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City of Athens: The impacts of Covid-19 pandemic on tourism

Evangelia Kasimati, Panagiota Dionysopoulou, Aikaterini Kakka

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Evangelia Kasimati[*], Panagiota Dionysopoulou[†], Aikaterini Kakka[‡]

Abstract

This papers studies whether the inbound tourism at the city of Athens, the capital of Greece and hostess of the well-known ancient monument of Acropolis has fully recovered, after the end of lockdown due to Covid-19 pandemic. Through the literature review is ascertained that cities as tourism destinations, faced up bigger decline and slower recovery compared to rural tourism. From the secondary research comes up that city of Athens during the duration of the pandemic has also faced up a big decline. Three years later, a full recovery has almost obtained. Our primary research finds that the city's cultural attractions, the climate and the positive for the city perception are the main reasons for visiting Athens. The marketing for the city's projection by the official tourism's organizations contributed to the visits' increase.

JEL classification: I18, Z39

Keywords: Covid-19, Athens, recovery, tourism motivation

[*] Bank of Greece and Hellenic Open University (HOU). Email: ekasimati@bankofgreece.gr

[†] Ministry of Tourism and Hellenic Open University (HOU). E-mail: yoldi63@gmail.com

[‡]Corresponding author. Athens Municipal Police and Hellenic Open University (HOU). E-mail: kakkakaterina@gmail.com

1. Introduction

Travelling for holidays nowadays is considered as a human right and need for people for a better way of life and also in order to get away from the stressful everyday life (Middleton et al., 2009). The year 2019 was the tenth consecutive year of tourism's growth (UNWTO, 2021). In 2019 tourism and travel accounted for 10,3 percent of global GDP (WTTC, 2023; Statista, 2023). At Greece in 2019 these industries accounted for 12,5% of the country's GDP (Ikkos & Koutsos,2020).

The outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic stopped travel's and tourism rising. Because of the meters for social-distancing, lockdowns, prohibitions and restrictions in travelling in 2020 global international arrivals dropped by 74% compared to 2019 (UNWTO, 2021). Respectively international arrivals at Greece dropped by 76,5% (Ikkos & Koutsos, 2020). However, in 2021 after the ending of the second wave of pandemic a small recovery of tourism begins. In 2022 the international arrivals reached up to 63 percentage of the 2019's international arrivals (UNWTO, 2023). Specially the international arrivals around the Mediterranean Sea in 2022 reach up to 87% percentage of 2019 (UNWTO, 2023).

In case of Greece in March of 2023, the inbound tourism decreased by -11.2% compared to 2019 and amounted to 27.8 million travellers, compared to 31.3 million travellers in 2019 (Ikkos & Lamprou, 2023b).

Urban tourism and city break tourism have been emerged as one of the fastest growing forms of tourism (Castela 2018; Potier 1996 in Kostopoulou, 2022) but had also been the hardest hit from the pandemic form of tourism. The city of Athens by 2019 had emerged as a popular destination (Gourzis et al., 2019; Vitouladiti et al., 2018).The social distancing requirement in order to prevent the transmission of Covid-19 has been an obstacle to the rapid recovery of densely populated cities (Rogerson & Rogerson 2022). That condition resulted in a slower rate of recovery in urban tourism than outdoor and rural tourism (Hidalgo et al., 2022).In Greece for 2022 there is a greater increase in air arrivals to the destinations: "Sun and Sea" compared to 2019 in contrast to the urban destinations of Athens and Thessaloniki (Ikkos & Lambrou, 2023c).

The purpose of this research is to investigate the impact of Covid-19 on the city of Athens and in particular the Municipality of Athens on the basic tourism figures and to explore when, to what extent and the reasons that a tourism recovery took place. The objective that is initially examined through the secondary research is the change in the main tourist figures due to the pandemic. The crash the restart and the recover in the tourist figures and their comparison with the tourist figures of 2019 as well as to capture the state of the main components of the tourism product before and after the pandemic.

The second objective through the primary research is to find out the reasons and motivations that led visitors to choose the city of Athens as a tourist destination after the pandemic. Last, we present an indicative report of the marketing strategy and response due to the pandemic from the supply side of public & private entities & businesses.

