



Original Research Article

The current situation and development prospects of cruise tourism on Kefalonia Island: The relation between satisfaction and intention to revisit using structural equation modeling

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Today, cruise tourism is the fastest growing sector of the travel and tourism industry. Yet, it is a neglected area with limited coverage in contemporary tourism literature. Cruise tourism has been concentrated in the Caribbean and the Mediterranean regions. However, operators are looking for alternative and exciting destinations. The island of Kefalonia is a possible alternative for cruise tourism. The purpose of paper is to critically examine the potential for cruise tourism in Kefalonia. In particular, it presents the current state of cruise tourism in the island of Kefalonia and identifies its potential as a port-of-call by investigating visitors' impressions, satisfaction and intention to return in the future. The paper also identifies the factors that affect the formation of perceptions by visitors. This paper is intended to provide valuable information to operators willing to develop cruise tourism in the island. First, a discussion about global cruise industry is conducted. Primary data collection is carried out in Kefalonia during the peak of the cruise season in the last quarter of 2017. For this purpose, appropriately constructed questionnaires were used and statistical analyses were conducted. The findings yielded an overall positive satisfaction outcome, though some level of dissatisfaction was documented as well. Finally, some promising directions for future research are presented in order to help the concerned authorities implement effective tourism policies and establish the island as a cruise destination.

Key words: Kefalonia, cruise tourism, tourism development, tourism policies.

INTRODUCTION

Albeit a relatively new phenomenon, cruising constitutes a rapidly growing sector of maritime tourism. It comprises transport and hospitality activities (Papatheodorou, 2006) combined into an all-inclusive holiday package (CRISIL, 2005). Cruise ships, as multi-functional traveling vehicles are destinations in themselves (Wild and Dearing, 2000; Mancini, 2000), offering to tourists a plethora of comfortable facilities and enjoyable services, available both onboard and at the ports of visit (UNWTO, 2012; Teye and Leclerc, 1998). What is more, this unique tourism product, though previously viewed as a luxurious form of vacation for the-'rich,' has now become considerably affordable and accessible to a greater percentage of tourists.

Cruising is the fastest growing sector within the tourism industry, having grown at approximately double the rate of

international tourism as a whole during recent decades, with an average growth rate of approximately 8,1% since the 1980s (Hung and Pertick, 2010; Wood, 2004). In particular, its growth was most impressive in the North American and European markets (Bartolome et al., 2009). The cruise product consists of the ship itself and its itinerary (UNWTO, 2010). Ports or destinations play a major role in itinerary development. They are an attraction basis for the enrichment of cruise passengers travel experiences and they provide an opportunity for cruise passengers to learn about the local community's history, culture and lifestyle as well as experience its natural attractions. Cruising also has the potential to reach even the last of 'untouched' places from the map leading to the development for numerous peripheral areas (Holloway

2002). The present study consists of two parts: a) a literature review of the cruise industry, not only in a global basis but also in a smaller market, such as Kefalonia Island, and b) a primary research involving cruise passengers who started their journey from Piraeus in Greece, one of the most important ports in the Mediterranean Sea (Lekakou et al., 2010); they spent time on Kefalonia and then continued to the other ports of Mediterranean. Given that the current study, in the authors' best knowledge, is a first attempt to scientifically approach cruise tourism in this specific destination, this article intended to critically examine Kefalonia's potential as a port-of-call in order to provide valuable information to operators willing to develop cruise tourism in the island.

