


Article

Development of a Cycle-Tourism Strategy in Greece Based on the Preferences of Potential Cycle-Tourists

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Abstract: Cycle-tourism seems to be an emerging touristic model in many countries, including Greece. Although the infrastructure is limited, entrepreneurship can support the development of such tourism sector, as cycle-tourists have specific needs to be met during an excursion. Thus, it would be helpful if stores that meet specific prerequisites could be certificated as cycle-friendly companies. In order for such certification to be developed, it is necessary for those parameters to be defined. This paper focuses on that topic and such criteria were identified through in-depth interviews with cycle-tourists and cycle-tour operators. Through this research, conclusions were derived about the criteria according to which cycle-tourists in Greece select stores and accommodation during an excursion. Those selection parameters were transcribed to indicators that will be used in order to develop the certification at the next phase of the research. Moreover, conclusions were compared with outcomes of similar international studies. It was found that cycle-tourists are interested in specific services, regardless of the country in which they live or travel. Besides conventional touristic activities, the importance of small retail stores in remote villages acting as meeting points with local people and culture was highlighted.

Keywords: cycle tourism; Greece; case studies; indicators; certifications; interviews; selection criteria; certification; entrepreneurship

1. Introduction

Tourism is considered an important sector of the service economy at a global level [1,2]. The rise of tourism has been traced back to the last 70 years [3] as a result of various changes on the social, cultural, and economic basis of societies. In Greece, where tourism consists a major wealth source [4–7], as it represents 18–20% of the national GDP [8], many visitors are interested in leisure and relaxation. In that context, “sun lust” touristic model became popular across the country [9], with particular emphasis on the Aegean islands [3]. However, taking into account various socio-economic, ecological, and cultural consequences caused by a significant concentration of tourists [9–11], concerns have arisen regarding the sustainability of mass tourism [12]. In that context, niche tourism, namely tourism based on specific

activities closer to the personal needs of each visitor, came at the forefront in order to revitalize the touristic product and overcome seasonality, which is the main problem of mass tourism in Greece [3].

Such a touristic model is cycle-tourism [13–15]. By reviewing the international experience, it turns out that exploiting such an alternative can contribute not only to protecting the natural sources and people's health [16] but also revitalizing local economies [17]. Those three sectors are the three pillars of sustainable development [18]. Cycle-tourism meets most aspects of sustainable tourism like optimal use of environmental resources, respect for the socio-cultural authenticity of host communities, social and economic benefits to all stakeholders, high levels of consumer satisfaction [19]. Pröbstl-Haider et al. [20] claim that the planning and management of mountain bike trails may contribute to minimizing negative effects on the environment, as the effects caused by mountain bikers are similar enough to those caused by hikers, although that is not always true. Due to the fact that recreation is the aim of cycle-tourism in most cases, Bakogiannis, et al. [21] underline that cycle-tourism can be effective in preserving natural sources as it is a cause in order for environmental protection plans to be scheduled. In Greece, it is included in the Naturalist-Ecotourism aspects of niche tourism approaches [7]. Social bonding is also possible as local communities' participation is something that usually happens in order for the infrastructure to be preserved. In the case of Valdresbanen Rail-Trail in Norway, volunteers from the local community have undertaken the maintenance of the route. Community engagement in this process makes cycle-tourism a part of public life [21]. Apart from the positive effects on the natural and social environment, economic effects are also visible for local economies. This finding also derives from a recent study implemented by the European Cycling Federation [22]. According to that study, the lion's share of jobs in the new free-wheeling economy is in the cycle-tourism industry, which employs 524,000 people (including accommodation and restaurants), compared to 80,000 in retail, the second-highest sub-sector. The results derived by a study of Sustains for the UK [23] as well as by Simonsen, Jørgensen and Robbins [24] are similar. Buning and Gibson [25] also point out that cycle-tourism (and sport tourism, in general) is considered as a sustainable form of tourism. This is the reason why many communities seek to attract them by meeting their needs.

Those findings support the emergence of such a trend across Greece, as there is a need to be developed through entrepreneurship [14], preservation of national capitals, and attraction of external ones. This target is reinforced through the cycle-tourism model, as people are encouraged to take fewer overseas and more domestic holidays [16].

