

The profile of visitors of Greek thematic parks-The case of Tsilivi waterpark

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Abstract

Thematic parks can become an important part of the promotion for a destination. This paper has examined the profile of visitors to a thematic park in Zakynthos, Greece. It is important to mention that there is a lack of research into this field; hence it is important to have empirical evidence on this field. The research has taken place in a sample of 272 visitors of the Tsilivi waterpark. It is important to remark that the profile of the visitors seems to vary. It is not made only from small children but it is made mostly from whole families coming from a wide range of demographic characteristics. Indeed, the majority of the visitors were aged from 35 to 44, which is an indication that a thematic park focuses mostly on families made from the parents and the children. Indeed, the formation of recreational theme is mostly a family task or a number of people who know well each other.

Keywords: Zakynthos, thematic parks, visitors, Greece, tourism, Tsivili Park.

JEL Classification: L83, M31

1. Introduction

Theme parks are a widespread form of recreation throughout the world. They are centered around one or more key themes and are an important attraction for tourists for the region in which they are located and, in general, the country where they are hosted. They are so popular that it favors growth in the wider region, as a number of other businesses such as hotels, mass catering and transport networks will grow and shape differently. It is remarkable that among the highly developed categories of leisure parks are the family, with facilities for mini golf, karts and water sports. The theme parks are expected to attract considerable investment interest, create new jobs and contribute to the development of less developed regions (Moutinho, 2016).

Theme parks have become an important asset of each well-known destination. There is some developed in Greece, mostly on summer destinations. At this point, it is important to mention that there is a lack of research on the thematic parks of Greece. For this reason the authors have taken the decision to examine the case of Tsilivi waterpark in Zakynthos. The aim of this study is to identify the demographic and other characteristics of the Greek thematic parks visitors, by examining the case of Tsilivi waterpark. The results will indicate the profile of the visitors including gender, family status, age, etc.

2. Literature review

2.1 The concept of recreation

The term "recreation" has its roots in the Latin word recreation which means revitalization, entertainment, stimulation, recreation, fun. According to the traditional approach, "recreation" is a process that restores,

revitalizes and restores health. The historical approach considers recreation as an activity that rests and renews the individual from his obligatory work (Afthinos, 1998). More (1985) emphasizes that what matters in the recreation process is the final feeling of the participants. Kraus (1978) defines "recreation" as a form of human activity and experience, which is not limited to the playful form it can have but extends to other forms such as travel, museum visits, reading as well as a variety of other spiritual, artistic and physical activities. Most definitions define recreation as a remarkable, socially acceptable experience, which is done in leisure time, and aims to create feelings of satisfaction, pleasure and well-being through the voluntary participation of the individual (Weiskopf, 1982). Kouthouris (2009) states that "recreation" is the state of revival, wellness, in which the person is driven through his free involvement in activities of his own choice, during his free time.

Recreation, as a result of a very large number of activities, occurs in different places in a society (Bello et al, 2017). Recreation, as a supply of services or goods or programs of varying interest and content, creates close relationships with diverse market areas, depending on the needs and wishes of the citizens of a society (Kouthouris, 2009). According to the author, organizations providing recreational services in a society are categorized as: a) in state administration and management bodies, such as local authorities, state enterprises, ministries, general secretariats of agencies; b) voluntary, non-profit organizations such as environmental protection, scouting, church, Red Cross, and c) Private initiative providers such as sports and recreation companies, healthcare providers and health rehabilitation companies tourism and outdoor leisure services, theme parks.

2.2 Recreational parks

The increasing interest in recreational activities, away from the daily routine and organized form of competitive games, is a recognized trend in most European societies (Meldrum, 1971). The incentive that motivates individuals to participate in recreational activities is fun (Deci & Ryan, 1985), and the feeling of freedom, contact with nature and the creation of new friends (Festeu, 2002). Another key reason for participation in recreational activities is lack of competition, since participation is more important than performance (Rubens, 1999).

This rapid increase in leisure attendees has resulted in its commercialization and the creation of some well-known outdoor schools, such as Outward Bound USA and the National Outdoor Leadership School. Apart from the appearance of the schools, the parks of recreational leisure activities started to be created from the middle of the last century. Recreational parks are vital to providing opportunities for people and one of the most important features of most cities (Veal, 2006). They provide a variety of opportunities for recreation, tourism and cultural activities and are places where people can participate, relax and socialize (Low, Taplin & Scheld, 2005; More, 1985). The programs, which are offered in these parks, vary greatly. However, in most cases they provide several activities (cycling, trekking, shooting, climbing, horse riding, shooting, etc.), as well as places for relaxation and relaxation (spa, whirlpool).