Impacts of Cruise Tourism

Literature has widely focused on the impacts of cruising, yielding considerable findings from an economic, social and environmental perspective (European Community, 2009; Dowling, 2006). Cruise industry brings many financial benefits to the destination ports (Dwyer, 2004; Brida and Zapata, 2010; Brida et al., 2014) and contributes to regional development. It directly and indirectly affects the economy of a destination. The direct effect is the generation of revenue by the suppliers providing goods and services to the cruise vessel, passengers and crew. Cruise vessel expenditures listed by authors include port costs, marine expenses, food and beverages, fuel, water and maintenance. Passenger expenditures include the costs incurred by cruisers that are not part of the cruise travel, such as taxis, souvenirs, shore excursions, food and beverages, etc. Authors also enumerated crew expenditures as restaurants, retail goods, recreational activities, transport, etc. These direct expenditures result in the indirect effect of cruise tourism on the economy of a destination, due to the purchases made by the direct suppliers from other companies. Dwyer and Forsyth (1998) developed a comprehensive framework of the direct and indirect cruise-related impacts on local economies, based on the expenditures of two principal sources: Passengers and cruise operators. The framework displays the types of cruise expenditures and their national and regional effects. With the changing structure of cruise ships operations, from all inclusive travel to user-pays situation, passengers spend money onboard for facilities like extra tariff restaurants and food outlets, recreational activities, mini bars, same-day newspapers, etc. This structure generates local and regional revenue through land-based tours and shopping programs (Najafipour et al., 2014). Braun and Tramel (2006) state that the economic gain from operator and passenger spending depends on various factors, such as fleet size, passenger capacity, length of cruise itinerary, attractiveness of port of call and size of home port's industry cluster. In addition to the economic benefits obtained from cruise travel from the expenditures of operators and passengers, cruise tourism also contributes to the economy through ship building and maintenance companies. It is approximately 10 times more profitable to build vessels for nautical tourism than to build vessels for other purposes (Kalanj, 2014). Furthermore, as in all other tourism activities, cruising generates intense sociocultural effects for both passengers and locals. The 'blending' of different cultures and nations onboard and at ports

provides a platform for socialization and establishment of friendship between individuals from different countries (Brida and Zapata, 2010; Braun et al., 2002).

However, certain negative aspects have also been highlighted, including locals' feeling of loss of privacy due to the large influx of 'outsiders,' overcrowding and health risks, though it is believed that these can be strategically managed through effective education (CRISIL, 2005). Similarly, from an environmental point of view, concerns have been raised regarding the pollution caused by cruising. Such concerns can be addressed by increased awareness and sensitization, which should be mainly targeted at organizations like the International Council of Cruise Lines (ICCL) and the implementation of new regulations, such as MARPOL 73. It is important to handle wastes and pollutants properly as well as plan and implement the management process accordingly, in order to eliminate the negative effects of cruise ships on the environment. Some of the major cruise lines have taken firm steps regarding this impact, but measures should be taken to completely eliminate the negative effects of cruise tourism on the environment. The wastes generated by cruise ships, which damages the environment, are listed as black water, gray water, solid waste, hazardous wastes, bilge water, ballast water and air pollution (Brida and Zapata, 2010).

The international Context of the Cruise Industry Development

The cruise industry has evolved considerably and in recent years emerged to as one of the most rapidly developing segments of the global tourism industry, with millions of passengers cruising each year. On a global basis, the cruising sector is dominated by North America. In recent years, above average growth rates have been reported in emerging cruise markets in the Asia Pacific region and recently in Europe (CLIA, 2015). From 2000-2010, the demand for cruising increased worldwide by 93%, from 9.73 to 18.80 million passengers. Table 1 below shows the demand for cruise tourism in the last decade. The main cruise market is the Caribbean, with more than 40% of all itineraries, followed by the Mediterranean (12.7%) and Alaska (7.9%) (UNEP, 2002). Around the world, cruise passengers mostly come from USA (66%) and Europe (22%), with UK (7%), German (4%) and Italy (4%) being the major source market (Wild and BREA, 2007). However, recent studies have reported sharply declining rates for the Caribbean market, suggesting that the queen of the cruise industry is on its way to a saturation phase (Jones, 2011; Weeden et al., 2011). This saturation effect may be due in part to global recession and financial crisis, as well as the fact that cruise lines have increasingly started to focus more on the particularly attractive Mediterranean region. In recent years, the Mediterranean cruise industry has grown so markedly within the global cruise market that it now ranks second in the world. Demand growth rates are constantly positive. Supply is steadily growing; major world companies are deploying more vessels in the area; many passenger terminals and ports are undergoing infrastructural modernization (Madrid, 2004). Overall, the entire Mediterranean cruise sector holds a far greater appeal than in the recent past. This area, naturally divided by the Italian peninsula into its East and West segments,

