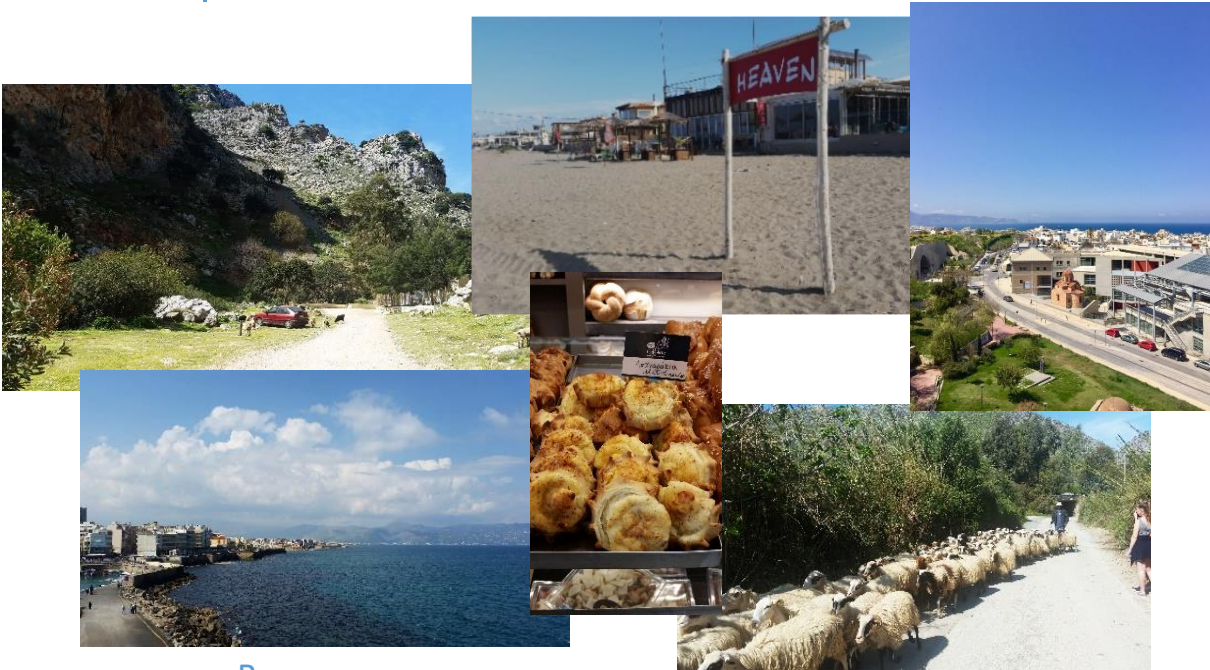


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Expanding the tourist season in the Heraklion region of Crete

TOURISM MASTER 10TH SEMESTER THESIS



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Abstract

This thesis project examines the concept of seasonality in tourism, focusing on the island of Crete, and the Heraklion region in particular, with its effects on the local communities and responses from tourism stakeholders. Its aim is to explore the challenges and possibilities of turning the city of Heraklion and its nearby sea resorts into permanent tourist destinations, by focusing on the possible strategies and actions which could be undertaken in order to extend the tourist season. Furthermore, some of the local stakeholders' perspectives and the collaboration among them towards eliminating seasonality and the challenges it creates have been argued.

The tourism industry is confronted with seasonal fluctuations of demand in all over the world. Seasonality has been attributed to various factors, mostly caused by climatic conditions, human decisions, cultural factors and supply limitations, which continuously create challenges and problems for the destinations in terms of attracting visitors, unemployment and overuse of facilities during a particular period of the year. The idea behind this paper is attempting to present some possible solutions for further developing the tourism industry on the Greek island of Crete. It is essential to consider these seasonal fluctuations and challenges, and examine the possible strategies to be applied in order to turn the Heraklion region into a permanent destination, as the tourism industry carries a vital importance for the local economy in Crete.

For the purpose of this paper we have used both qualitative and quantitative methods during our field research in Heraklion, and interviewed several local stakeholders in order to have a broader outlook on the local authorities and their actions toward the development of the tourist sector. We also made use of a short questionnaire in order to get an idea about some of the foreign tourists' perceptions and reasons for visiting the area. In a destination that has been struggling to attract visitors outside of the summer season, forging collaborations between the local authorities - as decision makers - and other major tourism stakeholders, such as tour operators and airlines, could be the key to ensuring that the Heraklion region is able to present itself to a wider scope of visitors during the off-season, thus having a better chance to expand the tourism season.

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1. Introduction

Tourism is an industry with a background of thousands of years. As defined by Peters (1969), international tourism is the largest single item in the world's foreign trade, and it has already turned into the most important export industry and earner of foreign exchange during the last centuries.

In the past few decades, tourism development has significantly expanded throughout the Mediterranean region and the islands alongside (Andriotis, 2000). Actually, the high increment in revenues, time allocated to leisure and the development of technologies, has caused the rapid demand increase for recreation and vacations for a noticeable amount of people (Wahab and Pigram, 1997; Cooper et al., 1998). This research study, with a focus on Heraklion and the island of Crete, identifies tourism as a highly argumentative and considerable tool of change. The noticeable existence of factors like natural beauty, infrastructural wealth and rich cultural and heritage background has affected the tourism expansion process of Crete, to the point where the island now hosts about 25% of the total foreign incoming tourists and more than 50% of the total foreign exchange revenues of Greece (ibid).

Appropriate climate conditions nowadays are known to be the basic factor effective in the competitiveness of a tourism destination (Lin et al., 2006). The environmental conditions are in general just as important as the natural attractions of the region or the offered facilities for the attractiveness of a destination (Hamilton and Lau, 2005).

With the increased development of the overseas tourism, the competitiveness among international destinations has been created (Bordas, 1994). Nowadays, travel agents - and not countries - are trying to sell destinations to the customers, hence by increasing the tourism satisfaction level through destinations, and not with offered facilities, can cause the repetition in visiting one region (ibid).

The impacts that the seasonal demand variations are causing, is one of the very major concerns of the tourism industry; both in public and private sectors. As Butler (1997) remarks, "*after the movement of people on a temporary basis (seasonality) may be the most typical characteristic of tourism on a global basis.*" Seasonal fluctuation is known to be one of the most significant features of the tourism industry. In other words, seasonality

causes temporal attractiveness of a specific destination for the holidaymakers (Ball, 1989; Higham and Hinch, 2002; Jang, 2004). As Allcock (1989) remarks, the general inclination of the tourism flows to focus more on short periods of the year, and not whole year long, which claimed to be one of the most common problems of this industry in a lot of countries, is also including Greece (Drakatos, 1987; Tsitouras, 1998).

Referring to King (1993), an island can be best described as a *“most enticing form a land. Symbol of the eternal contest between land and water, islands are detached, self-contained entities whose boundaries are obvious; all other land divisions are more or less arbitrary.”*

Therefore, general tourism has different impacts on all communities, but island communities tend to be more and more under the pressure of tourism, and the main reason is the contained nature of the islands (Andriotis, 2000).

The islands, despite the fact that they can vary in a lot of ways, such as size or the scale of their isolation, have some common characteristics as well (Royle, 1989; Schofield and George, 1997). As Royle (1989) clarifies, the smaller islands tend to be under the danger of severe problems, such as providing their inhabitants with reasonable living conditions in spite of the limited resources they have.

The tourism development of the island regions is mainly controlled by tour operators and hotels, and accordingly, the local involvement in this process is normally in a very low stage. Meanwhile, due to the small dimensions of the islands and their economies, often the revenues earned from foreign exchange carries a very high importance (Wilkinson, 1989; Butler, 1996; Lockhart, 1997).

Regarding to the intensity of the seasonality issue for island destinations, this research project seeks to investigate the possibilities of turning Heraklion and its nearby sea resorts into permanent tourist destinations. In the following sections, we aimed to discuss the origins of seasonality on the island of Crete, as well as arguing the effective factors in this phenomenon, while also discovering the stages or the possible challenges the destination is confronted with and the possible strategies which might be beneficial in this process. In other words, our main target in generating this research project is to examine the tourism industry in Crete with the focus on the theme of seasonality, which is the major characteristic of the tourism sector in this region. On the other hand, the outcome of this

research project is to come up with, and present the cases which require more concentration, strategies and management of the enterprises and tourism agencies, in order to overcome the seasonality issues and to protect the area from its social and economic impacts. Particularly in this research we aimed to describe and argue the strategies that are actually used in the development process of the area.

1.1 Problem formulation

This study will attempt to contribute to research in the field of tourism, by focusing on the Greek island of Crete - namely the city of Heraklion and its nearby sea resorts – which is an island in the development process, with a very significant tourism industry.

Owing to the fact that Heraklion is struggling to attract tourists during the cold season, tourism employees and people whose living depends on tourism activities are faced with up to half a year of unemployment and limited income during that period. Many shop owners for instance, or people living in the villages nearby Heraklion, who make their income by selling goods or renting out their places to tourists, are having difficulty without the much needed tourist presence.

This research study has been entirely targeted to examine the tourism industry and its development process in Crete, with the intent of appointing effective strategies for this development, especially during colder periods of the year, and to diminish the existing problems at the same time.

In the context of seasonality – and the Heraklion region - struggling to attract tourists from November until April, this project seeks to investigate and answer the following question:

What are the challenges and possibilities of turning Heraklion and its nearby sea resorts into permanent tourist destinations?

1.2 Research questions

In order to get the best response to the project problem formulation, we will look to answer the three following sub-questions in the analysis section:

- How is seasonality affecting the locals and what are the consequences of turning the area into a permanent tourist destination?
- How are the local stakeholders affecting tourism in Heraklion and the surrounding areas?
- What potential courses of action could be undertaken in order to turn the area into a permanent tourist destination?

1.3 Tourism in Heraklion, Greek island of Crete

The aim of this subchapter is to offer the reader a general introduction to the state of tourism in Crete, from a view on its climate, to other aspects such as its development and infrastructure.

One of the world's major industries and priorities is travel and tourism, which includes transportation, accommodation, recreation and various other services offered to the visitors. The Mediterranean region is one of the world's premier tourist destinations, especially the southern European countries such as Greece, Italy and Portugal. In these areas, tourism actively contributes to their economies and to their increased quality of life (Proença 2008).

The tourism industry in Greece has been traditionally summarized to sun, sea and sand, and in general summer activities and tourists seeking for them. As a result, tourism is a highly seasonal sector which has been majorly concentrated and relies on islands and low-yield package tours (WTTC, 2006).

Crete, Greece's largest island, located at the southern edge of the Aegean Sea, with a surface of 8.669 square kilometers, is the most famous island of Greece among foreign visitors. Each year this island hosts over 2 million visitors. Thus, tourism is the major economic source of this region (Matzarakis & Nastos, 2011). As one of the main tourist destinations of Greece, Crete is characterised by its 1000 kilometers of coastlines and 300 days of sunshine (Proust, Angelakis, Drakos, 2009).

1.3.1 Climatic conditions and Seasonality in Crete

Seasonality is evidentially more prominent in island destinations, and the reasons can be counted as the accessibility problems during winter months, the distance of island destinations from big cities and the dependency to local markets (Baum and Hagen, 1999; Andriotis, 2004), as well as the visitors' motivations to come to these destinations, which are frequently depending on the sun, beach and good weather (Nadal et al., 2004). While the rural regions contribute to these problems, offshore island areas have to deal with the obstacle of a marine barrier. An island area does not have the same circumstances as the mainland regions; hence it cannot compete with equal conditions, due to its isolated location. Therefore transportation is a very significant tool in connecting the islands with the outside world (Abeyratne, 1997). However it is an intricate phenomenon far more momentous and inevitable than an occurrence caused by simple climate change (Butler, 2014).

The travel and tourism industry in Greece is highly seasonal because of its heavy dependence on resort based tourism products, sun, sea and sand (WTTC, 2006). The circumstances have been even intensified during last couple of years due to the continuously augmenting competition in the industry, especially in neighbouring countries. This has resulted in further reductions to the already short peak tourism season of the country, and also caused increments in the country's, and more specifically the island regions' reliance on tourism and vulnerability against the changes of the consumer demands (ibid).

The Heraklion region and more specifically Crete are characterized by a quite mild climatic condition, with very low variations. Because of its geographical situation, the island has been preserved from the cold weather conditions in Europe during winter months and severe warmth in summertime. Therefore, the climate is absolutely pleasant in Crete (Matzarakis & Nastos, 2011). The island has registered a very significant growth in the development of its tourism industry during the past three decades (Konstantinos, 2001). Referring to the tourism climate and tourism potential analysis done by Matzarakis & Nastos (2011), in Crete, the coldest months of the year are January and February with the minimum temperature of 7 - 9 °C in coastal areas and 4 – 6 °C in the mainland. As a result, during this period, the eastern parts of Crete, as well as Dodecanese, are the areas

with the warmest temperature in the whole of Greece. On the other side, the warm and dry period of the year in this region is between April to September, with almost no chances of rainfall and high temperatures. During this period the hottest months are July and August and the highest temperatures can vary between 28 - 32 °C, which in southern Crete can reach 40 °C, especially in mainland areas. Yet the thermal comfort in this area is still bearable even in this period, because of the low air humidity. In general, this tourism climate analysis for Crete, indicates that the natural potential for tourism in this area is high, therefore there is a possibility for the tourism period to be extended and not be limited to the summer months. The mild periods of the year are generally available for wellness and expanding cultural tourism (Matzarakis & Nastos, 2011).

1.3.2 Tourism Development in Crete

The very primary phases of the tourism development in this region began with non-institutional incoming tourists, such as explorers, as Cohen (1972) described these visitors as the first to discover the major tourist attracting destinations. According to Greger (1988), the only tourists visiting Crete were the small number of educated foreigners, especially in archaeological or classical fields. Modern tourism per se has begun taking place in this region only after the industrial revolution in the twentieth century. The development of transport systems and the increased accessibility resulted from the construction of roads or through maritime routes or railways made it possible for foreigners to be able to visit Greece, particularly its coasts and nature. During that period the very first resorts have been created in this area, empowered by private sector and in the meantime fully controlled by the Greek government (Dritsas, 2009). These dramatic changes in the economic basis have started to show up within Greek islands during the 1970s. After many years where the only economic activity of these regions has been agriculture and fishing, they have started to be confronted with a new demand of holidays from the western European countries, which caused them to look at this industry as a brand new way of empowerment and economic development (Butler, 2014).

Even though the tourism industry in Crete is not a recent occurrence, it has significantly developed during the past twenty years (Andriotis, 2004). The reasons causing this delay in development of Crete were mostly caused by the distance from western European countries, and poor infrastructure. The major factors and components of the continuous

development process of tourism in Crete can be counted as pleasant climate conditions, breath-taking nature, and cultural heritage (ibid). Nowadays, considering all these factors, foreign tourism has turned into the premiere resource of revenue for the island. However, there are several social and environmental issues which have been caused by mass tourism development and the unresponsive tourism planning strategies (ibid). Cretan tourism, according to Andriotis (2005), has now reached its maturity stage.

As the OECD Tourism Committee (OECD, 2008) has reported, in Greece the tourism activities - including both direct and indirect activities - contribute to the national GDP by 18.2%. There are about 840.000 people employed in various tourism activities, which represents approximately 19% of the total workforce of the country, and as a result, tourism is the first sector in the economy of Greece, with the highest number of employments.

While the major touristic areas of the island of Crete are located on the northern coast, and the highest number and most qualified infrastructure can also be found in this area, on the other hand, the southern coast has not been provided with the same level of infrastructure, with only 10 percent of the island's beds being located in this part of the island. In general, Crete's contribution to tourism comprises 10.043 units of hotels and restaurants, with a reported number of 25.910 employees in 2006 (NSSG, 2006).

Tourism has been recognized as a development strategy in Crete, due to the fact that it has a great potential for generating income and services in this area, developing infrastructure and community welfare (Andriotis, 2002b; Kousis, 1984).

The Crete Island holds the competitive edge of providing the most suitable Mediterranean climate. Therefore, various sectors of daily life, agriculture, production and consumption remain without a redundant change during the year. While the incoming visitors are provided with a warm sunny air condition, the local population's requirements are covered in a sustainable manner during the year (Vlachou, 2013). Even though tourism in Crete creates a lot of revenues and employment, nevertheless, the tourism industry is surmounted by foreign tour operators, which are mostly from Northern European countries, providing all-inclusive packages. Although in this method of development a huge portion of the revenue is being arrogated, records indicate that more than 85% of

the hotel enterprises supply their required ingredients from local distributors (OECD, 2005).

Presently, Crete “*is a mass standardized tourism destination with all the environmental threats associated with the induced social and land use changes*” (Proust et. al, 2009, p. 5), and also competition from other eastern Mediterranean destinations, such as Cyprus or Turkey. Plus, by the increased demand of visitors in selecting more authentic destinations, there is a need for diversification in tourism strategies in order to attract new touristic segments (OECD, 2008).

However, the tourism industry in Crete has not been developed smoothly and without having to deal with problems; though the most striking obstacles have been seasonality and the dependence on tour operators (Donatos & Zairis, 1991). The working chances and the number of available jobs in Crete are quite restricted due to the oscillation of the incoming tourists in more than half of the year, and these factors are extremely limiting the turnovers and jobs in the rest of the year (Drakatos, 1987; Tsitouras, 1998).

1.3.3 Tourism Infrastructure in Crete

The touristic resorts usually are constructed near international airports or ports (Theodosakis, 1994). As the largest international airport of the area is located in Heraklion, therefore the very first tourist resorts of the island have been diffused in the vicinity of this area (ibid).

However, at the beginning of tourism development in Crete, the facilities were quite limited, as reported by Basil (1964), there were very limited amounts of beds available for tourists during the 1960s. At that time, Heraklion, as the largest city of the island, had an approximate number of 300 hotel beds and an additional 300 beds in run-down buildings, which did not provide any further or essential facilities or services (ibid).

After 1963, the island has reached the development stage, and the first resort on the island, Minos Beach Hotel, has been constructed that year. After that, during 1968 and 1975, many large hotels have been opened in Crete and as a result, the amount of available beds has been doubled during this time frame (Technical Chamber of Greece, Crete and Dodecanese Divisions, 1981).

In general, the international tourism in Greece highly relies on air access, as more than 70% of the incoming tourists use airways in order to reach Greece. In the meantime for Crete the internal transportation of the island is quite important, since the only way to reach the area is by ships or boats (WTTC, 2006).

2. Methodology

As the basic theoretical perspective of this research has been ascertained in the introduction, this section will look to explain the methods used in collecting the necessary data, which would lead us to deliver the best possible answers to our research questions, and ultimately, this paper's problem formulation: what are the challenges and possibilities of turning Heraklion and its nearby sea resorts into permanent tourist destinations? In addition to explaining the methods, we are also trying to come up with clear reasons of why we had applied these methods. Thus this section has been divided into several parts: the research approach, the philosophy of science, the research methods and the sets of processes we exerted in collecting the required information. We will describe the mindset behind the collection of data, explain why the chosen methods were the best approach of gathering information, and also introduce those who helped us with their knowledge on the topic, namely our interviewees. At the end of this section we will discuss the validity and reliability of our findings, and also highlight the limitations we had been confronted with during this research process.

2.1 Research approach

The induction and deduction in a research process are mainly referring to the way of using theories regarding the empirical data. In other words, the research theory is either based on the collected data, empirical data confirming or contradicting the existing theories on the subjected theme. The way a research project is conducted carries a lot of importance from the outlook of the reader, who is going to have a brief conscious on how the main idea of the research has been generated and is going to be supported and followed by next procedures and stages.