The above trend has been followed in recent decades by Greece with the creation of several recreational parks. These enterprises are either private or public in nature and one can participate in a number of activities, often paying the equivalent. Increasing the number of recreational parks has increased competition and pushed businesses to provide the highest quality service.

2.3 Theme parks

Europe has a significant number of themes / amusement parks scattered all over the continent, USA has a high number of theme parks. This kind of industry has spread across Western Europe with a large concentration sites in Germany, France and the United Kingdom. Meanwhile, in southern Europe there some projects planned or underway in Spain, Italy, Turkey and Greece. At present, the European theme park industry comprises 19 major attractions with annual participation of more than 1 mlnvisitors and over 45 medium scale attractions, involving between 500,000 and 1 million visitors The European theme parks produce an annual contribution of about 70 million people with income of around 1.5 billion euros. European industry is about 1/3 the size US industry in terms of revenues. The European market has changed, of course, since the opening of Euro Disney Park in France (Clave, 2015).

A theme park and the overall environment of tourism must be a place which natural features and services will be provided for an estimated capacity of visitors. The tourist offer and market demand are the two aspects

that require careful consideration for planning theme park. Required, i.e., intensive and continuous monitoring of market developments, with a longer-term perspective on the park design. Attempts for theme parks are made so to be designed mostly directed towards improving economy of the region, because the economic impact of the theme parks are generally positive if they cause an increase in employment, income and exchange. Meanwhile, improved transport facilities created throughout the years from state authorities and other infrastructure for tourism and residents of the area have improved the quality of tourist services but also transportation towards destinations. A recent trend in European theme park industry is the acquisition of sector of basic, strong ownership groups. This occurs in industries as mature, and there is also such a trend in the US. In Europe, several acquisitions they have started. In 1990, Madame Tussauds museum bought the «Alton Towers» (the «Madame Tussauds» also has several smaller attractions in Mainland Europe and «Rock Circus» in London). The organization «Walibi» bought «The Smurf Park», increasing its participation in the theme park industry by acquiring 11 four parks. Finally, the largest hotel company in France, the «Accor», acquired interest in «Parc Asterix control." With the unification of Europe and the continued maturation of European industry theme parks, this trend will continue in the coming years. All amusement parks have the following key features (Cornelis, 2010):

- They have an appeal to family audiences.
- They contain one or more theme environments
- They have a similar form, that include rides, musicians, artists, costumes, characters and others, which is a "free" entertainment vicinities (artificially created).
- They have a high level of investment per unit.
- They have high standards of service, maintenance and cleaning.
- They contain several activities (entertainment) to create an average time visitors stay, typically 5-7 hours.
- They usually have an admission policy with a single fare

Regarding the specifications for amusement parks, as in any type of activity-investment, so the theme parks are specific conditions for the establishment and operation characteristics. They must include a building made for public support facilities and various dimensions few square meters space limits, mandatory functional requirements many more. The Entertainment Theme Parks are obliged to respect these specifications, in order to approve the installation and to obtain the special operation signal by the relevant tourist authority service. Most of theme parks are close to hotels or they include hotels within their premises so to serve with the best possible way their customers. Also they tend to give special attention on issues of security and safety overall (Avery and Dickson, 2010).

Greece is a country which has not many theme parks. Actually, there is not any theme park which can be compared to Disneyland, Alton Towers etc. Recently there has been the Attika Zoo which is a major investment and some smaller parks throughout Greece, while overall the case of Greece is that it is country which has aimed into high-quality tourism. This includes the creation of leisure parks, including the one predicted in the Elliniko Area which is estimated as being the largest investment of this kind in Europe.

Based on the above, the scope of this research is to evaluate the operation of an ongoing leisure park in Greece but also what are the prospects of such as investment in the future regarding this park.

3. Methodology

3.1 Participants

The sample of the survey was made up of 400 Greek participants of Tsilivi waterpark, which is a private enterprise in the theme of leisure theme parks in Zakynthos. 400 questionnaires were distributed to adult participants in the park and 313 (78.25%) were returned. Of these, 272 (68%) were used in the survey due to incomplete or unreadable elements of the rest. Of the participants in the survey, 126 (46.3%) were male and 146 (53.7%) were female with an average age of 33.2 years \pm 10.25 years (range 18 - 59). Regarding their educational level, a number of participants had 31 (13.7%) had postgraduate studies, then a portion had university degree and 34 (15%) the majority of participants (n = 63) were high school graduates, 29 primary school graduates and 20 (8.8%) high school graduates. Of all respondents, 40% (n = 98) were unmarried and

56.3% (n = 138) married. The majority of married children had two children (48.1%), one child (23%), three children (13.3%) and many (4.4%), while 11.1% of married children did not have children.

