

Accessibility, Tourism and Social Welfare: Covid19 and a new Quality-of-Life Tourism Model for the Greek islands

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Abstract

This paper aims to draw attention on the insularity issue faced by many Greek islands and to discuss how the challenges connected with insularity are affected by the Covid19 pandemic and the mobility restrictions measures imposed by the central government. Given that the current tourism pattern of Europe and Greece in particular is going to alter, this paper proposes a new tourism model that could improve the competitive position of the remote Greek islands, while enhancing the total social welfare. This Quality-of-Life Tourism Model (QoLTM) exploits the unique features of the small islands, transforming insularity into a tourist competitive advantage. The proposed QoL tourism model is consistent with the Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations and aims to improve the well-being of both visitors and island residents.

Keywords: *Insularity, Accessibility, Sustainable Development, Quality of Life Tourism, Covid19.*

JEL Classification: Z32, Tourism and Development

1. Introduction

Greek tourism industry has experienced a continuous growth in the last decade, with tourist arrivals crossing the of 30 million border line in 2018 and following the same rising trend in 2019, too. However, the situation in 2020 will be dramatically different. Tourism industry is facing an unprecedented challenge from Coronavirus disease 2019 (Covid19) which has grounded airplanes, shut down hotels, and cancelled the vacation plans of millions of people.

Greek government took immediate and effective measures to contain the COVID-19 virus spread which are producing very positive results in terms of reducing the lethality of the disease. The successful health crisis management has gained very positive feedback from the global community and has significantly improved the image of Greece which was severely distorted during the times of economic crisis (2008-2018). More challenges are ahead however, since International Monetary Fund forecasts that Greece is falling again into recession due to Covid19, taking a 10% bite out of GDP and a 5% increase in unemployment (IMF, 2020). The situation may be even worse, given the fact that Greek tourism contributes up to 30,9% to the national GDP and up to 25,9% to total employment (SETE, 2020).

Greek islands have long suffered the inequalities stemming from insularity such as the long distance from mainland, problematic transport connections, limited supply of goods, seasonality in social and economic life and vulnerability to environmental challenges (ESPON, 2013). These features prevented the development of mass tourism in most of these areas, something that was seen as a handicap so far. Even though a growing number of sceptics had already criticized the mass tourism monoculture it was not until a disaster unveiled its fragility, just as happens in natural ecosystems. In these cases, the only sustainable treatment is the enhancement of biodiversity, which, in the case of tourism can be translated into a portfolio of differentiated niche strategies, based on special local characteristics. Since it is known from ecology science that biodiversity is favoured in islands due to their unique set of influences and conditions (Chisholm, 2016), this paper suggests that the Covid19 pandemic may pose a unique opportunity to view insularity through totally new lenses. The main goal of the paper is to increase consideration of the insularity issue and to explore how the remoteness and inaccessibility of isolated islands may turn into advantages towards the development of an alternative model of Quality of Life (QoL) tourism. More specifically, this work deals with the following questions: a) What are the possible implications of Covid19 pandemic to insularity? b) How can small islands, particularly Greek islands take advantage of the new landscape emerging in the tourism industry and how they can restructure their tourist strategy into a sustainable destination management model based on the Quality-of-Life concept?

To deal with the above questions, this paper first refines the notion of insularity and its implications for the Greek tourism, and then presents how the current pandemic has altered some core dimensions of island life. Next, the paper deepens into the idea of Quality-of-Life (QoL) tourism and presents a proposed QoL tourism model (QoLTM) aligned with the requirements of sustainability and able to promote social welfare for island visitors and local residents altogether.

2. Conceptual framework

Insularity, Accessibility and Tourism

The issue of insularity has lately gained attention by the European Union, in an attempt to identify, understand and handle the European islands' peculiarities within the framework of EU cohesion policy.

The notion of insularity includes both 'objective' and measurable characteristics, including small areal size, isolation, as well as unique natural and cultural qualities. Although there is not a single definition of insularity, it is a combination of the following characteristics (ESPON, 2013; Margaras, 2016):

a. Transportation of people, products and services.

