

Destination management and strategic market planning: a strategic planning technique of the total tourism product with the assistance of section elevation diagrams

G. Siomkos¹, Ch. Vassiliadis² & Th. Fotiadis²

¹*Athens University of Economics and Business*

²*University of Macedonia*

Abstract

Herein, a methodology for analysing an area's broad tourism product is presented. In particular, after theoretically approaching the issue of Destination Management, and the issues of marketing and planning geographical sections, the use of a Destination Card is proposed for applications relevant to areas' strategic analyses. The aforementioned card is a result of the combination of tools for landscape architectural design (landscape planning/section elevation diagrams) and particularly face analysis sections, with the presentation of both practical evaluation criteria and area categorisation criteria from the theory of Destination Management. Destination analysis through the Card may facilitate the procedures of Strategic Planning and tourism development-elevation for destinations. Furthermore, the Destination Card is based on the application of marketing concepts, since it makes use of data and information related to the demand and to the opinions of residents/professionals within each community.

Keywords: destination management, strategic market planning, destination card, section elevation diagrams, tourism product analysis, SWOT analysis.

1 Marketing places and tourism destination management – tools for planning development strategies

Kotler et al. [19, pp.99-138] constructed a table for identifying an area's strategic development potentialities. The audit instrument for infrastructure, attractions and people includes measurements regarding the current situation, the audit potential, and the effect potential on the issues of infrastructure, attractions and



people as well as on basic services and area planning. According to the aforementioned writers, there are five processes on the subject of the area development philosophy. Those are the following [19, pp.72-98]:

- Community development. This process's positive issues centre upon infrastructure development plans regarding a community's neighbourhoods or subsections. Infrastructure features contribute to the development of sectors like health, education, public safety, residency, and transport. This process has a major disadvantage; it does not provide for future community development. Deficiencies centre upon financial weaknesses and lack of provision regarding the systematic integration of the community into a competitive prefectorial, regional, national and international environment. In addition, it does not take into account new economic circumstances since planning is made from inside towards outside. Community is regarded a good product and since it sells, it also attracts people. In this case, we do not take into account that also somebody else may copy or develop similar or better products, communities. Also, development discordances are frequently observed between residents and organisations.

- Urban design. This philosophy follows the community development philosophy which in turn will assist to the development of a qualitative environment within which residents live and work. It is differentiated in the sense that it is particularly concerned with issues relevant to the areas' design quality. The architecture, the aesthetics of city areas and of environment, the quality in the use of public services by people (with or without special needs), the transportation network, the sanitation, and the environmental pollution, are all study fields of the area development design. Designers believe that changes in those issues cause changes in the perceptions and behaviours of residents. A main disadvantage of this philosophy, taking into account that also this process is affected by the disadvantages of the previous process, is the inadequate attention given to the economic viability of both the designs and the area in general.

- Urban planning. Often this process is directed by qualified departments for urban planning. Committees evaluate the best possible studies (from developmental companies-consultants and government agencies) based on the cost/benefit relationship, taking into account the limitations posed by the available budget. Often here, the largest part of the total time is devoted to evaluating studies and protecting public interest.

- Economic development. This particular process is the subject issue of economic development departments (committees and consultancies). It enfoldes the creation of employment and the attraction of people through new industries, investment growth, and productive use of resources. In particular, economic planning enfoldes activities that encourage destination competitiveness regarding economic, social, educational and cultural issues. Community competitiveness is based upon the four factors aforementioned. More analytically, these factors are the life quality of the local community, the positive image and marketing, the potential for economic development, the natural structure of the community, tenable technology, the skilful, adequate, motivated workforce, and the available funds. During the process of planning, SWOT analyses (see also Mc Donald, [23, p.34]) determine both the internal and external factors influencing local



economy and community. Based on the philosophy of the development procedure herein, local economies should be capable of producing income in order to repay imported commodities. This process should examine and include also planning activities of previous processes. Planning in view of economic growth looks forward to the future. Continuously coordinated and planned activities target the community's viability. Often herein, during the strategic planning of structure, industry, attractions and skilful workforce, the participation of a wide range of representative community populations is required.

