts in most places and villages in Evrytania are fairly low or imperceptible.

(iv) Tourists characteristics

- ↘ The majority of tourists in Evrytania comes from the domestic market (91%) of people living in metropolitan cities. Their average length of stay is 2.6 nights. As a result, relations with locals are minimal.
- ↘ Private cars and tourist buses are the primary modes of mobility.
- ↘ Visitors' main interests are:
 - Forest, mountain, and scenic grandeur
 - Leisure and relaxation
 - Life close to nature
 - Knowledge of the region
 - Churches and monasteries

The tourist incentives listed above are perfectly compatible with soft tourism.

(v) Destination issues

- ↘ The general attitude of the residents toward tourists and tourism development is positive, assuming that tourism will revitalize communities, reinforce local economies, provide employment opportunities, and reverse the pattern of young people departing the region.
- ↘ Local traditional features do not appear to have been impacted or changed because of tourism.
- ↘ Local buildings have not been converted to tourism operations, with the exception of a handful in certain localities, which are mostly hostels or restaurant-café businesses. In general, the major and traditional features of the villages have not been modified in such a way that the location has become a tourist destination. However, there has been a change in one community, notably Megalo Chorio, the principal village in Potamia's regional unit.
- ↘ The environment is highly valued and safeguarded in general. However, greater attention should be paid to the sewage systems in the communities. Additionally, some conventional environmental management and personnel environmental training should be introduced.

VI. DISCUSSION

Basic and traditional activities in Evrytania were inextricably linked to nature and the environment in a sustainable way a few decades ago. The local productive system engaged in such activities as of livestock, agriculture, and forestry, as well as building construction, and public services. The changes that occurred over the previous several decades, primarily as a result of the exodus of the more energetic sectors of the population, disrupted the balance of the productive system, destabilized the social structure, and gradually the entire economic and social framework crumbled (Evaggelodimos, 2019). Previous attempts to build basic tourism infrastructure (guesthouses, rooms to let) did not result in the expected development, and the current situation could be described as stagnant. Visitors, according to local information in the Municipality of Agrafa, are those who travel through on motorized means (motorbikes or jeeps), without staying. These transients may visit their villages and local attractions, but they do not contribute financially as expected.

Based on the information gathered, some assessments can be made for both municipalities, Karpenissi and Agrafa. In the case of Agrafa, a municipality with five municipal units, a first observation could be that MUs on the eastern side of it (Agrafa MU and Viniani MU) are falling behind in development, which may become irreversible soon. The noticeable lack of local entrepreneurship critical mass that may embark on a long-term development process by utilizing the productive potential of these places is a critical factor in this. Due to the mountainous nature of the area, accessibility to the municipality and the areas between villages is also a major issue. Though similar characteristics can be found in the rest MUs in the west side of Agrafa, as well, this one appears to have a more dynamic presence than the east MUs since there is a significant number of productive-aged people in this area who should be encouraged to seize opportunities as they arise.

The main issues here, however, are a lack of available housing, a lack of a development plan and promotion, and a lack of local interest in tourism operations. Kremasta Lake is a valuable resource with the potential to provide a prosperous future for the entire region when combined with livestock breeding and commerce. Even so, tourism, which began slowly in the area in the 1990s, is unlikely to thrive unless strongly supported. As a result of a recent local government decision to capitalize on the lake's tourism potential, "great optimism" appears to have been raised in the surrounding area.

The municipality of Karpenissi area is involved in tourism in a variety of ways, and as a result, it fully benefits from tourist consumption. The primary activities are as follows:

The ski resort. It is located in Karpenissi and attracts a large number of visitors during the winter season. It primarily benefits the Karpenissi market and a few nearby communities. It has a limited operational period because no additional activities have been linked to it (for example, development of off-season/winter activities such as mountain biking).

The sports and training center. Their initial concept was rather grandiose, but it was later unable to realize its full potential due to administrative challenges as well as a lack of management and promotion expertise. It is, however, currently being revitalized.

Monastery of Proussos. It is an historical religious and pilgrimage site and complex that attracts thousands of pilgrims and visitors per year. However, this type of tourism seems to overshadow all other types. It expands dynamically and methodically through tourist offices of major cities (Athens, Thessaloniki), and it has a strong regional presence as it adheres to an organized tourism pattern.

Other forms of tourism. Both adventure and nature tourism exist and thrive, but not to the same extent as religious tourism. Tourists can take advantage of a variety of natural and man-made attractions. On the region's rivers, tourist activities such as canoeing and rafting of varying difficulty are being developed. Free camping is also common along the river's banks. These forms of tourism are becoming more popular throughout the province, and participants prefer to stay in hotels located outside of the tourist area. As a result, communities and businesses outside of the Karpenissi-Potamia tourism axis benefit financially as well. These initiatives are an important part of the growth of such types of tourism for both domestic and international visitors.