For promoting this specific touristic model, the adoption of various measures such as the introduction of bike sharing schemes (the touristic city of Rethymno constitutes a great paradigm in Greece [26]) or the development of cycling infrastructure, at this time, both infrastructure and bicycle use, is limited on a national level [27], is considered necessary. The only organized interventions took place in the context of the CYRONMED project [3,14,16], while respective interventions were planned in the Regional Unit (ex-Prefecture) of Preveza and in Attica, with the imminent construction of the Attica Rail-Trail [14]. The above projects, although they are in relation to the proposal of the EUROVELO program for the development of European cycling paths, the routes 8, 11, and 13 are crossing the Greek territory. However, they are not integrated into these plans, which have not been implemented until now. Such a fact is maybe related to the absence of collaboration between the public sector and private representatives in order for cycle-tourism to be developed. The results in Scotland were opposite, where a national Cycle-tourism Forum was established in 2010 in order to promote such a collaboration [28]. In this direction, Gazzola, et al. [29] point out that collaboration between public and private stakeholders is necessary in order for a well-defined strategy to be developed. Through such a cooperation procedure, attention may be paid to: (a) Analysis of the reference features in order to highlight success factors and critical issues, (b) creation of a long-term strategy, based on resources and opportunities of each area, (c) development of an action plan that indicates the necessary investments and actions in order for the goals to be caught [29].

Beyond the technical infrastructure, the cycle-tourists will require to satisfy a series of needs that can be covered by businesses active on a local level, such as hotels, restaurants, retail shops,

and bike repair shops. The above businesses that can be considered as touristic businesses, in a wider sense, must be friendly to cyclists in order to meet their needs, and thus, their number will increase. Such a thing can take place through the development of a certification system of the businesses that are bike-friendly.

The question arising refers to the business certification parameters. What are the parameters and if understood, do they refer to all the types of businesses or some of them refer to a specific business sector? The aim of the research is to identify the preferences of potential cycle-tourists in Greece and thus to understand the criteria according to which they select accommodations and stores to serve their daily needs during an excursion. Those selection criteria have to be transformed into indicators that will be useful in order for a certification to be developed at the next phase of the research, which would be awarded to companies that meet specific cycle-friendly prerequisites. Another objective is related to comparing the results derived by this research in Greece with outcomes of similar international studies worldwide.

Taking the above into consideration, it should be mentioned that the aim of answering the above questions is to expand the context of this specific research paper, in the framework of which the international experience was evaluated (Section 2) and the research methodology was compiled (Section 3), that was based on the expansion of the cycle-tourists' preferences. The results of the research refer to the determination of measurable indexes (Section 4) that can be exploited for developing a business certification system. The conclusions (Section 5) arising designate questions and constitute reasons for further research, aim of which is the promotion of cycle-tourism in the country, in the context of the wider developmental policy based on the promotion of alternative tourism practices.

2. Literature Review: Case Studies on Promoting Cycle-tourism

The first approach to a national cycling strategy for Greece was formulated in 2008, through the CYRONMED project, as it was mentioned above. Through that project, a cycle-tourism strategy applying to most Mediterranean areas was developed. Specifying the benefits in terms of economic, environmental, and transportation terms, the strategy initially highlighted the upcoming upgrade of the tourism product quality. The profile of the cycle-tourists, who may be the future users of Greek cycle routes, was defined. The studied elements in CYRONMED [30] include age (40–55 years), number of persons per group (2.6 mainly couples), duration (one week), cycling distance per day (20–30 km), reasons for undertaking cycle holidays (1. relaxation, 2. being fit, 3. interest in nature), preferred itineraries (1. countryside, 2. forest, 3. wild nature), travel arrangements (1. by themselves, 2. via tour operators), food (light meal for lunch and a good quality dinner in the evening) and accommodation (high-quality hotels and 'bed and breakfast' types). The strategy has also identified the key planning priorities, including backbone infrastructure, secondary cycle routes, safe and easy access to towns and local sights, a network of suitable and easy-to-book cycle-friendly accommodation options, coherent and visible route signing, improved arrangements for cycle carriage by public transport and a proper system for bike hire at public transport stations. Such priorities can be combined with the objectives of Sustainable Urban Mobility Plans (SUMPs) for the implementation of which, various municipalities across Greece have expressed interest [31]. Furthermore, fundamental factors were considered to be the development of a more cyclist-friendly culture within the tourism industry, as well as better coordinated and targeted marketing of cycle routes and cycling holidays, in general. The strategy also contained bicycle routes planning guidelines and some key promotional priorities for cycle-tourism development in the Mediterranean [7].