Regarding their professional status 82 (35.7%) were private employees, 60 (26.1%) were civil servants, 53 (23%) students and 35 (15.2%) belonged to the other categories, another). Finally, with regard to their financial status, the majority (22.4%) of the participants had no income, 21% belonged to the categories with a monthly income of 400-750 € and 751-1200 €, 13.6% in the class 1201-2000 €, a 13.1 % had an income greater than 2000 € and an 8.9% less than 400 €.

3.2 Instruments

The questionnaires were shared with the participants when they entered the leisure park. Regarding the questionnaire, in order to study the quality of the services provided, the satisfaction of consumers and their intention to repeat the participation in the theme park, a questionnaire consisting of two parts was used. The first part included questions about the recording of demographic characteristics and other participants' information. In the second part was used the questionnaire of Zournatzi et al. (2007) quality, satisfaction and intention to repeat the participation (ZPH), and , which was translated into Greek by the Chang & Lee (2004) questionnaire, tailored to the theme park needs. This questionnaire included a total of 18 questions of which 5 investigate the quality of the services provided (e.g. leisure park provides reliable services), 6 study the satisfaction of the participants (e.g I am satisfied with the services provided in the recreation park) And 7 are considering the intention to resume their participation (e.g If I had to choose a recreation park again, I would choose another park). All responses were given in a Likert type seven-grade scale, from (1) "Absolutely disagree" to (7) "Absolutely agree". The questionnaire was printed on a double-sided A4 page to make it practical and easy for the participants. Regarding the income, the participants had to choose between no income, 0 -400, 400-750, 751-1200, per month in an individual bases and so on. This is one of the key parts of the questionnaire since this is the dependent variable that is going to be correlated with the independent variables which are associated with the intention to visit again the park.

Regarding the validity of the instrument of research, it relied in pre-existent questionnaires, for example the ZPH questionnaire which have been widely used and accepted. The Alpha Cronbach 0, 85 which is also an evidence of high validity. The data was analyzed with descriptive statistics where the analysis occurred in SPSS with the use of frequencies.

3.3 Procedure

Any questions were clarified and asked to return them when they left the park. At the same time, they were informed that the questionnaire serves research purposes and follows the code of scientific ethics, while the results obtained will be used to improve the services of the leisure parks. The completion of the questionnaire was voluntary and anonymous and lasted about 5-10 minutes. There were specially arranged spaces in the park (restaurant, café and entrance) that the participants in the survey could sit down and complete the questionnaire with calmness. The distribution of the questionnaire was done throughout the park, daily, within one week, to cover the entire opening hours of the leisure park. This has ensured the "randomness" and "representativeness" of the sample.

4. Results

Out of the 272 respondents, 126 (46.3%) were male and 146 (53.7%) women, aged 18 to 59, with the highest concentrations being reported in the 35-44 age group (34.4 %), 18-24 years (26.9%) and 25-34 years (23.8%). Table 1 presents in detail the distribution of participants in the age categories.

Table 1. Age classes of participants

Participants	Percentage
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Age groups		
18-24 yrs.	61	26.9%
25-34 yrs.	54	23.8%
35-44 yrs.	78	34.4%
44 +	34	15%

Regarding their educational level, the majority of the participants (n = 63) were high school graduates, followed by university graduates (n = 38) and technological institute graduates (n = 34). Table 2 presents in detail the distribution of the participants' educational level

Table 2: Education of participants

Education levels	Participants	Percentage
Elementary	29	12.8%
High School	20	8.8%
Lyceum	63	27.8%
Universities	38	16.7%
Technological Universities	34	15%
Postgraduate	31	13.7%
Other	12	5.3%

Regarding their marital status, the majority (n = 138) were married, with 48.1% of them having two children, while 40% were single. Table 3 presents in detail the distribution of the marital status of participants in the theme park.

Table 3. Marital status of the participants

Marital status	Participants	Percentage
Singled	98	40%
Married	138	56.3%
Widowed	3	1.2%
Divorced	6	2.4%

	Without children	15	11.1%
	One children	31	23%
Married	Two children	65	48.1%
	Three children	18	13.3%
	More than three children	6	4.4%

As far as their professional situation is concerned, it included 4 categories: students, civil servants, private employees and other categories (freelancers, households, others). Higher rates (35.7%) were observed in private employees and civil servants (26.1%). Table 4 shows the structure of the participants' professional status.