As Bryman (2008) argues, the theory is the outcome of an inductive research, and in support of his statement he analogizes it as “*drawing generalizable inferences out of observations*” (p.25). Some researchers think that it is more appropriate to utilize both inductive and deductive approaches in the research. As Patton (1991, in Hyde 2000) explained the research process, the first step is collecting the empirical data, which is gathered using the inductive approach. On the next steps, the research theory and the data templates will be discovered by the researcher, who will concentrate on verifying or ignoring the theory, which refers to the deductive approach. This process, i.e. utilizing both inductive and deductive approaches in a research, is an abductive research, as called by Morgan (2007).

In this research project, our data has been generated through interviewing some of the major stakeholders and people active in the tourism industry of the subjected region, Heraklion. We learned what are some of the reasons behind tourists visiting the region, and also how the local decisionmakers are working together to ensure that those tourists are getting the best possible experience and keep returning to Crete. After analysing the questionnaires and interviews we had collected, and taking into account theories such as those on seasonality and destination management, we came up with possible new solutions to combat the effects of seasonality and attract more tourists to the region, not only during summertime, but also during the colder months of the year.

2.1.1 Inductive research

Induction, deduction and abduction are logical reasoning forms that are used in both qualitative and quantitative research. When you add observation to the mix, then you have the basis of all research (Flick, 2014). In order to come up with valid statements and theories, there is a need of acquiring reliable knowledge which can be accomplished through observing what’s happening around you. If what you perceive keeps recurring reliably, then you could derive a rule, which could be more or less probable or valid. For instance, pertaining to this project’s problem formulation, there are other cases of tourist destinations which have managed to fight off seasonality. For this reason, one can claim that there is no reason why Crete would not be able to do the same. This is called induction, a manner of reasoning that for a long time used to be considered as fundamental to discovering new ideas (ibid). Thomas (2006, p. 238) defines inductive

analysis as referring to “*approaches that primarily use detailed readings of raw data to derive concepts, themes, or a model through interpretations made from the raw data by an evaluator or researcher*”. This falls in line with the approach used for this paper: during our field trip to Heraklion, we have collected information from our interviews, which were then analysed. From all the raw data, certain themes began to re-occur and patterns started to emerge, thus conclusions were drawn, which helped us build our analysis on. According to Strauss and Corbin’s (1998, cited in Thomas, 2006, p. 238) description of induction, “*the researcher begins with an area of study and allows the theory to emerge from the data*”.

For the purpose of this study, we have applied induction as a method of deriving theories to our research problem. Although we have used the mixed methods approach during our field data collection phase, gathering knowledge by combining the tourist questionnaire results (which falls rather in the quantitative data mix) with those from the semi-structured interviews (qualitative data), we can genuinely say that overall, our research has been mostly qualitative. Referring to Thomas (2006), induction offers the researcher a set of procedures which can be easily used to analyse qualitative data, which in turn may lead to reliable and valid findings. And according to Flick (2014, p.10), “*qualitative induction is the basis of all scientific procedures that find, in collected data, only new versions of what is already known*”.

Although induction has proven to be a more simple method of developing new models or theories, especially in the context of focused evaluation questions (Flick, 2014) – something we have been able to incorporate within our primary field data collection (interviews and questionnaires) – one should not totally rely on the qualitative inductive approach for generating new theory, as it is only a probable form of inference. The fact that destinations such as Mallorca manage to operate throughout the year, does not necessarily mean that the same would apply to the Heraklion region in Crete.

In terms of our data collected from tourists, through questionnaires, we have tried to transfer the quantitative properties of this sample group, and make it representative of all the elements of that group, in our specific case, to all other visitors in the Heraklion area, extending the case of a few into a general rule. This falls under the quantitative induction analysis (Flick, 2014), generating merely probable results. Quantitative inductions may be redundant, however, they are not truth conveying.

2.1.2 Deductive research

Most of the research which this project is based on is inductive. However, we should not be as bold in claiming that during our research, we made no use of deduction. According to Hannam and Knox (2011, p. 179), the early stages of a project are deductive, relying on previous research and theories: *“we simply cannot start a project without having previous exposure to ideas and theories, so we should recognise that the early stages are always deductive and always reliant on earlier research”*. Our project was no different. Before conducting our field data collection, we had to rely on the available online information on topics such as seasonality, destination management or tourism stakeholders. These in turn formed the backbone for our field research, influencing the questions posed to our interviewees. Eventually, the data collected on the field in Heraklion, which we used for our final theoretical claims, was driven by induction.

2.2 Philosophy of science

Science, in the vision of epistemology or knowledge, is an inquiry method about the world's structure and occurrences. The philosophy of science is concerned with the understanding of the subjects, operations and the essence of the scientific theories (Machamer, 1998). To be clearer, philosophy of science is attempting to define the methods used in research in order to evaluate their validity and elaborate and accept the achieved results, as well as examining the effects that science has on the operations and interests of the nonscientists and the society (ibid.).

The philosophy of science, which is the connection made between science and truth, is known as the demand for knowledge, according to Ponterotto (2005). In other words, the philosophy of science is entirely connected with the hypothesis, basements, methods, implications of science, and with the manners in which science is being used in a research (Forster, 2004). Basically, the philosophy of science attempts to illustrate and understand how a science works among a broad confine of sciences (ibid.). The research philosophy is there to define and argue the statement of the researcher versus the themed subject. It is majorly subjected to merge the concepts regarding ontology, which is known as the basis of the reality, epistemology, since it is the conscious and knowledge, and

methodology, which explains the process and foundation of the research (Ponterotto, 2005). The deductive logic is concerned with the validity of the arguments considered in the research, since an argument is only acceptable when the presuppositions lead to the conclusions in a deductive way (Forster, 2004).

Though the question is, why is the philosophy of science so important for the research? The philosophy of science operates like a disciplinary element which is concerned with subjecting the basic premises that have created the underlying structure of the research, while examining its validity in a critical manner. Briefly, by philosophy of science it is possible to contemplate on what we have done through this research, and what our target was; while it also questions the exposed methods and process by which we chose to reach our goals (Machamer, 1998).

In general, the philosophy of science will be an opportunity for us to define our status and position in relation to the tourism industry in Crete, our ideology and outlook about the subject and therefore the reliability and credibility of this research project.

2.2.1 Social constructivism

The research paradigm and philosophy according to Ponterotto (2005), is a collection of the hypothesis made about the reality of the world and it is being used for the researcher in order to find the best participants, interviewees, methods, etc. In another description made by Sandelowski (2000), these paradigms are the viewing position of the researcher. The paradigms can be vary in two major groups, positivism and constructivism. While positivists believe that an exterior reality exists far away from the human experiences, on the other hand constructionists presume that the social world keeps being constructed and reconstructed through the various human experiences and as the human knowledge completes. The reality, according to the opinion of the constructivists, is what we think and what we construct, and nothing external in the world (Jonassen, 1991). On the other side there are also objectivists, who believe that there is an independency between social entities and social actors (ibid). The difference between objectivists and constructivists is that the social phenomena is being completed by the social actors, in the latter's opinion. This paper is based on and is following ... philosophies... Refer to Morgan (2007), it is somehow impossible to have a complete concordance in between different ideas and

paradigms, however it has been cleared that utilizing one paradigm in a research does not make the other paradigm wrong and will not cause the rejection of other paradigms. As long as the paradigms are not mixed and merged, a various number of them can be used in a research and it is up to the researcher to decide which (ibid).

2.3 Research methods

This project has been collected based on the qualitative approach. The basic element of the methodology is interviewing the local tourism stakeholders, such as hotel industry and municipality representatives; the interviews have been arranged in such a manner as to reflect the opinions of Heraklion's stakeholders.

The reason why we selected qualitative approaches is that this is an exploratory research, therefore by utilization of qualitative approaches we tried to explore and search for the possibilities and challenges of attracting tourists to Crete throughout the year.

Exploratory research is the most credible research method, substantially regarding the subjects that are not clearly discussed, understood, or the problems which are uncertain or unpredictable. In this type of research, as it is also obvious from its given name, the main target is to discover the research problems and questions. The primary characteristic of these kind of researches is the flexibility they show in regard to the subject, and not following a strict structure with the problems. Rather these types of researches are known to aim the discovery of the situation and the conditions of the environment in which the mentioned problems are occurring and to explore the important factors and their effects in the subjected situation (Saunders et al., 2012).

On the other side, qualitative approaches are related to a scientific research type, which contains several steps of investigation, the systematic usage of methods in order to reach the valid answers to the research questions, evidence collection and finally the conclusion.

The qualitative research method is known for possessing the utmost impact in culture and society related subjects, or with issues where there is a low knowledge about, which requires more data in terms of values, opinion, behaviours and the social theme of a

special population involved with the mentioned topic (Bryman, 1988). This is one of the main reasons why we selected the qualitative approach in our research.

There are several methods included in a qualitative research. With this paper and the research we have done, we aim to explore the challenges and possibilities of turning Heraklion and its nearby sea resorts into permanent tourist destinations. Therefore we have employed methods in both the data collection and analysis processes, in order for us to be able to perceive the current situation of tourism in Heraklion and the problems and challenges that the local stakeholders are confronted with during the non-touristic season of the year.

2.4 Data Collection

The data collection section is allocated in introducing and explaining the process of info gathering that led us to our final results, as well as describing the difficulties, challenges and limitations we faced during our field research in Crete, which took place in Heraklion and Amoudara, between the 5th and 11th of April, 2017.

Since the data collection is the base resource of the research, which helps analysing the problem and reaching the answers to the main questions, we aimed to find the most reliable sources for our data collection process. By using the snowball effect, with some help from our local contacts in Heraklion, as well as existing literature on how seasonality is affecting Crete, we were able to first target and then get in touch with some of the local stakeholders, who are in charge of shaping tourism in the region and were best suited to help us with our research. Our primary data was achieved through open interviews with the several local tourism stakeholders we've been able to meet while in Heraklion, and also through structured interviews with those who we could only reach via email. A short questionnaire has also been used in order to assess the tourists' level of interest in visiting the area during the offseason. Our secondary data was gathered mostly before our field trip, through reviewing various articles on the topics of seasonality, management of tourist destinations, and the roles played by various stakeholders in shaping those destinations, in order to help us collect the primary data, namely the topics we were going to discuss and the questions we were going to ask our interviewees. Also, we researched certain local tourism news websites such as the Greek Travel Pages and the Tornos news

websites, in order to find out more about the current state of tourism in the area, in relation to seasonality.

2.4.1 Primary data

The most important, and at the same time challenging aspect of our research, has been collecting our primary data. Since our secondary data per se – which will be discussed later on in the methodology chapter – was too scarce to build our analysis on, we concluded that the best information could only be achieved on the field, through face-to-face interviews. Also, a short tourist survey was conducted on location, in order to get a better feel on what attracts visitors to the area and to assess their interest of returning in the region during the off-season. This was achieved through presenting tourists with a questionnaire, which will be further detailed later on in this subchapter.

Having said this, the toughest part of the field trip to Heraklion was not necessarily having to rely on our reduced student budgets, but mostly the uncertainty of not knowing exactly who exactly we would be talking to, especially from the local tourism authorities. Other than Professor Andriotis, Mr. Serafim and Mrs. Vefa from the Candia Maris hotel – who will be presented, along with the others who helped us with the research, in subchapter 2.6 – none of our other interviewees were known. In order to collect the required data through interviews, we had contacted the previously mentioned individuals, and once we arrived in Heraklion, several others, who we considered the most appropriate to provide valuable insight to our research questions, were approached as a result of either being recommended, or by pure chance – sometimes just knocking on a door may lead to the best results! We simply inquired about their availability for face-to-face interview sessions, during an appropriate period for both parties, and after providing them with a brief description of our project we simply staged the interviews.

The questions have been organized in a manner that could benefit us with the most effective answers, which could lead to our required data for analysing the main theme of the project. The basic structure of the interview questions was approximately the same for all the interviewees; however we had presented some additional questions particularly prepared for each interviewee. For example, we knew from the beginning that with each individual, we would be discussing about the ways in which seasonality is affecting the

locals, how are the various stakeholders impacting tourism in the region and what various measures could be undertaken in order to expand the tourist season. Nevertheless, during each interview, we placed more emphasis on certain areas, depending on each interviewee's experience and expertise. The interviews were widely drawn between different organizations and stakeholders, some of whom were targeted early on during our research process, while others were chosen as a result of the snowball effect, recommended by our previous interviewees – a process which we will elaborate on in the subchapter about interviewees. Given the circumstances, while the topics discussed remained unchanged, depending on the interviewed person and their position, different, more specific questions were required, which would have pertained to their various aims and objectives.

Qualitative research interviews as defined by Kvale (1983) are referred to *"an interview, whose purpose is to gather descriptions of the life-world of the interviewee with respect to interpretation of the meaning of the described phenomena"*. The most common method in the process of data collection in a qualitative research method is face-to-face interviews, although it can as well be done in several different methods.

Face-to-face interviews can be mainly characterized by the synchronous communication structure they possess in the context of time and place. This form of interview has several different advantages, however the synchronous communication system can be counted as the most significant, one which makes it possible to benefit the social cues, such as voice, body language and intonation. Although the importance level of these social cues will vary from one case to another (Emans, 1988), we have benefitted from this method in creating a suitable environment and ambience for our interviewees, in order to get the most out of each interview session. By applying this flexible method we could smoothly get rid of the formal and strict ambience we had been confronted with at the beginning of some of the interviews.

The ability to be recorded is the other benefit of these kinds of interviews. We took the advantage of having more accurate reports by recording and then transcribing them.

Applying the semi-structured interviews was one of our major advantages during the primary data collection process. This way we could maximise our chances of receiving all the necessary data from the interview sessions. The semi-structured interview system,

with its open-ended questions, was utilized during the primary data collection process in order for the interviewees to have more freedom in answering the questions and not be limited by the questions we subjected them to.

The duration of each interview session varied greatly, depending on each individual's schedule. For example, the interviews we held with the people working in the hotel industry lasted from 10 to 15 minutes, while the meetings with the local authorities and experts oscillated from 30 minutes to over an hour. In order to keep the relaxed and friendly atmosphere of the interviews, we informed our interviewees beforehand of the general topics to be discussed.

In the case of those people who, for various reasons, we were not able to meet in person, we had to rely on structured interviews sent via e-mail. These were also selected as a result of either being recommended during our field trip, or people we had previously encountered and had prior contact with.

2.4.2 Secondary data

As well as using interviews as the primary data source in our project, we required a set of secondary data in order to get more familiar with the current situation of tourism in Crete - particularly in Heraklion. In order to have a general view on themes such as seasonality, in what ways is it affecting Crete, who are the local authorities and stakeholders in charge of tourism, and what measures have already been undertaken to extend the tourism season - and to generally better prepare the field data collection trip to Heraklion - we collected these secondary data using books and articles found on Google scholar, and also local tourism websites. For example, the Greek Travel Pages and the Tornos news websites proved effective, as we were able get an overview of last year's tourism situation in Crete, which continues to improve compared to previous years. At the same time, as a result of searching on those websites, we found out about the Greek Tourism Confederation (SETE), which represents the association of tourism stakeholders from the private sector, with members from all over Greece, including Crete, and Heraklion.

Secondary data's importance has been clearly explained by McCaston (1998), "*if secondary research and data analysis is undertaken with care and diligence, it can*

provide a cost-effective way of gaining a broad understanding of research questions". The important point in utilizing the secondary data is that it may not be able to generalize to every different case or region; rather the secondary data should be clearly appraised according to the primary data achieved directly from the involved stakeholders.

As mentioned earlier, our project has been based on a qualitative approach with a viewpoint to secondary data that mostly interacts with the legalized past literature sources (Bishop, 2007; Heaton, 2004). The major source in our secondary data collection was academic articles from the similar research studies or resembling cases. By benefiting the information collected from both primary and secondary data we had the opportunity to have a wide perspective and sight regarding our problem formulation and the main theme of our case study and what we were going to concentrate on and search for.

In an effort to accumulate as much knowledge possible, we have reviewed different reports and articles on the Crete and Heraklion tourism industry, tourism stakeholders in the region and the tourism development process in recent years. These reports and articles as sources of secondary data helped our understanding about the different actors involved in the tourism industry, and how they are shaping it.

2.5 Mixed methods approach

The mixed methods research is an approach to inquiry combining the gathering of both quantitative and qualitative data. The main reason for using this form of inquiry is the assumption that by mixing both the qualitative and quantitative approaches, the final result will provide a more complete understanding of the researched topic, than either approach alone (Creswell, 2013). While qualitative data results tend to be open-ended to interpretation, quantitative data is more characterised by close-ended responses, such as those posed in surveys or questionnaires. The reason for mixing qualitative and quantitative methods came from an early belief that each one, taken separately, has particular weaknesses. Nevertheless, by using both approaches, those flaws could be neutralised (ibid.).

In the case of our particular study, we deemed necessary to take into account both the opinions of the local tourism stakeholders, as well as those of the visitors to the area. The reason why we decided interviewing the locals simply had to do with their experience and

knowledge of the situation, having to withstand the effects of seasonality year after year. In turn, tourism in the Heraklion region cannot be expanded without taking into account the visitors' reasons for visiting in the first place. Therefore tourists opinions and their interest in visiting during the off-season was also of interest to us. In the case of the former, we mostly held semi-structured interviews - except for the few people who we could only get in touch via e-mail, for whom structured interviews were devised - posing open-ended questions, which are representative of the qualitative approach. At the same time, the tourist survey relied on four questionnaire questions, that some of the Heraklion visitors were kind enough to answer. This is representative of the quantitative approach of collecting data, where a high number of subjects gave us a small glimpse into aspects such as their motivations behind planning their holidays in the Heraklion area, or whether or not they would consider visiting the region during the off-season. Hence, we assumed that by collecting and mixing all the gathered information, we would achieve a more comprehensive understanding of our research problem, something which neither qualitative nor quantitative approaches could generate on their own.

2.5.1 Qualitative data

For the purpose of collecting data for our thesis, the main method we used was the qualitative research approach. As they are based on interpretation of the results, qualitative methods are better suited than quantitative methods to a field such as tourism research (Hannam and Knox, 2011). Unlike quantitative research, which only allows for a limited amount of time spent with each research subject, and a limited amount of answers which can be collected, qualitative research offers a greater opportunity of interaction with each source, which adds more validity to the research findings (ibid.). Thus, *“tourism research should proceed using qualitative methodologies because they enable theory to guide the early stages of projects and to emerge at the end as a result of the research findings”* (Hannam and Knox, 2011, p. 175). Whether it involves cultural or social issues, qualitative research is most effective when researching subjects that have not been thoroughly investigated before, and where there is a need for more information about the values, opinions, behaviours, and social backgrounds of those involved in the studied phenomena, such as the people working within the tourism industry in and around Heraklion, in our particular situation.

According to Hannam and Knox (2011), three major groups of methodologies could be considered qualitative: participant observation, interviews and focus groups, and discourse analysis.

For the purpose of this paper, we never really considered using the participant observation approach, as that would have required us spending a serious amount of time on the field (Hannam and Knox, 2011), and witnessing for example how certain individuals are dealing with seasonality. Also focus groups were something that seemed a little bit out of our reach, in terms of convincing multiple local tourism stakeholders to join us at the same time for a chat. Instead, we decided to go to Heraklion and set-up multiple interviews with some of these people, in order to pick their brains up on how they would try to combat the effects of seasonality, or develop new collaboration strategies between them, which could lead to bringing in more tourists throughout the year.

2.5.1.1 The semi-structured interview

“It is vital that you are well prepared for an interview, and this process starts with deciding on the kind of interview you will conduct” (Hannam & Knox, 2011, p. 182).

For the purpose of this project, we have decided that the best way of collecting knowledge was through semi-structured interviews. As the most held in common form of interviews used in researches, the semi-structured interviews are characterized by their flexibility (Lewis-Beck et al., 2004). Unlike structured interviews, where questions are presented in a predetermined order and don't allow room for adjustment on the part of the interviewer (Hannam and Knox, 2011), the semi-structured interview approach allowed us to intervene during each interview, and adapt the order of topics and questions based on the answers we received. According to McGehee (2012), most *“tourism industry stakeholders are often very busy people, but they also tend to be immersed and involved in their work, and as such are eager to share their thoughts”*. As a result, even though before each interview we had prepared a list of questions relating to seasonality, local tourism stakeholders and possible courses of action for expanding the tourist season, we decided that it was in our best interest to remain flexible in our approach, always willing to go more in-depth when certain information needed delved more into.