- Strategic market planning. The reinforcement of local communities regarding decision-making issues, the bureaucracy and the weakness of authorities to encourage economic activities in districts as well as the intensive pressure from competition during the 1980's caused the adoption, development and establishment of business philosophy or Market Concept by authorities that are known as public authorities. It is worth mentioning that anymore European development programmes stress the contribution also of private authorities broadening in this manner the financial features of investment activities [40, pp.187-207] and [9, ss. 9-34, 56-67]. This necessity is understood if one examines the planning procedures adopted by the European Union during the 1980's. In this manner, marketing activities appear to contribute to the strategic planning of areas by helping to illuminate-elevate a destination's competitive advantages, also to develop new activities-products for the destination and to encourage economic, community, cultural, educational activities regarding the identification of market opportunities. In particular, strategic market planning follows the following steps:

- a. Area evaluation. Situation and SWOT Analysis
- b. Future visions and objectives. Preferences of interested parties (Market Research).
- c. Formulation of strategy (Strategic planning)
- d. Actions and Tactics-plan.
- e. Application and feedback.

Next are briefly presented some Marketing Strategic Design instruments regarding the broad tourism product-potential of areas.

According to Inskeep [16, pp.95] tourism destination planning improves by using the Evaluation Matrix for Tourist Attractions technique. The evaluation of attractions (Attraction Feature) (natural, cultural, and special characteristics) is part of the wider geographic area planning and is an inextricable part of an area's tourism development plans. The attractions' evaluation procedure is done in scales of 1 to 5 or of 1 to 10 and is concerned with the following factors (Evaluation Factors):

- Accessibility
- Economic potential for development
- Environmental impact of development
- Sociocultural impact of development
- National / regional significance
- International significance



Moreover, roughly the last couple of decades, practice adopted the use of double dimension maps. In 1973, Belt, Collins & Associates made use of the aforementioned maps aiming for the tourism development of the Fiji Honolulu, Hawaii islands [16, p.103-106]. The map's two dimensions included the following attraction features:

- Landscape, natural features and leisure features
- Cultural, historical features and archaeological features of attractions

The aforementioned attractions are categorised based on the dimensions in space; then specific development areas are identified. Gunn [35, p.188-191] made use of the zone identification technique for the state of Texas U.S.A. (Gunn [13, p.115-121]). During that particular process, six criteria were identified concerning the categorisation of a geographical area into specific zones of tourism destinations. The research criteria were:

- the regional identity
- the infrastructure of the region
- the size of the region
- the attractions
- the existence of authorities that shall develop activities in the region
- the accessibility potential

Identified zones that were recognised through technique analyses such as the aforementioned destination area-zone identification or the nearest neighbour analysis ([35, p.219-226] and [38]), may thereafter be analysed in selected destination areas so as to enrich the decision-making process. Subjects of research may be the specific points of nearest neighbour analysis or also sections elevations with total points more than 1.

More than one points of the previous analysis methodology are incorporated in the sections. Moreover, points in sections may be identified in the resultant broader areas that were identified after the end of the destination area-zone identification process. Next, the use of functional diagrams improves the visual presentation of the functions in the geographical space (zoning, access, places of interest, help centres). At the same time, apart from the aforementioned technical analyses, section elevation diagrams are used as strategic instruments for identifying the adequacy of area characteristics with the preferences and interests of various groups of Demand (Segments), taking also into consideration competition and the visitors' interests as indicators of the current situation [38]. This analysis approaches the modern philosophy of destination development through a strategic marketing process.

Next, an improved tool for enhancing tourism destination development strategies is presented based on the marketing concept (see also [19, pp. 72-98]). The tool comprises a practical card for analysing the current situation and market research information. Namely, it includes analyses of:

- the geographical areas
- the total tourism product to be integrated from the aspects of natural-cultural places of interest and wider tourism offer (see also [16, pp.95])
- the development potential of those areas
- the target groups of visitors



- the level of organisation of the community's authorities and lastly
- the competition [1, pp. 58-59]

2 Planning procedures – strengths and opportunities

The strategic tool of Planning – Analysis should inform about the following issues-questions (see also [29, p.232-234]:

- Organisation-Environment (OE): What are our strengths – weaknesses with regard to the integration of both the internal and the external Image of the destination (coordination between residents-authorities-professionals and creation of Image for potential visitors)?

- Demand-Visitors (DV): What do visitors want and what is their attitude towards us regarding competition?