This research highlights the fragility of the tourism industry in times of health crises and its interdependence with other economic activities. More specifically, an original attempt is made to collect and present in one paper all the data concerning the city of Athens as an urban and city break destination and the adaptation and transformation because of Covid-19.

2. Literature review

2.1 City tourism in Europe before Covid-19

According to Nilsson (2018) urban tourism had the fastest growth relative to other forms of tourism. Before the Covid-19, half of all international visits had as destination the cities (WTTC, 2022). There are cities whose economy is based on tourism and a significant percentage of the cities' GDP comes from it (McCartney et al., 2021). In research by Adamiak and Szyda (2022) which carried out to identify the areas of high tourist concentration and expenditure worldwide, it was found that in 2019 among the top 30 cities -in terms of the number of incoming tourism- 11 European cities were included.

2.2 Travelling preferences because of Covid-19

Through the literature review it is observed that in the surveys concerning the year 2020 and the 1st half of 2021, the potential and actual travellers were mentally affected by the pandemic and there was a desire for closer home destinations, in a rural environment and at less popular destinations. According to Li et al. (2021), in the recovery phase in a survey in Southwest China, the dominant trends in visitor preferences were short-distance travel and local destinations. Visitors also avoided destinations with more confirmed cases of Covid-19 (Li et al., 2021). Falk et al. (2023) analysed data in 65 regions in Austria, Germany, Switzerland and the Czech Republic for the summer of 2020. They observed that even in domestic tourism there was an avoidance of mainstream urban destinations and a preference for rural destinations regions. In fact, in 2020 there was an increase in overnight stays in sparsely populated areas by 27% in July and 10% in August compared to 2019. Also, the same researchers report similar conclusions for France in the summer of 2020, i.e., an increase in domestic tourism in sparsely populated areas. Urban tourism received the biggest blow compared to other forms of tourism. The most important reason is the observance of social distances as a measure of dispersion against Covid-19. Cities were less flexible in social distancing than the countryside (Rogerson & Rogerson, 2022). During the periods when the restrictions were lifted (mainly the interim period between the two quarantines) those who travelled preferred non-urban destinations and generally less popular areas due to the fear of transmission of Covid-19 (WTTC, 2022). Vaishar and St'astna (2022), in the study on tourism in the Czech Republic, found that in 2020 there was a decrease in city tourism and an increase in tourism in rural areas compared to 2019. Robina-Ramirez et al. (2022), also report that after the lifting of the first lockdown in Spain, rural accommodation increased. According to Osti and Nava (2020) during the pandemic, people believed that mountain destinations were safer than coastal and urban destinations and although they were loyal to them in their previous trips, they replaced them with mountain destinations. Hidalgo et al. (2022) report that in Spain the cities of Madrid and Barcelona recovered more slowly than coastal destinations and the islands of Spain. The main reason was the higher rates of spread of Covid-19 in the cities. Koufodontis and Gaki (2022) also report, according to their research on the TripAdvisor platform, that cities with recognized cultural heritage monuments showed a reduced number of tourists, with several of them being cited as insufficient in terms of protection measures against Covid-19. It was therefore observed in 2020 and 2021, a shift towards tourism in the countryside due to the fear of infection by the corona virus in crowded places.

2.3 Adaptivity and recovery strategies

A lot of cities applied strategies not only to response at the present situation but also to adapt their product in order to increase the after-pandemic tourist inflows. In the city of Krakow in Poland they target in domestic tourism through promotion in major Polish cities (Kowalczyk-Anioł et al., 2021). Rome-Milan-Florence-Venicere defined their image in social media & their relationship with residents (Pasquinelli et al., 2021). Paris and London attracted locals in an effort to preserve living historical centres (Pappalepore & Gravaro-Barbas, 2022). However, tourism organizations and authorities considered that the immediate economic recovery is more important. They supported quick and strong restart by strengthening existing tourism product rather than inciting change (Milano & Koens, 2021; Jones, 2022; Papageorgiou & Tsakaki, 2022; McCartney et al., 2021). Jones (2022) recommended that in United Kingdom they would rather stay in the tourism product & visitors stay in the tourism standards of the pre-Covid-19 period.

First Hypothesis: The official marketing organization of municipality of Athens: “This is Athens” what kind of campaign supported.