Lack of surface transport and lack of adequate connections. Limited accessibility to the islands, especially during the winter. Infrequent, time-consuming and expensive transport that raises the costs of economic activity. The transport problems may be exacerbated if the islands are located in border areas. Monopolistic or oligopolistic phenomena are quite often in air and sea transportation connecting islands with the mainland raise the transportation costs.

b. Natural and cultural environment

Fragile ecosystems. May be small and/or mountainous with little arable land. Additional problems may be caused by drought, rising sea levels and land erosion. Fish stocks are limiting due to over-fishing. Many islands suffer from water scarcity which is made worse during the summer season, with increased tourism flows. The latter have additional implications for garbage and waste production and management. Energy insufficiency is another issue since islands must import fossil fuels from the mainland with significant transportation cost. It is also not unusual to run out of fuels in cases of strikes or bad weather conditions when the maritime transportation is interrupted.

Most islands have rich history and culture. Both natural and cultural environment although a major competitive advantage for tourist industry at the same time threatened by mass tourism. Some of the oldest European civilizations were developed on the Greek islands (Cycladic, Minoan civilizations, etc.), therefore the islands have unique archeological sites, a distinctive architectural heritage and the fascinating local traditions of a centuries-old and multifaceted civilization.

c. Monoculture economies – economic stagnation

Most EU islands have small size and limited quantity and variety of resources that prevent economies of scale. Moreover, most of them depend heavily on tourism monoculture and diversification of the economic activities is very limited, creating a very fragile economic equilibrium. Islanders also fall behind in the use of new information and communication technologies (ICTs) and in research and innovation, since universities and innovation centers are usually located in metropolitan areas.

d. Social services and infrastructure

Islands are costly areas since governments must create infrastructure (i.e. ports, airports, schools, hospitals, energy and water networks, waste treatment) for a small number of people. Island isolation prohibits agglomeration externalities. Many islands are far from administrative centers and their residents must travel a long distance to use social services. Social services are also restricted and even deteriorated, especially during the current economic recession and due to the large refugee flows that many Mediterranean islands have experienced in the last years.

e. Demographic trends – emigration – refugee flows

Tourist islands manage to maintain and attract young people, giving opportunities for employment and entertainment. Other islands, however, suffer from ageing populations since younger residents migrate to the mainland in search for education and job opportunities. Furthermore, the massive migration and refugee flows reaching several Greek islands have far-reaching humanitarian, social, economic, political repercussions on local and national level.

f. Unemployment – lack of professional development

There are limited employment opportunities in the islands. Primary sector is underdeveloped due the lack of arable land, declining fishing stocks, high production and transportation costs. Most jobs relate to the tourism industry, even in this case however, employment is only for the summer and seasonal unemployment is high. Educational and training opportunities for professional development are also restricted.

g. Lack of financial support

Although the peculiarities of insularity have been acknowledged by the EU, there is lack of collected data about the costs related to the islandness. Therefore, islands are treated equally to the mainland areas with the same GDP as long as the funding opportunities, although they are in a more disadvantaged condition. Island authorities claim that area GDP as the sole criterion is insufficient to take account of an area's particular needs and specific provisions should be made for islands in the EU funds allocation. There is great heterogeneity in the features of EU islands, regarding the size, the population and the economic growth which prevents a common treatment of the problems stemming from insularity.

h. Agriculture

Agriculture development is difficult in islands due to the mountainous terrain, small size of fields, low diversity of production, low demand based on local market, dependence from the mainland for the raw materials and fossil fuels, high production costs, inaccessibility to distribution channels and sometimes, adverse weather conditions and drought. These specificities make islands non-competitive compared to the mass production that is prevalent to the mainland but have not been considered by the European funding for agriculture.

All the above characteristics mean that islands cannot be competitive to the mainland over the same products and services. It is a conclusion of the EU program ESPON 2013 that islanders must have equal access to networks and a more efficient and sustainable use of infrastructure and services coupled with the broadest possible dissemination of knowledge and innovation capacity.

