

WEB PRESENCE ASSESSMENT OF FOKIDA'S INFRASTRUCTURE RELATED TO THE BUSINESS TOURISM

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Abstract

Greece is consistently among the most competitive countries in the field of tourism competitiveness, both throughout Europe and globally. The Greek Observatory for the Information Society analyzed the index of the tourism competitiveness (TTCI), focusing mainly on the Information Technology and Communication (ICT) infrastructure for tourism. The purpose of this study is to determine the meaning and dimensions of business tourism, the description of the current situation in the field of using ICT in hotels, focusing on online presence of tourism for business travelers and a case study of Regional Unit of Fokida.

Keywords: business tourism, Fokida, Greece, website.

1. INTRODUCTION

Business tourism (Davidson, 1994¹) is concerned with people travelling for purposes which are related to their work. As such it represents one of the oldest forms of tourism, man having travelled for this purpose of trade since very early times. Types of business tourism are:

- Conference tourism.
- Tourism to promote products.
- Business tourism.
- Exhibition and Conference Tourism.

Ian McNicoll (2004) states in details the characteristics of business tourism and its connection with the offer and demand, mentioning that these tourists may spend money for products that are not directly related to business tourism. On the other side, the business tourists add prestige to the tourist profile of their destination place.

Business tourism is almost always quality tourism². This category of tourists are always welcomed by local operators, because they are conscious and mature people who contribute to the economic development of their destination³, while their presence therein can be done at any period of the year and often out of the high season periods⁴.

On the part of tourism professionals, it is necessary to provide a minimum level of services and infrastructure⁵ and rudiment promotion accompanied by motives to select their destination at least by the business tourism organizers. If this is the minimum aim, however, is not always enough for a stable and enduring choice of destination, as for that high quality services are required accompanied by excellent quality of service⁶. Business tourism is often linked directly to the viability of the hotel clusters. The relationship between customer satisfaction and accommodation selection, regarding to business tourism, is reflected in several researches⁷. What we can observe in these researches is that business travelers require quality and are satisfied with services similar to their job status (e.g. secretarial support, use of workplaces, free use of internet connection).

Generally, business travelers are reliable judges of accommodations because they travel often and have diverse experience of destinations, infrastructures and services. They justifiably are strict judges with high demands, according to Dolnicar (2002).

1 Cited by Swarbrooke & Horner (2001).

2 For the claims of this paragraph, all information is retrieved from the website <http://www.iccaworld.com> and from the stage of Mrs Karvouni (2012).

3 Although sometimes the cost of a business trip is disproportionate to the financial capabilities of the traveler, though we accept without loss of generality that this group of travelers has the minimum required financial ability, which allows them to afford decent accommodation and qualitative food (where these costs are covered by the same), and also for other activities that accompany the traveler and can be combined with their needs (Karvouni, 2012).

4 Comparing to leisure tourists, who make extensive use of massive infrastructure at certain times, which are different for each region.

5 Business tourists will surely make use of benefits and services according to Kravaritis and Papageorgiou.

6 Watson (1992), Lewis (1993), Smith (1993), cited by Karvouni (2012).

7 Karvouni (2012) from p.21 and onwards.

2. GCI AND TTCI INDEXES

According to ICCA (HAPCO, 2015, www.iccaworld.com), Greece is an ideal destination for business tourism, as it has appropriate infrastructure complemented by natural beauty for parallel recreation. Supplementary, our country is not just a geographic area with many facilities and choices, but an attractive proposition for everyone.

GCI index (Global Competitiveness Index) ranks countries according to their competitiveness. The latest measurements (2014 – 2015) gave our country the 81st position in the world (among 144 countries).

TTCI index (Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Index), which is measured annually by the World Economic Forum, is composed of 14 indicators structured into four sections. TTCI is a subset of GCI.

The most recent reports of TTCI available on the website of the World Economic Forum (<http://bit.ly/1K49JxW>) for the year 2014-2015, ranks our country at the 31st place.

3. METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

In the context of this article, the case study was the Regional Unit of Fokida, in order for the business tourism infrastructures to be studied as to their web presence. The research of bibliography was focused on tourism websites benchmarks and a commonly accepted list was resulted including requirements, which a modern tourism website must meet.