Taking the above into consideration, it is underlined that, apart from the natural sources and the landscape, most of the potential cyclist-tourists in Greece are interested in cyclist-friendly culture and services. These initial conclusions derived by previous research [30], prove that it is necessary to ensure that the various cycle friendly services would be of an expected level. This action could be supported by the development of the certification that is examined in this paper.

Intending to organize the research methodology, a literature review preceded, which focused on research aiming to comprehend of the cycle-tourist behavior. The specific methodological selection was the result of the existence of a very specific research question, which refers to the parameters that make a business bike-friendly and, therefore, affect the promotion of cycle-tourism. The specific question was approached in various countries, as much in Europe as overseas. The first internationally recorded research about cycle-tourism took place in Denmark, a country with adequate terrain and cycling culture. In 1995, it was decided by the government of Denmark to exploit these data for the country in order to acquire an additional competitive advantage in the tourism sector. The research was implemented by Simonsen and Jorgensen [32] and referred to two Danish islands. The need for the cycle-tourists to be involved in free activities, cultural or naturalistic ones, is underlined in the research conclusions. At the same time, they tended to avoid involvement in typical touristic activities. It is also underlined, that important services in which the cycle-tourists are interested in Denmark refer to the parking and safekeeping of their bicycles, bike repair by the proper personnel, and the purchase of spare parts (if necessary), the safekeeping and transfer of luggage and bicycles but also accommodation and food consumption in places where they can draw information about the interesting locations, preferably in their own language. The sectors of accommodation and food consumption seemed to earn considerably from the growth of cycle-tourism, since about 93.00 DKK are spent, on a daily basis, by a cycle-tourist for accommodation and 58.28 DKK on food consumption [32].

Corresponding conclusions arose from a similar study in New Zealand [13]. The cycle-tourists evaluated corresponding characteristics, like those noted above, as important parameters for the encouragement of cycle-tourism. They identified the small number of lodging points with specialized services for cyclists, like safekeeping of luggage and bicycles, as well as the absence of spots for bicycle renting or repairing along the cycling routes. They also considered as important the provision of information, in particular, in isolated areas, which are more attractive to cyclists. An important conclusion of the research referred to the accommodation type selection. The cycle-tourists tend to select smaller and regional settlements in relation to conventional tourists. Their behavior regarding the type of accommodation is similar, since they are interested in affordable lodgings, with fewer conveniences, like camping sites (organized or free), hostels, and DoC campsites (camping sites designated by the state without the possibility of washing or cooking) [13].

In a study that took place in February 1998 in the United Kingdom [33], it was ascertained that the cycle-tourists' motives for the selection of a destination focused on the natural landscape and the existence of infrastructure. However, the fifth most important criterion referred to the existence of restaurants and pubs at a short distance from their place of accommodation and along the cycle path. These issues were important for the cycle-tourists in order to socialize, 51.3% of the participants in the research evaluated the possibility of stopping at a pub as the third most important element of a cycle route in order to be selected in the context of a cycling excursion [33].

The importance of catering establishments (food companies, restaurants, pubs, cafes, etc.) is more evident in the results of a study in Australia [34]. The cycle-tourists, members of various cycling clubs, underlined that the most important activity during their cycling referred to the visit in a restaurant (76.9%). The third most important activity referred to the purchase of items for the coverage of their daily needs (43.7%). Moreover, their interest was noted for finding accommodation providing services friendly to a cyclist, like guarding and renting a bicycle and the provision of special meals, friendly to cyclists [33]. Another finding is related to the limitation of accommodation costs. It was obvious not only in the case of New Zealand [13] but also in this research in Australia. Indeed, most cycle-tourists select a camping site as the predominant type of accommodation, while they are also interested in cabins and staying at a relative's or friend's house [34].

Finally, a more recent study conducted in 2014 in Croatia [35] underlined the main elements with which a cycle-tourist selects accommodation during an excursion. These criteria are the following according to importance: Possibility of parking or guarding a bicycle in the hotel (86% agreed with this), professional help with the repair or maintenance of the bicycle (81%), possibility of clothes

washing (70%), tour services based on cycling (66%), possibility for renting a bicycle (65%), possibility for transferring the bicycle (54%), meals adapted to cyclists' needs (49%), and possibility of safekeeping the bicycle outside of the hotel they stay (39%) (some consider that the possibility of parking the bicycle must exist not only inside but also outside the hotel) [35].

