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Urban Dynamics and Networking in Coastal Cities -The case of tourism

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Land use and Water Management in a Sustainable Network Society

**URBAN DYNAMICS AND NETWORKING IN COASTAL CITIES: THE CASE
OF TOURISM**

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ABSTRACT

Traditionally coastal cities had a role as trading ports or gates of entry connecting the hinterland other parts of the world or the country, and acting as points of departure or arrival for goods and people. Trade and industry, were the spine of the economy for many years and a network was created between ports and coastal cities in order to move people (workforce), goods, and materials. Tourism is a dynamic spontaneous phenomenon, which creates opportunities for many coastal cities to participate in a different network of exchange. Tourism is considered an activity that does not create networks in the traditional sense but as mobility increases information and familiarity could pose as a new kind of connection between coastal cities. This paper aims to explore the structure and dynamics of such a network at an inter-intra regional level. The focus is on coastal cities since they are very popular tourism destinations and they account for the majority of visits in Europe. Reference will be made to the Greek middle size coastal cities since many of their traditional activities are degrading, they already attract a large number of visitors and they provide the opportunity for regeneration through tourism. The paper will be based on a questionnaire survey of visitors conducted during the summer months (June-August 2003) in Volos a middle size coastal city in Greece. The questionnaire is part of a broader survey of tourism in Volos aiming to explore tourism characteristics, flows and to evaluate the tourism product of the city. This network relationship will be examined in terms of complementary and competition and the impacts on city-region relations. Finally the policy implications and the potential for expanding and planning this network in order to contribute and promote sustainable development of coastal cities will be explored.

KEY WORDS: urban networks, coastal cities, tourism networks, tourism.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this paper is to explore to which extent network potential exist amongst Greek coastal cities. Tourism will be considered as the main activity that will be analysed concerning its network creating potentials. Finally the theoretical hypothesis will be tested against data collected during a survey of tourism in Volos. Firstly, networks will be discussed and explained in their traditional structure and a connection will be made between coastal cities and more importantly ports and traditional networks. The special emphasis will be on the EU and the changing relations and competition status between countries, regions and cities. Finally tourism will be deconstructed in order to define the basic concepts that could allow for a potential network to be created and the characteristics this network.

NETWORKING PRINCIPLES

In the last few years we have witnessed important developments in the process of European integration as well as dramatic changes in the structure of Europe as a whole. As we have recently witnessed yet another enlargement, it is safe to say that the scene is not static and development, changes, will continue to happen. We are living in a Europe of very strong interrelationships where boarder regions and cities are called upon to play a new role in a continuously changing relative geography (Chamis, Fox, 1993). Peripheral member states are depending upon transportation networks and infrastructure of their neighbouring countries. Greece depends on Italy in relation to sea transport across the Adriatic, Portugal depends on Spain for the development of road and rail connections, Ireland depends on the UK for access to the channel tunnel and to the core of Europe as we know it today.

Apart from the obvious transportation networks; an interesting new development in the EU is the establishment of co-operation networks between cities at a European level (Chamis, Fox, 1993). The development of urban networks has been used as a policy instrument to built alliances, exchange knowledge and save resources, take advantage of scale economies, develop common markets, and exploit complementarities, which are all part of the new trend of internationalised policies (Pyrgiotis, 1991). According to the

recent ESDP, urban networks are advocated as a means of securing polycentric and balanced spatial development rather than concentration in a few mega-urbanisation belts (Kratke, 2001). The overall aim of urban networking is to achieve synergistic advantages by way of developing co-operation and division of labour and income between cities or urban regions (CSD/BSR, 2001). At first networks of co-operation occurred between cities in adjacent regions within the same country and soon expanded to include adjacent regions in neighbouring countries (Chamis, Fox, 1993). Geographical proximity may at first acted as a trigger for co-operation and complementation between cities and regions, but it is not a precondition for networking as long as they share common interests, common problems and potentially common opportunities. Traditionally networks, as opposed to centralised hierarchical systems, had a major advantage and a major problem as well. Networks are more flexible and adaptable forms of organisation, able to evolve with their environment and with the development of the cities that participate in it. Still by definition networks do not have one centre, they decentre performance and opportunities and they share decision-making. This creates a problem in co-ordinating actions, focusing resources and beyond an “optimum” size managing complexity (Castells, 2000). This concept of polycentricity has at least three meanings in the context of European spatial planning and regional geography.