The special character of the insular regions has been acknowledged both at national and European level. There is a clear statement in the article 101 in the Constitution of Greece stating that “The legislator and the Public Administration when acting in their regulatory capacity, must take into consideration the special circumstances of the insular and mountainous areas caring for their development.” Moreover, at the European level, the Treaty of Amsterdam recognizes the structural handicaps of the islands which impair their economic and social development and suggests that specific measures may be taken in favour of these regions in order to integrate them better into the internal market on fair conditions. Integration through transport networks is one of the main pillars of EU’s cohesion policy which aims to support job creation, business competitiveness, economic growth, sustainable development, and improve citizens’ quality of life.

Sustainability

The concept of sustainability has received many definitions, most of them accused for being too conceptual, vague, ambiguous and restricted to environmental issues. However, the most common definition of sustainable development was given by the World Commission on Environment and Development chaired by Gro Harlem Brundtland, in its report, *Our Common Future*: “sustainable development is the development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” (WCED, 1987). While sustainability has long been interconnected with environmental protection, this notion is much wider, expanding to virtually every dimension of economic and social human activity, tourism included. The general notion of sustainability has been further specified into seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) included in the United Nations’ 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (UN, 2015). The 17 SDGs are universal and their fulfillment requires action on all fronts – governments, businesses, civil society and individuals altogether. The systemic character of sustainability and its importance is stated clearly in *Our Common Future* which recognizes that the many crises facing the planet are interlocking crises that are elements of a single crisis of the whole and there is a vital need for the active participation of all sectors of society in consultation and decisions relating to sustainable development. Under this prism, the concept of sustainable tourism draws additional attention in the current global health crisis and the need to reorganize the existed tourism development and destination management models on a genuine sustainable basis emerges as urgent as never before. The conceptual framework of the proposed QoL Tourism Model draws from the specific definition of McElroy and Albuquerque (2002) for island tourism: “Sustainability ideally seeks to preserve a permanent and widely shared stream of income by creating an adaptive competitive destination niche market through the ongoing guidance of participatory community planning without unacceptably sacrificing the socio-cultural and natural integrity of the asset base”.

Quality-of-Life Tourism

Similarly to the sustainability, the Quality-of-Life (QoL) concept has been subject to different interpretations, for the purposes of this paper however, the definition of Anand & Sen (2000) is adopted which describes QoL as “the ability of people to lead the kind of life they have reason to value. It is the enhancement of the capability to live better and richer lives, through more freedom and opportunity”. QoL is addressed in the literature from various viewpoints, philosophical, sociological, marketing management and other, either objective or subjective, all of which are applicable to tourism (Sirgy et al. 2006). QoL and tourism interconnections have recently been introduced in the literature, based on the simple clue that “a nice place to live is a nice place to visit” (Uysal et al., 2012). Scholars have examined the QoL-tourism relationship both from the visitors’ and the residents’ standpoints, producing conflicting conclusions. Many studies suggest that tourism drives development and QoL through job creation, income generation, poverty elimination, induced mobility, better education, health and social services in tourist areas (UN, 2014; Read, 2018; Cabrera & Foronda-Robles, 2019). Other argue that the economic development produced by tourism is not equally distributed with the destinations’ benefits being insubstantial (Pratt, 2015) and the local residents’ QoL finally being deteriorated (Gascón, 2015; Scheyvens & Russell, 2012).

3. Methodology

This study first explores the theoretical foundations of insularity, sustainability and Quality-of-Life tourism. Both literature review and typological analysis are engaged to conceptualize the core elements of the above notions. In the first part of the paper, a theoretical analysis of the available definitions and paradigms is conducted in order to examine the extent to which these concepts can be instrumentally useful for the construction of the Quality-of-Life tourism model (QoLTM).