Table 1 summarizes the basic conclusions of the above studies, which in total underline the importance of local entrepreneurship in the development of cycle-tourism. The basic conclusions can be summarized as follows:

- Accommodation and food consumption constitute the most important services, according to cycle-tourists [34]. Evening entertainment does not seem to play an important role [34].
- Even if cycle-tourists are interested in limiting expenses for stay [13], a fact proven by the selection of cheap accommodation, however, many are those who spend a great part of their budget for accommodation [31], focusing on the existence of infrastructure, friendly to the cyclists [34,35].
- The services in which cycle-tourists are more interested refer to the following [32,34,35]: Existence of hydration, bike-friendly overnight stay (with the possibility of selection from a wide range of accommodation types), travel information in their own language, meals friendly to cyclists, possibility of involvement in various outdoor or cultural activities, clean sanitary spaces, possibility of bicycle repair, maintenance, transportation, renting, and parking.

Table 1. Main conclusions derived through the literature review. Source: [13,32–35].

Main Topics	Europe			Overseas	
	Denmark	United Kingdom	Croatia	New Zealand	Australia
Methodology	394 interviews on two islands	Questionnaires sent to 390 households. 192 answers received	199 e-questionnaires spread out via social media (personal messages)	321 — 8 pages questionnaires (41 questions)	564 questionnaires spread out The questionnaire was designed in collaboration with a group of experienced cyclists participating in semi-structured interviews (focus groups)
Main Conclusions	Free activities (preferable) vs. conventional touristic activities Interest in services like: Bike parking, bike repair/maintenance, luggage/bike storage and transfer Money spend for accommodation, daily needs, tickets to sights of interest	Aspects of cycle paths assessed: Quiet paths, pubs available, marking some of the main aspects Interest in: Landscape, places with cycling infrastructure as well as restaurants and pubs Less interest in night life activities	Conventional accommodation is preferred Main aspects in accommodation: Parking or guarding a bicycle in the hotel, repair or maintenance of the bicycle, clothes washing, tour services based on cycling, renting a bicycle, transferring the bicycle, meals adapted to cyclists' needs, safekeeping the bicycle outside of the hotel they stay in	Small settlements (preferable) vs. cities and towns Interest in services like: Bike repair/maintenance/rent; luggage/bike storage and transfer Tendency to save money spent for accommodation	Cultural and naturalistic activities (preferable) vs. conventional touristic activities Classification of cycle-tourists based on their profile (preferences, interests, budget) Tendency to save money spent for accommodation

3. Methodology

The literature review (Section 2) constituted the starting point for developing the methodology used in the present research. Figure 1 presents the methodological context, which is based on conducting in-depth interviews. The aim of the interviews was to confirm that the findings of the case studies' review are also valid in Greece, since the generalization of results in every geographical location does not necessarily consist of a good practice, risk of wrong hypotheses lurks, because of the different socio-economic, cultural, and natural characteristics of various countries [36]. Contrary to most of the case studies examined above, where the questionnaire method was exploited [13,33–35], in this project, the conduction of interviews was selected. The same procedure was used in the research that took place in Denmark [32], where the researcher helped the participants in filling the questionnaires.

In this way, the risk of errors concerning the different interpretation of the questions, the incapacity of understanding them and the absence of honesty by the participants was avoided [37]. This issue constitutes a basic advantage of the interview method against questionnaires, since the researcher can control the reactions of each participant [38–40]. Regarding the type of interview, the results are of higher quality when an in-depth interview is exploited [41], in relation to telephone or electronic interviews. For this reason, the use of in-depth interviews is recommended if there are no time restrictions or restrictions regarding the research budget [39,41].