- Market/Competition-Product (MP): Is there a potential for an increase in the activities within the current market or is it possible to open out in new markets (fashions in preference of lucrative sectors)? Should the product stay as it is or should new lines be developed in order to exploit the unique advantages of the destination?

2.1 Strengths and opportunities

Based on the aforementioned, destinations should organise tourism development activities starting from the OE features. Ere market segments are analysed and strategies regarding the whole tourism product offer of an area are determined, significant importance should be given on the coordination of authorities [29, pp.229-243]. Therefore, e.g. the coordination between communities, municipalities, districts, regions, national, international and professional authorities is considered essential for the accomplishment of the strategic objectives (see also [19, p.34]. Coordination is simplified through the enhancement of communication networks between the authorities for cooperation and the authorities for realising strategic plans (see also [14, 33]). The unity of actions for the coordination of authorities also includes the coordination of authorities and the community [17, p.3-11]. The establishment of sustainable tourism conscience by residents also contributes to the creation of a better climate for cooperation between local community and the governing bodies. In practice, the expression of that essential commission is met in the form of sustainable regional development plans, also known as SAM (Special Area Management plans) [41, pp.335-344]. The quality of the services offered, depends greatly on the human workforce employed in the tourism industry or residing in the local community [18, p.1545]. The success of residents in the Kozaki community in Japan, regarding the unchangeable conservation of their traditions and the development of tourism activities in parallel, is owed to the coordinated activation of community members and supportive authorities (public authorities and retailers) that were located in Tokyo [7, pp.239-254]. Generally, residents' participation in Planning contributes to the creation of a destination image with internal and external clarity ([34, p.3-7] [36, ss.31-66]). Often we



ignore the participation of residents in decision making. Often also, being carriers of Supply, we do not take into consideration the desirable life quality of the average resident and of the temporary visitor. Here, authorities should not apply research techniques that simply analyse the data from a routine collection through assessment instruments. The experience of daily routine, in-depth research and resident role-playing by researchers- authorities in order to understand the local needs of small communities, is a research methodology often disregarded. Quality research of that type supplements the quantitative data and provides information about the structure design, the implementation of marketing strategies, and the particularities in need of attention during the participation of local community residents ([32, p.3-11], see also [11, pp.479-488]). Both local and social development contracts include reports for the creation of common tourism conscience of the participants. The creation of uncompetitive primary education, the strengthening of education in issues of local developmental needs, the expansion of know-how into broader groups of local communities through training, as well as the potential for exploitation in funding issues, comprise features of sustainable development with a strategic marketing character. Also in this stage of Design, the destination features regarding accessibility, the existence of banks and retail shops, the existence of public authorities' information offices, the existence of local tourism offices and travel organisers, entertainment services, leisure, gastronomy, culture and education are taken into account (see also [20]). The evaluation of local and of wide tourism infrastructure and the simultaneous coordination of authorities conduce to the improvement of services and strengthen the efforts for development of tourism activities in areas of interest.

Once the aforementioned analysis of OE features is achieved, further actions should focus on the analysis of target groups (DV). Apart from the capabilities for investigating the adequacy of the product potential regarding the preferences of consumer groups, fashions and the preferences of specific groups of visitors often involve market opportunities worth investigating [21, pp.48-55]. In 1970, Gray specified two groups of visitors based on their interests, namely the sun – lust tourists and the wander – lust travellers. The former prefer warm beaches and destinations with water and sun. The latter prefer destinations with unique natural and human constructions [3, p.296]. At the same time, opportunities may emerge from knowing the behaviour of tourists regarding competitive destinations (CD) as well as from restructuring their clientele about available product lines, e.g. information regarding the demographic characteristics and the activities of potential tourists for product lines such as the long term tourism – mild -alternative tourism, and the short term tourism –holidays-mass tourism. In addition, the motivation for coming characteristics may constitute a basis for classifying alternative categories of tourists [10, p.746, 760].