Table 1. Global demand for cruise tourism from 2000 to 2010

Area	2000	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
N. America	6.88	9.96	10.38	10.45	10.29	10.40	11.11
Europe	2.07	3.15	3.44	4.05	4.46	5.00	5.54
The rest of the world	0.78	1.21	1.29	1.37	1.45	2.18	2.25
Grand total Passengers (millions)	9.73	14.32	15.11	15.87	16.20	17.58	18.80

Source: ECC 2011

provides opportunities for differentiation of cruise services (Lekakou and Tzannatos, 2000). In accordance to the UNWTO (2010) data on the share of cruise ship companies, Costa cruises and MSC cruises lead the Mediterranean cruise market, accounting for more than a third of all cruises in 2010 (21% and 15% respectively). The main Mediterranean cruise ports -those with the highest number of cruise passengers in 2009- are also the main Mediterranean home ports: Barcelona, Rome, Athens, Venice,

Palma de Majirca and Savona (GPW and BREA, 2010). The Mediterranean cruise product includes a variety of alternatives, such as cultural sites of major ancient civilizations (Lekakou et al., 2009), rendering the area a "hot" destination for cruise passengers. Consequently, more and more destinations, such as Europe, the Black Sea and Middle East are trying to secure a place in the global market of the cruise industry and develop strategies in order to benefit from the financial advantages of the sector locally and internationally.

The Case of Greece

Greece has a comparative advantage over other countries in maritime tourism. Strategically located in the Mediterranean, has 15,000 km of coast, numerous islands, large protected sea areas, a mild climate with plenty of sunshine, etc. Due to its intriguing and varied landscape as well as its historic and cultural wealth, Greece is an ideal place to develop cruise tourism, and is one of the most popular destinations in the region (Diakomihalis, 2007).

In the 2014 report of the European Council of Europe Greece, and particularly the Greek islands, was ranked the third most popular destination in Europe, with 4.1 million passenger visits. As a home port, Greece attracted 313,000 passengers in 2011, ranking 5th in the European list, with Piraeus port documenting the largest number of tourists. However, cruise tourism in Greece does not have the share it has in other countries and remains unknown to the average Greek. It is believed to appeal to high budgets and people often confuse it with coastal navigation, i.e., Greek ports are mainly where ships pass through but do not depart from, so the cost incurred by passengers and cruise agencies in Greece is low (National Bank, 2012). This is due to the fact that cruise agencies usually use the departure ports as a base from which they obtain fuel, food and other equipment, and they also carry out repairs on parts of the ship there. According to data from the ECC 2011/2012 report, it is evident that although Greece's rank in the cruise industry remains stable among the first three destinations in Europe, it keeps reducing its share. Though it held 21% in 2009, the percentage dropped to 17%. Greece was 6th in the European ranking based on the revenues from cruise

business activities in 2011, making a profit of 605 million Euros (46% of this came from transport, while 17% came from repair works), which is 4.3% more than in 2010, and amounts to 4% of the European grand total. Furthermore, people who were directly and indirectly employed in the cruise sector in Greece were estimated to be 12,078 individuals in 2011. Moreover, Greek maritime tourism sector has been hit by global recession to a greater extent compared with other destinations (Zaharatos and Tsartas, 2008). Greece is the least developed with regards to port infrastructure, which in general remains stagnant and insufficient (Diakomihalis, 2007). Nevertheless, Greek islands and coastal areas are considered to be attractive destinations, and cruise companies show great interest in Greek ports. According to the Hellenic Organization of Tourism (EOT, 2016), cruisers sailing under a Greek flag who could take one-day, three-day, four-day, seven-day or many-day cruises around Greek ports in other countries of the East Mediterranean make up more than 160,000 tons and have a total capacity of more than 100,000 passengers.