- *At the scale of Europe as a whole* (inter-regional), the possibility of developing multiple dynamic growth zones across Europe (see figure 1), to challenge the tendencies for a strong core region to which other parts of the territory are peripheral. In this context, South East England, for example, as well as Northern Italy are generally positioned as part of the existing dynamic growth core.
- *At the scale of the territory* (intra-regional), the situation where there are multiple urban centres, often interconnected, rather than a single dominant centre. In Europe, examples of this type are the Randstadt in the Netherlands and the Rhine region in Germany, in contrast to the Paris region or to Southern England which is focused around the core of London.
- *At the scale of the urban agglomeration* (intra-urban). This refers to the multiplicity of nodal points within large urban areas, which challenge traditional notions of cities focused around their city centres. This situation is common in

large formerly industrial conurbations, as in the Ruhr area or in many large cities in UK, it is also observed in touristy rivieras along the Italian or Spanish coasts.

The concern of this paper following the ESDP, is primarily with the first and second meanings of polycentricity. At a European level, the emphasis is upon identifying potentials for promoting multiple growth zones. As proposed by the ESDP, this model should be pursued across the whole EU territory “to ensure regionally balanced development, and create global economy integration zones” (ESDP, 1999, para. 67). At the scale of territory, the focus is on developing these in such a way, that benefits spread out from key nodes within a region to other parts. Within this context, intra-regional polycentricity is understood as a form of “settlement structure” which is characterised by “a graduated city-ranking” (ESDP, 1999, para.71). Thus, for the ESDP, promoting polycentricity is a major *policy aim* at the European scale whilst at the same time it is a key *policy tool* at the intra-regional scale. It is in this context that the challenge of identifying the potentials for a polycentric network of coastal cities using tourism as their main functional activity, forms one of the key objectives of this paper.

COASTAL CITIES, DYNAMICS AND TRENDS

This paper focuses mainly on coastal cities, based on the hypothesis that they present a separate category that has shared common developmental characteristics in the past and, similar problems and opportunities. A brief presentation of the current state of coastal cities is necessary in order to identify those specific characteristics and the potential for the creation a new type of network in order to address some of the main problems of coastal cities. Coastal cities are large urban centres with over 20,000 people. The population of these cities is generally increasing because they provide easy access to oceans, rivers, beaches and other natural areas and are a good source for raw material and food. In addition they provide good access to jobs, employment, housing and via the port access to a wider market.

In the Mediterranean area in general and Greece in particular, coastal cities play a very important role as they account along with the broader coastal zone for more than

50% of the total population. Coastal population grew from 85 million in 1980 to 124 million in the year 2000 (Trumbic, 2003), an increase much higher than any other non-coastal part of the Mediterranean. Overpopulation and concentration of people in the coastal zone is one of the most important pressure factors faced by Mediterranean countries since many resources, natural habitats and estuaries are also located in the coastal zone. The number of coastal settlements with more than 10,000 inhabitants doubled from 1950 to 1995 and urbanisation of the coastal zone has reached 65%. Apart from permanent residents, the Mediterranean coastline is one of the most popular tourism destinations accounting for 33% of the world's international tourism.

Urbanisation and accommodation of constantly more people in the coastal zone on the one hand, and on the other human activities and tourism pose a threat for the environment. Tourism has been considered a mild intervention but in the Mediterranean basin it is a core economic activity that has taken the size of an industry, increasing the pressure on coastal areas, since sea-sand-sun tourism is very popular. Therefore it becomes clear that urban development and tourism development require special attention in order to achieve sustainability ensure future development. Attempts to put the principles of sustainable development into practice have led to a variety of alliances and partnerships during the recent years (Hartman et al., 1999).