2.4 Recovery

International tourism showed large recovery rates in 2022. Arrivals reached 917 million (Statista, 2023), doubling arrivals in relation to 2021 (UNWTO, 2023) but not in relation to 2019 where they were 37% short. In 2023, according to the first quarter (Q1) data, global international arrivals were 20% less than in 2019 (UNWTO, 2023).The development of urban tourism in Europe showed the greatest increase compared to the rest of the world. In Euromonitor's 2022 survey of the top 100 destination cities worldwide for the year 2022, the forty cities are located in Europe, while the top ten are made up of 8 European cities with Athens being at 24th position (Popova et al., 2022). In August of 2022 in Italy the total overnight stays caught up with the volume reported in August 2019, prior to the impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic (Statista, 2022). In 2022 Paris and the wider Île de France region received 44.1 million visitors +95% compared to 2021 and only 13% less than 2019, while receipts were 10% less than 2019 (pro.visitparisregion.com, 2023).The increase in arrivals to

Europe was contributed by intra-regional movements and the simultaneous increase in arrivals from the USA (UNWTO, 2023; Popova et al., 2022).
The change in preferences is captured in a survey carried out regarding the trends and preferences for international travel in the markets of Greece, Europe, and the USA in which was held in September 2021. It was observed in most markets the desire to return to the product: “Sun and Sea” as the most popular choice followed by the preference for cities (city break) after the decline they had due to Covid-19, as well as the return to popular European destinations (Ikkos & Lambrou, 2021b). It is concluded that the vaccination and illness of a large part of the world's population created a sense of security in people to return to “normality”. It is also due to the fact that people who found themselves in an environment more exposed to the virus and lived a long period of social isolation needed a change of environment and recreation (Boto-Garcia & Leoni, 2022).

Second Hypothesis: Who was the proportion of Athens tourism after Covid-19 and did it keep up with the increase in Europe and the surveys ‘preferences?

2.5 The city of Athens

City of Athens is the capital of Greece and the Municipality of Athens is the largest municipality in the country. Administratively, it belongs to the Region of Attica and specifically to the Central Sector of Athens of which it is also the headquarters[1] (Asprogerakas, 2007). The Municipality of Athens is part of a wider metropolitan area and the city of Athens is understood as the entire basin of Attica which also includes the city of Piraeus[2] which is the most important port of the country. The port of Piraeus is located only 15km from the centre of Athens and is the main port of access to the Aegean islands which are preferred by incoming and domestic visitors during the summer season. This connection is very important as many inbound tourism visitors choose to combine their stay in an island destination in the Aegean Sea with a short visit to Athens (short-break). At the same time, the basin in its southern part is wetted by the Saronic Gulf (Aegean Sea).The centre of Athens is 34 km away from Athens International Airport “Eleftherios Venizelos” which is the largest in the country and its time distance from the city centre takes 40 minutes (www.athenstransport.com/airport). The airport is connected daily to major cities in Europe, Asia and the Middle East and has two terminals, one of which serves low-cost airlines.[3]

The climate of the region is dry Mediterranean with little rainfall in winter and hot summers.[4] An also important geographical advantage of Athens is the short distance from the Piraeus-Sounio coastline, the existence of which increases the tourism product of the city. This Southern coastline, is approximately 80 kilometres long. It starts from Piraeus and ends Southeast at the cape of Sounio and

[1] See also https://www.patt.gov.gr/
[2] See also https://el.unionpedia.org/
[3] See also https://eastmediterranean.wordpress.com/ and https://mpattiki.etme.gr/index.php/el/
[4] See also https://eastmediterranean.wordpress.com/ and http://emy.gr/emy/el/

the Ancient Temple of Poseidon. On the coastline, the natural environment, the tangible and intangible cultural heritage and the social life of the inhabitants in terms of entertainment come together.

Regarding its history, Athens has been inhabited since the Neolithic era (Stasinopoulos, 2023). In the 5th century BC, the Acropolis was built, one of the most recognizable monuments in the world and a World Heritage Site (Kyrtata & Ragou, 2012;odysseus.culture.gr, 2012). Athens has a rich cultural identity. There are monuments from the 5th century BC, traditional settlements from the Roman, Byzantine and Ottoman periods. Also, architectural buildings of the 19th and 20th centuries (ebooks.edu.gr; Kyrtata&Ragou, 2012;odysseus.culture.gr, 2012;KEDE, 2018). Most of them are concentrated in the "heart" of the Municipality of Athens and have been unified by pedestrian streets forming the so-called historical centre as shown on map 5 (gis.cityofathens.gr, 2022;athensattica.com, 2023).