A brief description of Fokida is followed, focused on elements that can push back or attract leisure and business tourism; a fact is that close to the county boundaries, tourism (leisure and business) struggles against tough opponents (e.g. Arachova, Nafaktos and highland Nafaktos, Lamia, Karpenissi, Patra and all the north coast of Peloponnese).

Next step was to choose websites of some hotels, using a simple and random search over the web; the main criterion was the hotels to be located in different places of the county. For each of these websites a positive or negative element was noted in an objective manner. Any quantitative scoring and ranking, which could be based on statistical functions, was knowingly avoided. It is rather a simple recording of which website criteria are met, even at minimum.

Regional Unit's infrastructure for professionals is listed, based on the data of the Hellenic Chamber of Hotels, as follows:

- hotels (5-3 star, first and second grade),
- convention centers and halls suitable for meetings,
- spiritual and cultural centers.

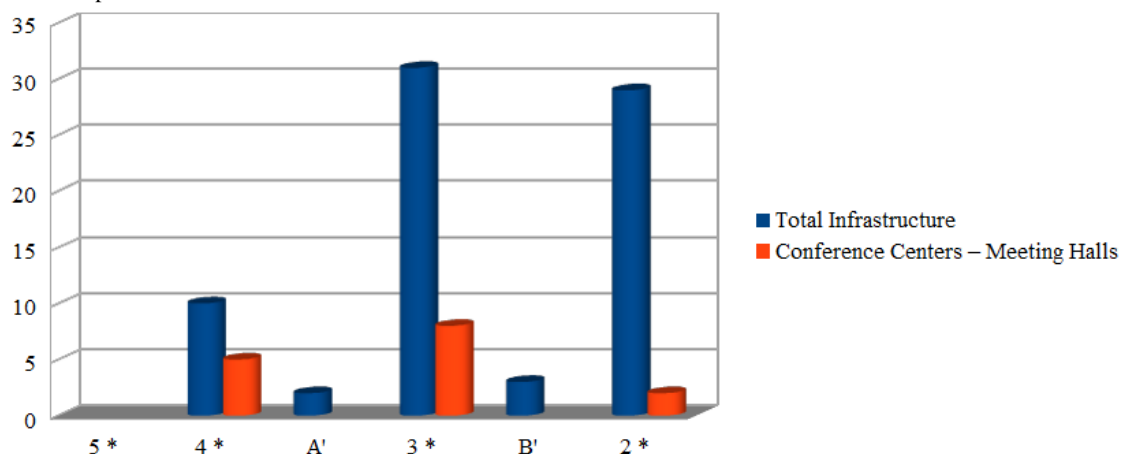
For each of the above infrastructure, their web presence was looked for and evaluated objectively, according to the criteria adopted. A business traveler not only deals with the websites of hotels, but also visits other sites (e.g. local clubs, municipalities, individuals with information for tourists); this is why we made a similar search and evaluation of websites that are not owned by hotels, but by organizations (Regional Unit of Fokida, Municipalities of Delphi and Dorida, Greek National Tourism Organization – GNTO), while the evaluation criteria were modified to fit the style and content of these websites.

Evaluation was reflected in graphs. Note here that any representation is based on contents until April 15, 2015.

3.1 Websites selection of hotels for business events

Our methodological approach was concerning the hotels of Fokida, which have a conference center or meeting room according to the Hellenic Chamber of Hotels.

Figure 1: The total number of tourist facilities in Fokida (2 star and over), compared to their category and the existence of infrastructures for professionals.



Source: Hellenic Chamber of Hotels.

For our purposes, websites of the following main actors exploited:

- GNTO's official remarkable and complete portal www.visitgreece.gr,
- Regional Unit of Fokida,
- both Municipalities, Delphi and Dorida. Especially for the Municipality of Delphi, the official and very informative portal www.visitdelphi.gr was utilized.

There are remarkable web places, according to the descriptions and photographs found at the portal of the Municipality of Delphi.

3.2 Evaluation criteria of a tourism website

There are many researches⁸ on the issue of evaluation of a website, without a commonly accepted evaluation tool, since – besides the objective criteria – there is a strong subjective element, which plays its own important role on the characteristics exhibited by a website, such as simplicity, speed, understanding, completeness on information, attractiveness and compatibility with technology.