NETWORKING IN COASTAL CITIES

Throughout history, cities have been the centres of creativity and innovation and the marketplace for the exchange of ideas, goods and services. Coastal cities in particular had the advantage of sea trade and transport and they were mainly developed as ports. Coastal cities develop tangible and intangible linkages both with their hinterland but also with national and international markets. The success and viability of many cities depended upon their capacity to maintain and extend their networks in order to broaden their reach and become the economic centre of their region.

To the same extend that the significance of the internal and external network system is being discussed, research should also be devoted to the urban system itself beyond the individual urban region. Cities today should be seen as a system of competing centres of location and as a system of hierarchic relationships and

consequentially, urban economic analysis must be integrated both in regional and in a larger scale framework (Kratke, 1993). Issues of competition are very important in identifying the willingness of cities to co-operate and share information, decision-making and most importantly resources and benefits. It is doubtful if in a network-like mode of action it is possible to base strategic planning on shared vision and shared will, if reciprocal interests are not taken into account (Sotarauta, Linnamaa, 1998).

Coastal cities have been playing the role of nodes in this polycentric system for many years. The development and economic prosperity of coastal cities was imputed to their geographical location and their ability to develop their networking and trade through the sea. Volos in particular has one of the most important ports in Greece and has a strong industrial legacy. As it happened in many cities though throughout Europe, Volos faced a rapid de-industrialisation phase leading to acute problems of urban and economic decline. The economy in coastal cities faces a shift towards the service sector and more specifically tourism. The challenge now becomes to use all the available assets of the urban environment and focus on the development of the new economic activity. Coastal cities are more open to co-operation and networking is a practice that has proven beneficial for the previous economic activity therefore it becomes very important to explore the potential of using a network-like approach for the development of tourism as well.

TOURISM AS A NETWORKING ACTIVITY

As we have seen previously, networks based on trade, industry, transportation or even organisations are a fairly common practice. Tourism is an emerging economic activity that has been steadily gaining ground in the de-industrialised era. In the Mediterranean region especially, many of the tourism researchers are arguing, that it has taken the size of an industry (Hall, Page, 1999), therefore it becomes very important to examine its characteristics in order to determine whether it provides the conditions to create a network. Tourism is a volatile phenomenon subject to changing fashions and fads. Most studies have tried to explain the motives behind visiting a specific place and to create a typology of destinations based on the preconceptions of the destination. Furthermore, most tourism studies categorise tourists according to their socio-economic

characteristics (captives, young adventurers, families, retired etc.), according to reason for visiting (visits to friends and relatives, business, Holidays etc.) and finally according to the main activity tourists engage in, while on holidays (sea-sand-sun, business, cultural visits etc.) (ETB, 1998). The outcome of such an analysis leads to the conclusion that as tourist become more mobile and independent it is very difficult to identify common patterns of behaviour on which a network could be based. It appears that tourism can only create organisational networks of firms and investors with an emphasis on actors from the market-private sector since the supporting services of tourism accommodation and leisure are also activities governed to a large extent by private initiatives. In traditional markets success is based upon competing and overcoming all other competitors, where this idea of co-operation and complementary relation through networking, has to be tested and is not immediately accepted.

Tourism destinations and especially successful ones have been traditionally competing for the higher spending longer staying visitors and for a larger share of the tourism market. It was touristically underdeveloped regions that first realised the potential gain of co-operation and region marketing instead of specific destination marketing and have promoted many cities as dormitories in order to visit the wider region (eg. seaside resorts in Britain after a long period of decline changed their marketing policy in order to increase the number of nights spent in the resort) (Vrassida, 2000). This new shift creates a wider destination area (in many cases even outside the strict borders of one region) which includes many sub-destinations. New ideas about place marketing are trying to change the competitive legacy of tourism and the narrow borders of a destination by promoting certain places as a base in order to visit the wider region. The outcome of this new approach is to promote intraregional co-operation/interregional competition. Already this new marketing formation is starting to develop a complementary relation between the sub-destination, and a shared decision making process, which is the basic function of a network. Therefore we can say that tourism has indeed created a connection between cities in the same region and has promoted a shared- common marketing policy for many destinations with proximity playing the most important role.