The face-to-face interviews undertaken during this research took part in Heraklion and Amoudara, Crete, during April 5-11, 2017, and targeted both public and private sector tourism stakeholders. The broached topics revolved around themes such as seasonality and its effects on locals, the consequences of turning the area into a permanent tourist destination, the most important stakeholders in the region and the ways tourism is affected by their activities, and measures which could be taken for expanding the tourist season. The most challenging aspect of this process was not necessarily coming up with a list of question which would reflect the aims of this project, but rather finding the best people to talk to, and ultimately setting-up the interviews themselves, as most of our interviewees had really busy schedules, thus leading in some cases to a list of questions being sent via e-mail. Our interviewees will be talked about in subchapter 2.6.

An important feature of the semi-structured interviews is that both interviewer and interviewee are free to direct the process of interview (Hannam and Knox, 2011), a process which was especially obvious during our first interview in Heraklion, with Tourism Professor Konstantinos Andriotis. This form of interviews are relatively informal, they are partially structured through the use of a checklist or schedule, and also offer the possibility of asking follow-up questions and reacting to unexpected data (ibid.). As argued by Lewis-Beck et al. (2004), these interviews have the potential to lead to new subjects, or even to ideas which are apart from the main theme of the interview. In the semi-structured interviews, the interviewee's answers are more spontaneous and frank, as the time delay is quite low between the question and answer.

2.5.1.2 The e-mail interview

A structured interview is characterised by its rigidity - the one conducting the interview cannot intervene and adjust the following questions based on received answers – and a previously established agenda, where the interviewer is devising a set of questions, which are then posed in the same order to all interviewees (Hannam and Knox, 2011). An e-mail interview would fall in this category, as the order of questions is always the same and there is no room for adjustment, since there is no contact between the two parts.

For the purpose of collecting information for the analysis part of this paper, we had to resort to this type of interview whenever faced with the impossibility of meeting our interviewees in person. For instance, while in Heraklion, we were not able to schedule

interviews with representatives of The Region of Crete, and in the cases of stakeholders based in Athens, such as SETE or the GNTO, the e-mail interview was our only choice available. Thus, depending on each interviewee's background and activity, we devised sets of different questions, targeting their field of expertise. Nevertheless, we still managed to keep those questions on the areas of seasonality, its effects, stakeholder activities and potential courses of action that would lead to the extension of the tourist season in the Heraklion region.

As with any form of data collection, the e-mail interview also has its advantages and disadvantages (Hunt and McHale, 2007). An important advantage relates to the reduced cost of such a method, as it requires no travelling expenses, no equipment or transcribing costs (*ibid.*). It also allows the researcher to interact with the research subjects anywhere in the world, where they have access to e-mail. Another advantage is the time for reflection. Usually an interview occurs in real time, but in the case of the e-mail interview, the interviewee has plenty of time to reflect on an answer (*ibid.*).

In terms of disadvantages, perhaps the biggest was the impossibility of some of our interviewees submitting their answers in a timely manner, due to busy schedules or perhaps lack of interest, thus diminishing our chances of gaining extra knowledge through follow-up questions.

2.5.2 Quantitative data

As part of the mixed methods approach to collecting information for this project's analysis section, we also had to rely on gathering quantitative data, represented in our case by the tourist survey we conducted on the field. Although much more limited in terms of generating knowledge when compared to the qualitative approach, this method still is helpful in terms of being able to reach and gather information from a large amount of people (Hannam and Knox, 2011).

2.5.2.1 The questionnaire survey

According to Hannam and Knox (2011), the questionnaire is a helpful tool in terms of assisting researchers reach a large number of people, nevertheless the amount of information acquired via the questionnaire is generally quite small. Questionnaire surveys

are good in terms of understanding what is happening in a particular context, but less useful than interviews in understanding why, due to their limited theoretical content and depth (ibid.). Unfortunately, only a limited number of responses can be gathered using the questionnaire method, a fact that is quite limiting the chances of the researcher discovering something new and unexpected. At the same time, the little amount of time - about five minutes - spent interacting with each subject is limiting the validity of the research findings - further discussed in chapter 2.7 - which accordingly should not be heavily relied upon when drawing a line and coming up with the conclusions for a research project (ibid.).

The main reason why we intended on collecting data using the questionnaire survey was our desire of coming up with potential courses of action, which could lead to extending the tourism season in the Heraklion region, by taking into account visitors' particular interests in visiting the island. The tourist survey devised for the purpose of this project targeted randomly sampled foreign tourists, travelling either alone, in pairs or in groups, and it took place between the 5th and 11th of April, 2017, in the city of Heraklion and its nearby sea resort, Amoudara. The process was fairly simple: tourists were approached on the Amoudara beach, in the Heraklion city center and within the premises of the TUI Magic Life Candia Maris Hotel. A total of 76 questionnaires have been filled during our research. Each questionnaire contained four close-ended questions, nevertheless, two of those questions - reasons for visiting Crete and visiting the area during the off-season - asked the research subjects to elaborate on their given answers. For the purpose of this study, we had to devise a short questionnaire, which wouldn't require more than five minutes spent with each subject. Since our presence in Heraklion lasted for just under a week, and the general approach was mostly qualitative, consisting in face-to-face interviews, we had to be as efficient as possible in reaching as many tourists as possible. Realising our subjects were not experts in the field of tourism, willing to spend their time and knowledge with us, but merely tourists on vacation, thus looking to relax and not be bothered by pesky students, or locals trying to sell them stuff on the beach or on the city center streets, we adapted our survey duration and questions accordingly.

With this in mind, we proceeded in using the questionnaire survey as a means of reaching as many tourists as possible, in trying to get a general idea of what motivates and attracts them to visit Crete in general. Our intention was never about trying to go in depth and

analyse each individual's mindset, since this paper is not about tourists' behaviour, but rather finding out whether or not they would be interested in visiting the area outside the sun and beach season, and what would draw them to visit Crete during the November-March timeframe. In short, whether they were visiting just for the sun and beach - as Crete is perceived by most tourists according to Andriotis (2005) - or is there anything besides that which would challenge the stereotype, sparkle their interest and would not require packing a swimsuit.

2.6 The interviewees

"What people say in interviews is used as final evidence in the final presentation of a project, thus instating interviewees as important elements of the research process" (Hannam & Knox, 2011, p. 183).

According to McGehee (2012), the primary factor in the success process of any research study is the expertise applied in selecting the interviewees. For the purpose of this study, we tried to pick the brains of those who are not only confronting with and are affected by the effects of seasonality, having to live through them year after year, but also some who have previously done research into the matter and are considered experts in the field, such as Professor Konstantinos Andriotis. A total of eight people were interviewed face-to-face, while three more submitted their answers via e-mail. Some of them were working in the hotel industry and had a previous working relationship with one of the authors of this project (Mr. Serafim and Mrs. Petrou), and as a result, were the first people we relied upon for interviews. Others were found online, after reading papers on topics such as seasonality and the state of Crete tourism (Professor Andriotis), while the rest were approached after being either met by chance (Nikos and Elefteria) or recommended while we were in Heraklion (Mr. Garancini, Mr. Stratakis, Karin, Mrs. Karagkouni, Mrs. Livani and Mathew Halpin).

A Professor in Tourism at Middlesex University Business School, Konstantinos Andriotis holds an MSc in International Hospitality Management, a PhD in Tourism Development and Planning and a Postdoc in Tourism Marketing. He is the editor of the International Journal of Tourism Policy and the book series Tourism Development and Management - Issues and Approaches. He has authored over 35 peer reviewed articles and book

chapters. He is a regular reviewer for 19 journals and a member of the Editorial Board of 21 journals. His work has appeared in various journals and he has authored five books. He has acted as Chairman and member of the Organising and Scientific Committees of various international conferences. Tourism development and planning, alternative forms of tourism, sustainability and community attitudes to tourism, are among his research outputs and interests. During the early stages of our research, we have stumbled upon some of his papers on topics such as tourism and seasonality in Crete, and decided to get in touch with him and ask for a more in-depth insight on our research. Luckily for us, he happened to be in Heraklion during our data collection phase there, and although pressed to catch a flight, he still offered us his valuable time and insight on the local situation, thus proving instrumental for the rest of our interviews, in terms of who we could target and some of the topics we could broach. And although he had no connections among the public sector, he pointed us to some of the local tourism authorities, such as the Municipality tourist office, the Regional agency of the Ministry of Tourism, and the Region of Crete office.

Getting in touch with the local tourism authorities was of the utmost importance for this project, thus we wanted to get an official opinion from the Municipality in relation to our research. While in Heraklion, we managed to get in touch with perhaps the most important representative of the public sector, Deputy-Mayor for Tourism, Gian Andrea Garancini. For the first time in its history, the city of Heraklion has a deputy mayor, which focuses exclusively on tourism. For the past year, Mr. Garancini has been in charge of tourism development within the city, and since seasonality was one of the main issues he has been confronting, he agreed to talk to us on this subject.

Another point of emphasis before our field trip was talking to someone from the Ministry of Tourism, to find out if any measures are being taken in extending the tourist season. As mentioned earlier, many of our interviewees came about as a result of the snowball effect, and Aristidis Stratakis, Chief Officer for the Regional Tourism Office, Directorate of Crete, was no exception. When visiting the Region of Crete office, he was recommended as the person to talk to, who could speak from an official position.

During our interview, Mr. Stratakis was joined by his colleague, Eleftheria Agiomirgianaki, who is in charge of the Heraklion Prefecture Hotel Licensing. The interview was very productive not just in terms of getting Mr. Stratakis' and Mrs. Agiomirgianaki's official and

personal opinions on the current situation, but also because of the material we were handed, including last year's statistics and officials plans for future strategies.

Not just the opinion of the public authorities was important for this research, but also that of the private sector. As the official organization of the local tourism stakeholders, the Greek Tourism Confederation, or SETE, holds a central role concerning the tourism strategy throughout Greece, including Crete. With the help of Deputy-Mayor Garancini, we were able to contact Aggeliki Karagkouni, Project Manager in SETE. However, due to her being based in Athens, we had to settle on sending her a few questions via e-mail. Nevertheless, she provided us with statistics relating to seasonality, and a general plan for the tourism strategy in Greece, which also takes seasonality into account.

Katerina Livani, from the Ministry of Tourism (GNTO) has been approached via e-mail, as a result of being recommended by Mrs. Karagkouni. As head of the Market research department, Mrs. Livani's responsibility is to collect data about the arrivals of tourists (inbound tourism), the duration of stay and the expenditure. Her task is to provide information to those who decide about the strategy of the GNTO. Unfortunately, since her position did not involve Crete specifically, she was only able to provide us with a general description of the GNTO's activities.

Another person we got the chance to interview was Serafim Karouzakis, general manager of the TUI Magic Life Candia Maris Hotel, a five star, all-inclusive hotel located in Amoudara, a sea resort located right next to the city of Heraklion. We identified him early on during our research, as a person who could talk about the many ways seasonality is affecting the hotel industry in the area, and what are its impacts on the people working in this field of tourism. Hosting mainly German tourists, Candia Maris is operating each year from early/mid-April, until late October.

Vefa Petrou, guest service assistant manager at TUI Magic Life Candia Maris Hotel, was also kind enough to join Mr. Serafim during the interview. As someone who is directly impacted by seasonality, she offered us insight on what is it like for locals who only work in the hotel industry for about half a year.

Another person working at Candia Maris, only this time for tour operator TUI, is Karin. During our previous interviews we realised the central role that tour operators play in bringing tourists to the island, hence we thought it would be extremely important for our

research to get the opinion of someone working for such entity. Karin's role at TUI is being a representative for the company in front of the client and also in the hotel. She has been working for the company for eight years, and with various tour operators since 1995.

Someone we got to interview by chance was Nikos, the manager of the hotel where we have been staying while on our data collection trip. A 40 room, family-owned and run facility, Park Hotel does not rely on tour operators in order to get clients, but on various travel agencies and Booking.com. Open for tourists between April and September, Park Hotel is still available all year round, although only few locals use its facilities during the off-season.

Finally, Mathew Halpin, in charge of the Lakkos project, was mentioned by Professor Andriotis as someone who could offer an external opinion on how authorities are working on developing tourism in the city of Heraklion. The Lakkos project is an initiative where local artists, groups and the Heraklion Municipality work together to upgrade and revive Heraklion's previously most neglected area in the city center.

2.7 Validity and reliability

In this project, we considered humanistic inquiry as the recourse of researching and analysing the data, in both literature and data collection, in order to have a broader view and to be able to come up with a deeper knowledge and conscious about the subjected context. Humanistic approaches as described by Fromm (1947) and Hirschman (1986), consider the reality of humans, that the human beings are able to reason, and through reason, neutral knowledge can be concluded instead of depending on alternative manners of achieving knowledge, such as science or religious ways. Humanistic inquiries lead the researchers to discover various manners of problem understanding, before coming up with ideas to resolve the situation.

According to Hirschman (1986, p.240) the humanistic method "*is an interpretation of the phenomenon about which one is inquiring*". The exploratory research method has allowed us, as researchers, to be pertaining and meantime be positive in the expounding of data in its own nature.

There are several other criteria of evaluation, which are mainly being utilized in qualitative researches, and since our research is a combination of both qualitative and quantitative approaches, we have considered them as well. The major methods, according to Lincoln and Guba (1985), are credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability.

Credibility, as defined by Robson (1993), is aimed to illustrate that the research has been done in a manner that ensures the subject has been identified and described in a detailed and accurate way. In other words, credibility intends to test the trustworthiness of the research. According to Shenton (2004), credibility is an instrument to test whether the data analysis of the research coincides with the actual situations of the phenomena. In this research project, we used both primary and secondary data to investigate the topic of our discussion. Therefore in order to increase the trustworthiness of our findings, we considered utilizing various types of data collection methods.

Transferability means investigating whether the data collected and the results of the research have the ability to be transferred to other similar situations and contexts (Leininger, 1994). *“To assess the transferability of an interpretation one must know not only the specifics of the context in which the interpretation was generated, but also the specifics of the context to which the interpretation is to be applied”*, Hirschman (1986, p. 245) clarifies. Since this research is an exploratory project to analyse and suggest the possibilities and challenges of turning Heraklion into a permanent tourism destination during the whole year, we selected the interviewees and questionnaire respondents from the area, and in order to enhance the transferability of the research, we considered providing a broad description of the subjected area. Therefore it made it possible to transfer the findings and results of this research to other similar locations and cases who share similar characteristics.

Dependability is also one of the humanistic tools, which refers to the consistency of the research project and evaluates the certainty of a research. It shows whether the project has the required quality to stay stable through the years, and in comparison to other researches and methods (Miles and Huberman, 1994).

Finally, confirmability, or in other words, objectivity, tries to investigate whether the reader has been provided with the necessary data, in order to be able to judge the sufficiency of the research (Robson, 1993). Confirmability enhances the trustworthiness

of the results offered by the researcher (Hirschman, 1986). In this research, in order to come up with conformity, the general methods and procedures have been explained and described step by step in details. This research project is completely open to critics, and researchers with findings other than what has been presented in this paper, can challenge or confirm the ideas offered by its authors.

Since this paper is based on mixed methods and is a result of both qualitative and quantitative approaches in the data collection and analysis, then the research should be measured by the tools of evaluation offered for quantitative approaches as well. The two main issues to be considered in a quantitative research project are the validity and reliability of that research.

Validity is the realm in which the data collection and the gathered information will reflect the whole content under research. In a tourism research, as it deals with people and their behaviours and attitudes, certifying its validity is a difficult issue, since its only reliance is on uncontrollable responses mainly gathered through questionnaires (Veal, 1997). Therefore, this type of data can never be as certain and reliable as the data collected through the natural sciences (Pizam, 1994; Veal, 1997). According to Vaus (1991), there is neither an ideal method, nor a manner to determine the validity of a research.

Reliability on the other hand, refers to the degree to which the results gained will be identical from one occasion to other similar occasions (ibid). While validity intends to find out whether the research tools are measuring what needs to be measured, on the other side reliability is concerned with the stability of the measured info. Validity is comprehensive, which means that when a measure is valid, then it is reliable as well. Nevertheless, the reliability of a measure does not always represent its validity (Singleton et al., 1993). In humanistic themes, due to the uncertain and variable social conditions, reliability is hard to control, and sometimes impossible (Veal, 1997).

In this paper, in order to increase the reliability of the collected data, we considered paying more attention to the wording of the questions used in the questionnaire, and also in the interviews, in order to prevent any misunderstandings.

2.8 Limitations

Limitations in a research study are generally the possible, uncontrollable factors which might occur during the research study and which may affect the process.

Like any other research, we confronted with several limitations and challenges during our data collection process. However, as Wiersma (2009) mentioned, the very major limitation at this point is the reliability of the interviewees and finding the most appropriate people in this regard. We had encountered the very exact challenge in our data collection process as well, as finding the most relevant people to interview was the primary priority and challenge for us, especially in regards to city representatives. And although we feel most of the interviewees were our best choices available, some of them - especially some who we could not talk to in person - were not necessarily knowledgeable on the specifics of the situation in Heraklion. In other cases, some of the people we got in touch with could not manage to deliver their answers on time for the purpose of this paper, due to busy schedules.

One other obvious limitation was the financial one: since we were on limited budgets, we were not able to spend more than a week in Crete - a factor which contributed to our inability of meeting every person we intended for interviews.

The language barrier also proved to be an obstacle, as most of the existing material on seasonality and its effects was in Greek. This also made it a little difficult during some of our interviews, as not all the interviewees were proficient English speakers, thus making it hard sometimes both for them to express their opinions, and for us to understand everything that was being said. Also, during the tourist questionnaire data collection phase, since the majority of visitors were non-English speakers, we were confronted with plenty of language-related refusals, which we did not anticipate beforehand - although it is worth noting that none of the tourists who were approached on the beach, refused taking part in our little survey, regardless of their English language skills.

Finally, the lack of published papers and studies in English regarding seasonality in Crete and Heraklion, meant that prior to our data collection trip, our knowledge on the matter was built only on the studies undertaken by Professor Andriotis (2002, 2005). Accordingly, the information we had to rely on could be a little outdated - something which the professor

made sure to mention during our interview - although in his opinion, not much has changed since.

3. Literature Review

Even though Crete is an island located in the Mediterranean Sea, therefore blessed with a mild winter climate, and also breathtaking landscapes (Proust et al., 2009), which would suggest multiple tourism possibilities throughout the year, tourism in the area is still characterised by seasonality, only lasting from April until October (Andriotis, 2005). Considering its heritage and natural assets, the authors of this paper find it hard to believe that such a place would only entice tourists to visit it for its sunny beaches, during the summer season. Therefore, this chapter of the paper will discuss some of the existing literature on the difficulties behind staving off seasonality and the tourism season not being extended throughout the year, by covering the theoretical aspects that need to be discussed and explained prior to commencing our analysis on the possibilities of turning the Heraklion region into a permanent tourist destination. For that reason, we have identified three major topics which need to be addressed: first and foremost, seasonality, second, tourism destination management, and finally, the influence of stakeholders on tourist destinations. We will look into aspects such as seasonality - reasons, consequences and possibilities of combating its effects - and its impact on tourist destinations, at the ways of managing tourism on multiple levels, such as national, regional and local, and at some of the most influential entities on shaping the tourist landscape.