Holiday homes. For the whole Evrytania regional unit, the abundance of vacation homes is crucial. These may mostly be those of emigrants from a certain time period (either within Greece or abroad). However, some individuals with no connections to the region have also purchased homes because they enjoyed the area. Even if their stay is short, the economic and social benefits to the local market are substantial.

Tourism has been viewed as a development tool that, under certain conditions, can help to improve the local economy, empower society and the population, and reduce disparities (Vlami et al., 2012; Delitheou and Alexiou, 2021). Evrytania is a region where projects to promote other types of tourism have been launched in order to highlight the region as an important not only winter but also all-year-round alternative tourism destination. These measures will boost the economies, demography, and social wellbeing of the various settlements, laying the groundwork for the region's sustainable development.

However, a number of *critical aspects* of the development process should be taken into account, such as:

(i) Managing the Evrytania's tourism development process. Although the initial objectives were excellent, some issues emerged during the development process which influenced the procedure and transformed the original plan. Such issues include:

- ↳ a "closed circle" of people directly involved in policy planning;
- ↳ fund management, and setting of priorities;
- ↳ population shrinkage;
- ↳ difficulty of generating sufficient interest to drive development in more backward and isolated areas;
- ↳ emergence of divergent trends from a specific type of tourism;
- ↳ RU's limited productive base;
- ↳ promotion and marketing capabilities;
- ↳ inability to create innovative and "unique" tourism products due to lack of vision;
- ↳ other difficulties related to deficient infrastructures, such as roads and other means of communication.

(ii) Inefficient use of resources available at the tourist destination. Because of the inability to develop a comprehensive plan with clear objectives and procedures, stakeholders involved in the development process describe the procedure as "fragmented," "disorganized," and "selective". The perspective of this approach primarily benefited those with a political or friendly connection to the local government. Furthermore, it neither covers both municipalities equally nor fully leverages all of the resources that tourism might very well exploit.

The absence of a strategy for the progressive integration, organization, marketing, and administration of all potential tourist resources has resulted in the limited and fragmented use of a portion of the area's accessible tourist and natural resources. As a result, many sites remain unappealing and can only be discovered by chance or through volunteer work. However, they are occasionally improperly exploited. An example is the independent, often unregulated activity of groups of visitors, both Greeks and foreigners, in areas with a high degree of vulnerability or risk to the forest by activities such as free camping in forest areas, motorized traffic on forest roads, and walks, and so on.

(iii) Tendency of religious and pilgrimage tourism to dominate in the field. Religious tourism is the only type that is consistently, and on a large scale, organized. Its standardized structure tends to dominate the Karpenissi-Potamia region, which is the main tourist axis in Evrytania. It primarily resides in Karpenissi (due to the lack of adequate accommodation for group travel needs in other areas). As a result, its presence benefits only the tourism industry in the Karpenissi and Potamia districts (MUs).

At the same time, its potential could override the interests of the entire tourist industry, resulting in the decline of other types of tourism, leading to what is known as "monoculture", being exclusively to religious tourism.

(iv) Worsening, instead of improving, of the inequalities between the two Municipalities of Evrytania. Karpenissi was the municipality that received the most financial assistance from European and national funding. This plan has resulted in the development of a scenario that makes difficult any possibility of expanding the benefits of tourism to places other than those already developed in terms of tourism. The focus on the development of these districts fails to deal with the inequities between the two municipalities, and exacerbates the required effects to deal with difficulties of the severe underdevelopment. As a result, the question arises whether promoting alternative tourism in an already marginalized mountainous region like Evrytania can help to strengthen the productive base, the demographic structure, and the inhabitants' standard of living.

VII. CONCLUSION

The main characteristics of the alternative tourism philosophy are the protection of the environment and surrounding area, stimulation of the local community, and its active involvement (Delitheou et al., 2020). Small tourist infrastructure and low number of tourists will inevitably contribute to the welfare of the local people without causing any damage to the environment (Smith, 2011). The above measures that are supposed to implement the alternative tourism development programs in Evrytania in a sustainable way have not yet had any impact on the trend of young people leaving the area and emigrating. Furthermore, these measures of the tourist industry have not led to any growth dynamics in other economic sectors. Although the decision-makers claim that the programs have been effective, the question arises of how a development program can be considered successful when it fails its overarching goal of keeping people in its location.

The findings of the Evrytania survey on alternative tourism as it impacts the whole area shed light on issues which suggest that implementing development programs "from below" necessitates, first and foremost, the participation of the local community. In our case, it appears that a group of players who are both key businessmen in the region and politically connected to the local government have "replaced" the local community as an important actor and participant in the development process, influencing both the direction and content of development. This situation, which could limit prospective beneficial effects in an underdeveloped area and obviously hinders any development attempt in a setting supportive of alternative tourism and sustainable development, needs to be changed.

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