Proximity has been considered a prerequisite for the creation of a networking relation for many years, but there is recently a change in the logic of space. The

traditional way of articulating space as places is being complemented by a new dynamic of interactions, nodes and polycentricity, thus creating a space of flows. Tourism as an activity is based on travelling from one place to another. Therefore a traveller represents a connection, a link between two nodes the place of origin and the destination. In a networked system no node is more important than another but nodes increase their importance by absorbing more information or resources and processing it more efficiently (Castells, 2000). Applying that to tourism, we can see that we have two nodes and the flow of information between them acts as a catalyst in deciding for or against visiting a specific destination. The importance of information networks for tourism is fairly obvious since no one visits a place they don't know about and marketing and advertising a destination has been widely accepted as means for increasing tourism.

Expanding on this thought, tourism is by definition an activity that has a place of origin, a destination and a route connecting the two places. Increased mobility has shortened and constrained the route depending on the available or preferred, means of transportation. In organized tourism where everything is pre-arranged by a tour operator who already has all the information, it is very easy to follow that route and determine a link between the place of origin, major attractions along the route if there are any, and finally the destination. As tourists become more sophisticated, they tend to arrange their own travel plan based on their desires, experiences, constraints and information and tracking of this route becomes extremely difficult. Independent tourists are more flexible in their travel plan, and there is always the potential for the plan to change dynamically as they enrich themselves with experiences and information along the way. As advertising and the word of mouth are the main information sources and as we accept that there are destinations with a similar tourism product, a hypothesis is made that a network could be created. This new type of network will be initiated by the information flow and advertising of destinations not in the place of origin but in destinations offering a similar tourism experience (similar tourism product). While choosing a destination, a tourist takes under consideration many parameters and even the reminiscence of a previous successful trip. It is important for any network attempt to be able to communicate to the tourist which destinations will provide the same or similar experience. By that we mean that contrary to most popular tourism studies, the

emphasis is not on assessing the contribution of tourism to the local economy. The emphasis is on understanding what information or experience or memory a tourist gets from his/her destination. The popular question is inverted placing visitors at the centre of attention and looking at a destination (a place) as an active member in the whole tourism process. Instead of trying to assess the contribution of the tourist to the local economy the emphasis is on analysing what experience, information or memory the local community provides for the tourist and how much this affects the choice of a future destination.

Communication and information is very important for the development of tourism and at the same time sharing this information between destinations becomes equally important for the creation of a network system. Participants in dialogue may build a sense of shared identity as part of a system or community, and a changed identity of their own in the process. We do not build our identities as isolated individuals, but as people or groups in a context and a community (Booher, Innes, 2001). In a broader sense, accepting destinations that are co-operating as the participants in the dialogue, they could promote a shared identity as part of a network of common experiences with similar tourism product for example cities of culture or cities of sport. Another very important aspect is that this dialogue and the establishment of co-operation needs to happen not only between cities. Communication should also happen between potential visitor both in the place of origin and the destination place, in the hope that when they leave they will have enough information that will motivate a future visit to one of the other cities in the network.

CASE STUDY

The hypothesis from the theoretical review is that tourism can indeed create a new type of network between destination that will be based on similar experience and information flow between destinations with coastal cities presenting a good opportunity. In order to test this hypothesis, a survey of visitors in one Greek coastal city was completed. The results of the survey were then analysed against widely accepted destination typologies, in an attempt to define which destinations offer a common tourism experience and whether this information can influence tourism choices.

As understanding and analysing tourism has become increasingly important, many local authorities, private organisations, global organisations, have tried to quantify tourism through the collection of numerous statistical data. The first step in managing urban tourism is to determine the target group of the city (by collecting demographic data of the tourists) and then to determine the tourism flows within the city. Surveys of visitors are a common practice in tourism research and provide information about the characteristics and travel behaviour of visitors to a destination (DCMS, 1999). On the other hand, when attempting to get information on tendency to visit a place, the questionnaire surveys were conducted in the place of origin and were circulated to residents (ETB, 1998). This method although very popular, could not provide accurate results due to the fact that people in their homes mostly answer based on their preconception of their potential destination. Such surveys provide information concerning the travel patterns and behaviour of residents, thus examining the link between their home city and the destination.