The first subchapter will try to shed a little light on the reasons behind the occurrence of seasonality, its consequences and ways of dealing or even eliminating it. We will discuss the elements that are essential to managing a tourism destination, where the concept and roles of destination management organizations (DMOs) will be explained (Wang, 2011; Morrison, 2013), along with the importance of local authorities getting involved in the development of tourism and destinations (Williams and Lew, 2014). Finally, we will have a general discussion on tourism stakeholders, with an emphasis on tour operators and airlines, which seem to have the greatest impact on Crete tourism (Andriotis, 2002).

3.1 Tourism and Seasonality

This subchapter will discuss some of the reasons and consequences of seasonality, and also ways of diminishing its effects, which has been a serious subject in tourism related researches, especially in recent decades. The seasonal pulsations and fluctuations of demands, which are imputed to various factors such as climatic changes, human decisions, traditions and limitations in supplement are strongly affecting the tourism industry throughout the world (Andriotis, 2005). As a result, the tourist destination confronts with several problems in the number of incoming tourists and accordingly, low returns on investments done in the tourism sector, and the overuse of the services and existing facilities during the tourism off-season (ibid). Seasonality and the impacts it has on various fields, such as social, economic and environmental, has always been one of the primary issues and problems in the tourism industry and tourism strategies in many countries (Andriotis, 2005; Drakatos, 1987; Tsitouras, 1998, Flognfeldt, 2001). According to Commons and Page (2001), seasonality is strongly connected to tourism, and the tourism flows are generally examined by the seasonal factors. Seasonality has enticed the attention of a lot of researchers in the last decades (Amelung et al., 2007; Andriotis, 2005; Butler, 1994). Climate, as a very important factor in the tourism resource base of an area, plays the significant role of distinguishing the sustainability of a region, since tourism is a self-evident phenomenon which does not require any elaboration (de Freitas, 2003). Seasonality is a feature for the tourism sector, which can be counted as a serious concern and problem for mass tourism destinations (Butler & Mao, 1997). *“The overall consensus of opinion (...) is that seasonality is a problem (...) and that it is something to be overcome, or at least modified and reduced in effect”* (Butler, 1994).

As Butler (1994) argues, seasonality may be originated from two basic sources, natural and institutional, which will be explained in the following section of this paper.

3.1.1 Reasons of seasonality

Natural seasonality is the result of the conversions of the climate conditions, and these variations normally get augmented in polar climaxes where the distance from the Equator gets increased. Additionally these variations may be effective on tropical locations, where climatic changes such as rainfall or humidity may affect the attractiveness of a region

during particular seasons of a year (Butler, 1994). In general, the main season for most tourist destinations is summer. According to Nadal (2004), more than 80% of island regions tourist arrivals occur between May and September, which is not only the result of fine weather during these months, but also the outcome of other factors affecting human decisions, such as school holidays or public holidays (ibid.) also claims that school holidays during summer months are the most effective element for determining seasonality. The sport seasons are also specified by different activities such as skiing or surfing, which are mainly related to climatic conditions (Butler, 1994).

On the other side, institutional seasonality is caused by humans, its effects are much more palpable and at the same time less predictable than those of natural seasonality. Institutional seasonality is the consequence of a mixture of several factors, such as religious, cultural, ethnic and social issues (ibid.).

Another reason causing seasonality could be the inertia or tradition. According to Butler (1994), most people choose summer months or public holidays for going on vacation not just because they have to, but also because they have always done so and it has turned into a regular habit.

Seasonality is not always imputable to the tendency of the holidaymakers to choose having their vacations during the peak seasons of the year; it is also relevant to the limitations that make this choice complicated or in some cases impossible (Lundtorp et al., 1999). These limitations can be counted as the inability of governments to manage having open-businesses during the entire year, the low activities of tour operators and their unwillingness in offering continuous service during the off-season (Andriotis, 2005).

3.1.2 The Consequences of Seasonality

As many researches are unanimous (Jang, 2004; Butler, 1994; Bonn, 1992), seasonality is considered to be one of the most undeniable and pervasive dilemmas tour operation managers are dealing with.

Islands, with their special natural attractions, are confronted with more special challenges in the sustainability concept (Sheldon, 2005). In island regions, the traditional form of economic development normally has to deal with a set of restrictions, such as external

dependency, the lack of self-governance and the authority for decision making, isolation, accessibility limitations, rural, lack of resources (scarcity) (Butler, 1993; Cross & Nutley, 1999; Milne 1992; Pearce, 1995; Royle & Scott, 1996). Therefore the tourism industry is a very strong source for the development process of the island regions. Considering the remarkably higher revenues and the levels of employment caused by tourism, even though they are mostly seasonal, governments have been persuaded to focus on the tourism industry as a means for enhancing the local economy and reducing the gap between themselves and developed societies. However, in order to be able to overcome the mentioned restrictions on islands, tourism is not enough, and the benefits of the revenue collected from tourism activities should be kept in the destination as long as possible (Sheldon, 2005). For this purpose, several strategies such as tax policies, entrepreneurial subsidies and investment motivations are beneficial methods to be applied in these destinations (ibid). In other words, tourism seems to be a modernizing tool in the economy of these kinds of destinations.

To be clear, in island destinations, generally, the significant role in the development process of the tourism industry is played by the local authorities (Andriotis, 2002). The very same situation occurs in Crete as well. As Rajotte (1982) explains, the major resources affected by tourism activities are land, water and energy supply, resources which are considered to be hard and expensive to produce or to import. Additionally, the small population of the island destinations translates in a limited domestic market, which causes reliance on the foreign trades (Pearce, 1987). On the other side, the climatic conditions and isolation are a factor against the economic development in island destinations (Smith, 1996). Therefore, the demand fluctuations in the islands should be well known and understood through the sector diversifications, so that the relevant and efficient strategies and plans could be applied in order to enhance the quality of offered services and infrastructure, or for the employment stabilization (Sheldon, 2005).

The undeniable and dramatic increase in population experienced by tourism destinations in high seasons of the year causes various problems in environment and also in resources (Andriotis, 2000). For instance high consumption of electricity in peak seasons of the year in Caribbean region has caused electricity blackouts; the very same issue has been captured in relation to water supplies as well (Jackson, 1984).

The negative impacts of seasonality on the tourism sector have been elucidated by Manning and Powers (1984, p. 25) as “*uneven distribution of use over time (peaking) is one of the most pervasive problems with outdoor recreation and tourism, causing inefficient resource use, loss of profit potential, strain on social and ecological carrying capacities, and administrative scheduling difficulties.*” These negative impacts are particularly tangible in economic terms. According to Connell (1988), island destinations have very limited economic resources. Apparently, the single resources of islands, which carry comparative advantages are beaches, unpolluted seashores, and warm and pleasant climate. Therefore, in order to be able to stay in the competitive market of tourism, the islands should preserve these advantages.

The compaction of the tourism activities and high increment of population into a few months of a year cause several difficulties in accessibility to capital, a lower amount of investment return, thus resulting higher risks and an overuse of infrastructure and facilities during those months, while the rest of the year is characterised by under-use. Therefore, it means that high revenues should be captured during the peak season, in order to neutralize the losses in the off-season (Mathieson and Wall, 1982). Accordingly, as a result the services offered by the suppliers normally are reduced in quality, in order to make the most possible of the peak tourism demand, which leads to visitor dissatisfaction (Andriotis, 2005).

And the effects are even bolder as this industry has turned to a major source of economic and social development of a country. That is why there is an increasing tendency to make sure the destination has an annually active tourism industry rather than just a seasonal activity (Butler, 2014).

Refer to Cooper et al. (1998), seasonality will intrinsically waste the employment and the investment done on the employees by only occupying them for a temporal duration. Accordingly, the argument that seasonality has a strong influence on making things difficult for local entrepreneurs, specifically the accommodation owners, as they recruit full-time staff for a specific period and then being able to keep them in the colder months of the year, has been raised as well by some researchers (Lundtorp et al., 1999; Pearce, 1989; Yacoumis, 1980).

Overall, the seasonal fluctuations cause challenges in terms of local employment for the residents (Vaughan et al., 2000). The locals occupying tourism related jobs are eventually confronted with the situation of staying unemployed during the off-season or searching for other replacement jobs for that period (ibid.). As a result the level of unemployment and the competition in the labor market significantly increases during the off-season (Butler, 1994; Mathieson and Wall, 1982).

Another issue caused by the seasonal fluctuations in a tourist destination is the overuse of infrastructure and services caused by the increment of the number of visitors during the peak season, therefore, the increase in required employees often leads to lack of expertise, efficiency and experience, which results a decline in the offered services' quality (Dickson and Huyton, 2008). This reduction in the infrastructure quality not only challenges the tourism sector, but also is a serious problem for the local residents who are "*called upon to pay this social cost of the peaking problem*" (Murphy, 1985, p. 81).

Islands are frequently having to deal with the economic health challenges and limitations, due to their restricted economic resources (Sheldon, 2005). The very same circumstances are as well being seen in our case study destination, Crete. The tourism industry is the major revenue resource and largest economic activity of the island (Andriotis, 2004). According to Croes (2004), tourism is being suggested as a strong element for the islands, in order to be able to expand their economic scale and prevail the restrictions which island destinations are normally being confronted with.

On the other side, there are as well some researchers that believe there are some benefits which could be counted on in relation to running a business on a temporal basis (Drakatos 1987; Hartman 1986; Goulding et al., 2004). Basically, the responses to the seasonal activities of tourism can be divided in three areas: employment, costs and facilities, and environmental safety (Witt and Moutinho, 1995). According to Hartmann (1986), "*dead seasons are the only chance for the social and ecological environment to recover*".

Though, the question is why do people prefer island regions with high expenses for spending time near seaside, while they could benefit from similar beaches near their hometown, without having to spend so much time (King, 1997)? According to Baum (1997), the reasons that make the islands more attractive and different for the people who visit may be their confined location, or their small dimensions, the ability to reach from

one side of the island to the other side in minutes and just by walking. *“The feeling of separateness, of being cut off from the mainland, is an important physical and psychological attribute of the successful vacation”* (Baum, 1997, p. 21).

3.1.3 Fighting seasonality

Seasonality is known as a formidable phenomenon due to various issues; as a result, it has profound impacts on all aspects of a tourist destination, such as economic, social, cultural and environmental. Therefore, considering and addressing all these issues and attempting to eliminate these effects by changing the seasonal pattern of a destination are quite essential (Butler, 2014).

Although it is not possible to entirely eliminate seasonality, because of the reasons and motivations of the holidaymakers, nevertheless there are still some strategies and possible courses of action which would be effective in combating seasonality (Oxana, 2016). According to Witt et al. (1991), as cited by Baum and Lundtrop (2001, p. 154), *“there are four principal strategies for managing seasonality: changing the product mix, market diversification, differential pricing and encouragement/facilitation by the state of the staggering of holidays”*. The major proceedings counted by Butler (2014) are briefly defined as below:

Extending the tourism season is the most and common response action to be applied in a destination challenged with seasonality. Since the aim is to extend the tourism season by increasing the attractiveness of the destination, therefore decreasing the prices of the offered services and accommodation is a strategy being applied in several regions. However, this attempt is not easy to succeed. Its success is strongly connected to the flexibility of the market in its travel adjustments and arrangements, in order to be capable of attaining a significant number of visitors during the off-peak season, and the sensitivity of the destination to price decrements which would be effective in keeping the destination as an attractive choice for the visitors (Oxana, 2016). Although unlike the popular assumption, the main target of price changes and reductions is to increase the demand during the off-season by presenting promotional prices and booking offers, and not only to increase the profits and revenues (ibid.). However, the effectiveness of price reductions on extending the tourist season depends to the coordination and collaboration

of the effective stakeholders, the flexibility of the destinations, the transportation system and the services available for the off-season tourists (ibid.). On the other side, there are also some negative consequences and challenges for this strategy, such as the unprofitability of business, caused by serious price reductions during the off-peak season, without the expected benefit through it (Corluka et al, 2013).

If it feels like a destination is not capable of attracting visitors outside the peak season, it might be because its key touristic offerings and attractiveness are only accessible during a particular period of the year (such as sea, sun and sand destinations), thus what should be noted for these kind of destinations is to attempt to add more offerings and extra attractions for the off-season period (Butler, 2014). As a matter of fact, these attractions will not be entirely linked to the weather and temperature conditions, so they might be indoor activities or events which would still be attracting irrespective to the temperature. Setting these kind of additional events and attractiveness regardless of the temperature circumstances requires a high amount of organization, branding and marketing activities and major investments, especially if the similar situation exists in nearby competitor destinations (ibid.). Essentially, in order to address the negative impacts of seasonality the attention should be more focused on the off-season and on spreading the tourism throughout the year, with stable number of tourists whole year long. In order to address seasonality, the policy makers need to apply nuanced strategies for attracting tourists during the shoulder-season and the off-season, by capturing the differentiation of tourism demand, such as cultural, religious, business or sport tourism (Jugović et al., 2011). Although these kinds of strategies have the strongest effect in the destinations which already have a well-established tourism industry, nevertheless the most effective strategies should be chosen based on the dynamics of the supply-side dimensions (Lee et al., 2008). Since “sun, sand, sea” destinations are challenged with the high tourism demand during the peak season, and on the other side considerably lower or even no demand during off-peak season, the attempts should be applied in a manner to point the increment of demand during the off-season (Ćorluka et al., 2013). These kinds of actions would provide the basis of sustainable development for the destination (ibid.). One applicable strategy of the tourist products in order to absorb more visitors to a destination during the low demand period is by promotion of selective forms of tourism; the internationally substantial tourism trends such as globalization, standardization, segmentation, standard of life, lifestyle, mobility, or needs, are factors changing the tourist

behaviours and expectations which makes it possible for the tourist industry to accomplish these changes in the tourism sector apart from the sun, sand, sea tourism. These changes in the behaviour of demand should reconcile the destinations through presenting various tourist offerings and products with the target of decreasing the negative impacts caused by mass summertime tourism (ibid.).

In other words, in order to change the season duration of a destination, there should be enormous changes in every aspect of it, which would revamp the destination; certainly such renovation would require great investments and changes in the various aspects of the destination, for instance with allowing the promotion of activities which were previously not permitted (ibid.). The success of the revamping strategies is strongly connected to the competitors and how the destination is prepared for competing with the ever-changing and increasing demands. As a result, the revamping step is a continuous process which should always renew itself during time (Butler, 2014).

The revamping process of the destination should be applied in a way that makes the destination somehow different and unique from other similar destinations (ibid.). A destination might intend to change its fixed image, services and facilities entirely in order to attract new visitors to a brand new market that could be active throughout the year and not for a specific season, but there is no guarantee that this attempt will surely succeed. The major and primary step and purpose is to create a destination unique and different from others, which would be capable of attracting people to have a unique experience in a particular place (ibid.). This differential can be done through benefiting the existing resources, or by creating new different events, such as festivals, fashion events, performances (Goulding et al., 2004). Refer to Getz (2010), the strategic promotion of the festivals and various events in a destination plays an inevitable role in the development of the destination, attracting new visitors, and the contribution of the market in the destination's economy. Events are very important elements in distorting temporal imbalances in a destination (Goulding, 2008). In other words, the concept of winter events and festivals is a long-established phenomenon being applied in several destinations (Mules, 2004; Wardrop & Robertson, 2004; Higham & Ritchie, 2001), and while some festivals were created more than a century ago, some others have been recently resurrected or created in order to meet socio-cultural, environmental, sportive or political goals.

Adding an extra season to the existing main one is another possible and impressive action which could be exerted in some destinations. This could be conceivable by creating winter attractions such as winter sports, to a destination which is mainly a summer destination, or vice versa, by creating summertime attractions to a mountainous destination by offering outdoor interesting events like hiking, mountain biking or rock climbing. As a matter of fact, such strategies are only applicable in destinations benefitting from appropriate climatic and geographical conditions for creating a double-season destination (Butler, 2014). Such market diversifications and marketing campaigns, devised in order to attract more markets in various seasons, have also been argued and suggested by Witt & Moutinho (1995), through the strategy of flattening of seasonal peaks and lows. These kinds of activities will not only add a new season and attraction to the existing one, but will also enlarge the existing summer or winter market and create the circumstances to have permanent attractions and touristic activities in a destination (Butler, 2014).

Generally, the strategies and plans applied by a tourist destination or an organization need to consider the causes and their effects; as a result, a deeper perception or a better awareness about the market segmentation and the tourism behaviour and motivations could be very helpful in the development of a destination and marketing approaches, in order to encourage more visitors during off-season (Baum & Hagen, 1999). Considering the causes behind a destination confronting with seasonality can vary from one destination to another, the responses it generates from tourism stakeholders is the main focus and concentration of the development strategy (Lee et al., 2008).

3.2 Management of tourist destinations

Considering the fact that tourist destinations compete to offer visitors the best possible experiences, but at the same time manage the effects of tourism on the local communities and environments, the importance of destination management has gained traction during the past few years (UNWTO, 2007). In order to be able to deliver the ultimate tourism experience, the local destination must rely on a variety of players that have to work as part of a team. Therefore, managing a destination “*calls for a coalition of these different interests to work towards a common goal to ensure the viability and integrity of their destination now and for the future*” (ibid.). Wang (2011, p.3) defines destination management “*as a proactive, visitor-centred approach to the economic and cultural*

development of a destination that balances and integrates the interests of visitors, service providers and the community". According to Morrison (2013, p.5), "*destination management involves coordinated and integrated management of the destination mix (attractions and events, facilities, transportation, infrastructure and hospitality resources). Effective destination management requires a strategic or long-term approach based upon a platform of destination visioning and tourism planning*". It is in this context that the success of many destinations today is relying on the activity of a destination management organization, or DMO. While its' initial purpose was that of marketing a destination, its role has recently expanded to also being the strategic leader in developing it, as part of a coherent strategy (UNWTO, 2007).

The following subchapter will look at the actors who are ultimately responsible for the state of tourism within a destination, which means they are also the ones who are in charge of potentially extending the tourist season and alleviating the effects of seasonality. At the very top of the list sit the DMOs, or the destination management organizations, responsible for everything involving tourism on a national, state, regional or local level (Wang, 2011; Morrison, 2013). It is the DMOs role to get everybody else on the same page on everything involving tourism, as Wang (2011) states that ultimately, all efforts by the other responsible entities, the local authorities and stakeholders within a destination, have to be coordinated by the DMO. All those aspects will be presented more thoroughly in the following subchapters about DMOs and the roles played by local authorities in the development of tourist destinations. Next we will discuss about stakeholders and look at how tour operators and airlines - which tourism in Crete heavily relies on - are shaping the tourist landscape. Combined, all of these entities have the potential to shape the destination, including the means to fight off seasonality and turn the area into a permanent tourist attraction.

3.2.1 Destination management organizations

A relatively new topic within tourism academics - "*still in its infancy*", according to Fyall (2011, p. 341) - due to both their complexity - the presence of multiple stakeholders, each with a different input over decision making, nevertheless none of which who can fully take charge of development and planning matters - and difficulty to manage, destinations need to develop suitable strategies for their long term development. Dwyer et al. (2009, in *ibid.*)

state that in order to “*sustain and enhance their competitiveness in what is increasingly becoming a highly competitive arena of activity*”, those who are responsible for managing destinations first need to comprehend the challenges and opportunities which they have to deal with.

It is in this context of requiring a strategy for destination development that the need for what Wang (2011) describes as an “*umbrella organization*” first came about. Or as Morrison (2013, p. 5) explains, “*destination management organizations (DMOs) came into being because of the need to mount a coordinated effort for planning, developing and marketing tourism destinations*”.

Morrison (2013) makes clear that destination management is accomplished through DMOs, who are tasked with coordinating the efforts of multiple stakeholders within a tourist destination, in order to achieve its goals and vision. Although its role includes multiple other activities beyond marketing, that are essential to the success of a destination, Ritchie and Crouch (2003) argue that marketing still remains the main sphere of a DMO.