Kefalonia Island as a port-of-call

Kefalonia, which is one of the most developed tourist destinations, one of the Ionian Islands (island complex) and it is the biggest and most mountainous island in the Ionian Sea. It is adjacent to the Greek mainland and is administratively under the Region of the Ionian Islands. Tourism has greatly developed in the biggest part of the island, and the tourist season lasts six months, from May to October. The port of the town, Argostoli, has welcomed a remarkable number of passengers in the past six years, 2010-2016, serving as a port-of-call where ships stop by during the cruise (Lekakou et al., 2009). Table 2 shows the number of cruise arrivals and passengers, according to statistics kept by the Port Fund of Kefalonia and the Federation of Greek Ports.

With respect to these data, it is evident that although the number of cruisers and passengers diminished in 2014 and 2016 compared with 2013 and 2015 by approximately 11%, the performance is still satisfactory considering that 2014 is the fourth year of the port being a cruise tourist destination.

Overall, cruise tourism is an asset to the local community, generating many financial benefits. Disembarking passengers spend money, which goes into the local economy, and at the same time, their experiences act as an inexpensive live publicity worldwide. The industries that benefit most from cruise tourism are food industries (food and drink), transport sector, travel agencies, cultural activities (archaeological sites, museums etc.) as well as souvenirs, local products and commonly used products, which are directly affected by the amount spent by tourists.

Table 2. Cruise Tourist Industry

Year	Cruiser arrivals	Number of passengers
2010	64	82.812
2011	72	158.118
2012	98	120.739
2013	100	135.659
2014	79	88.032
2015	112	149.222
2016	77	85.465

Source: Federation of Greek Ports and the Port Fund of Kefalonia

In this context, the current research focuses on investigating the development prospects of cruise tourism in the island of Kefalonia. Given the region's attractiveness as a cruise destination and the fact that ports-of-call constitute one of the major reasons why tourists choose specific cruises (Brida et al., 2014), it is believed that addressing the current potential of the cruise product in the area will provide valuable information both to local managers and to cruise companies, which will further assist in making good use of the multiple benefits this sector may offer towards the sustainability of the island, both locally and regionally.

METHODOLOGY

In order to investigate the prospects for cruise tourism development in Kefalonia, a review of past research on cruise tourism, particularly on tourists' experiences, was conducted, and then self-completed questionnaires were distributed. The questionnaire was translated into three languages, English, Italian and French. The cover letter provided information about the general purpose of the study, detailed instructions for administering the questionnaires, the data collection procedure and a request to fully complete the questionnaire. The questionnaire is comprised of three sections and was pilot tested (n=50) with cruise passengers a year earlier. Their comments were used to revise and clarify the statements in the survey. The first section contained questions about respondents' profile, utilizing socio-demographic variables (age, gender, marital status, education, employment status and geographic origin), travelling party and major source of information used to book the cruise. The second section asked respondents to indicate their level of satisfaction, while the third section dealt with attributes that affect the cruise experience. A 5-point Likert type scale, ranging from "5=extremely satisfied" to "1=very dissatisfied" was used to assess respondents agreement with a set of statements. Parameters, such as the visitors' satisfaction rate with the services in the town, tours, sightseeing and trips were examined. Also, per capita expenses for purchases and on which products, tourists' preferences in Kefalonia, and their intention to visit the island again in the future were assessed. The population of this study consisted of passengers who disembarked from cruise ships at the port of Argostoli during the peak of the cruise season in the last quarter of 2017. Due to the difficulty in accessing cruise passengers, a strategy of convenience sampling was implemented, based on which the subjects were selected

because of their convenient accessibility and proximity. Afterwards, when the data collection was completed, descriptive statistics, and multiple regression analysis were conducted using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (IBM SPSS), version 19. The tourist satisfaction was estimated using the Structural Equation Models methods (SEM). The path diagram was used in order to show the relationships of variables in SEM.