This study is part of a wider tourism survey in Volos a middle-size coastal city in Greece, which was completed in two phases; the first set during the summer months and the second during the winter months, by the Environmental Planning Lab of the University of Thessaly. The questionnaire that was designed can be separated in two sections where the first is a “typical” questionnaire for visitors designed according to the principals mentioned above, in order to get information on the characteristics of visitors, flows, and behaviour. The second section of the questionnaire that will be used in this paper aims to identify which other place (apart from Volos) would tourists choose to visit and how does this relate to their initial choice of destination which is the coastal city of Volos. Collecting information on tendency to visit from tourist, contradicts the usual methodology which focuses on residents. This was done intentionally because we are not trying to examine the link between place of origin and destination. The advantage in asking tourist about future visits is that their answer is already enriched by the experience of their current destination and they have already been informed by their current destination. The aim of this study is to examine where this new experience and information leads them next, which in turn will present the link between destinations.

RESULTS

In total 206 useable questionnaires were collected in five areas of tourist concentration in the city (train station, port, museum, two hotels). As a result 44 places were identified by the sample as potential destinations for a future trip. Although only 15 of these destinations are coastal cities they account for 125 potential visits or 61% of the sample.

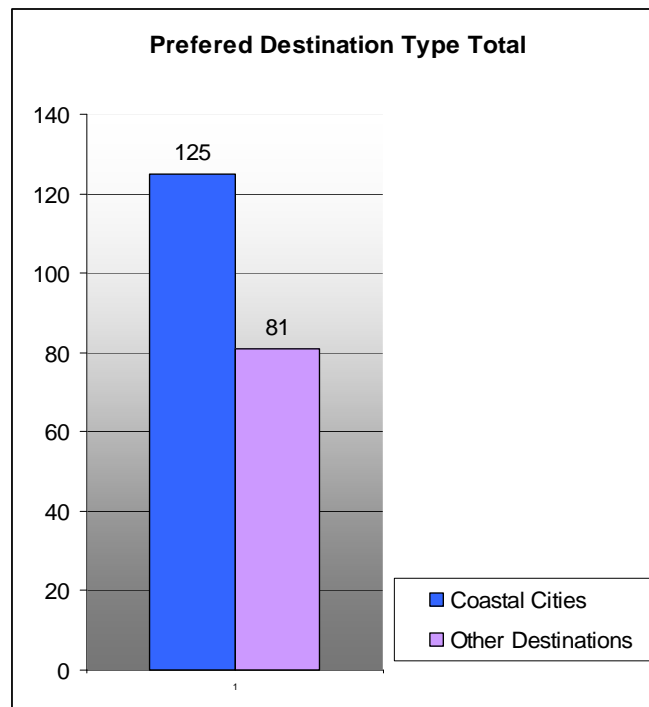


Diagram 1: Preference of coastal destination by the majority of the sample including both winter and summer results

The immediate assumption is that people who visit coastal cities have a tendency to prefer coastal destinations. Although this is obvious from the results and can act as a basis for discussion, it is still very general and no network can be created and be functional on such a loose categorisation and broad inclusion of cities.

Comparing the data of summer questionnaires to the data collected during winter, very little difference was found in the tendency to visit a coastal city. As we can see in diagram 1, tourists in their majority chose a coastal city as an alternative destination regardless of the time of year that they were asked. One of the major problems of tourism as an economic activity so far has been its seasonal nature, especially in destination where the tourism product is thought to be sea-sand-sun. Coastal cities do

not present a characteristic example since they combine the element of sea and attraction to the water element but they can also be categorised under urban tourism destinations. Tourism in coastal cities (urban coastal tourism) is not as dependant on the weather as resorts tourism, it is closely tied to national holidays (extended weekends) and it involves less overnight stays.