Referring to Wang (2011, p. 15), a DMO has the “*unique role as the official face and voice of the destination*”, which should also be the “*unbiased, ‘can’t be bought’ provider of the best travel information available*”. The extent to which a DMO will be successful or not depends on the support it gets from the various stakeholders within the destination. Its main mandate is to promote visitation to the destination area, which, nevertheless, implies the establishment of strong connections with all the key stakeholders, industry partners and advocacy groups from the local community. This is the reason why DMOs need to reflect the expectations of all those groups within a destination, in such a manner that the development, management and promotion of the tourist destination pertains to the needs of sometimes very different stakeholders (ibid.).

According to Wang (2011, p. 4), DMOs “*continue to face confusion, uncertainty and doubt from their local governments, stakeholders and partners regarding the roles they can play and the value they can offer*”. In the context of a continuous fight over funds and tax money with other non-tourist entities, the DMOs need to emphasize their importance and role of being leaders in the sustainable development of destinations - or risk not being included whenever decisions affecting local communities are being made (ibid.).

Heath and Wall (1992) mention the following tasks of a DMO: strategy formulation, representing the interests of stakeholders, marketing of the destination and coordination of destination activities. However, depending on the source, a DMO has multiple, more elaborate roles within a destination. One such source is the UN World Tourism Organization's publication, which states that a DMO should have four different functions: leading and coordinating, marketing, creating a suitable environment, and delivering on the ground (A Practical Guide to Tourism Destination Management, 2007, in Morrison, 2013).

Its first role – leading and coordinating – means the DMO should be the central figure in any tourist destination, getting all the local stakeholders on the same page, leading and coordinating their efforts for the overall benefit of the respective destination and community. All the resources within a destination have to be used at an optimum level, from local attractions and amenities, to accessibility, local workforce, prices and overall image. A huge challenge in fighting seasonality lies in convincing the various tourism entities, each with its own agenda, that sometimes less is more and the overall good of the destination should sometimes trump the goals of its members. Referring to Andriotis (2005), *“it can be assumed that entrepreneurs and managers are more concerned with their day-to-day activities than with looking ahead”*. In short, DMOs cannot effectively perform all the roles of destination management without the assistance of tourism stakeholders (Morrison, 2013).

The second task as a DMO refers to marketing, which basically means the way it promotes the respective destination, so that people are enticed to visit. This function includes coming up with various campaigns which would drive local businesses, providing the correct information services, operating and facilitating bookings, and managing customer relations (CRM). A huge challenge for the Heraklion region in expanding the tourist season would be the ability to change common perception and market the region as more than just a sun and beach destination (Andriotis, 2005).

Third, a DMO has to create a suitable environment which would promote and lead to a sustainable tourism development within the destination. This means everything from planning and infrastructure, to developing products, technology and systems, as well as human resources. In order to be able to control tourism, policies, laws and regulations are also required, so the local authorities also have to be involved by the DMO. An

important characteristic of seasonality is that it involves the concentration of a large amount of tourists in a short amount of time. This is likely to result in inefficiency within the tourism industry, which in turn takes its toll on the physical and social resources of the destination (Andriotis, 2000).

Lastly, delivering on the ground means that the DMO has to make sure that everyone who visits the destination gets the quality experience they were promised in the marketing campaign, and sometimes more. Basically, the destination's goal is to exceed tourists' expectations, so "*that they then both recommend the destination to others and return themselves, on a future occasion*" (ibid., p. 6). This represents a huge challenge for the DMO, since many suppliers, in order to take advantage of the peak tourist season have no choice but to reduce the quality of their services, which consequently leads to visitor dissatisfaction (Andriotis, 2005).

Destination Consultancy Group (DCG), a tourism consulting company from the US, expands on UNWTO's roles of a DMO. While it also recognises a DMO's roles of leading and coordinating, and marketing, it also adds those of planning and research, product development, partnership and team-building, and community relations to the mix (ibid.).

Whether it is the DMOs, or the CVBs – convention and visitor bureaus, how they are known as in the USA –, or the RTBs – regional tourism boards, the UK version of DMOs –, Wang (2011) identifies very similar roles, which all involve in one shape or form dealing with the local community leaders, stakeholders or industry partners, which are instrumental to a DMOs success. No matter if it is about building connections or just getting those entities to commit to its destination vision, the DMO is tasked with the "*continuous and never-ending practice of teaching, preaching, promoting and modelling a visitor-centred doctrine to all stakeholders in the destination community*" (ibid., p. 15). Hence, he has identified the following nine roles of a DMO: information provider; community brand builder; convener, facilitator and liaison of community tourism activities; catalyst of the collaborative initiative; advocate of the tourism industry; organizer of destination marketing campaigns; funding agent for collective marketing activities; partner and team builder; network management organization.

Ibid. also mentions the four levels of DMOs, which are presently operating in most countries. At the top sits the national tourism office, or the NTO, whose main responsibility

is managing the entire country as a tourism destination. The second type of DMO is the state tourism office, or STO, which is mainly responsible for managing a state, province or territory, so it would attract visitors. An RTO, or the regional tourism office, is tasked with managing a concentrated tourism area, such as cities, villages, islands or coastal resorts. Finally, the smallest DMO is the local tourism office. An LTO can be either the local government authority or some cooperative association consisting of local tourism businesses.

To conclude on this subchapter, the DMO is the umbrella organization in the respective tourist destination, and who it actually is depends on the local structure of the economy. It could be the local municipality or just the most important company in the area, who is tasked with coordinating various activities within the destination. Its most glaring role is that of marketing and promotion of the destination (Morrison, 2013), but also others, such as information provider, builder of the community brand, or just an advocate of the tourism industry in general (Wang, 2011). It is expected to provide leadership and manage the network of stakeholders within the destination, for the good of the local community. The DMO should be *“the community’s single most important marketing organization, projecting a coherent image for the destination into various targeted markets”* (ibid., p. 17).

3.3 Stakeholders Approach

The main idea of stakeholders approach, or stakeholder management, which has been systematically generated during the 1980s, is to apply a formulation which leads to the satisfaction of both shareholders and all other groups related to the business (Perić et al., 2014). The major task in this process is to administrate and complement the relationships and interests of all the stakeholders in a manner to assure the long-term satisfaction of all the effective elements (ibid). Therefore, in order to manage the long-term satisfaction and success of the industry, the first step is to recognize the stakeholders. The stakeholders approach consists of two steps: the first attempt is to identify the stakeholders, the interests and the stakes, the next step is to manage them and distinguish the process (Freeman, 2010; Tkaczynski, 2009). The challenge arises when the organization intends to assign time, energy and other resources (ibid.), therefore it is

suggested to divide the stakeholders into two major groups (Clarkson, 1995). The major categories of stakeholders, as defined by Cleland and Ireland (2006) are:

Primary stakeholders, which refer to the groups and persons connected with a legal conventional relationship to the project, such as main investors, decision makers (government), project owners, which in a tourism context, refers to the tour operators, hotels. In other words, the primary stakeholders are those groups without whose continuing contribution, the organization would not be able to survive.

Secondary stakeholders refer to those groups which are directly or indirectly affected by the project. These groups are not the essential elements of the project, such as media, interest groups, various institutions, citizens. These groups are not essential for the survival and existence of the organization.

Due to the sorely competitive tourism industry, the stakeholders approach is being applied by the authorities in order to be able to overcome this extreme competition. As mentioned before, for the success of tourism in a destination, having collaboration among the stakeholders is indispensable. As the stakeholder theory is connected to the social, economic and psychological issues, it is known as a multidisciplinary approach, therefore it makes the tourism industry as a very complex phenomenon as well (Perić et al., 2014). Accordingly, the anatomized and complex nature of tourism has bolded the importance of cooperation and collaboration between the different stakeholders with their various interests in the process of tourism planning (Ladkin and Bertramini, 2002). The stakeholders approach is increasingly becoming more and more popular with the increment of environmental sobriety of public groups, as it involves various consumer groups, as well as competition, government, employees and media (Saftic et al., 2011). There are various benefits and risks mentioned in the deployment of the stakeholders approach. The benefits of utilizing this approach have been defined by D'Angella and Go (2009) as economies of scale, synergy, decrement in seasonality, higher rate in occupancy, promotion plans, events and festivals in the destination, better communication between stakeholders and more involvement of various stakeholders in the decision making process. On the other hand, from the perspective of local residents, the efficient use of stakeholders approach will lead to an increment in existing job opportunities, as well as the improvement in the quality of infrastructure and services (Burns and Howard, 2003).

Considering the managerial outlook, the stakeholder management will only be effective if it deals with those groups effective in the project and the groups being affected from the project at the same time (Freeman, 1984). The general stakeholder groups effective in the planning of the tourism industry are residents, tourists, employees, government, locals, tour operators, hotels (Geić, 2007). Viewing from the prospect of stakeholders theory, one of the most significant opinions on tourism industry is the functional approach which views tourism as an active power that if implemented and managed correctly has the potential to be very effective in general growth, and meantime decreasing the environmental and cultural costs (Bramwell &, Sharman, 1999). Refer to a functional approach, all effective parties and stakeholders interested in or somehow affected by the business should collectively manage the tourism sector. Bramwell and Sharman (1999) defined the three benefits of cooperation between stakeholders in tourism planning as below:

- It will be effective in decreasing the conflicts in between the stakeholders.
- It will legitimate collective activities, if the stakeholders are permitted to be involved in the decision making process.
- The willingness of collaboration may increase the cooperation of policies and the related actions (ibid.)

In general, the stakeholders approach is challenging and somehow problematic in the context of collaboration in between the stakeholders which have diverse outlooks on the same subjects. In particular, within the tourism industry, since the sold products are intangible, therefore the relationships, perceptions, experiences and satisfaction of the tourists create the basis of essential managerial decisions and applications (Peric et al., 2014).

3.3.1 Roles played by local authorities in the development of tourist destinations

Local authorities, as explained by Bramwell and Lane (2010), are playing a very crucial role in the tourism industry and its development. The three major roles played by the local authorities have been divided as the key coordinator for the strategic planning, owning, managing and promoting the infrastructure, and finally developing the area as a tourist destination (Vaughan et al., 1999).

In all tourist destinations the tourism planning and strategies are majorly being prepared either by central or local authorities. While the involvement of local authorities is quite various in different countries, in recent years their importance has been recognized (Can et al., 2014). The very significant point for the activity of the local authorities in the tourism sector in order for tourism planning, as well as their efficient participation in the system, is the benefit they will have from tourism. The local authorities and government has traditionally been one of the most effective elements in supporting and controlling tourism development of the local destinations, such as preparation of infrastructure, promotion of tourist attractions, advocacy of development plans, events and festivals, and policies. Moreover, the tourism industry contains several stakeholders, such as travel agencies, community groups, or private sector, which are controlled by local authorities to subject the development process in a sustainable manner (Palmer, 2007). With the content of sustainable tourism, besides having an impressive effect on maintaining tourism resources, local governments play significant roles in the success and promotion of tourism industry. In order for the tourism development of a destination on a sustainable basis, the contribution and collaboration of all ranges of stakeholders is inevitable, and the role of local authorities in this context is to plan and take the efficient decisions in order to assess long-term interest. To attain this goal, the local authorities are capable of having a very strong influence on tourism (Aser and Dulce, 2011).

The tourism in Greece has a very centralized structure; as a result local authorities are not very autonomic. The major decision makers in this industry are the government and the ministerial headquarters in Athens (Komilis, 1987). In recent years, in order to re-establish the tourism industry in Greece and position it onto the right path for growth, the WTTC has been commanding the current government to move Greece's travel and tourism forward since 2004 (WTTC, 2006). Accordingly, the Ministry of Tourism has been re-established, as well as the restructuring of the Greek National Tourist Organization (GNTO), with an increment of more than 400% in funds dedicated to marketing and branding activities, and the resurgence of the National Tourism Council, which is a consultative board of the active stakeholders of the industry. In general, the current situation of bureaucracy in Greece's governmental and managerial system has several negative impacts in terms of investments and operations. The major responsibilities for most effective policies and regulations in Greece fall to several ministries, however on the other hand the country is suffering from lack of collaboration and cooperation between

these ministries. Furthermore, in order to increase the speed of the current policies and cooperation between the various ministries, the bureaucratic processes should be simplified in order to involve the minimum possible number of departments and individuals (ibid.).

3.3.2 How tour operators are affecting tourism

According to Käscher (1997), tour operators supply tourism services and mount them into various packages, which are directly or indirectly offered to the tourists or travel agencies. Basically, the tour operators act as an agency between supply and demand for tourist services.

Tour operators, as the central link between tourists and their holiday destination, and consequently as the pressure point for the tourism industry, play a significant role in creating more sustainable touristic activities; in other words, tour operators can act as a decisive element for a positive change and empowerment of the tourism industry, if they could benefit their influence in a positive manner (Budeanu, 2005). Tour operators, with the strong influence they have on the choice of tourists in visiting one particular destination, have a decisive impact on the tourism industry on both sides: the demand (tourists) and the supply (service providers). In general, tour operators are classified as wholesalers, however they sell both indirectly to travel agents and also directly to the tourists. Due to the high competition within the tourism sector, tour operators attempt to encourage travel agents to promote their packages by offering high commissions, motivating programs and advertisement (Maru et al. 2013). Especially the ones which have their own tours and packages are capable of affecting the occupancy of local residents, by hiring local employees, and they can also promote a sustainable supply chain of suppliers who adhere to sustainable practices (WTTC, 2002). Tour operators with the enormous distribution network they have, tend to hold a focal position in the supply chain of tourist packages, which makes it possible to have the control on the improvement and promotion process of the tourism sector, which could attract and encourage more visitors to a destination and to have more tourism activities (Budeanu, 2005). The actual activities of this kind of operating groups are more of the supporting kind and coping with the direct effects caused by the facilities under their control and management (ibid.).

In general, the tour operator is initially responsible for providing the best possible situation and prerequisites for the tourist experience in a destination; such as an attractive description of the offered tourist product, an appropriate service process, and a reliable and an operational service system (Komppula, 2005). The challenge existing for tour operators and more specifically package tourism, is that tourists tend to use services offered by individual service providers, although tour operators bundle the products (Komppula & Boxberg, 2002). As a result, the offered packages by tour operators should bring added value to the offers, otherwise they would not be able to attract the attention of tourists (Komppula & Boxberg, 2002). Considering the limitations which tour operators are confronting with, there should be an innovated approach in cooperation and collaboration between the various stakeholders and suppliers, such as hotel owners, transport companies or service providers (Spasic, 2012). What is now being done by many of the big European tour operators, actually, is they have started recognizing and addressing the negative effects of their activities, in order to spread their responsibilities outside of their classic activities, in a more proactive attitude towards their suppliers and customers for having more sustainability and protecting and maintaining environmental and cultural resources (Budeanu, 2005).

Tour operators are going forward to have sustainable tourism by feeling responsible in the concepts of sustainable development as the centre of their activities (TOI, 2005). There are several fields which tour operators can incorporate in for sustainable manners, such as internal management, product development, supply chain management, customer relations, cooperation with the destination (Carbone, 2004). In other words, what encourages the tour operators to act in a more sustainable way is the target of gaining a better self-image; therefore, supply chain management is the major priority for tour operators (Khairat, Maher, 2012).

3.3.3 How airlines are affecting tourism

The tourism and air transport are two areas with important linkages and interdependencies (Wittmer and Bieger, 2006). Tourism industry was the main factor causing the development of airlines and even the creation of its different forms, such as charter flights. On the other side the airlines have also affected the discovering and development of entirely new destinations (ibid.).

According to the analysis done by Wittmer and Bieger (2006) on the connection and interlinkage between tourism and airlines, there has been a strong correlation between the development of tourism and air transport and different airlines. In general, airlines have a huge quantitative effect on tourism, and there are several factors which could be considered as a reason for this claim; the importance of airlines is entirely undeniable, as the main transport system to the point where in some countries such as Malta, or Iceland, one hundred percent of the incoming tourists use air transportation as their transport form. The low cost air transport is one other reason highlighting the importance of airlines in the development of tourism, as there is a strong connection between the number of air travels and the incoming international tourists' number. Additionally, in well-developed tourist destinations, the importance of air travels has been magnified as the major transport system for the overnight stays which are more than four days long, however the charter flights contribution has been decreased recognizably. Commonly, the frequency of flights, as well as the situation of the airport in the destination within the airline network, have a great impact on the number of visitors (ibid). Another important element which has been affected by air transport systems is the type of the destinations and travels. For instance the evolution of charter flights has speeded up the development process of destinations such as the Caribbean Islands and the Maldives (Bieger, 2006).

As a matter of fact, the development of airlines and tourism are inseparably connected and dependent on each other. Hence, airlines and tourist destinations should reach an equilibrium between them and take this interrelatedness into account and establish a win-win partnership. This target could be reached by the destinations' investment in airlines, by a form of marketing through paying airlines a service fee in order to motivate them to arrange more flights to the destination, which would also bring long-term profit for the destination (Signorini et al., 2002).

3.4 Tourist behaviour

There are a variety of tourism consumer behaviours which the tourism stakeholders are confronted with each day. The tourism industry's development and improvement is deeply relevant and dependent on the tourists' behaviour and decisions, and the factors influencing them (Vuuren, 2011). Referring to Cooper and Hall (2008), tourism is contingent on a variety of influences and factors, such as travel motivations, previous

experiences, or culture, which determine the distribution of the sector. Consumer behaviour, according to McColl et al. (1994, p. 116), refers to “*the actions a person takes towards purchasing and using products and services, including the decision-making process that precedes and determines those actions*”. It is evident from the previous statement that the actions and behaviours which the consumers present are very significant elements for tourism development. That is why having a knowledge on and understanding and analysing the tourist behaviours is a significant issue in enhancing the strategies and plans and organizing the presented services and tourist products (Caldito et al., 2015). Tourist behaviour, or consumer behaviour is referred to the “*activities people undertake when obtaining, consuming, and disposing of products and services*” (Blackwell et al., 2001, p. 6). In other words, tourists are exposed to certain courses of behaviours before, during and after traveling to a destination. This is considered as tourist behaviour, which is the result of the relation and interaction within personal and environmental factors on an ongoing foundation (March & Woodside, 2005). According to Papatheodorou (2006), the destination choice has been a significant issue in the tourism industry. Thus, it is essential for the tourism stakeholders to consider, identify and have knowledge on the perceptions and requirements of the consumer groups in order to be able to satisfy them and as a result develop the tourism industry (Anon, 1985). In this regard, it is obvious that consumer behaviours and intentions are quite variable depending on the cultural and social issues, therefore analysing them has always been a challenging issue influenced by several elements (Choibamroong, 2006). However, this decision making process is affected and influenced by several elements, such as culture, travel motivations, finance and also the tourists’ previous experiences (Ankomah et al., 1996).

The key concepts in tourist behaviour which require to be understood in the tourism development and planning, according to Cohena et al. (2013), are decision-making, values, motivations, self-concept and personality, expectations, attitudes, perceptions, satisfaction, trust and loyalty.

Tourist behaviour, and in general consumer behaviour, is a complex phenomenon due to the various factors which affect it. Referring to Sirakaya and Woodside (2005), the models which used to define the tourist behaviour are specified through describing the way “*tourists follow a funnel-like procedure to narrow down choices*”. Commonly, tourists tend

to make choices through eliminating some options from the available ones. Though the models explaining and analysing the tourist behaviours attempt to illustrate why tourists prefer to choose some alternatives and eliminate the others, and what are the effective factors in this process, such as the well accepted “pull and push model of motivation” (Dann, 1977; Uysal et al., 2008).