FINDINGS

The examination of the data gathered from the survey yielded a total of 304 valid questionnaires. The sample consisted of 56.95% women and 43.05% men. Among them 31.35% were older than 60, and they were of various nationalities, with Italians (20.41%), Germans (9.18%) and French (10.20%) representing the majority. Pensioners represented 23.9%, full time employees made up 32.89% and those with higher educational level made up 42.52%. Finally, 59.87% were traveling with friends or family. The satisfaction rate with cleanliness and services at the port of Argostoli at the entrance gate is positive enough, as it ranges from 90-95%. There was some dissatisfaction (4%) with the services at the reception area. Overall, 57.67% of the participants did not join any tours, which means that they did not have the chance to explore the area around the town. Of those who joined tours, 42.33% expressed the greatest satisfaction with the natural beauty of the island, touring and sightseeing, restaurants and retail businesses, and 97% expressed their satisfaction with the inhabitants of the town. Some dissatisfaction with services (34%) was also documented. Based on their comments, dissatisfaction focused on buses (probably due to their age and technical problems) as well as taxis which were reported to be costly. Moreover, dissatisfaction (9%) was expressed with museums and archaeological sites and, to a smaller percentage, with sites (2.56%) that were amongst the most popular attractions besides tours for tourists who choose Kefalonia as a tourist destination.

The above percentages, according to comments, are due to the fact that no archaeological sites were found (they were probably destroyed by the earthquakes in 1953), the museums were either closed during opening hours or they had never heard of them. In addition, long queues for admission were reported to be tiring. Almost all visitors (9 out of ten) bought something, cheap or expensive, during their stay in Argostoli, including local products, souvenirs, clothes and shoes. Among the visitors, 75.50% spent up to 50 Euros per capita, and 14.06% spent 50-100 Euros. This

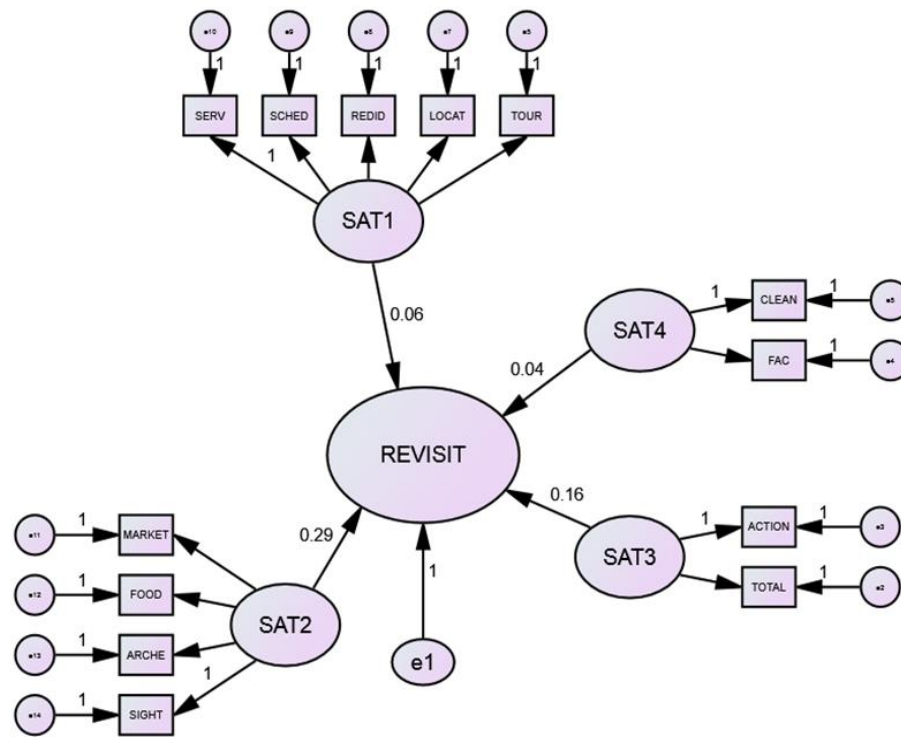


Figure 1: Structural equation model of the relative importance of the underlying structure of satisfaction to the intention of revisit