2.6 Athens as an urban and city break destination

Athens from 1930 to the mid-1970s was the main and only tourist destination in Greece (Asprogerakas, 2007). However, the development of the tourist product of the Greek islands which took place from the 1970s resulted in the decline of Athens as a tourist destination (Karachalis, 2015). The redefinition of the city as a tourist destination and the gradual increase in arrivals took place again from 2004 (Karachalis, 2015).In Athens in the period 2008-2012 there is a tourism recession with the main causes being the economic crisis and political instability (Kasimati & Sideris, 2015). According to Kasimati & Sideris (2015), in 2014 there is an increase in city-breaks in Greece, with the increase in arrivals in Athens at 27% and in Thessaloniki at 16%.The rising of the city-break is concluded to be due to the growing interest of incoming tourism in the archaeological sites and history of Greece (Kasimati & Sideris, 2015). Kostopoulou (2022) also mentions that the interest in the cultural heritage of Greek cities and the knowledge about their history is a reason for the rise of the city-break in Greece. The city of Athens by 2019 had emerged as a popular urban tourist destination. The city's popularity is reflected in the increase in short-term rental listings on the Airbnb platform. Collecting data from the website: Inside Airbnb, from July 17 at 2015 to July 16 at 2018 there was a 300% percentage increase in listings. Indicatively, it is reported that in 2017 there were 5,127 listings in which a reservation was made at least once, showing an increase of 56.5% compared to 2015 with 3,275 listings (Gourzis et al., 2019). In addition, Athens in Euromonitor's annual report for 2019 ranked 43rd in the top 100 destination cities and 23rd in the annual report for 2022 (Euromonitor, 2019; Greek Travel Pages, 2022). The image of Athens and its brand has been associated mainly to its cultural heritage. Most touristic cities have developed mainly thanks to the cultural monuments they have (Romao et al., 2018). According to Frangos et al. (2015) the historical monuments and the sunny environment of Athens impress visitors. Vitouladiti et al. (2018) in their study conclude that the main advantage that Athens presents as a destination is the Archaeological attractions and the cultural events and as the second most important are following the climatic conditions. Also, according to the same study, visitors consider as an important advantage that they can easily navigate the city on foot. At the Athens-Attica and Argosaronic Hotel Accosiation (EXAA) survey (2021), Athens is considered by visitors as one of the cities they should travel to. According to the same survey74% of visitors have as main reason of visiting holidays and recreation. For 46% of them the main reason is culture (EXAA, 2021). After the social isolation caused by the pandemic the individual's need to belong somewhere (Maslow, 1954) became more intense and according to Chark (2021) cultural tourism satisfies this need through the feeling of nostalgia. The feeling of nostalgia has the meaning of the desire to feel or have something that existed in the past and has been idealized (Christou et al., 2018 where ref. in Chark, 2021). Touring areas that have preserved past architecture with ancient and historical monuments takes people back in time, they feel part of that era and imagine they are living then (Chi & Chi, 2020 in Chark, 2021). As Jones (2022) recommended for United Kingdom that visitors would stay in the tourism standards of the pre-Covid-19 period.

Third Hypothesis: The cultural tourism continues to be the most popular form of tourism in Athens

The image of Athens generally though the researches is that of one financial destination (Frangos et al., 2015; Vitouladiti et al., 2018). Also, in the EXAA survey (2021) the quality-price ratio in terms of hotels, restaurants, cafes, entertainment centres and markets has been rated with an average of 8.25. Finally, in Hanna and Rowley's (2019) study of the image and personality emitted by eight European cities, Athens is presented as exciting and at the same time peaceful with a lack of malice. Similarly, to the research results of Vitouladiti et al. (2018), visitors perceive Athens as interesting, exciting, friendly and safe.

Fourth Hypothesis: There is a positive image of Athens.