The analysis of the features of pre-selected groups of tourists helps the evaluation process of the total offered tourism product per geographical area and predetermines the adequate Demand groups that shall yield profits for the geographical destination (CD). The identification of adequate Demand groups for the geographical area's destinations contributes to a more economic



formulation of marketing strategies, because of the more rational use of resources for marketing activities. Often the climate, the landscape, the mode of life, the level of tourism services offered, as well as the wider tourism infrastructure comprise features for illuminating tourism areas. From the side of tourists, these features represent push and pull motivation factors for travelling ([2, pp.46-53] [13, p.123] [15, pp.29-34] [42, p.42]). These features have both a natural and an artificial character and once they are organisationally coordinated and are accompanied by services of high quality, then they facilitate the process of illumination of the unique characteristics of the relevant destinations ([12, pp.2-9] [35, p.164]). Subsequently, the aforementioned features contribute to the formulation of a differentiated destination image that offers distinctiveness to tourists (e.g. unique sightseeing and services) and are connected to the residents' living quality.

A relevant example of assimilation of Canada's all-season resorts product features with the characteristics of European market segments is the following: According to Owens [28, p.41], Canadian tourism attractions assimilate the preferences of Europeans regarding the following features: snow ski, golf, authentic culture, and cultural activities, high level of hygiene, warm welcoming of visitors, friendly residents. Namely, Canadian attractions are associated with two main market segments in Europe:

- Sports-and-outdoors, and
- Culture-and-nature groups.

The first segment of approximately 8 million people is composed mainly of young people, single men seeking adventure products. The second segment of approximately 6 million people is mainly composed of people of various demographic characteristics for each European country under examination. Thus in England, the culture-and-nature group consists of women between 45 and 54 years of age, while in Germany it consists of people of 25-34 years of age. Their main interests include beforehand organised travels based on informational material, looking for different cultural experiences, and looking for impressive landscapes.

The analysis of the aforementioned factors regarding the destination's strengths and opportunities facilitates the subsequence of the Design process, i.e. the process of the determination of objectives [19, pp.90-98]. However, what needs great attention is the structure of the broader environmental factors of SWOT Analysis. Generally, the following should be analysed:

- Natural-social factors (e.g. area distance, residents' hospitality, climate, seismic areas, or areas with a lot of natural disasters) ([24, pp.222-231] [26, pp.36-39]). Political factors and facts (such as Design policies harming local particularities (the balearisation case: [39, pp. 193-195], general image of the country, travelling instructions, areas of war conflict or of social crises-terrorism, as well as the general image exposed by the media or by opinion makers [6, pp. 56,60] [37, p.36]). Economic factors (such as increase in cost of equipment, energy, funds, available natural resources and forecasts) (see also [8, p.194] [27, pp.41-65]).



- Marketing factors (e.g. intensity of competitors' exposure and distribution networks- influence of travel agents in destination development) ([5, pp.425-431])

- Substitution factors (e.g. entertainment parks, teleconferencing (see also [28, p.29, 31-34]) and technological factors (e.g. transportation, communication [25, pp.39-47]), as external or uncontrollable factors may lead a destination to an economic crisis, and may also strengthen the efforts of competitive destinations to maintain or expand the market segments they already have. Thus, while in 1986 European destinations held 63.5% of the total arrivals worldwide (World Tourism Organisation's Europe region), only after a decade in 1996 the same destinations held the 59.2% of the total arrivals worldwide. The investigation of the rates in competitive geographical areas shows a clear tendency of an increase in arrivals (more than 8% per year during the decade 1986-1996) within the regions of East Asia and the Pacific, Africa and the Middle East. The region East Asia and the Pacific also showed during the decade 1986-1996 a unique tendency to increase income exchange compared to all other worldwide destination [4, pp.290,293].

Often, there are coordination and control weaknesses regarding the process of the centrally directed tourism Planning and Management to monitor the quality of the services and to restrict both the uncontrolled development and reduction in the quality of the tourism sites in regional destinations. Usually, the impacts of the aforementioned weaknesses in known destinations are described through the complaints of traditional categories of visitors. Among others, complaints concentrate on the issues of high prices compared to offered value, differences in the exchange value, low level of services, and overdevelopment-saturation of tourism areas [6, p.59].