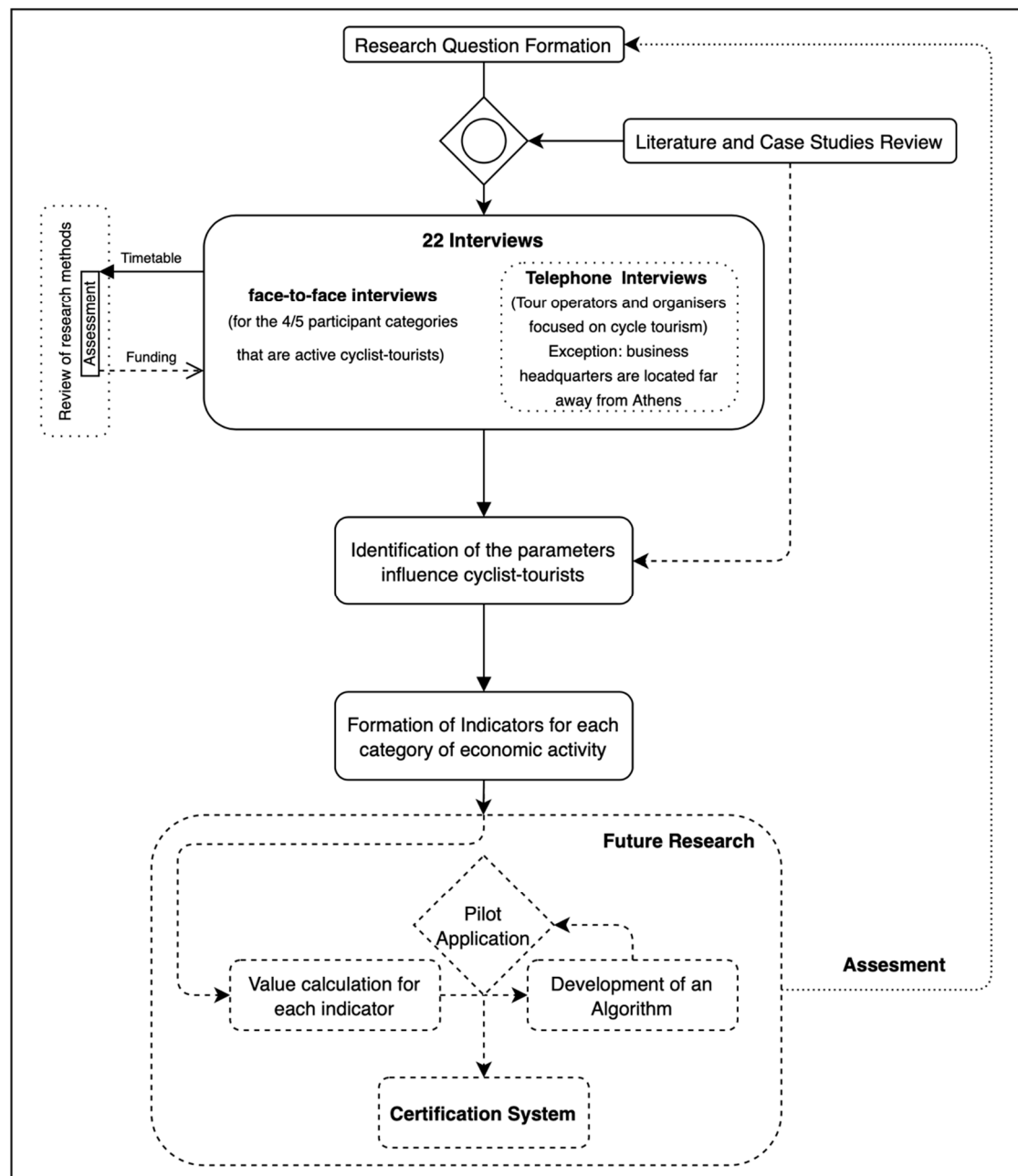


Figure 1. Methodological framework. Source: Own elaboration.

For the selection of the participants, the cycle-tourists categories were evaluated, as they were come up by related research [34,42]. The cycle-tourists in Greece are expected to be interested in certified bike-friendly businesses, such as Do it Yourself (DIY) cycling tourism and recreational cycling businesses. The following population groups fall into this category:

- Experienced cyclists from abroad engaged in DIY cycle-tourism and recreational tourism.
- Experienced and inexperienced cyclists from abroad engaged in DIY cycling tourism and short duration recreational tourism.
- Experienced and inexperienced Greek cyclists engaged in DIY cycling tourism and short duration recreational tourism.
- Experienced Greek cyclists engaged in long-duration cycle-tourism.

Due to the fact that cycle-tour operators and excursion organizers may be interested in such a certification, it was necessary to include people from this specific sector in the sample of the participants in the research. Because of the fact that members falling into the specific population group live and work not only in Athens but also elsewhere in Greece, the interviews with those people took place by telephone, for reasons of limitation of the research cost.

For finding the participants in the first four categories, the research group addressed two groups interested in cycle-tours. The selection of the sample took place with the “snowball sampling” method that secures a friendly attitude during the interviews [43]. This method is based on the fact that each respondent recommends the next participant [43–45]. The optimum number of interviews is obtained when the “theoretical saturation” is achieved, namely when the new interviews do not add new information to the already acquired [43,45]. The duration of the in-depth interviews ranged between 30 min and two hours. The duration of the telephone interviews was shorter since it ranged between 20 and 60 min.