is considered to be a satisfactory spending ability, given the fact that each cruiser has a large occupancy. Although 43% expressed their wish to return to the island on a holiday package (11.39%), individually (54.43%) or on a cruiser in the future (29.11%), a large percentage (57%) was uncertain or even reluctant (32% and 25% correspondingly). What people liked most about the island was its natural beauty, food, shopping and a combination of them all. Things that mainly appeal to tourists and prompt them to come to the island on holiday are mostly its beauty,

touring, adequate information, sightseeing, museums and archaeological sites followed by restaurants, shopping and cruise schedules. Furthermore, 37.75% were reported to prefer staying in Bed and Breakfast hotels, and 25.98% in rented apartments and 4 or 5-star hotels. Finally, the passengers were quite satisfied (95%) with the information services, the cruise schedule, the restaurants and the tours. However, dissatisfaction with shopping was noted (5.20%, either because they expected a wider variety or due to high prices.

Statistical modeling of the relation between satisfaction and the intention to revisit

In order to understand the relation between satisfaction and intention to revisit the same destination, structural equation modeling (SEM) was used to examine the structure of relation. As the first step, SEM model identified four major latent constructs underlying the factor structure of satisfaction(Figure 1).

1st factor adds up all variables related to the frame of the cruise

SAT1	FRAME
SERV	Services
SCHED	Guide schedule
RESID	Residents
LOCAT	Locations
TOUR	Tour

2nd factor includes all live experiences from the trip

SAT2	EXPERIENCES
MARKET	Mercantile
FOOD	Food
ARCHE	Archaeological
SIGHT	Sights

3rd factor is essential the negative of dissatisfaction, a global attitude of the trip that may happened if it was completely unorganized

SAT3	NOT DISSATISFIED
ACTION	Organized trip
TOTAL	total satisfaction

4th factor include the essential attributes expected to be at the highest level in every trip.

SAT4	THE BASICS
CLEAN	Cleaning services
FAC	Facilities

Regression modeling on the first order factor variables to the endogenous variable of revisit, reveals the relative importance of each factor.

Construct	Label	Effect	P-value
SAT1	FRAME	0.059	>0.05
SAT2	EXPERIENCES	0.291	<0.05
SAT3	NOT DISSATISFIED	0.165	<0.05
SAT4	THE BASICS	0.038	>0.05

Living experience, the 2nd satisfaction factor, is the leading cause of propensity to repeat.

The above mentioned structural equation determines that the proposed model fits the data well.

Model fit Statistics

Statistic	Value	Comment
χ^2/df	4.516	Moderate, acceptable taking into account sample size
RMSEA	0.085	Reasonable approximate fit
AGFI	0.912	Good adjusted goodness of fit
TLI	0.892	Acceptable

In short, responses underpin a simple statement:

"I will revisit if I enjoyed positive experiences and I am not dissatisfied"

DISCUSSION

The findings of this survey conducted in the island of Kefalonia demonstrated that despite the problems faced in the sector, cruise tourism in the area is constantly developing, especially due to the actions taken in the last three years. Moreover, it constitutes a basic field of economic activity which interacts with the local community, since the visitors' spending supports the economy. However, more actions should be taken to further develop the sector. First, the upgrade of port infrastructure is a top priority. Moreover, from the passengers' perspective, basic amenities at the port, such as telephone booths and transport facilities, hold great importance while disembarking from a cruise (CRISIL, 2005). As for safety matters, the practices followed should be improved by introducing electronic devices, such as automated scanners, so as to create a secure and 'cruise friendly' port. Therefore, consolidated investments in the port infrastructure should focus on its versatile exploitation in order to host larger ships and mega yachts, as well as offer necessary conveniences to tourists. Furthermore, a strong human resource network is another important determinant for the development of cruise tourism. Since the manner of receiving and treating tourists constitutes a critical factor, establishing a 24-h service center at the port with qualified personnel is of particular importance (CRISIL, 2005). Also, authorities and agencies dealing with cruising should formulate effective training programs covering key areas, such as communication and hospitality, tourist safety, services management and environmental aspects. Creating awareness about cruise tourism will encourage residents' participation in this challenging field and will provide incentives for cruise operators. In particular, attempts