3 Analysis Card of a tourism product of an area (Destination Card)

The following strategic planning instrument is a Destination Card. The Card's concept is based on the presentation of neighbour geographical areas in the form of section elevation diagrams [30, pp.112-127]. The diagrams are presented on the card in sequence based on the faces that are pre-selected in the area to be analysed (see also [38]). The following graph presents a lake area of a hypothetical architectural design. The area includes six view sites (a, b, c, d, e, f). The view sites correspond to the related analysis sections regarding each one of the faces of the aforementioned Card. For each one of the geographical points of the sections presented, follows an analysis of the following features-criteria (see Fig. 1, 2):

- Organisation-cooperation level of community authorities (e.g. state in every possible community of the relevant to last sections).
- Natural, cultural, special, technical service based on each area of each section analysis.
- Market Segment Analysis. In this level, the most important characteristics and the preferences of potential visitor groups are presented and are cross-checked with the Supply potential of the areas of each section. The data are collected



through primary research by market research companies-institutes-foundations and may be about market segments of countries or areas of visitors' origin (e.g. countries exporting flows of visitors). Data and information may also be collected from local community research e.g. research regarding the analysis of the visitors' profile.

- Access potential, economic potential for development, socio-political impact of the development, national significance, international significance of sections.
- Competition is evaluated based on the above criteria. The evaluation is done on the last right column of the Card. Specifically; it includes the Country, the destination, and the evaluation of each criterion. In the Card column there may also be presented other important reports-information for activities and other issues relevant to each criterion e.g. competitors' product features and relevant target groups.

The evaluation of areas is done subjectively by responsible specialists-consultants-researchers based on three categorisation levels (see Fig. 2). The evaluation scale includes three levels: a. bad/low (white/ light colour), b. average (dark colour/ grey/ darker grey than the previous evaluation level), c. very good/high (very dark colour/black/ the darkest grey relative to the previous evaluation levels). In the analysis graph of the creation procedure of the Destination Card, the evaluation of sections based on selected criteria is done on the basis of white, black and grey colours. Colouring is done on the rod - bars, when it is about the evaluation of the adequacy of the areas regarding the unique features and the preferences of the target groups of Demand (e.g. vibrant colour=high i.e. adequate area-Supply). In addition, in the evaluation of areas based on pre-selected criteria, the colourings of the circles show by the first criterion e.g. dark colour=very good organisation of the community's authorities.

Lastly, a total evaluation of the areas of each section is performed based on the aforementioned evaluation levels. The total score-value of a View Site's areas or in other words a Section's areas determines next the place of each section of the analysis area and therefore the most significant development and elevation areas of a destination's Tourism Product.

Evaluation of areas based on the aforementioned criteria contributes to determine the objectives of a specific geographical area's strategic development plan. As it was already made clear in the introduction, destination card analyses are part of the broad SWOT analysis and contribute to the rational selection procedure of objectives and determination of strategies.

4 Example application of destination card, and possible limitations

In the following example, a destination card is developed for the geographical area between Xanthi and Alexandroupolis, Greece (see Fig. 1, 3, and 4). For a better demonstration of the strengths, weaknesses – opportunities and threats of the card's section areas, the following snake plot was created. Sections were evaluated on the snake plot based on the average mean of the evaluations for each of the twelve criteria of the card (see Fig. 1).