In total, 22 interviews were conducted (6 women and 16 men) with people who do cycle-tourism and belong to the age range of 35–65 years old. This spectrum represents the social profile of the most active people in cycle-tourism.

The interview range of topics had been determined before their implementation and included a series of issues, like the motives for someone’s participation in a cycle-tour, the criteria for the selection of routes, the parameters affecting each criterion, the evaluation of the routes infrastructure and the convenience the cycle-tourists wish to have during their tour. From the research results presented in the following section, indexes arose aiming at the measurement of the grade of the importance of the parameters and future quantification of the quality information bearing upon the preferences of potential consumers.

4. Results

The results arising from the interviews designated the preferences of cycle-tourists. The economic activities that could encourage the cyclists to get involved in CIY cycling tourism and recreational cycling to interact with them do not necessarily fall into the touristic ones. With their moving speed and being in the countryside, the cyclists focus their interest more on general retail stores than on specialized ones. In small, remote, unexplored villages, there is often a small convenience store which also offers drinks and coffee, acting as meeting points for local people, traditionally men. During the interviews, it turned out that such places are of high importance for DIY cycle-tourists because there they can find supplies for the rest of their trip, information about a place of interest, or accommodation to rest. It acts as the link between the “foreigner” (the cyclist) and the local people and culture. Cyclists feel that through those shops, they really explore local tradition.

“The traditional coffee shop is the alpha and omega in a small village or town, because there you learn what’s happening in the village! Everything! The case is usually that there is a coffee shop and there is nothing else. Nothing! Or you can’t find even this small store and then you have to find whose home is the “coffee shop” of the village. (. . .) If there is a coffee shop, then you will find five things, it goes together, there is no coffee shop without a convenience store built inside . . . ”

Cyclist, Interview No 10

From conventional economic activities, the ones that interest them the most are:

- Retail shops (convenience stores, corner shops, fruits and vegetables, bakeries, supermarkets, etc.), since they are useful for the cheap resupply of the cyclists, who have additional motives for visiting them if: (a) They allow to put their bicycle in the shop or park it in an area with visual contact, (b) provide infrastructure (even minimum one) for repairing usual bicycle malfunctions, (c) sell food useful to cyclists (dry food with energy and protein and hydrating food), (d) have clean toilets, (e) sell local products, (f) provide information about sights and events on the local level and (g) have free wi-fi connection.

“A bike-friendly café? (It should provide) Bike stands of good quality and the necessary cycling infrastructure. Concerning nutrition, it should provide cyclists with all the necessary alimentation (hydrating and dry food) in order to cope with cycling. It would also be nice to be a thematic café focused on cycling in order to be really bike-friendly. (. . .) In case shopkeepers behave in a non-bike-friendly way, tourists are expelled. Someone visited a café and there was no place to park her bike. She never visited this café again”

Cyclist, Interview No 7

“Apart from (cycling and parking) infrastructure, (. . .) I want to have “real” local lunch! I want to eat something that locals usually eat at their homes: Their bread, their cheese. Don’t kid me: I don’t want you to sell me something expensive that is not a traditional product”

Cyclist, Interview No 12

“(I need) Information about museums, places of tourist interest, archeological site, wine festival, beer festival, public day, carnival, photographs of interesting places”

Cyclist, Interview No 17

- Catering services, such as restaurants, taverns, fast foods, coffee shops, snack bars and confectioneries since, apart from the possibility for cyclists to buy products, it is possible for them to rest. The visit motives in such stores by the cyclists are referring to a series of issues, similar to the ones presented in the previous bullet point.
- Accommodation like hotels, hostels, cottages, cabins, and camping. Parameters taken into consideration by DIY cyclists for the selection of accommodation are the following: (a) Provision of traditional local food, (b) provision of sightseeing information, natural formations, events and weather, (c) free wi-fi connection, (d) possibility for maintaining the bicycle and temporary stay of the bicycle at the hotel, (e) non-imposition of the minimum number of overnight stays, (f) possibility to wash the bicycle, (g) offer of proper breakfast (rich in calories and proteins) early in the morning, (h) specialized services, like transportation of luggage, possibility of renting a bicycle and organization of a bicycle-tour in interest locations, (i) provision of services for relaxing and body recovery, (j) operation during a period longer than the usual high season, during the summer months.