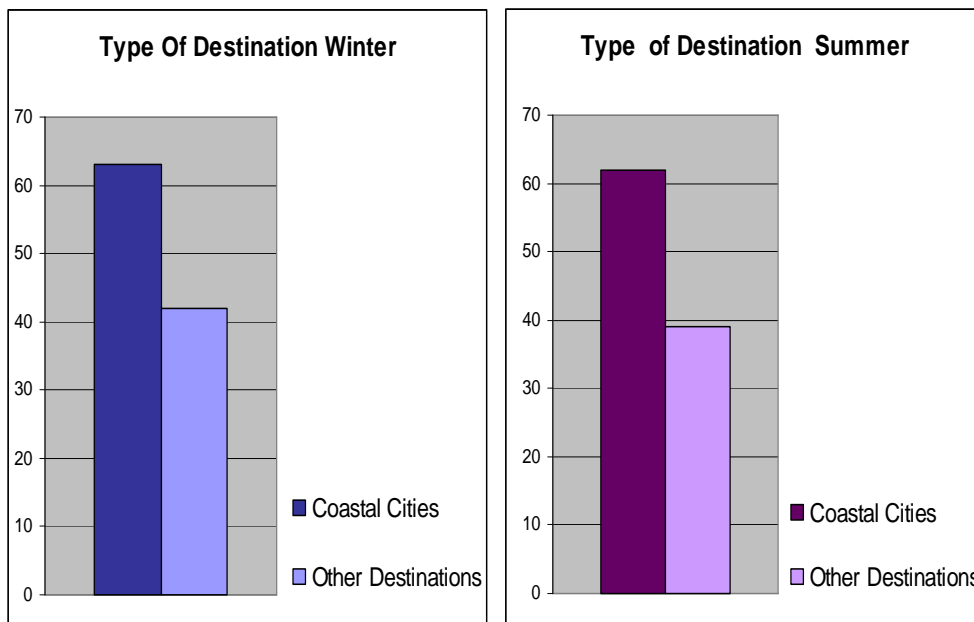


Diagram 2: Preference of coastal destinations analysed separately for winter and summers results

Volos is a coastal city of 120.000 people, with a unique natural and built environment. It is a city where the mountain meets the sea situated on the roots of mountain Pelion inside the Pagasitikos gulf. The city’s plan follows a grid with a long waterfront promenade, two major axis parallel to the coastline and two vertical axis leading to the mountain. The city is situated half way between Athens and Thessaloniki with good road access. Within and hour drive from the city one can find the ski resort of Hania, many beaches for swimming, mountain walks, archaeological sites and traditional villages, or using the flying dolphins one can choose to visit the north sporades islands. Based on the first section of the questionnaire where tourist identified the major attraction and activities in the city, and this brief description of the city, an

attempt was made to categorise the preferred destinations according to the offered experience. A set of initial indicators was defined against which preferences will be tested. These indicators are still very broad but were intentionally that way due to the nature of tourism, which is a multi-purpose activity and cannot, in most cases, be narrowed down to one specific attraction or one specific activity.