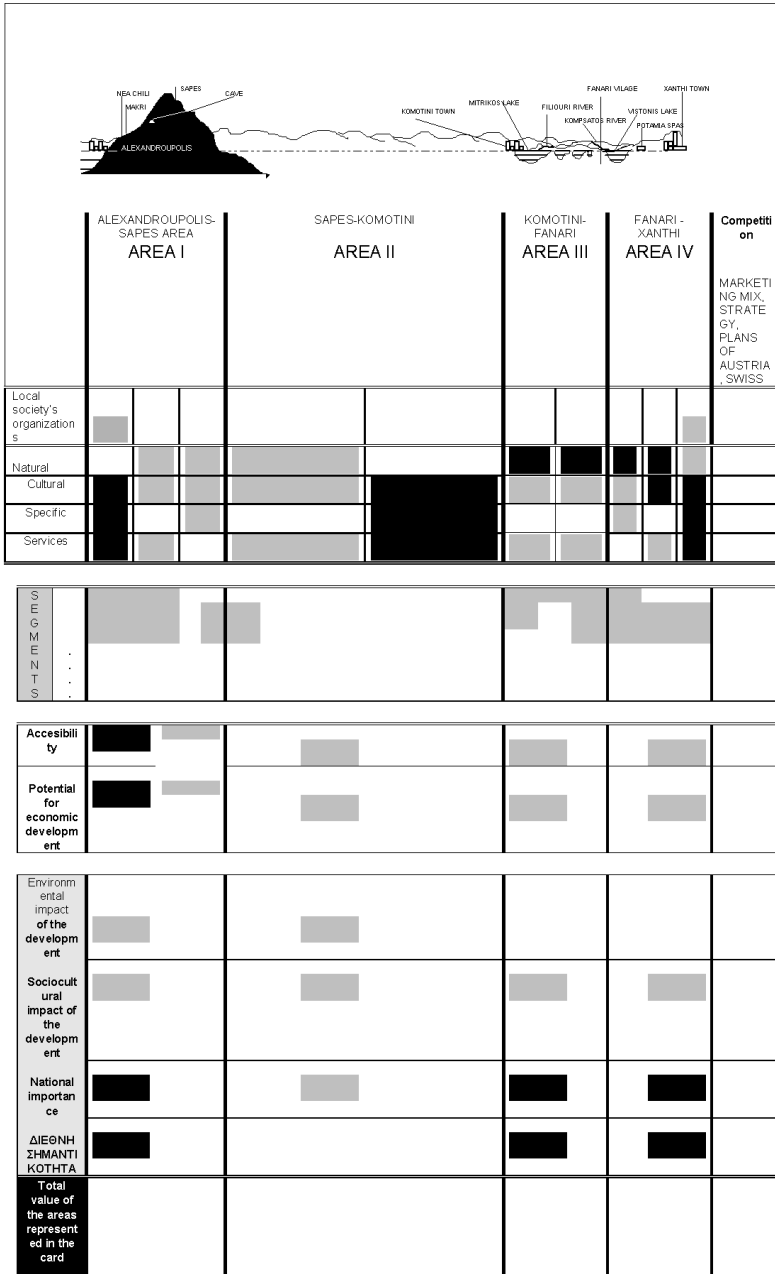


Figure 1: Destination card – Analysis of the tourist product of geographic area. (Four-folded card – each fold stands for a specific area.)



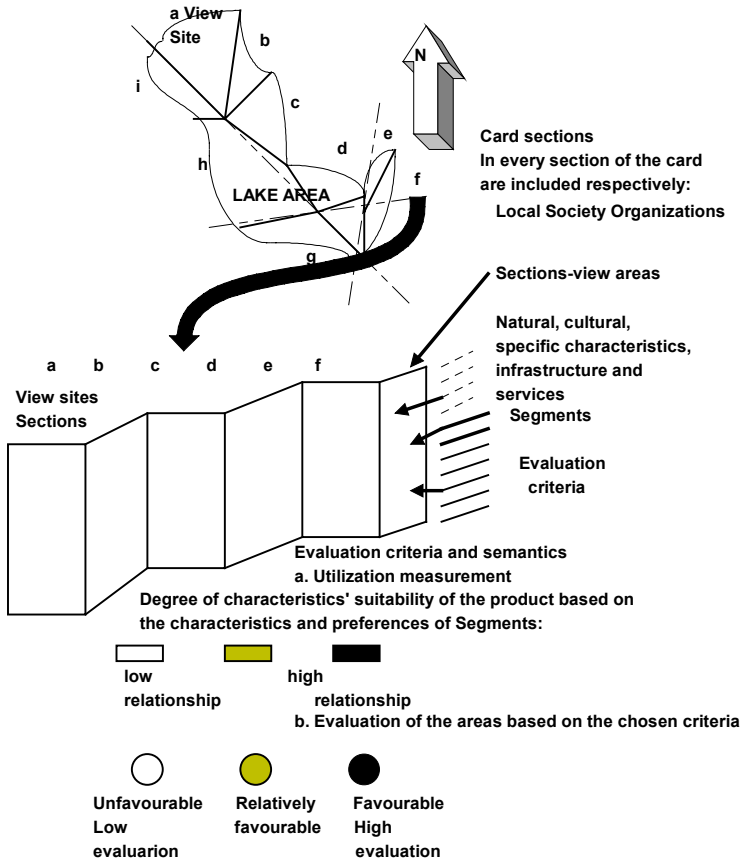


Figure 2: Analysis of the procedure of the development of the destination card concerning the evaluation of the infrastructure and its matching with the visitors' needs and the local society.