“Emphasis is given to local food”

Cyclist, Interview No 2

“Wifi is a human right (. . .)! A mobile phone is also a map”

Cyclist, Interview No 4

“Bike-friendly hotel gives you the opportunity to park your bike at the hotel. (. . .) This means to keep it in a room or a garage. It is also important to know if there are any tools or even spare parts. Maybe, it is not possible for a hotel to provide many of them, but some of them can be found. (. . .) It would be nice if a bicycle retail shop is located close to the hotel”

Cyclist, Interview No 4

- Bicycle retail shops for the purchase of spare parts and accessories. These shops should be certified, since a large part of the participants in the study underline that those who occupy themselves with cycle-tourism tend to use expensive bicycles. Thus, they are interested in the provision of certified services.

“In case you ride your own bike, it is important to find a bicycle retail shop. I need to know that I can find someone that can repair my bike or even spare parts and accessories. In another case (do not ride your own bike), it is necessary to find a place from which you can rent a good bike”

Cyclist, Interview No 2

“You don’t need a toolkit, but information about the nearest bike shop”

Cyclist, Interview No 17

- Bicycle renting services since the inexperienced cyclists are not expected to have the proper equipment for the routes they wish to visit. Besides, sometimes the transportation of the bicycle from the cyclist’s home to the destination he/she may be interested in visiting is not affordable. Indeed, experienced cyclists are interested in renting expensive bicycles, and for this reason, they look for shops that provide high-quality services.
- Sports equipment retail shops where cyclists can buy cycling items.

“You may need sports clothes. You never know when you need new leggings”

Cyclist, Interview No 8

Finally, a critical point seemed to be land transportation, like railway and bus lines, as well as maritime transport for people. Referring to the specific services, cycle-tourists are interested in the transportation of the bicycle, if possible, without having to take it apart and reassemble it after disembarking.

Taking all the above into consideration (stores, economic activities, in general, in which cycle-tourists are interested and the criteria based on which they select each business or service), various indexes were organized (Table 2) for the evaluation of these activities. Each index evaluates the different parameters that arose from the interviews, under the spectrum of literature review. It is worth mentioning that the indexes are not common for any type of shop or service, since, as previously shown, the criteria evaluated by the cycle-tourists for each category of economic activity differ. Their organization takes place in six partial categories: (a) Retail trade, (b) catering services, (c) accommodation, (d) rental activities, (e) bicycle repair services, and (f) land transportation. As seen in Table 2, the index applying to all categories refers to the possibility of information provision. The index referring to the operation period of each enterprise (seasonality) applies almost to all the categories. Indexes like the possibility of small-scale bicycle repairs, the relation of the enterprise with the local identity and the possibility of internet use, follow. Finally, common indexes to two categories are those referring to the possibility of entry and supervision of the bicycles as well as the existence of guarantee of the provided services.

Table 2. Indicators for assessing how cycle-friendly companies are. Source: Own elaboration.

a/a	Indicator	Types of companies					
		Retail Trade	Catering Services	Accommodation	Rental Activities	Bicycle Repair Services	Land Transportation
1	Information Provision	+	+	+	+	+	+
2	Operation Period (Seasonality)	+	+	+	+	+	
3	Possibility of Bike Repairs (small scale)	+	+	+			
4	Local Identity	+	+	+			
5	Wi-Fi Connection/ Information on Weather Conditions	+	+	+			
6	Entry/Supervision of the Bicycles	+	+				
7	Supplies	+	+				
8	Warranty	+				+	
9	Proper Cyclist Menu		+				
10	Breakfast			+			
11	Clean Toilets		+				
12	Bicycle Storage			+			
13	Bicycle Wash			+			
14	Services for Cyclists			+			
15	Physical (body) Care			+			
16	Bicycle Transport						+
17	Freedom of (residence) Choice			+			
18	Variety of (rental) Services				+		

The 18 indexes presented in Table 2, arose through the investigation of various parameters evaluated through questions placed for each parameter. Table 3 presents the index calculation method for the retail trade category. An analogous philosophy for the compilation of the indexes is evaluated in the remaining categories.