Subsequently, secondary data sources are utilized to draw the socio-economic and environmental picture of the Greek islands during the current Covid19 pandemic. Finally, a synthesis of the above instruments is attempted through the elaboration of a new tourism model. The QoLTM is elucidated at the results section of the paper, by analyzing the model dimensions and how they are linked with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, specific areas of action required in every dimension and the government and institutional enablers necessary for the successful QoLTM implementation.

Greek islands and Insularity

Greek sovereign land includes 6,000 islands and islets scattered in the Aegean and Ionian Seas, of which only 227 are inhabited. This truly unique morphology makes Greece a world-famous tourist destination. Notwithstanding, islands also face considerable challenges that accompany the insular identity. A matrix typology of Greek islands is based upon a combination of their surface and their population (Table 1). There is only one very large island, (Crete) and its extended surface and population allows for the development of an internal market of goods and services of a sufficient size. There are also five large islands (Corfu, Rhodes, Evia, Lesbos and Chios) their size being at the lower limit adequate for the development of some medium-level services for local use. Most Greek islands fall under the “small” and “very small” categories, which are accompanied by poor infrastructure and services insufficient to meet the needs of the local population.

Greek islands have declining and ageing populations that sum up to about 15% of the total national population (Spilanis&Kizos, 2015). Apart from the quantitative, the qualitative characteristics of the insular populations are discouraging too, since the share of tertiary education (College/University) graduates lags well behind the national average, a feature that is very disappointing, given that educational levels are indicative of one’s place capabilities to promote productivity and innovation, which are the main drivers of a better future. This feature is made profound in the negative EU Regional Competitiveness Indices of all Greek insular regions (Table 2).

Table 1. Typology of Greek Islands

Area\ Population	Verylarge (> 500.000 residents)	Large (500.000 – 50.000 res.)	Medium (5.000 – 50.000 res.)	Small (750 – 5.000 res.)	Verysmall (750 >res.)
Very large (>1000 km ²)	1	3			
Large (500 – 1000 km ²)		2	1		
Medium (100 – 500 km ²)			13	7	
Small (100 – 50 km ²)			6	9	
Very small (50 km ² >)			1	15	22
<i>Total</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>21</i>	<i>32</i>	<i>22</i>

Source: Spilanis & Kizos, (2015)

Table 2. Educational and competitiveness levels of Greek islands

Region (insular)	Tertiaryeducationgradua tes	Primaryeducationgradua tes	EU RegionalCompetitivenessInd ex, 2019
South Aegean	10,90%	51,14%	-1,39
Crete	13,71%	50,29%	-1,26
Ionian islands	11,40%	54,70%	-1,33
North Aegean	12,40%	52,18%	-1,61
nationalaverage:	17,12%	46,67%	

Sources: Spilanis & Kizos, (2015); EC (2020)

The insular economies are based heavily on the tertiary sector (more than 85% of their GDP), since the main economic source for most of them is tourism. Primary sector is no longer profitable to make one's living, manufacturing is almost absent from the islands, neither is there a sufficient internal market for professional and scientific services(Table 3).

Table 3. Economic structure of Greek islands

	Islands	Nationalaverage
Agriculture, fishery and forestry	5%	4%
Industry and mining	6%	11%
Trade and transport	35%	23%
Real estate	16%	20%
Publicservices	21%	22%
Arts and entertainment	5%	4%
Professional and scientificservices	3%	5%

Source: Spilanis&Kizos, (2015)

The tourism monoculture of the insular economies is made even more apparent when examining the contribution of islands tourism to national tourism income and to the regional GDP (Table 4). South Aegean and Ionian islands depend heavily on tourism to generate income, while Crete differentiates from this pattern due to the higher diversification of its economic sectors for the reasons discussed above (large size, strong primary sector and sufficient internal market). North Aegean islands including Lesbos, Limnos Samos and Chios fall behind since they face a severe refugee and migrant crisis since 2016.