Table 4. Occupational status of the participants

Occupational status	Participants	Percentage
High school or university students	53	23%
Public servants	60	26.1%
Private sector	82	35.7%
Other jobs	35	15.2%

In terms of their financial status, the majority of participants were in the category of non-income (n = 48), followed by categories with a monthly income of 400-750 € and 751-1200 € (n = 45). Table 5 presents in detail the distribution of the financial situation of the participants in the park.

Table 5. Income of the participants

Income (in €)	Participants	Percentage
No income	48	22.4%
Less than 400	19	8.9%
400-750	45	21%
751-1200	45	21%
1201-2000	29	13.6%
More than 2000	28	13.1%

Of the participants in the theme park, 31.9% were residents of the Region of Zakynthos, while the majority of 68.1% were residents outside the Region. The majority (n = 81), i.e. 36.2%, travel a distance of 1-5 km to come to the park, 29.5% travel a distance of less than 1km and a 18.3% travel a distance of 5-10km. The time they spent on moving to the park ranged from 5-10 minutes (38.2%)

and less than 5 minutes (29.2%). In terms of the way of transportation, car was the most popular mean (44.5%). Table 6 presents the basic topographic features of the participants.

Table 6. Geographic distribution of the participants

Characteristics	Items	Participants	Percentage (%)
Residency	In the island of Zakynthos	74	31.9
	Outside the island of Zakynthos	158	68.1
Residency from the thematic park	<1 Km	66	29.5
	1-5 Km	81	36.2
	5-10 Km	41	18.3
	>10 Km	36	16.1
Time needed to visit the thematic park	<5 min	62	29.2
	5-10 min	81	38.2
	10-15 min	32	15.1
	>15 min	37	17.5
Transportation	On foot	43	18.2
	Bicycle	20	8.5
	Motorbike	57	24.2
	Car	105	44.5
	Public transportation	11	4.7

Regarding the way the participants visited the park, the majority of the participants (46.5%) went with their family, 23.7% with their partner and lower rates with the boyfriend (16.2%) or alone (13.6%). Regarding the number of people who came together in the park, 37.2% reported 4 people, followed by 22.1% by 2 people. Interesting is the time spent in the park, with 39.2% reporting 2-3 hours and 28.7% 3-4 hours. Their annual frequency of participation in similar parks was 44.8% 2-3 times / year, 27.6% 1 time / year, and the other categories were smaller. It is noteworthy that an overwhelming percentage (84.8%) had previously participated in theme parks of recreation and a large percentage (64.2%) had visited the park again. Table 7 presents in detail the above general features.

Table 7. General characteristics of the participants

Characteristics	Items	Participants	Percentage (%)
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Companionship	Partner	54	23.7
	Friend	37	16.2
	Family	106	46.5
	Alone	31	13.6
Number of persons	1 person	16	6.9
	2 persons	51	22.1
	3 persons	42	18.2
	4 persons	86	37.2
	>4 persons	36	15.6
Duration of visit	up to 2 hrs	33	13.9
	2-3 hrs	93	39.2
	3-4 hrs	68	28.7
	>4 hrs	43	18.1
Frequency of visits	Never again	30	12.9
	1 time	64	27.6
	2-3 times	104	44.8
	>3 times	34	14.7

The participants of the theme park were able to take part in nine activities. Of these, the most popular (n = 195) was the "Lazy River" activity, with 79.6%, followed by "Multi Slide" (n = 186), Rafting (n = 173) and Open Air » (n = 172). Table 8 shows the participants' activities. The majority of the participants (38.2%) liked the "Turbulence" action, followed by "Rafting" (17.6%) and "Multi Slide" (7.8%). The lesser actions were "Open Air" (22.7%), "Lazy River" (18.2%) and "Children's pool" (17%).

Table 8. Participation in activities

Activities	Participants	Percentage
Children's pool	146	59.6
Swimming pool/Jacuzzi	160	65.3
Lazy River	195	79.6
Multi Slide	186	75.9
Rafting	173	70.6
Space Hole	137	55.9

Black Hole	147	60
Open Air	172	70.2
Turbolance	154	62.9

5. Discussion

Regarding the demographic characteristics of the individuals who participated in the survey, the results showed that women were more than men. This is in agreement with other studies conducted in recreational activities (Astrapellos, Costa & Astrapellou, 2010; Kouthouris & Alexandris, 2005), while other studies report a higher proportion of men (Alexandris et al., 2006; Barlas et al. Dalakis, Tsitskari, Costa, Alexandris, 2011; Lee et al., 2011; Barlas & Koustelios, 2007; Belias et al., 2017). At the same time, the results showed that the majority of participants in the theme park included people aged 35 to 44, as in Dalaki et al. (2011), Priba et al. (2007). In contrast, Barlas et al. (2010), held at a ski resort, showed that the average age was much lower. Similarity was also found in the results of Alexandris et al. (2006), Astrapellos et al. (2010), Kouthouris and Alexandris (2005).