Table 3. Questions used in order to quantify the indicators available for commercial companies. Source: Own elaboration.

a/a	Indicator	Questions	Answer
1	Entry/Supervision of the bicycles	Are bikes allowed in the store? Or Is there any temporary cycle parking space, which will be visible in order for the owner/customer to supervise her/his bike during her/his stay at the store?	Yes
		Is there any temporary cycle parking space, even if it is not possible for the owner/customer to supervise her/his bike, during her/his stay at the store (each time)?	Yes
		None of the above applies?	Yes
2	Possibility of bike repairs (small scale)	Is there any infrastructure available for repairing common bicycle damage (i.e., bicycle inner tube, kit)?	Yes
		Is there any toolbox available?	No
3	Supplies	Is food useful for cyclists (dry food, food providing them with energy and hydration) for sale? (Shops selling bicycles, accessories, and sport equipment are excluded. For the latter, the only obligation refers to offering cycling clothes)	Yes, variety of choices Yes, 1–2 alternatives No
		Is the store open all year?	Yes
		Is the store open from the 25th of March until the 28th of October, at least?	Yes
4	Operation Period (Seasonality)	None of the above applies?	Yes
		Are any local products for sale? (Shops selling bicycles, accessories, and sport equipment are excluded)	Yes, variety of choices Yes, 1–2 alternatives No
		Can cycle-tourists ask for information (in English) about places and sights of interest in the wider area? Or Are the employees able to suggest cycle routs? Or Are the employees able to inform cycle-tourists about customs or events?	Yes No
7	Wi-Fi Connection/ Information on weather conditions	Is there any free wi-fi connection available? Or Are the employees able to inform cyclist-tourists about weather conditions?	Yes No
		Can cycle-tourists buy certified spare parts with a warranty? (Applies only to shops selling bicycles and accessories)	Yes, variety of choices Yes, 1–2 alternatives No

5. Conclusions

The aim of this paper is the detection of the parameters affecting cycle-tourists in order to select the businesses from which they will be served during their cycling excursions in Greece. For conducting

the research, the possible clients of a future business certification system were determined, namely those who occupy themselves with DIY cycle-tourism and recreational cycling.

The method of in-depth face-to-face interviews was exploited in this wide group in order to investigate their particular needs. It was confirmed that the same needs existing in other countries, for which studies have been published, apply also to Greece. At the same time, some particular services arose, which could hardly be detected by literature, if the specific methods of social research had not been followed, which puts emphasis on the production of knowledge and not its verification.

Regarding the detection of the businesses, an interesting conclusion of the research is that the businesses for which cyclists are interested in are not necessarily the “touristic”. Cyclists wish to move to isolated areas in order to meet new people and to come in more direct contact with nature. In these areas, every business commercial activity or service, as small scale as it may be, can prove to be useful. Thus, each retail trade business could contribute to the promotion of cycle-tourism and benefit from it.

In Greece, small, unexplored villages are the favorite destination of cycle-tourists. They offer what is missing from conventional touristic places: Authenticity, real communication with local people, in-depth interaction with local culture and tradition. Traditional coffee-shops acting as meeting points and convenience stores for local people are interestingly an important place cycle-tourists seek to find. These stores in non-touristic places could gain the most by their cycle-friendly certification, a finding enriching knowledge about how cycling tourism could foster development in remote territories [29].

Local origin was often mentioned by cyclists as an admired characteristic of products and services offered to them, although not bike-specific. Cyclists spend time and energy to escape from a conventional lifestyle, the absence of motor noise allows them to hear and to smell, they also want to taste the place they are visiting. Cyclists search for local products to learn about local culture. It seems that cycling certification goes hand by hand with the certification of local products, thus fostering local economic development.

The connection between cycling tourism and local culture was brought to the forefront with the research methodology applied.

For the conventional touristic business of the tourism sector, and the business offering accommodation and catering services, a detailed list of the services that would be useful for the development of cycle-tourism was compiled. Besides the above-mentioned activities and services, they do not differ significantly from what is known in the cycle-tourism literature [13,15,24,32–35]. Cyclists want to safeguard their bicycles, to be able to repair it, to find information about cycling routes and places of interest, to find food, water and energy drinks along their route, to rest in a place offering cyclist-specific services.

These services constitute indexes for the evaluation of the businesses in order to be awarded the title of a bike-friendly store or service. This title is expected to be awarded through the certification system, which is already under development.

Our goal is to make all those indexes measurable. Only in that way could the system operate with automated procedures. The rating of each parameter is expected to contribute to the development of an algorithm, which will permit the easy classification of a business into the above two categories. The procedure for the development of an algorithm constitutes the object of future research, which is pioneering for Greek standards. Besides, the development of such a certification system is expected to constitute the basis as much for the evaluation of the system as for its improvement by adding or removing parameters.

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