As part of this work, many related researches were utilized. A 'mixed' list of evaluation criteria is presented after procession, oriented to tourism websites:

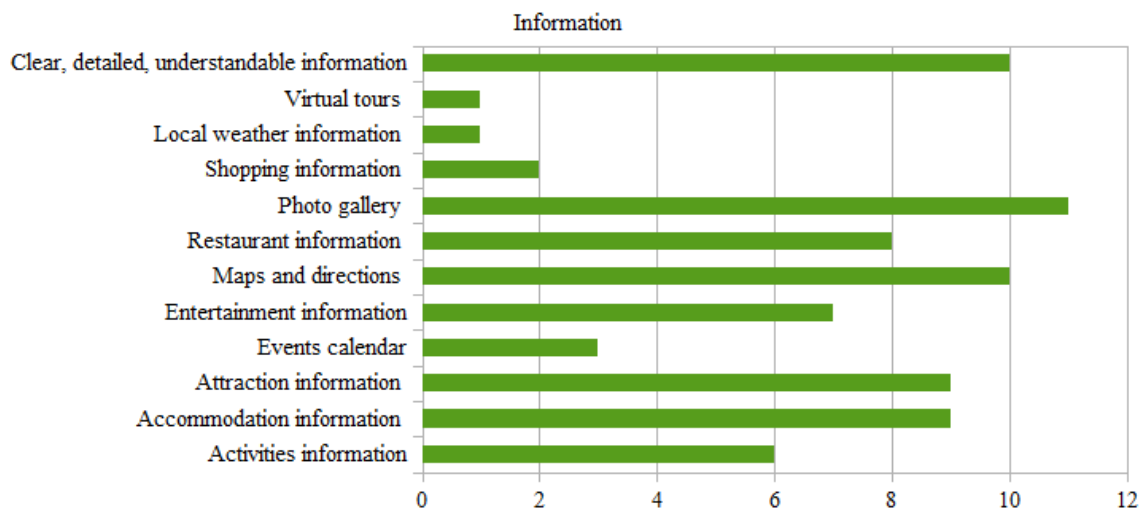
Table 1: Website attributes	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Activities information • Accommodation information • Attraction information • Events calendar • Entertainment information • Maps and directions • Restaurant information • Photo gallery • Shopping information • Local weather information • Virtual tours • Clear, detailed, understandable information 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interaction with user <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contact information (e – mail, phone, mailing address, on – line chat, skype – viber – whats app etc.) • Multiple language versions • Newsletter registration • Links to social media (youtube, vimeo, facebook, instagram, twitter etc.) • Feedback form • Online reservation • Privacy policy • Discounts 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Technical <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Link workability • Load time • Search engine recognition • Visual appearance & design • Hosting of the website (owned or embedded in another website) • Date of last modification of the site • Not existence of spelling and syntax errors • Facilitating people with specific features (impaired vision, hearing, etc.) • Absense of advertisements and pop-ups • Eventually raises the interest? 	

4. RESULTS OF THE METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

Some of the results are shown below in a graph, based on the criteria listed above for the first group of evaluation criteria, for all eleven of a total of twelve units of our sample (Anemokambi Beach hotel is in use by tourists, but its web presence is rudimentary; most information for this hotel can be found in entries in tourist sites of third parties that advertise generally accommodations or take reservations).

⁸ A simple Google search returns more than 32.000 scientific articles for the time zone between 2013 and 2015. Source: Google Scholar (<http://bit.ly/1GEIIB8>). These results may be different when visiting Google Scholar today.

Figure 2: Results of evaluation.



5. CONCLUSION

We observed that there is a slight discrepancy between the different sources on the quantity and location of areas mainly for business tourists: some websites refer fewer infrastructures for business travelers than others, with no up-to-date websites for all sample⁹.

Another paradox is that we learn about some of these infrastructures through very poor websites both in technology development and content, or even with no web presence, but through advertising in other tourist websites or by telephone. This does not reduce the quality of service, but it is a sample of a certain mentality, which we expect in the future to change. An important service already provided is the availability of suitable web technologies.

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9 As mentioned at chapter 4.