Another significant element in the tourism behaviours is known as motivation, which has been defined by Iso-Ahola (1999) as the primary forces that encourage, guide and retain a person’s behaviour. Therefore being informed about the tourist motivation is very substantial for the tourism stakeholders and destinations in order to satisfy tourists’ expectations, requirements and aspirations. The tourist motivations are in general controlled by a push and pull model (Gnoth, 1997). According to this model, tourists commonly tend to travel because of Pushing and Pulling elements. While push motivations are internal wishes and sensations motivating the tourist to travel, pull motivators are external factors and reasons that stimulate the tourist to choose and visit one special destination (ibid.). The pull motivators are related to the destinations’ characteristics, such as landscape, cultural and historical heritages, and climatic conditions. Therefore branding and marketing strategies are very essential for creating an appealing image of the destinations, which would motivate the tourists (Crompton, 1979; Kim & Lee, 2002).

In general, the tourist behaviour is strongly attached with the issues of why, when and how the tourists buy the tourism products and the effects of those behaviours (ibid.). It is essential for tourism professionals to comprehend the model of push and pull of tourist motivations, which would define consumer behaviours. Certainly, recognizing the target markets and motivating potential visitors to come to a destination through marketing and managerial strategies and then satisfying them by creating unforgettable experiences is the responsibility of tourism managers and major stakeholders (Vuuren, 2011). However, the success of all these steps is strongly relevant to the strategies and how they have been exploited. Since tourists have a various range of motivations, expectations and behaviours which would differ pursuant to their nationality, culture, social level and previous travel experiences, therefore it is very important and essential for the decision makers to study the travel demand data and elements (Ankomah et al., 1996).

4. Analysis

In the analysis chapter we aim to answer the main problem of the project - what are the challenges and possibilities of turning Heraklion and its nearby sea resorts into permanent tourist destinations? In doing so, we will go through and analyse the three sub-questions of the research which have been specified in the introduction part. First we will discuss about the challenges faced by those locals whose livelihoods depend on tourism: how they are dealing with seasonality, and in which ways would the area be affected in the scenario where it were to succeed in expanding the tourist season throughout the year. The second subchapter will examine the impact which some of the most important stakeholders, such as local authorities, tour operators or airline companies, are having on tourism in the area. Finally, we will look at potential courses of action which could be implemented, in order for the tourist season to be expanded in the region. The reasoning behind our first sub-question was determining some of the pluses versus the minuses in relation to eliminating seasonality, and whether or not acting for the expansion of the tourist season is worthwhile or not. The second sub-question has to do with determining the major players who are dictating the fate of tourism on the island, since any destination's success is highly dependent on their actions. We were interested on the relationship that has been established among some of them (Ladkin and Bertramini, 2002), and whether or not there have been any actions commonly undertaken for expanding the tourist season. The last sub-question will dwell on possible solutions or measures which could be implemented in order to reduce the effects of seasonality, or eradicate it altogether.

This chapter seeks to expound on the collected data – both the info we have gathered from the interviews done with the local stakeholders while in Heraklion, as well as the tourist survey and our secondary databases – by mixing and analysing it from a theoretical point of view. The idea of this chapter is not only to simply answer our research question, but also challenge some of the existing literature and see whether or not it matches or is contradicted by our gathered field data, thus possibly contributing to the already existing knowledge on seasonality and its effects.

4.1 The effects of seasonality on the local population

In this first part of the analysis we will discuss about how the people in the Heraklion region are dealing with the effects of seasonality. Referring to what has been previously mentioned in the literature chapter, seasonality is the main issue affecting the tourism industry of the Heraklion region, and of Crete in general (Andriotis, 2002). Seasonality is so bold in the area, that a very large percentage of the population in the region is being strongly affected by its ramifications, since according to *ibid.* about 40 percent of the locals are directly or indirectly involved in tourism. No one seems to be safe from its effects, from those working in the hotel industry – whether it is hotel managers or simple employees – to those whose jobs are in businesses which are revolving around the presence of tourists on the island, such as bars, restaurants, souvenir shops or various other endeavours. According to some of our interviewees, many of the locals are accepting seasonality as fact and have learned to deal with it, whether it is pursuing other jobs, such as in the other main industry on the island, agriculture, or just getting through with the little unemployment benefits they get from the state.

4.1.1 Roles played by agriculture in connection to expanding the tourist season

Since tourism is the number one industry in Greece, as noted in one of our interviews by Deputy-Mayor Garancini (p. 6), the majority of the locals in Crete are employed in only two types of occupations: tourism in summertime and agricultural activities during winter season, which is also consistent with Andriotis (2002). As stated by *ibid.* the two activities are interrelated, as many of those who work in the tourism industry during the tourist season are also the same who migrate to agriculture in the off-season, in search of an extra income.

According to professor Andriotis (p. 30), the whole focus should not be only on the tourism sector, and there should be a balance between tourism and agriculture. So in some ways, seasonality is not something necessarily bad for the locals and consistent with Drakatos (1987), Hartman (1986), Goulding et al. (2004), there could be some benefits to not having a permanent tourist season. Due to the instability of the tourism demand, it would

not be a good idea if the entire island's activity were to concentrate only on tourism. Referring to Butler (1994), one type of seasonality, institutional, could be man-induced, with stronger and less predictable effects. Therefore, if anything were to happen, such as a terrorist attack or something similar, which could affect the tourism industry, then Crete would have to deal with a problem much more bigger than the issue of "regular" seasonality, because in this scenario there would not be anything else left to be done anymore: *"There should be a balance between tourism and agriculture. Because if the locals will leave their fields and then focus entirely on tourism, it means that if something happens to tourism (...) – let's take Turkey as a scenario, but let's say we'll have a terrorist attack (...) – they're not going to have anything else to do the way they are living, so always I believe there should be a balance between tourism and agriculture, and this has to continue"* (30:10).

Nevertheless, there is room on the island for everyone, both those who want to work full time in tourism, and those who prefer to split duties between tourism and agriculture (p. 10). When asked about it, Mr. Garancini acknowledged the fact that there are plenty of people who cannot be bothered with seasonality and its effects, and prefer keeping things as they are now: *"There are many people who are pretty much okay with that"* (10:19). And this does not have to be an issue, on the contrary, it is good that there are some who actually take advantage of the land and the opportunities it brings: *"Of course, if there is somebody – and percentage is still high in Crete – which have, which has land, which wants to have the family in collecting the olives, in other forms of agriculture during the winter period, it's very good that they go on with it, otherwise the land will be abandoned"* (10:21). Still, despite the lack of interest on behalf of some of the locals, the aim should be toward achieving a year-round tourist destination: *"It's okay, it's our job to create the conditions and to convince more and more people to give the island, give the city the possibility of being a twelve month tourist destination, if they wish. If someone don't wish or don't like it, it's okay, it's not a big deal, we are not going at war with everybody, and Crete is big enough for everybody to find its own way, and its own way of developing its personality or its working career"* (10:33).

However, there is a large number of locals who do not have any agricultural interests, and would much rather work than just collect monthly unemployment benefits, while sitting at home: *"When we want to extend seasonality, we don't want to make it while*

others... in a way that would make other sectors suffer. Not at all. There is plenty of people, during the winter period, who could very well be employed in tourism, because they are not employed by agriculture in that period” (10:24).

Unlike smaller islands, with small populations and limited domestic markets (Pearce, 1987), Crete is an island which has the possibility to sustain itself (p. 24). According to Elefteria, it is blessed with a rich land, where many things could be grown: “*We have everything, basically. We can live without having imports” (24:17).* As a result, some of the people working in tourism, are turning their attention to agriculture during the off-season, with an emphasis on olives and the olive oil industry. “*In Crete we all have olive trees” (23:39),* claimed Elefteria, although she was quick to point out that living from olive trees is not enough for people to be sustaining their lives. Still, for many this is an extra source of income to the unemployment benefits they are collecting from the state, relieving some of the financial burden they are forced to go through.

4.1.2 Financial issues

As previously mentioned, many of the inhabitants in the Heraklion region choose to deal with seasonality by shifting their sights on agriculture during the tourist off-season. And many more, who do not have the means, or are just not suited to work in this field, have to look for other sources of income (Vaughan et al., 2000), in order to close in on the gap between the unemployment benefits which they receive from the state, and their actual needs.

According to Mr. Stratakis, for decades the Greek tourism, and especially Crete, has relied on mass tourism (p. 15). In consonance with Elefteria, besides tourism, nothing else seems to work for Greece, and consequently for Crete: “*The situation is really bad, yes, at the moment, the economy is bad. The only thing that saves us is the tourism, because this year, they say we are going to have four million tourists in Crete” (18:27).* Considering Crete boasts a population of just over 600 thousand inhabitants, according to the 2011 census, means that the local-to-tourist ratio is at least six tourists for every local, which further emphasises the importance of the tourism industry for the local economy.

Normally the tourist season in Crete lasts from April to October, with July and August being the high months, June and September the middle season, and April, May and October the low seasons. In other words, in general, many of the activities and economic sources of the island, such as airports, museums and hotels, are only working at optimum capacity during the peak season, which is mainly shortened to three months, according to Mr. Stratakis (p. 15). However, this year, referring to Deputy-Mayor Garancini (p. 8), the first charter flights to Crete started in early March. This means there are at least four months of off-season in the area, during which the majority of the region's population does not have a fixed occupation (p. 11), thus presenting a big challenge for local employment (Vaughan et al., 2000). Even Mr. Serafim Karouzakis, manager of five star Candia Maris hotel, is affected during the off-season, just as his fellow hotel employees, such as Mrs. Vefa Petrou: *"as you can imagine all of our colleagues, including us, they are affected by the non-operation of the hotel industry during the winter season, which means that the wages during the winter are very low"* (11:20). And although the state pays a small amount of around 400 Euro per month as an unemployment wage during this period, it hardly helps locals overcome this duration.

And obviously, not just hotel workers are affected by seasonality, but also those operating in other businesses which are reliant on the hotel sector functioning at its normal level: *"of course it affects not only the people working in the hotel, but also people outside the hotel that are to some extent interrelated to tourism, whether these are souvenir shops or supermarkets or taxi drivers, because tourism is a very big industry that has to deal with a lot of different professions"* (11:27). According to Mr. Serafim, all of those entities depend on the sales generated by tourists, therefore there is *"a huge difference the financial results for somebody during the winter period and during the summer period"* (11:38).

Pursuant to Butler (2014) and Mathieson and Wall (1982), during the off-season there is an increased level of competition on the labour market, due to the high unemployment rate. This is a fact not only in tourism related jobs, but throughout all working sectors in Crete: *"it affects I think all of us"* (12:30). Due to the difficulties resulted from having to sustain themselves with only 400 Euro each month, *"which is nothing"* (23:36), there are a lot of people searching for second jobs during this period, whether it is young people going abroad in search of alternative jobs, or families moving to the countryside to pass

this time with agricultural activities. *“Well actually a lot of us are looking for another job”,* claims Vefa (12:22). Consequently *“some of them they go abroad to other countries, Germany for example, or Austria. Other colleagues, so first they have their own agricultural activities, like olive trees, like grapes, or they come from a village, so they live on winter time in the village with their family. Most of the young people, they are looking for another job during the winter time, also in the city inside in a café place or in a small factory which produces some traditional products like soap or different things for souvenirs”*.

The problem is that during the off-season, not only are the locals being confronted with a huge decrement in their revenues, but also they have to pay high amounts of taxes whole year long. Due to the economic crisis, mixed with the low unemployment income and high taxes, the situation is dire for the locals. According to Elefteria, *“it’s difficult for us, for economical, because we pay a lot of taxes now – the Greeks”* (19:27). This is also one of the reasons why many hotels choose to close down during the off-season, rather than stay operational. Nikos, manager of the family-owned Park Hotel, thinks that the high taxes - which remain unchanged throughout the year - are behind the lack of business development and destination advertisement in the region: *“the taxes are going higher, we have to pay lot of money... so the business, they cannot develop. Also the economic system it’s not good, the financials. So this also one reason that we cannot advertise as much as we want the hotel and the city and the island”* (27:24). Lowering those taxes would subsequently lead to some hotels remaining operational for an extended period, afford dealing with the fewer guests, and according to Nikos, also being in position to offer discounts in order to attract tourists (p. 28).

Still, considering all this financial burden which locals are forced to deal with on a yearly basis, there remains light at the end of the tunnel. Despite Greece’s and Crete’s *“economic crisis, the locals, they have several problems, got a lot of taxes, their income to be reduced”* (31:39), there are some who believe the situation is actually not all that bad. According to Professor Andriotis, life in Heraklion *“is much better compared to other countries, other European countries”* (31:41). Australian artist Mathew Halpin echoes his opinion, and states that the reason for which he has moved to Heraklion is because *“the quality of life here is very high. (...) You do not need to earn a lot of money here to live a good life”* (5:5). And with the creation of more opportunities available for locals as a result

of expanding the tourist season, there is still room for improvement. And in the next subchapter, we will discuss about some of the consequences – including benefits – of eliminating seasonality in the Heraklion region.

4.2 Consequences of turning the Heraklion region into a permanent tourist destination

Just as everywhere else, there are two sides to the story, and the consequences of turning the Heraklion area into a permanent tourist destination could be both good and bad, mostly depending on who you are asking and their personal perspective.

According to data obtained from the GNT0, the tourism industry in Crete is mostly concentrated on the northern coastline of the island, which also includes the Heraklion region (p2). The strong presence of the tourism industry causes several negative effects in all aspects of living, including environmental and noise pollution. At the same time, there are issues pertaining to also the quality of services offered by the locals to tourists, especially during the high tourist season. The effects of tourist activities already can be felt on *“the way of life and behaviour of the local people”*, according to the GNT0 report (p2), and as result, *“they lose slowly the traditional style of living”*. Finally, there are multiple issues which have to do with the infrastructure: the overbuilding of several tourist destinations, hosting a huge number of guests, which exceeds their capacity; overcrowding due to the many shops, bars, restaurants and other tourist-oriented businesses operating on narrow streets, which takes its toll on the local people. Consequently, one could only imagine the magnitude of the impact that such activities would have if they were to be practiced throughout the year. Consistent with Hartmann (1986), the non-tourist season is the only chance for the social and ecological environments to recover, and Professor Andriotis, who advocates for a moderate expansion of the tourist season, was very emphatic when referring to how the current tourism practices affect the island’s environment, especially in regards to the actions of tour operators, who: *“destroy the environment, they don’t care about the environment”* (36:15). He points at the fact that this is not the right path to walk on if the ultimate goal is achieving sustainability in tourism (p. 36).

As previously mentioned, no seasonality could have aggravating effects on the state of the island. Just as professor Andriotis stated during our interview, many of the locals would prefer the safety of a full time job in tourism, hence other industries, such as agriculture, could get neglected. And in the situation of a conflict or terrorist attack, which would lead to many tourists heading elsewhere, Crete would not be able to rely on any other industry to compensate for the loss of tourism. Pursuant to Professor Andriotis, “*the impact is also negative*” (30:8) for many locals, “*because they’re not going to have anything else to do the way they are living, so always I believe there should be a balance between tourism and agriculture, and this has to continue*” (30:15). Nevertheless, he clarified that his stance is not against expanding the tourist season, although the growth should be moderate and it would be a good thing if more hotels would manage to remain open all year long, “*but not all of them*” (30:19), due to the instability of tourist demand and the need to balance tourism and agriculture.

In general, referring to the interviews we have done with the various tourism stakeholder representatives in Heraklion, the possible development and expansion of the tourist season on an island like Crete would also bring several advantages with itself. The primary advantage would be, of course, be the non-existence of seasonality and, accordingly, the chance of permanent employment in the tourism sector or in tourism related areas, since the economy of the island generally relies on how active the tourism sector is (p. 7). In the current economic situation of Greece, and with the economic crisis the country has been going through for the last years, the tourism sector is being seen as the only saviour element for the locals, according to Elefteria (p. 18). In addition, another significant outcome would be the possibility of competitiveness with other major tourist destinations, which in turn would cause improvements in the quality of living for the local population, and improvements in the quality of services offered to tourists by the city of Heraklion - which at the moment only takes place during the summertime, since “*when the guest comes home, you clean your home better – you always do that*” (7:48). Referring specifically to the city of Heraklion, Mr. Garancini believes that “*it would be nice for the living, for the inhabitants here to have a better, and cleaner, and more viable and livable city twelve months a year. And so I think that the enlargement of the tourism season would also have this impact on the everyday life of the city and of the island*” (8:1). And this would have an impact on the whole of Crete, since Heraklion is its capital city, hosting about one third of the island’s population, while also generating more than half of

its GDP: *"if you are capable of developing any kind of economy, any kind of activity in Heraklion, this is good for the whole of the island"* (8:7).

Even though expanding the tourist season has its detractors, and is not a priority for many others, the possibility of achieving a twelve month tourist destination is something that should be strived for, considering the benefits it would bring. Not doing so would be a mistake, according to the deputy-mayor, when taking into account the fact that Crete pretty much lacks any industries or revenue sources other than tourism: *"it is very, very, very wise thing to do, to invest in expanding the tourist season"* (10:41). Consistent with Butler (2014), countries where tourism plays a major role in their economic and social development, are affected even more than the rest by seasonality, therefore expanding the tourist season is becoming the norm. Mr. Garancini certainly made it sound as if expanding the tourist season should be the only way going forward for the city and its inhabitants, *"because that could be a guaranty for welfare and for better living conditions for all the citizens and maybe for many foreigners who would be attracted to come and live here, or attracted to come and invest here, simply because they know that the tourism is a twelve month activity, and not only a five or six months activity here in Heraklion"* (10:42).

4.3 The impact of tourism stakeholders on the Heraklion region

The content of this subchapter will analyse a part of the ways in which some of the most important tourism stakeholders in Crete, both from the public and private sectors, are affecting the state of the industry on the island, particularly the Heraklion region. First, the focus will be placed on the local authorities and their roles in promoting tourism in the area. As decision makers and coordinators of various other entities, organizations such as the Heraklion Municipality, the Greek National Tourism Organization (GNTO) or the Greek Tourism Confederation (SETE) are affecting tourism in specific ways, always searching for possible solutions to make the industry function at better parameters (p. 1). Following this, we will detail the importance played by airline companies and tour operators in generating tourism in the area, especially the major influence the latter hold

on the hotel industry, bringing tourists to the destination, and ultimately expanding the tourist season.

4.3.1 How local authorities are influencing tourism in the Heraklion region

As previously discussed in the literature section of this paper, authorities play a huge role in the development of tourism industry, from strategic planning, to managing the infrastructure, and, ultimately, turning the area into a tourist destination (Vaughan et al., 1999; Bramwell and Lane, 2010). Crete makes no exception, with the general fate of tourism on the island hanging mostly on the decisions made by the highest of authorities, which is the GNTO, followed by others, such as SETE, representing the interests of the private tourism sector, or the Region of Crete, the island's governmental authority. On a smaller and more specific scale, the decision maker in Heraklion is the local municipality, which for the first time ever is recognising the importance played by tourism in the development of the city. Consequently, since 2016 the Heraklion Municipality has appointed a deputy mayor tasked strictly with overseeing this activity. It was a much needed move, considering the fact that prior to Mr. Garancini becoming deputy mayor, there seemed to be no real plan for turning the city into a tourist destination: "*there has never been any strategy before for the city of Heraklion, on how to make the city a destination, or how to make it a city break destination and on how to expand the period – the tourist period*" (5:8). This means that now the city has a real opportunity to work its way toward turning into a permanent destination. This also comes with many challenges, such as separating itself in terms of how it is being perceived by tourists, since Crete is mostly viewed and promoted as a whole for its sun, sea and beach (p. 6). As stated by Mr. Garancini, "*Heraklion does not sell these kind of experience, which is sunbathing and beach. Never did... and never will*" (7:3).