As far as the educational level is concerned, the majority of the participants consisted of high school graduates and university graduates and TEI graduates. These results seem to be consistent with most of the research in the recreation area, but also in the area of municipal and private gymnasiums (Alexandris et al., 2006; Polatidou, Balaska & Alexandris, 2011; Costa, Glynia, Antoniou, Kouthouris, 2003). Participation in leisure and sports activities is related to the level of education and, more specifically, research shows that people with a higher level of education are more likely to be involved in such actions. The results of many surveys show that the level of education is an important factor in predicting participation in sports and leisure programs (Collins, 2003; Eitzen & Sage, 2003).

The results showed that most of the participants were married with two children, as opposed to the results of most recreational and sports research, which showed that the majority of participants were unmarried (Alexandris et al., 2006; Polatidou et al., 2011; Haravanis, Ypantidou, Costa, Kouthouris & Koustelios, 2007; Flabouras et al., 2015). In fact, research shows that marital status and the existence of children are negatively related to participation in sports and recreational activities (Ansari & Lovell, 2009). The opposite effects in this theme park are probably due to the fact that most theme parks have actions suitable for all family members and are offered for family involvement.

As far as their professional situation is concerned, most of them were private employees, a result consistent with Costa et al. (2003), who appreciated the quality of sports and leisure services in holiday hotels. Finally, in terms of monthly income, the results did not show anything remarkable, except for the observation that there were a large percentage of participants who said they had no income. This contradicts the fact that participation in such actions requires some financial cost, which may be covered by the parents or friends of the particular participants.

Frequency analyzes investigated the general characteristics of the participants in the theme park for the purpose of revealing their preferences, so that these elements contribute to the development of services appropriate to the needs of the customers of the particular parks. On the basis of these data, the majority of the participants were residents outside the Prefecture, which proves that tourists account for the majority of participants in theme parks. Most stayed at a distance of 1 to 5 kilometers and spent 5 to 10 minutes to reach the park, while the majority of participants used a private means of transport. This result may be due to the fact that the urban transport network in the city of Zakynthos is very limited, a factor which should be taken into account by the park managers in order to allow for better interventions.

According to the results of the survey, most visited the park with their family, their partner or their friend. Having a company involved in any recreational and sports activity is an incentive both for the start of the activity and for the preservation of it. Many people are encouraged to engage in some activity by having relatives and friendly people, which could lead to the creation of appropriate actions to enhance this type of participation. The lack of companionship is an inhibiting factors in recreational activities as well as by the research by Drakou, Tzetzis and Mamantzi (2008) an important deterrent to engaging in recreational / sporting

activities. Of course, the formation of most recreational theme parks favors group participation (family, company, company), because they provide a wide range of leisure services to visitors.

As far as the participants' other characteristics are concerned, the results showed that most of them participate 2 to 3 times a year in similar parks and their residence time is mostly 2 to 3 hours. Also, for the specific theme park, useful data on the number of participants per action, as well as the actions they liked (more or less) that could be used by those responsible for improving, modifying or even changing Activities.

6. Conclusions

Thematic parks are an important aspect of the tourist life of a destination. This research indicated the case of a thematic park in the island of Zakynthos. It is important to remark that the profile of the visitors seems to vary. It is not made only from small children but it is made mostly from whole families coming from a wide range of demographic characteristics. Indeed, the majority of the visitors were aged from 35 to 44, which is an indication that a thematic park focuses mostly on families made from the parents and the children. Indeed, the formation of recreational theme is mostly a family task or a number of people who know well each other.

From a critical point of view, while most of the well-known destinations in Europe have some significant thematic parks, such as Disneyland in Paris, Greece is limited only on small summer parks which are identified as thematic parks. Since it is understood that a thematic park is a vital part of the tourist life of a destination, hence it is understood that the local authorities must invest into those parks by providing the necessary incentives so that the investment to take place but also providing the necessary infrastructure. Regarding the potentials of a future research, the author will like to examine a number of thematic parks in Greece and abroad so to make a comparative analysis. This can be made with a quantitative analysis on those parks so to compare the demographic characteristics of the visitors on those parks.

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