Table 4. Tourism impact of Greek insular regions

Region (insular)	number of islands	contribution to total overnight stays	contribution to national tourism income	contribution of tourism to regional GDP
South Aegean	34	24%	25,70%	76,80%
Crete	1	27,50%	23,00%	47,70%
Ionian islands	7	11,20%	12,50%	73,00%
North Aegean	9	2,03%	1,20%	8,60%
sum	51	64,70%	62,40%	

Source: SETE (2020)

Covid19 pandemic and its implications for Greek insularity

It is a common practice to evaluate the islands' success in terms of economic and quantitative tourism development. We tend to consider that insularity is a plaque that burdens the development of these areas and condemns small islands to an endless state of under-development. But, was it always like that? History gives us proof that insularity is not inextricably connected to limited resources, poverty and vulnerability. Many renowned ancient civilizations like the Cycladic and the Minoan emerged in small islands and made these places economic and cultural centers with global impact.

At times when insularity is experienced as redemption, the islands become pioneers of extroversion in trade and interaction with other cultures. The extrovert nature of islanders cultivated multiple connections and drove the circulation of goods, money and ideas. This is an example of how the unique characteristics of the small islands can be managed to create wealth and well-being. The question is what management model should be applied to these areas in order to take advantage of their competitiveness while preserving their fragile character.

The Covid19 pandemic and the changing tourism attitudes that it brings may have an answer to this question. Mass tourism will no longer be a viable option for many tourist-receiving Mediterranean countries, including Greece, at least for the near future. Greece's mass tourism model applied so far was mainly based at cost advantages compared with the close competitors. Now the mass tourism is gone along with the competition. Therefore, it may be a good chance for Greece to adopt a differentiating tourism strategy, capitalizing the successful health crisis management by the Greek government, coupled with the distinctive features of the Greek islands.

Greece is generally considered as a safe destination and this image has been further enhanced during the current pandemic, due to the strict measures implied in time to keep the dispersion rates low. Greek islands are even more advantageous due to their isolation. So, insularity in this case turned out to be a positive feature.

Greece has a great potential for health, medical and wellness tourism development for several reasons including the high level of expertise of the Greek health professionals and bioclimate characteristics (Didaskalou et al.,2004). Sarantopoulos et al. (2014) investigated the supply side of medical tourism in Greece finding that high class hotels seem to be willing to invest in medical tourism, since they have the ability and the relevant infrastructure to develop it. The Covid19 pandemic triggered the empowerment of Greece's health system, thus offering the required public infrastructure for the development of health tourism in islands.

Another insularity issue that Covid19 partly solved is the digitization of public administration. Due to the implemented quarantine, Greek public sector was extensively digitized, and this brought several advantages to the islanders since it is no longer necessary to move to the regional administration centers for many of their transactions. The problem of island isolation suddenly turned into everyone's problem, therefore solutions were found more quickly than ever before. Digitization is an asset that islands will keep in the next day, improving their competitive position since it is known that digital innovation is paving the way for territorial cohesion (ESPON, 2019).

The total nationwide lockdown imposed by the Greek government since March 23 to prevent the spread of the disease has restricted individuals into their properties. Although this situation has created many practical and social problems in big urban centers, this is not exactly the case in islands, where local residents have plenty of free time for leisure, walking in the countryside and field cultivation, instead of frantically preparing for the tourism season as every year before. These circumstances have allowed the island residents to spend more time with their families, tightening the family bonds and rebuilding an emotional connection with their homeland which has far been disrupted the last three decades while Greek economy was transformed into a service provider. People re-appreciate the environment and the calming power of nature; in other words they experience the importance of sustainability in practice. This creates an important shift in the attitudes of tourism stakeholders and cultivates the ground for a reassessment of the dominating quantitative tourism model on a more qualitative and sustainable basis.

Overall, it is concluded that the successful management of Covid19 by the Greek government has increased the political and institutional trust that has suffered low rates for a long time. The health, education and civil protection systems reacted successfully to the crisis, improving the image of public services at international, national and local level (The Guardian, 2020). Social trust is a key element to social capital (Proikaki et al., 2015) which facilitates social cooperation, builds confidence and improves Quality-of-Life in island environments. Therefore, a QoL tourism development model has many chances to succeed.