Referring to the importance that authorities have in all decisions made and the way they affect not just tourism, but many other sectors, it was not necessarily surprising when, during our data collection process, we found out that the general perception of the job which the local authorities have been actually doing for the tourism industry is not really a positive one. Nevertheless, almost everyone agreed that expanding the tourist season mostly depends on their actions. "*I don't think they really help so much*" (26:34), says

Nikos, manager of Park Hotel. As far as who should have the most input into bringing tourists to the area - some of whom could implicitly book rooms in his family's hotel - throughout the year, he thinks that "*it doesn't depend on me, it's all the public system, they should help us to advertise the place*" (26:26). Professor Andriotis was even more emphatic: "*The public authorities always say they want to extend the tourist season, but they never do anything*" (29:21). And when mixed with Mr. Garancini's previous statement regarding a lack of strategy (p. 6), those affirmations have legitimate points. In spite of the negative perception, the simple fact that Heraklion has given tourism a high political priority by creating the deputy-mayor position, is indicative of the major role which the industry will play going forward in the development of the city.

Overall, Crete is in a better position at the moment when compared to previous years, in terms of the amount of visitors it hosted in 2016. According to Mr. Aristidis Stratakis, who is the Chief Officer of GNTO in Crete's Regional Tourism Office, almost 4 million tourists visited the island during that period (p. 15), which is an increase of about 60 percent from the approximately 2.5 million which Crete usually relies upon. However, all but a few have done so during the May-September period, according to the arrivals registered by Crete airports, and 2017 seems to be no different in terms of the GNTO's expectations (p. 18). Still, the general perception is that this accomplishment is not the result of good promotional activities undertaken by the government or other tourist authorities in attracting more visitors, but rather the general political context in the Mediterranean region, where "*a lot of tourists are afraid to go to other locations*" (29:27). This has resulted in many people searching for new holiday spots, with Crete being one of the few remaining options in the region. "*This happens just because of the situation in the surrounding area, the surrounding countries*" (29:30), according to Professor Andriotis. "*It doesn't have to do with the Greek authorities have done something about it. Honestly speaking, I don't think they've done anything*" (29:31). Given the chance to officially verify those claims during our interview with the representatives from the local GNTO office, we found out that they were mostly based on the reality of the situation. Although Mrs. Elefteria was quick to point out that people come to Crete because of the beauty of the island, with its nice hotels and many attractions (p. 19), she admitted that the major role in this significant increase was not played by promotional or marketing strategies, but rather by the conflicts occurring in some of Greece's other Mediterranean neighbours' backyards and the safe environment in Crete: "*They all come here because it's safe at*

the moment" (18:32), she said. *"But basically, yeah, this increase is because of the tourists... because of Turkey, yes"* (19:8).

Pursuant to Komilis (1987), tourism in Greece is very centralized, which results in the local authorities not having the autonomy to make major decisions. Even though the local Directorate of Crete is the representative of the GNTO on the island, the ministerial headquarters in Athens are the ones pulling all the strings: *"we don't have the possibility to promote the tourism. So the promotion, the advertisement, is in the head office in Athens"* (16:35). As a result of recommendation, we also contacted the GNTO's offices in Athens for comments, specifically Mrs. Katerina Livani, head of the Market research department. Unfortunately she was not able to provide us information pertaining to Heraklion in particular, nevertheless sent us a list of the actions undertaken for promoting Greek tourism in general (p. 4).

Besides the GNTO, promoting tourism in Crete is also one of the responsibilities of the local governmental authority, Region of Crete, with its tourism department: *"it doesn't belong to the Ministry of Tourism, it's another ministry – and they also try to promote Crete as a destination"* (17:3). During our data collection trip, we also reached out to the Region of Crete's Regional Unit of Heraklion Tourist Department for an interview, and although we had established contact with one of their representatives and managed to submit our questions, we did not receive the answers in time to still be used for this paper.

Not just enticing tourists to the region is important, but also promoting attractions and places for them to visit while in the area (p. 31). And according to Professor Andriotis, the local authorities could do a much better job at it: *"even Heraklion, which is not the most beautiful city in Crete. You can go around Heraklion – it has a lot of places to visit. (...) But the tourists, they don't see them. Because they are directed to visit the same places"* (31:6). However, this is somehow to be expected in the aftermath of an economic crisis, and the lack of funds is not surprising: *"now we have also the economic crisis. So this means they don't have the income to do it. They don't have the money that they need to do a lot of things"* (31:15). Professor Andriotis thinks that a major problem for the tourism industry of the island is represented by its political environment: *"even the money that they have, they don't use it in the correct way. The problem is that, it's mainly that we have the political parties – in my opinion, they destroy everything"* (31:17). Since political interests are dictating the amount of money made available for tourism authorities, it

becomes apparent that those in charge are also dictating who should be running tourism, based on political affiliation: *“they want to use their own people. They are not looking for the best staff, people working in the tourism industry, but those that support them”* (31:20). According to the professor, *“there are some employees that... they’re useless, okay? They are there just because they belong to a political party. So these people – they cannot do anything”* (34:34). This is a practice which generates a lack of continuity and cohesion, since the local political climate is pretty unstable, with political parties alternatively taking turns in rising to power. *“It means that there’s also no stable policy. Each party, when it wins the elections, has different people, changes the policy and so on”* (31:24). His views are shared by Elefteria, who points out at corruption and nepotism as common practices: *“We have a lot of corruption. If you have a master’s degree and the other one is the son of the politician – he doesn’t have anything and he doesn’t speak English, nothing – they say “okay, we employ you, because you are the son of the politician””* (18:20).

Any personal or political interests aside, the UNTWO (2007) urges for collaboration between the various stakeholders within a destination in order to manage it better. Mrs. Aggeliki Karagkouni, Project Manager for the Greek Tourism Confederation, wrote us about SETE’s role regarding the level of collaboration between its members. In her own words, *“SETE holds a central role concerning the tourism strategy in Greece. SETE is diffusing its proposals & related researches to all stakeholders to do their best for the local economy”* (1:14). A major topic of interest of the organization has always been seasonality, and many of its past actions have explored the possibilities of expanding the tourist season: *“All SETE’s attempts can be described as a huge effort to inform the public and the private sector about the ways Greece can fight off seasonality. In the past, SETE has participated in many conferences, forums and public discussions that have as main objective the extension of the tourism period”* (1:33).

As stated in chapter 3 of this paper, tourist destinations need to come up with suitable strategies for their long term development (Fyall, 2011). Therefore, the need of an “umbrella organization” (Wang, 2011) came about, *“because of the need to mount a coordinated effort for planning, developing and marketing tourism destinations”* (Morrison, 2013, p. 5). Tasked with coordinating the actions of multiple stakeholders within a destination is the DMO, with a main mandate to promote visitation to the destination area (Wang, 2011). If the GNTO or SETE could be looked at as sitting on top of the four level

DMO scale (ibid.), with a responsibility towards managing the entire Greek tourism, then the Region of Crete, with its tourism office, is in charge of both the entire island of Crete and the Heraklion region. Finally, the municipality sits at the bottom, acting as the local destination management organization, tasked with promoting the city as a tourist attraction. Heath and Wall (1992) refer to some of the tasks of a DMO, and emphasize strategy formulation, representing the interests of stakeholders, marketing of the destination and coordination of destination activities. Before prioritizing tourism by creating the deputy-mayor position, convincing some of those stakeholders to work together and representing their interests were no easy tasks, especially since there was no formulated strategy for tourism development. Getting everyone on the same page seems to be the biggest challenge. Quoting Deputy-Mayor Garancini, *“the tradition here was that people do prefer an egg today rather than a chicken tomorrow – it’s always been like that. It’s the logic of “I want my profit small or big, I don’t care, but I want my profit now. I don’t care about developing, I don’t care about planning the future, I don’t care about a strategy”.* The lack of strategy means also lack of cooperation among stakeholders. This has to change and this is changing” (8:12). But since he took office, things have slowly started moving in the right direction, with the Heraklion Municipality assuming the role of the “umbrella organization”, tasked with leading and coordinating (Morrison, 2013) the efforts of various stakeholders for the good of the city as a tourist destination. A committee for tourism and entrepreneurship has been established by the Municipality - *“first time in history where all stakeholders are present”* (8:18), according to Mr. Garancini. *“And when I say all, I mean from the Region of Crete, to the Municipality, of course, to the Chamber of Commerce, to the Merchants Chamber, to the universities, the Foundation for Research and Technology, the hotel owners, the travel agents, the police, I mean every, every, every, every possible stakeholder that can contribute to the improvement of the tourism sector – and this is working quite well”* (8:19).

As things seem to be heading in a good direction for the city - *“I can say that cooperation is going pretty well”* (8:30) - with the Municipality starting to make its presence felt among the various local stakeholders - *“You need cooperation, you need to plan together, and you need to implement the strategies together for the good of all”* (8:35) - it remains to be seen whether or not some of the other major players in the region’s tourism development - tour operators and airline companies - are prepared to follow suit.

4.3.2 The impact of tour operators in the Heraklion region

Crete's tourism industry is heavily influenced by two factors (Andriotis, 2002): seasonality, and its dependence on tour operators, "*which manage at least 90% of the tourism here*" (8:46), according to Deputy-Mayor Garancini. Considering the island's heavy reliance on tour operators, with their strong influence on tourists' choice to visit a particular destination (Budeanu, 2005), we needed to find out the extent to which they could potentially solve the main issue tourism in Crete is confronted with, namely seasonality.

Given the chance to update his stance on tour operators and their activity, Professor Andriotis considers that not much has changed during the last two decades, and profit still trumps everything else, including the possibility of extending the tourist season: "*They don't really want, because if they wanted they could do it*" (32:27). And the only reasons for bringing so many tourists to Crete at the moment is strictly related to profit and the political situation in the area, having few other viable options: "*They exploit the destinations according to their main interest. Their main aim is just profit. (...) They are bringing tourists now here because they cannot send them somewhere else*" (32:16). "*They don't want to support the local community, they care only for themselves. So that's the main reason. Either high profits or nothing*" (36:8). "*So I don't think they are doing anything that supports the tourism industry, other than reducing the prices of hoteliers and bringing low quality tourism*" (32:21). Another interesting point is that tour operators may have even more influence on tourism than the local authorities, and if expanding the tourist season would have been a priority of the former, than this could have been achieved by now, in collaboration with the latter: "*I think that if they have the support of tour operators, the authorities are going to help. They're going to support this initiative. Okay? But all the years, tour operators they weren't doing anything. I mean that there's not even a single flight from any European country directed to Crete during the winter*" (32:35).

However, things might be easier said than done, and turning things around could be a greater challenge than some might think, as seasonality has been acknowledged as a big issue for tour operators as well (Bonn, 1992; Butler, 1994; Jang, 2004). Since profit is the number one priority of all tour operators, they are not keen on experimenting with extending the tourist season and risk losing money. This is not that surprising considering

that those are profit oriented entities, a statement that has been repeated during some of our interviews, and confirmed by one of their own employees, Mrs. Karin. Having worked in the branch for 22 years, of which the past 8 have been spent with TUI, Karin has a pretty strong grasp of the industry's activities and priorities. In her opinion, tour operators have the power to extend the tourism season: "*The only thing which needs to be done is that one of the big tour operators decides to send charter planes here, for extending the season. It is the only thing which needs to happen*" (2:17). Then again, the reason why this has yet to happen is strictly related to other interests and ultimately profit: "*the reason why tour operators are not sending charter planes here is because the interest of the tour operators are somewhere else*" (2:37). "*Because to send a plane, to book charter flights and to pay them - because the charter flights needs to be paid - it doesn't matter if one person are on board or if a hundred and eighty persons are on board, so a tour operator is not experimenting. It is not. If it decides to do it, it will try to do it one hundred percent*" (3:7).

The ways in which tour operators are affecting Crete's tourism can also be felt by their influence on another major part of the industry, namely the hotel sector. For a tour operator's activity, as stated by Karin, the relationship it has with the hotel is second to none within the destination, regardless of what might happen to the political or social climate: "*what the tour operator wants is a good contract with the hotel. This is all, this is the main thing it needs. If the surrounding or if the contacts with the politics are going well or not so well, this is secondary. The most important partner for the tour operator is not the community, the most important partner for the tour operator is the hotel*" (3:35).

Although hotels in Heraklion remain open throughout the year, the same cannot be said about those operating in its nearby sea resorts, with very few exceptions. Nevertheless, some of those hotels used to be operational all year round - that is until tour operators took over their management. One such hotel is Candia Maris in Amoudara: "*When the owner was a local one – Metaxakis is the owner, he's Greek, based in Crete – he used to have it opened all year round*" (35:18), says Professor Andriotis. "*Now that one foreigner - the tour operator - is in charge, they closed it during the winter. So it has to do with the season of foreigners, of tour operators*" (35:19). Perhaps in some cases things were better off before foreign tour operators took over business, since those places were able to survive year in and year out, even operating 365 days a year: "*You realise what's*

going on when a foreigner, a tour operator takes over business perhaps he makes the situation worse” (35:33).

Renamed TUI Magic Life Candia Maris to reflect the change in administration, the hotel has only been operational for about seven months during the past decade, mostly from April to the end of October. It is a situation which Mr. Serafim, its general manager, hopes is going to change soon: *“Now unfortunately we operate only on a seven to eight month basis, whereas our goal is to operate on a twelve month basis - the hotel used to operate like this until 1997, sorry, until 2007 - but ever since some things have changed in the world economy and now we operate only on a eight month basis, but it’s our goal, our purpose and our wish to at some point to extend this eight month period and make it ten, twelve months” (11:12).*

Ultimately, tour operators have a huge effect on just about how much everyone whose income relies on tourism earns. Not just their employees, but also to some degree the spending patterns of the visitors they bring to the island, thus having an effect on all local economy which relies on the tourism sector, such as bars, restaurants, cafes, souvenir shops or car rental companies - some of which operate within those same hotels managed by tour operators (p. 11). And since profit is their number one priority, it is not surprising that the locals do not earn much, and the hotel sector heavily relies on interns and unexperienced staff: *“They don’t care about the locals at all. They don’t care. If you see now the salaries, are really reduced compared to how they used to be years before. And they are being reduced all the time. There are people who work in hotels for 500 or 600 euro, and also they get a lot of students to work, because they don’t pay them” (36:28),* says Professor Andriotis. *“In a lot of hotels, they fire all the locals that are experienced, and they know, they worked many years for the hotels... to get the trainees” (36:35).* By being able to control almost every move made by the hotel guests, tour operators can ensure that large amounts of the money spent on the island are occurring within their facilities, thus also contributing to their revenue stream: *“The tour operators prefer all-inclusive packages. Because they keep them inside, so they spend all their money inside the hotel. So there’s no leakage of money (...), they get all the money, all the profits” (41:35).* And it would not be in their best interest to organize any activities which could lead the guests to areas where the tour operators has no control over, such as city pubs or restaurants: *“But if they direct them to other place, they leave outside the*

hotel, it means that they come here for a coffee, they spend some money there, some money there... so this is against sustainability” (41:37). Mr. Serafim does not deny the influence that tour operators have on tourists and their expenditure: *“from the time the guests leave their doors until the time the guests get back to their house, all this period it’s something that tour operators can take advantage of and generate revenue, from the first step they make until their last step on the way back” (14:7).* Consequently, *“they make small percent out of each different step and at the end of the day they have generated a very big revenue, that’s why they have gone strong” (14:15).* On the more positive side, this controlled environment also results in more safety and comfort for the tourists, with qualified staff ready to provide answers to all their demands. One important responsibility tour operators have towards their tourists is to provide them with the best situation and prerequisites in a destination (Komppula, 2005), and Vefa thinks that *“they made the holiday of people easier actually, without them being afraid of getting lost or of do everything on his own as a tourist, as a guest. They feel sure actually” (14:17).*

To conclude this subchapter, for better or worse tour operators affect most of Crete’s tourism, from bringing in the majority of visitors, to directing them to preferred hotels, partially controlling their spending patterns and their safety. And perhaps even more importantly, it is mostly up to them to decide on whether to tackle the seasonality issue or not, by taking a chance on slowly extending the tourist season.

4.3.3 The importance of airline companies for tourism in the Heraklion region

The importance played by airlines for reaching island destinations (Wittmer and Bieger, 2006) has been talked about in the analysis chapter, both their roles in the development of a tourist area - *“I also say that the development, the further development of the tourism, but also the maintenance of the actual, the present levels of tourism, massively depend on how airlines do that, do their job” (8:43)* - and in the high number of tourists which rely on their planes for reaching those places. The situation of Crete and Heraklion is not different. According to the 2016 numbers, the majority of tourists who reach the island by plane - 2.89 million out of 3.94 million total - are landing on Heraklion’s International Airport, versus the 1.05 million who land on Chania’s International Airport. Of course, there are also those who prefer arriving by boat, especially tourists who also like to bring

their cars, but still the vast majority use airlines: *“it’s an island; the influence of airlines is capital. There are many people coming by boat. This, of course, has to do with tourists who want to have the car with them, or that come from the mainland, from Athens, which is cheaper – for many it’s a habit to take the boat. But we are an island, so the easiest, cheapest way to come – and not necessarily from far away – is by air”* (8:39).

According to Deputy-Mayor Garancini, there are some good signs that point out to a slow expansion of the tourist season, when compared to previous years, as in 2017 an extra month of charter flights was added: *“we had the first charter flights this year in March. We always have the first charter flights end of April – this year it was in March. And now they tend to put the last charter flight in November – which is pretty good, if you compare it to 5 years ago”* (9:1). The importance of airlines for tourism on the island also extends to their role in tackling seasonality, since tourists will not be able to come visit Crete unless flights are made available throughout the year: *“There is no direct flight, so it’s difficult for tourists to come here during the winter season”* (30:40). Hence, according to Professor Andriotis, charter flights are much needed, especially for sustaining winter tourism, in the context where *“there are no cruise ships during the winter, they are very, very limited”* (30:35). Karin also concurs that *“if you don’t have the charter flights to bring the clients to the destination, it is very, very difficult to sustain the winter season”* (2:43). Even tour operators are reluctant on booking charter flights during the off-season, as the risk of not filling them with enough tourists would be too much to bear for their budgets. As stated by Karin, in order *“to send a plane, to book charter flights and to pay them - because the charter flights needs to be paid - it doesn’t matter if one person are on board or if a hundred and eighty persons are on board, so a tour operator is not experimenting. It is not”* (3:7).

The influence that airlines have on tourism is starting to manifest itself during winter as well, in terms of extending the tourist season on the island. There is a strong correlation between the number of flights and that of incoming foreign tourists (Wittmer and Bieger, 2006), and there is a place where one airline is starting to turn things around and slowly transforming one destination into a permanent tourist spot. That city is Chania, and the airline company is Ryanair, which has already established one of its bases near the city. *“Chania, now with Ryanair, they got tourists all year round (...) The city has managed to have tourism in the winter season and so on”* (30:30), says Professor Andriotis. According

to Mr. Stratakis, Chania has succeeded due to the Irish company's presence in the area: *"It's all because of the flights. And also last year they had 200 thousand arrivals due to Ryanair. 200 thousand!"* (17:24). Looking on the statistics of tourist arrivals on Chania's International Airport, and comparing them to the arrivals on Heraklion's International Airport during the off-season, one can notice the differences. Granted, the overall number is decisively in favour of Heraklion, with almost 3 million arrivals, versus just over 1 million for Chania. Nevertheless, in terms of percentages during the November-March period, Chania boasts almost two percent of its total arrivals, compared to the just above half percent for Heraklion - with a staggering zero total registered arrivals during the month of January, and only 186 in February of 2016.

Similar to Ryanair, Heraklion is served by low-cost carrier easyJet. The difference is it only starts operating flights in May, and does not fly during the winter. Elefteria thinks that the city of Heraklion could achieve similar results to Chania, if only it was served by an airline company operating direct flights throughout the year, including the off-season: *"They don't have flights for winter, so that's the main problem. If they started opening that, it's going to be okay"* (17:32).