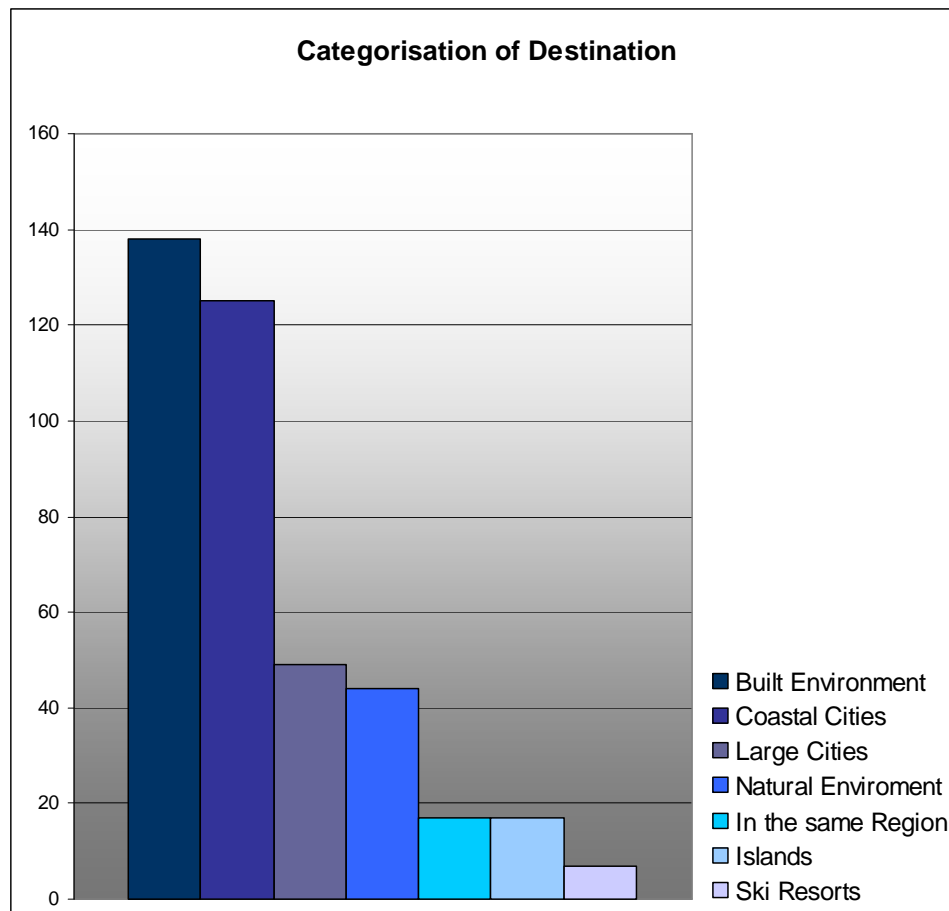


Diagram 3: Categorisation of tourism destinations according to major tourism attraction in Volos

As we can see in diagram 3, cities with an exceptional built environment are mostly preferred by tourist followed closely by coastal cities. It is worth mentioning that within the destinations with an exceptional built environment only one is not coastal, and many destinations are coastal but they have less than 10.000 inhabitants therefore they do not account as cities.

NETWORK POTENTIALS IN GREEK COASTAL CITIES

As the results indicate, there are patterns of behaviour that can be identified within tourists and these can indeed act as the basis for the creation of a new type of network. Rather than networks being caused by geographic proximity they are means of overcoming distance and the cost-benefits of local networks compared to non-local networks may indicate that local networks are not as efficient (Sorensen, 2002). Information, common experience and what is often mentioned in urban fabric analysis as “sense of place” can act as strong links between destinations. This new type of network will not be based on a physical link of exchanging product, labour or services as much as it will initially start as a system of complementary choices.

Still the main function of a network which is to share decision-making, evenly allocate resources and alleviate disparities will provide benefits to all the cities participating in it. Complementary destinations can act as all-year round destination providing an answer to one of the major problems of tourism. Careful planning and acknowledgement of the network can initiate mechanisms to protect destinations from being over-exploited and exceeding their carrying capacity and on the other hand a planned allocation of tourist can help control the segment of the market that each destination is accommodating (higher spending, longer staying, etc.).

Apparently, recognising common characteristics and potentials between cities does not result in the development of co-operation, collaboration or common policy networks just like that. Networking will increase the tourism market and the economic benefits with an ultimate goal to share them within the region, but places and destinations will continue to compete. Networking is not minimizing competition, but it works in a parallel way in order to develop some level of co-operation as well. Destinations will co-operate to attract a more and higher spending tourism but they will compete for the larger proportion of the market. There are a number of constraints in the development of such networks even though the benefits may seem obvious. A clear starting point for this lies in the analysis of the current political, institutional, cultural and spatial context of coastal cities their local and regional administrations and the way these intervene with the development of a common supra-regional policy. Intra-regional relationships need to be defined and planned in a way that allows two-way co-operation,

and new flexible tools of governance need to be employed in order to overcome strict administrative borders and view space as a set of similar areas (where this is necessary) and not merely as a set of close areas.

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