4. The proposed Quality-of-Life Tourism Model

Based on the conceptual review presented on the theoretical part of the paper and the real-life situation explained in the methodological analysis, a new tourism development paradigm is proposed for the Greek islands, especially the small ones. The core concept of QoL tourism model (QoLTM) as a sustainable destination management model is deployed in four dimensions: Economy, Society, Nature and Health and Safety (Figure 1).

Figure 1. QoL Tourism Model core dimensions

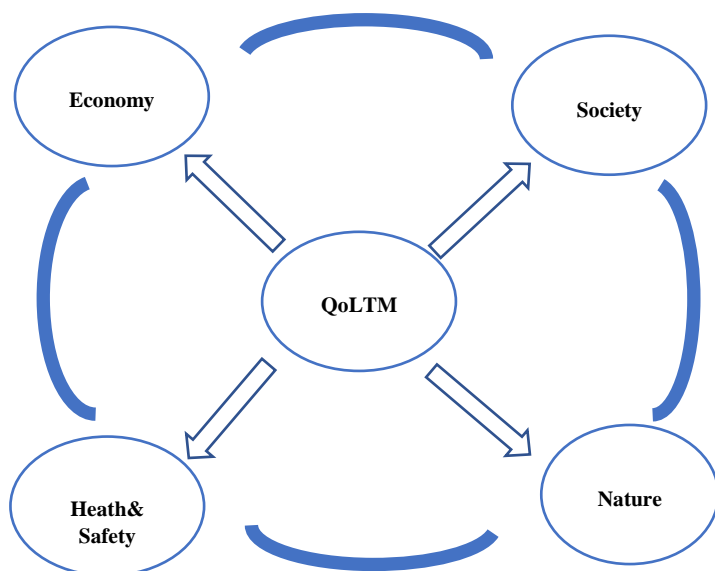


Table 5. QoL Tourism Model analysis

QoLTM Dimension	Areas of action	LinktoSDGs	Enablers
Economy	• Balanced Business Model	GOAL 1: No Poverty	Operation and support of micro small and medium sized enterprises (MSMEs)
	• Economic Development &Employability	GOAL 2: Zero Hunger	Financial Incentives for MSMEs
	• Sustainable supply chain	GOAL 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth	Research and training for MSMEs
	• Sustainable destination management	GOAL 9: Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure	Improve local employment opportunities
		GOAL 10: Reduced Inequality	Deployment of national and European financing tools

		GOAL 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities	Digitization of economy Support local suppliers Promote Quality assurance
Society	• Human Rights, Values & Ethics	GOAL 1: NoPoverty	Conservation and Restoration of Monuments and Sites
	• Education	GOAL 4: Quality Education	Create thematic parks
	• Vocational training	GOAL 2: ZeroHunger	Buil theritage sites
	• HRM development and empowerment	GOAL 5: GenderEquality	Events, sports and cultural festivities
	• Employee well-being	GOAL 10: ReducedInequality	Improvement of social services
	• Quality of Service		Built social responsibility
	• Quality of Life of local communities		Distance learning platforms Life long learning programs
Nature	• Climate change	GOAL 7: Affordable and Clean Energy	Energy management programs
	• Air Quality	GOAL 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities	Use of renewable energy sources
	• Material resources	GOAL 12: Responsible Consumption and Production	Desalinationplants
	• Water	GOAL 13: ClimateAction	Promotion of environmentally friendly transport modes
	• Biodiversity	GOAL 14: LifeBelowWater	Conservation programs open for tourist participation
	• Noise & pollution	GOAL 15: Life on Land	Waste management and recycling Partnerships with environmental organizations
Health and safety	• Hygiene and sanitation	GOAL 3: Good Health and Well-being	Improve public health system
	• Medical care	GOAL 6: Clean Water and Sanitation	Public health education campaigns
	• Water quality	GOAL 16: Peace and Justice Strong Institutions	Training of tourism staff to deal with safety and security issues
	• Accident prevention		Contingency planning System for the collection and analysis of critical data