Even achieving almost two percent of its arrivals during the tourist off-season would be a step forward for the city of Heraklion, as that would translate into almost 60 thousand tourists from November to March. This could be a start in turning the entire region into a permanent destination, and the model of Ryanair and Chania could be followed by an airline willing to schedule charter flights to Heraklion year round. Nevertheless, for this to happen, the region should be prepared with attractions enticing enough for tourists to consider worthwhile visiting during the November-March period (p. 7). In the following subchapter we will discuss some of the measures which could potentially lead to the Heraklion region becoming a permanent tourist destination, including ways of enticing airlines to operate during the off-season.

4.4 Turning the Heraklion region into a permanent tourist destination

After having gone through some of the effects inflicted by seasonality upon the local community, the possible outcomes of expanding the tourist season throughout the year, and the ways in which various tourism stakeholders are affecting tourism in the region, this final chapter of the analysis will discuss the possible solutions to ensuring that tourists visit the Heraklion region all year round, not just during the sun, sea and beach season. For that we will take into consideration both the perspectives of our interviewees and the conclusions gathered from our tourist questionnaire survey.

Although most island destinations tend to be limited to their pleasant climates and nice beaches in terms of economic resources (Conell, 1988), Crete does not fall in this category and has the possibility to diversify its tourist offer. In general, prior to the Heraklion region becoming a permanent tourist destination, it first needs to offer some tourist packages with special programs for the off-season period, in order to ensure the success of such an extension. Referring to Butler (1994), one cause of seasonality is inertia, where people are used to going on holiday during summer as creatures of habit, and accordingly, most tourist packages are geared towards these months. Hence, those off-season packages need to be different compared to the ones promoted during the peak summer season, such as the sea, sun and sand, since the tourist who is going to visit between November and March is also different than its April to October counterpart: *“they are the type of tourists that are looking for something different. They are the ones that prefer to visit villages, they’re not coming just for the sea and sun”* (30:41). Trying to understand these tourists’ behaviours would be a great plus for presenting them with the right package (Caldito et al., 2015), and tourist stakeholders in Heraklion should look to take into account their requirements for the further development of the industry, which is consistent with Anon (1985). Referring to the type of tourist who could be interested in visiting during the off-season, Mr. Stratakis told us that usually *“this kind of people, they live outside the EU, they don’t travel for a long in the same place, so you have to do a plan to visit many, many places in a short time period. For example, the Japanese, the Chinese don’t go for swimming in the summer, so they come here to photo, to see the archaeological sites, the places – that’s good for them”* (20:3). Some potential targets,

according to Elefteria, could be the pensioners, people who are looking for alternative forms of tourism, such as religious or mountain-related activities (p. 19). Considering the region has mountains and gorges, there are “*some tourist agencies here that promote this kind of activities, let’s say trekking and biking*” (20:20). In terms of religious tourism, Russian tourists seem to fit the bill, as they share the same Orthodox Christianity beliefs as the locals. Professor Andriotis thinks that “*they are coming not only for the sea and the sun, they are coming to visit monasteries, churches*” (34:10), thus, getting them to visit during the off-season would be a big plus for tourism in the region, since “*they are really high spenders, and they don’t come only during the summer, they come during the winter, because their interests are different*” (34:15). Considering tourists tend to narrow-down choices, by eliminating from the existing ones (Sirakaya and Woodside, 2005), it would be a good idea to present them with multiple off-season package options, and not just target a certain group.

It is important for the authorities to be aware of tourists’ behaviour and decisions, since those factors influence heavily the development of the tourism industry (Vuuren, 2011). During our time spent in Heraklion we were also intrigued by finding out what the average non-Greek tourist is looking for when deciding to pick Crete as a destination. Knowing tourists’ motivations - which drive their behaviour - is essential for satisfying their needs and expectations (Iso-Ahola, 1999). As a consequence we devised a short questionnaire where tourists were asked to name the reasons behind choosing to visit Crete. Tourists were given the possibility to opt between beach and other factors, where they were subsequently asked to name the latter (they also had the possibility of choosing both beach and other factors). After going through all of the 76 filled questionnaires - mostly by German tourists, who accounted for 48.7% of our research subjects - we were surprised to find out that only about 17 percent mentioned just beach as their main reason for visiting, compared to twice as many, 34 percent, who were enticed by the local history and culture. Amongst other reasons named: holiday or school trip, good weather, stop while on a cruise, gastronomy, landscapes or nature. Nevertheless, when adding the questionnaires which mentioned both beach and other motivations, the results pointed at the beach still remaining the number one pull (Gnoth, 1997), having been cited by 39.5 percent of approached tourists as their main motivation for choosing Crete. Referring to the previously discussed recent tourism increase on the island, which has been attributed to the political situation in other competing summer destinations within the Mediterranean

region, only 4 out of the 76 people we interacted with, or just about five percent, mentioned political reasons as the deciding factor on choosing to visit Crete.

The second important aspect of our questionnaire wanted to assess tourists' interest in visiting Crete during the off-season. The results were staggering in terms of the number of people who have actually visited Crete at some point between November and March, with only 2 of the 76 (2.6%) having previously done so. This percentage is not that far away from the official results registered by the GNTO during the same period of 2016, when just under one percent of all foreign tourist arrivals on Crete airports occurred within that five month timespan. Of all 76 questioned tourists, only 28 (36.8%) said they would be interested in visiting during the off-season, while 46 (60.5%) said they would not and two (2.6%) were not sure. An interesting aspect was the fact that most of the men (60%) we approached were actually willing to return during the offseason, compared to only 25.5 percent of the women who filled the questionnaires (age did not proved to be a factor, as the results were mostly similar, regardless of the subject's age group). As motivation factors for the unwillingness to visit, over 90 percent blamed cold weather, although pretty much all of them admitted to not being familiar with what weather is like in Crete during the off-season and just assumed it would be cold. According to the TUI representative from the Candia Maris hotel, Karin, Crete has a really good weather for most of the year compared to other places which operate on a permanent basis, and other than February and March, the climate conditions are pretty stable: *"I don't see any problem to extend the season till December, any problem, not at all. Even so Mallorca has the same weather like Crete, maybe even worse weather than Crete, Mallorca is working all winter"* (2:31). Referring to those who would consider visiting during the off-season, the most common cited reasons had to do with the multitude of outdoor possibilities in the countryside (36%), such as hiking, biking, skiing or just admiring the landscapes, followed close by the island's history and culture (32%) and its good weather (32%). Considering that Crete has the geographical conditions for creating a double-season destination (Butler, 2014), offering outdoor events during the off-season, such as hiking or biking, is a strategy worthwhile for attracting the existing market looking for such activities (WItt and Moutinho, 1995). These would also increase the already strong summer market and create the circumstances to have permanent tourist activities within the destination (Butler, 2014).

Overall, it would make perfect sense that almost 40 percent of our subjects named beach as one of their main reasons for visiting, since the survey did take place during the month of April, which is considered the beginning of the tourist season. Nevertheless, the multitude of other pulling factors shows there is a tourist market out there which could be targeted for visiting during the off-season, perhaps with a better emphasis on the warm climate, since most of the survey subjects were unaware of what weather is really like in Crete between November and March.

Referring to the information we gained from the interviews, there are still ways to go before reaching the point where extending the tourist season becomes reality. Although the only airport of the region is located right next to Heraklion city, just like many of its cultural attractions, the main elements of tourism in this area have always been sea, sand and sun. The image of Crete as a relaxation destination has always been ingrained on the minds of tourists, however these elements are not easy to advertise during the colder months, and as a result the number of incoming tourists is noticeably reduced during this timeframe. According to data received from the GNTTO, *“the Greek product remains typically “Mediterranean” and still has not managed to diversify and reduce the dependence from the mass tourism and to prolong the tourist season”* (p2). The Ministry of Tourism has the main responsibility in the tourism season expansion program of Crete and turning it to a four season destination. Therefore, one thing which can be done in order to overcome this problem during the winter season, is to offer more attractions, in cultural or natural contexts, or organizing various in-land tours, such as hiking or biking, considering that the climate is still mild during the winter season, or other daily tours, such as olive picking in local villages, or festivals and events (p3). As reported by the GNTTO, the importance of Greece’s culture and thousands of years’ old historical heritages has been featured among all other targeted sectors for the extension program, including wellness and health and gastro-tourism (p3). Referring to Deputy-Mayor Garancini, there are actually some attempts being done in this regard emphasizing the culture and history of the previous civilizations which have left their mark on the history of Heraklion: *“you cannot sell mainly summer and sunshine from November to March, but you really can sell many other things. And let me say that Heraklion is one of the few cities in Europe, and maybe in the world (...) where you can actually touch, and see, and experience six civilizations: the Minoan civilization, the Greeks, the Romans, the Byzantine civilization,*

Venetian, the Ottomans, you can add the modern one if you want... It's difficult to find that kind of richness in one city alone – and we are pushing on that" (9:5).

One of the main obstacles in the process of expansion of the tourist season in Crete has been explained by Karin, as the stakeholders' unwillingness in challenging themselves in order to try to expand the tourist season: *"to start something new, to make an attempt, to extend the winter destination in a destination which did not have a winter destination, you must have a serious reason to try it up, because it is a huge investment"* (3:14). Tour operators, such as TUI, are inclined in continuing with their regular tourism destinations with no off-season challenges, in order to avoid any possible risks, since the charter flights should be paid earlier by the tour operators. Therefore they mainly prefer not to encounter any serious challenges during the winter season. Nevertheless, things could be changing sooner rather than later, as there are some rumours swirling regarding the need to compensate for losses generated by political tensions in neighbour countries. *"Because of the closing down of other winter destinations (...) there are rumours on the market, yes I think that sooner or later a tour operator will start, but I don't know anything exact. As I said, tour operators can't experiment, it's a huge investment and they need to be sure it's working out"* (3:19).

Another important point preventing the island from being a permanent tourism destination, according to Mr. Stratakis (p. 17), is that there are no direct flights to Heraklion. Hence, the isolation of the island is one major obstacle for its tourism expansion process, because the only way other than with the plane to reach Crete is either by boat or ship, which is approximately a 10 hours journey from Athens, which means the tourists have no choice but losing two days of their trip in coming to and leaving from Crete. Referring to Mr. Stratakis (p. 23), one possible solution could be an incentive offered by the state to airline companies, so they will keep operating regular flights during the off-season, in the form of lower or no airport landing taxes. A similar strategy has been previously tried with local hotels, in an attempt to keep them operational during the winter: *"Not to pay a lot of insurance fees. For the workers here. So they tried to promote this way, like: okay, you work, you pay less fee for your insurance... the Greek workers"* (23:17). Lowering these taxes would also allow local business, such as hotels, to lower their prices in order to potentially increase tourist demand in the off-season, which is also consistent with Oxana

(2016). Nikos, manager of Park Hotel, is certain that if *“we don’t have to pay so much taxes, we can make discounts, so we attract clients and we get more clients”* (28:6).

Given that some of these stakeholders have their own agendas and will not act immediately to extend the tourism season, seasonality could still be fought-off by involving other strategies, without involving tour operators or airlines (Oxana, 2016). Managing seasonality could be realised by changing the product mix or by diversifying the market (Witt et al., 1991). Pursuant to what we have achieved during our stay in Crete and the data we collected through interview sessions, in order for the tourism industry of the area to be extended during the colder months of the year, the tourism products should be redefined, to be clearer, the exuberance of other kinds of activities apart from the common, sun, sea and sand should be capitalized. In other words, for the tourism season to be expanded the priorities should change to focus more on decreasing the tourism’s effect on local community and also the environment, as well as increasing the efficiency of the strategies undertaken. The very major problem of the tourism expansion process in Heraklion was the non-existence of an efficient strategy. Thus, as Deputy-Mayor Garancini mentioned during our interview session, they have been recently working on demonstrating and bringing forward the richness and cultural heritages of the region and the several civilizations which have passed through the area, therefore the maintenance and protection of the national and cultural heritages should be employed (p. 7).

Other touristic activities that could attract tourists whole year long are rural tourism, sports-related activities, or gastronomy, to name just a few. Therefore, the tourism industry in Crete should have its focus on the market segmentation to be able to compete with similar destinations such as Turkey, and to develop and enhance the offered luxury services with higher qualities in order to be able to highlight the image of value-for-money of the region. On the other side, the city of Heraklion is a vivid city with numerous universities and a large number of young populations, however there has never been a serious attempt in giving priority to this side of the city, while there could be several activities, events or festivals to attract these kind of visitors (p. 7). This is consistent with Butler (2014), who states that such activities are not depending on weather conditions, but they do require branding marketing and investments. Adding to the cultural activities in the off-season could also lead to more hotels staying open and more flights, as these stakeholders require some much needed incentives from the local authorities, in order to

take those chances. As stated by Deputy-Mayor Garancini, “*they always ask us: okay, we can do it, but what do you have to offer? They are not keen of expanding on their way, on their side, their operations, only for visiting the city. They ask us to add to the offer they would make to the tourists, some cultural events, some festivals, which take place not in the summer. Some special organization for attracting people in another way – and we are working on that too. Heraklion is a city which was absolutely used, from the period October – March, not to organize anything*” (7:27). Referring to Getz (2010), the staging of festivals and various events play an important role in the development of a destination. And although there would be no guarantees that such measures would lead to the elimination of seasonality, the goal would be to create a destination which would separate Heraklion from other cities and offer unique tourist experiences (Butler, 2014).

Despite of the various specifications each region in Greece presents to the visitors, there is one common characteristic that can be seen whole country wide and meanwhile diversifies Crete from all other destinations, which are its *tradition*, the unique lifestyle and culture that can be felt in every corner of the island, from agricultural activities such as olive picking, to the religious festivities getting held during December and January, small, flourishing villages only half an hour drive distance from the city of Heraklion, archeological sites or many other original and inimitable activities which could be very attractive for the visitors no matter which month of the year. Referring to Deputy-Mayor Garancini (9:42), “*we are now preparing some routes, which either start or finish in the city, which comprise the visit of different things in those villages: churches, traditional windmills, traditional olive plants, cheesemakers, many other things. The Minoan parts from Knossos, to those inland areas and villages, which are not yet discovered 100 percent, the different archeological sites which can be visited in any month of the year. So there is lots that can be offered and is offered actually, that we have in the countryside*”. Another kind of tourism, which is quite developed in similar destinations, such as France, Italy, Croatia, Slovenia and the Balkan area, has to do with visitors getting the opportunity to rent their own rooms in renovated old houses (p. 10). So what should be done in this regard in Crete is to simply benefit the existing richness of the area with the touch of Cretan hospitality in order to represent absorbing packages for the tourists whole year long. Managing to achieve a permanent destination - at least in regards to the city of Heraklion - should not be that hard, considering there are other examples which could be followed (p. 10). It is up to the local tourism stakeholders to change their

mentality a little bit and try to look at the bigger picture, instead of instant profit: *“the mentality is – the one we have today – it can change, because you can have not one egg today and a chicken tomorrow, but you can have everyday a chicken, if you invest logically, following existing examples – we don’t have to invent anything. Maybe we can have some originalities, of course, somewhere, which are due to the habits or to the history, but the ways of exploiting the most, a region twelve months a year are known more or less. It’s just a matter of absorbing the things that can be absorbed here, with a touch of Cretan hospitality or Cretan knowledge, and then you have a very good and interesting package that can be offered to tourists from October to March”* (10:4).

A great endorsement for tourism during the off-season came via Mathew Halpin, the Australian artist who now calls Heraklion city his home. As part of his collaboration with the Heraklion Municipality for the restoration of a previously neglected area within the old city, near the Cultural Centre, The Lakkos Project also aims at turning it into a tourist-friendly zone, with bars and cafes. He thinks that the landscapes and improving the existing infrastructure are the key to attracting tourists in the off-season: *“We need to improve the villages and encourage less beach culture. The snow covered mountains in winter are amazing. Spring is amazing here and the prices and crowds are much less!”* (5:38).

To summarise some of our findings and conclude this final part of the analysis, extending the tourist season and potentially turning the Heraklion region into a permanent destination is something which could definitely be achieved. What it needs in order for this to happen is a question of getting some of the tourism stakeholders on the same page and willing to take a risk instead of prioritizing quick profits. This could be achieved simply by offering various incentives, in the form of less fees or taxes. It is also important to be able to differentiate between the summer and the off-season tourist, and come up with packages that reflect this shift. The off-season tourist - no matter if local, Greek, or from other countries - is mostly looking for alternate forms of tourism, which usually revolve around nature-related activities, such as hiking or biking, the local traditions, culture and history, gastronomy. The infrastructure also needs to be upgraded, and the local attractions better advertised, along with the creation of various festivals or events between November and March.

5. Conclusions

The problem this project attempted to research had to do with the challenges and possibilities of turning the city of Heraklion and its nearby sea resorts into a permanent tourist destination, thus eliminating seasonality. Based on our research – interviewing the various local stakeholders and engaging some tourists' interest level in potentially visiting during the off-season – we came up with the following points.

First we needed to know how much of an issue dealing with the seasonality of the tourism industry actually is for the local population whose income depends on the industry, and what would be the consequences of expanding the tourist season. For about half a year, most of these individuals have to rely on unemployment benefits, which are barely enough for them to sustain their lifestyle. Many of them have to look elsewhere for an extra income during this period, whether it is in the other major industry of the island, agriculture, or other sectors. Some of them are even forced to look for jobs in other countries, for lack of alternatives. Although the benefits of extending the tourist season could be many, from job safety and better income for the locals, to improving the existing infrastructure – which is lacking at the moment, especially outside the city of Heraklion – still there are some negative aspects, which mostly have to do with possibly neglecting the agricultural sector, and not giving the local natural environment enough time to recover from months of overuse. Nevertheless, if the situation is approached correctly, backed by a good strategy, which minimises the negative factors, then the benefits could offset any worries some might have about expanding the tourist season. Still, we were left with the impression that many locals are at peace with the situation at the moment, and we could not figure out if the motivation exists on their behalf to really take a central role in trying to eliminate seasonality.

Then we needed to find out about the impact that the major tourism stakeholders have on the region's industry, if there is any collaboration going on between them and how much extending the tourist season falls on their shoulders. Other than the local tourism authorities, we found out that tour operators, airline companies and hotels – to a certain extent – have the biggest effect on the state of tourism in the Heraklion region, and Crete in general. Since hotels in Crete heavily rely on tour operators to bring in visitors, almost all our interviewees were of the opinion that expanding the tourist season lies mostly in

the hands of tour operators. The issue here is that most likely, they will not want to risk losing money by experimenting on extending the season. The same applies to airline companies, who at the moment only operate charter flights during the April-October timeframe. However, there are some signs that things are moving in the right direction, as some of them have already started operating charter flights in late March, about a month earlier than previous years. Finally, the local authorities need to step in and offer some incentives for airlines and hotels to keep operating during the off-season, so they could still keep people employed and minimise any potential losses.

Our final take had to do with the possible actions which could be undertaken in order to eliminate seasonality and insure tourists visit the Heraklion region throughout the year. Other than assuming some chances on behalf of tour operators, flight companies and hotels, it is important that those stakeholders also recognise the fact that summer tourists are different than off-season tourists, hence their offers need diversified. Those who are interested in visiting between November and March are clearly not your regular sun, sea and beach tourist, hence they need being presented with packages which take advantage of the region's natural landscapes, rich culture and history amongst others. Also, improving the cultural events offering, as well as the infrastructure, mixed with the previously mentioned actions and good overall climate, could definitely lead to expanding the season until December, if not eliminating seasonality altogether.

Our overall impression is that it is just a question of time before the tourist season will be expanded, however, it will mostly have to do with the political situation in the Mediterranean region, rather than local efforts to combat seasonality. The demand for tourism remains high, and by default many tourists will look at Crete as a viable option. Still, whether or not Crete and the Heraklion region could be able to sustain having visitors throughout the year, especially after the political waters clear, remains to be seen. If done correctly, backed by a solid strategy and contribution from all involved – which the city of Heraklion is working on – on top of the favourable political circumstances, all of the Heraklion region, including its sea resorts, could turn into permanent tourist destinations.

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