The difficulty of applying the Card in practice regarding the evaluation of criteria is owed to weaknesses in finding primary data from the designer-consultant researcher. Incoherent collection of necessary data for the criteria will consequently influence the quality of findings. According to Sahlberg ([31, p.21]), in the next decades we expect in Tourism, apart from the already existing and under development automated reservation systems, the development of destination information systems which directly concern consumers. The systems' success shall depend on the professional research on the fields of Consumer Behaviour and the Mode of Life of consumers (see also [22, pp. 99-164]). This progress in research and information transmission is a point for further development by the responsible destination authorities (e.g. departments for area planning and development), since it additionally contributes to the analysis of



co-operators and residents of the area, apart from the visitors (Image and creation of common tourism conscience analyses).

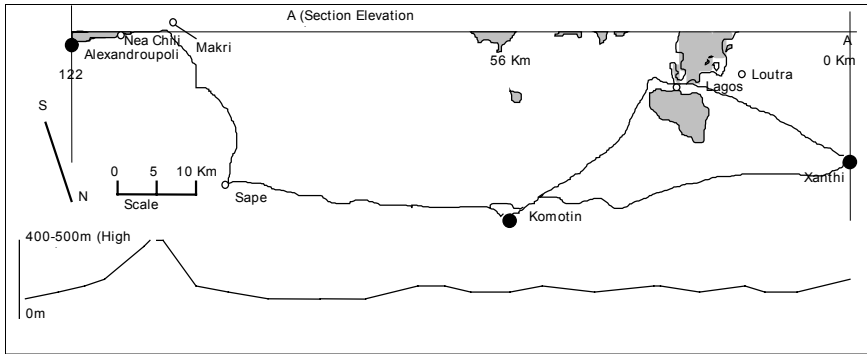


Figure 3: The study area and the position of the section.

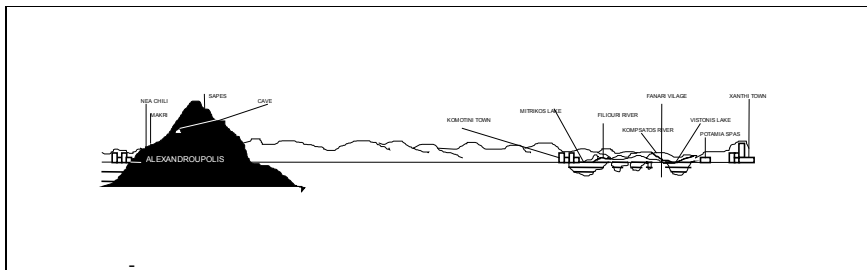


Figure 4: The Section Elevation diagram AA of the road scenic area from Xanthi to Alexandroupolis (Thrace/GR). – View site from the Sea to the North East Country.

5 Conclusions-recommendations

Based on the above snake plot we approach the sections that may exhibit threats or weaknesses. In our example, four sections need attention in terms of:

- AREA I, Organisation of community authorities
- AREA II, Inadequate Segments, Organisation of community authorities, International significance of the area
- AREA III, Special services-places of interest/ infrastructure, Organisation of community authorities, Environmental impact
- AREA IV, Environmental impact

Respectively, opportunities/strengths and therefore the advantages of the areas are the following:

- AREA I, Adequate Segments, Accesses, Economic potential for development, National and International significance of the area



- AREA II, Cultural, Technical service (more effort to elevate and develop the section)
- AREA III, Natural places of interest, National and International significance of the area
- AREA IV, Economic potential for development, National and International significance of the area

The aforementioned procedure for data collection on the criteria for the Card development, and the drawing of a snake plot, facilitate area planners in the strategic planning of the activities for the area's development. In our example, a check point for the areas' Supply may be the competitive destinations (Austria and Switzerland) that attract segments of foreign tourists who compile our focal point. An easy approach to the data of the competitive product can be done through the Internet.

The aforementioned analysis can initiate examinations and adjustments in the wider tourism potential of the research areas. Based on the adjustments to be made, the objectives will be easily approached, and alternative strategies as well as a more adequate marketing mix for every section will be developed.

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