Source: own elaboration

The four QoLTM dimensions are connected to specific UN Sustainable Development Goals (WTO, 2004). and elaborated into particular areas of action, as presented in Table 5 and explained in detail below. Finally, appropriate Enablers are required both at the governmental and institutional level for the successful materialization of the proposed model. The entire model is underpinned by SDG 17: “Partnerships to achieve the Goals” since stakeholders’ engagement in tourism planning and development positively contributes to local QoL (Chase et al., 2012).

Insular economy according the QoLTM model is based on the structural diversification and the balanced development of the primary, secondary and tertiary sector, not necessarily in a single island but maybe in a cluster of small neighboring islands forming a self-sufficient and sustainable economic ecosystem. This goal can be achieved via the support of micro small and medium sized enterprises (MSMS) or community-based business by giving them financial incentives (e.g. specific credits, tax advantage,, grants, etc) and providing them with training and funding tools that can create employment opportunities for the residents and an attractive market for local suppliers building a supportive economic network.

Social development is of equal importance with economic security in ensuring Quality-of-Life (Portney, 2013). Locals must be encouraged to preserve their customs, language, dresses, traditional occupations, music, cuisine, religion and cultural practices, all of them forming a strong common identity which is very supportive in times of crisis (Ashworth & Tunbridge, 2012). At the same time, this unique mix of characteristics shape the distinguishable brand image of every island. Social responsibility is a paramount importance to enhance the social capital (Moscardo, 2012) and can be materialized by sourcing employment and supplies from local communities, staff training and development and building strong bonds with local institutions and authorities.

Nature preservation refers to the environmental aspects that are essential to achieving Quality-of-Life (Andereck & Nyaupane, 2011; Portney, 2013), by maintaining essential ecological processes and helping to conserve natural heritage and biodiversity. Natural environment has restorative effects (Kjellgren & Buhrkall, 2010) and conservation programs and activities open for tourist participation can form the basis of a mutually beneficial tourist experience. Another important issue that calls for immediate attention is the energy and water autonomy of island regions that can be achieved by utilizing renewable energy sources like sun, wind, which are abundant in Greek islands. Waste management and recycling programs are also essential to minimize environmental deterioration.

Health and Safety has gained attention only lately, although it has been a core pillar in the concept of sustainability since its foundation. Developed societies have so far taken it for granted focusing only in security issues, but Covid19 pandemic has overturned several social and political priorities. Apart from the current situation however, contingency planning is considered as a necessary part of any tourism development model, since other threats stemming from natural disasters and climate change are also viable (Kuzemko et al., 2016) and appear with increased frequency (i.e. the Australia's 'Black Summer' 2019 devastating fires).

5. Conclusion

This paper draws from the sustainability, insularity and Quality-of-Life conceptual frameworks to synthesize a sustainable QoL tourism model that could offer an alternative development pathway for the Greek islands the next day after Covid19. Mass tourism is no longer a viable option and voices supporting a more balanced and value-based development approach gain more and more attention. The global situation calls destination stakeholders and policy makers to build new destination management plans founded on quality rather than quantity perspectives.

Greek islands are fertile grounds for various forms of alternative tourism. A promising aspect would be medical and health tourism that would capitalize the empowerment of the public health system to meet the expected high future demand for well-being and restoring experiences. Another opportunity is placed in higher education that can take advantage of the successfully implemented distance learning experience during the national quarantine, to offer competitive educational and training e-learning programs blended with on-site summer schools. There is also a need to restructure the tourism education to embrace new concepts such as safety, security, sustainability and crisis management.

Finally, QoL Tourism Model calls for a re-branding and re-positioning of Greek islands' tourism product under the prism of a differentiated niche strategy focusing on activities that promote the Quality-of-Life of both visitors and local residents on equal balance.

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