should be focused on implementing a better scheduling plan, which would coordinate cruise arrivals with overland means of transport and the opening hours of shops and sights. Finally, given that goods on sale are usually very similar to those in other ports (Jaakson, 2004). It would be helpful to reconsider the variety of the offered products and the prices, so as to progressively increase the tourists' incentive to purchase. What is more, targeted marketing strategies are the sine-qua-non to success in the cruise field. Effective management and publicity policies will promote the image of the island as a cruise destination and will contribute to the sustainability of this specific form of tourism in the area. Modern communication and information technology (mainly internet) comprise an important means of promotion, enabling the authorities and businesses involved to publicize their resources and approach directly and inexpensively their potential visitors to a local and global extent. A key marketing strategy would also be to create the image of Kefalonia as a 'must see' and 'value for money' destination, which constitutes an amalgamation of natural beauty, culture, cuisine and adventure. This could be achieved through developing an effective media campaign, including participation in international forums and conferences, organizing events and inviting cruise operators to inspect the resources offered. Also, developing a linkage between tourist regions, such as the existing multi-island network in Greece (North Aegean-South Aegean-Ionian Islands), may contribute significantly towards improving the tourist product through exchanging know-how and the formulation of joint cruise packages.

Another aspect to which attention should be paid -is the tourists' intention to return to Kefalonia. The findings of this study suggest that although for most respondents the cruise experience was positive, a considerable proportion of them are uncertain or even reluctant regarding a subsequent visit in the future. Thus, efforts should be directed towards building the visitors' 'loyalty' to the island, which would culminate in repeat visitations and positive word-of-mouth recommendation (Andriotis and Agiomirgianakis, 2010; Petrick and Sirakaya; 2004). One way to increase their motivation would be to diversify the tourist product beyond shopping and sightseeing, by incorporating in the cruise package on-shore recreational activities and excursions outside the town of Argostoli, which would familiarize them with the local natural and cultural heritage. Also, extending the time spent on the island would be a significant strategy, since the abbreviated time of stay may cause incomplete impressions of the place and the hosts (Henthorne, 2000). Finally, developing the cruise product according to the principles of responsible tourism would considerably improve the popularity of the port. With the notion of creating 'better places to live in and to visit', an action plan needs to be put in place concerning the key areas of environment, society, culture and economy, towards minimizing any negative impacts of tourism. First, as stated above, the local community needs to be involved in the decision-making process and decide collectively on the optimal size of tourism in the island. Also, the economic benefits generated from cruising should be equally distributed among residents. Moreover, environmental and cultural backgrounds needs to be maintained with the sensitivity of the world's diversity in mind, and awareness over related issues should be promoted in any case, along

with a mutual respect between both tourists and the hosts.

Conclusion

This study is the first attempt to investigate the potential of cruising in the island of Kefalonia as a port-of-call. The importance of the cruise industry to the economy of the island is undeniable. Questions surrounding the benefits and costs of developing cruise tourism in the island are discussed. This type of tourism seems to encapsulate a sound development opportunity in the current time of recession. Besides its many benefits, cruise tourism also contributes greatly to the local and national economic recovery. This work provides some potential answers with sufficient empirical support to provoke consideration by policy makers and researchers alike. Given that Kefalonia has great potentials to become an important cruise destination, a positive co-operation between the concerned authorities along with an effective action plan would attract more and more visitors. We hope that subsequent work would provide greater precision and application in responding to the question of the efficacy of cruise tourism as an engine of community economic development in this region.

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interests regarding the publication of the paper.

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