3. Sample and methodology

3.1 Sample and background

The secondary research is based on the collection of the already existing data from official tourism and statistical organizations such as Hellenic Statistical Authority, Greek Tourism Confederation, Hellenic chamber of hotels, Athens-Attica and Argosaronic Hotel Association. In the quantitative research the population to be studied is the inbound tourism visitors. Only inbound tourism was chosen as the inbound tourist currency is an important economic source (Lagos, 2005).The sample frame was selected from the population of visitors who visited Athens in the period from 30 March of 2023 to 10 April of 2023. One hundred and fifty-eight (158) completed questionnaires were gathered. Simple random sampling was chosen according to which each person in a population has exactly the same chance of being included in sample (Christou, 1999) combined with grouped sampling since the collection of the questionnaires was carried out almost equally in 4 geographical points of the city (Monastiraki Square, Entrance of the Roman Market, Acropolis Entrance and the Coastal line from Faliro to Alimos. An on-site survey was carried out outside important monuments and leisure spaces in combination with street research mainly in visitor gathering areas (Durbarry, 2020). At qualitative research the participants were totally four representatives of public and private tourism organizations and private tourism businesses.

3.2 Methodology

The research was based on the method of triangulation, according to which several research methods are applied and combined in the same study (Durbarry, 2020). Specifically in data triangulation primary and secondary data are combined. In the primary research, the mixed method was carried out using quantitative and qualitative research (Durbarry, 2020) as according to (Ford, 1987 where ref. to Durbarry, 2020) the combination of both research methods creates better chances for a full understanding of subject under study. Data, quantitative and qualitative method according to Durbarry's (2020) mixed methods design matrix is presented in Table 1. The arrow symbol means sequential. The plus sign means at the same time. Where QUAL and QUAN appear in all capitals, it means that more weight has been given to the respective research, while in lower case, less weight has been given. Data are collected simultaneously but more weight in the specific work is given to quantitative research.

Table 1: Mixed image design matrix

	Simultaneous	*successive*		
equivalent	QUAL+QUAN	QUAL	→	QUAN
		QUAN	→	QUAL
superiority	QUAL+Quan	QUAL	→	Quan
		Quan	→	QUAL
	QUAN+Qual	QUAN	→	Qual
		Qual	→	QUAN

Source: Adapted from Tashakkori & Teddlie (1998), Creswell (2003). Johnson & Onwuegbuzie (2004) where ref. after editing in Durbarry (2020).

The secondary research which is based on the collection of already existing data (Christou, 1999) was carried out with the aim of illustrating the tourism volumes in Athens in the period before the pandemic, in the interim and the period following the resumption of tourism until today.

The aim of the specific quantitative research is to capture the reasons and motivations that led visitors to choose the city of Athens as a tourist destination after the pandemic and if they consort with the before Covid-19 motivations. Understanding the motivations for choosing the destination will help to better identify the desired products. Demand according to Lagos (2005) is the force that activates business activity to produce goods and provide services. In addition, it will contribute to the improvement and strengthening in order to increase the tourism product of Athens (Middleton et. al, 2009).The instrument used for the quantitative research is the questionnaire. It consists of 24 closed type questions of which 2 questions (5 and 6) in their second part required open type answers. The types of closed questions are, 5 Likert-scale, multiple choice where one up to three possible answers are offered, simple alternative (Yes-No) and grading scale with decimal grading. The questionnaire is divided into 5 parts. The first part includes questions to make a general impression of the characteristics and reasons of the visit to Athens. The second part, which is the main part of the questionnaire, investigates the motivations and reasons for visiting Athens as well as the degree of satisfaction and the visitor's impressions.

The third part consists of only one question focused on whether and which parameters existed in relation to Covid-19 and their decision to visit Athens. In the fourth part the type of trip is partially specified and finally in the fifth part the socio-demographic data are specified. In particular, the second part of the questionnaire is based on the theoretical model developed in their study by Moreira and Iao (2014) (Table 2) which presents 19 factors that constitute the image of a destination and influence its attractiveness and loyalty to it and in the five main components of the total tourism product according to Middleton et al. (2009). In more detail questions 7, 8, 9 and 14 refer to the attractions of the destination which according to Middleton et al. (2009) and Lagos (2005) are the natural, the cultural, the built-architectural and finally the social attractions that exist in a destination. Questions 9 and 10 refer to the facilities of the destination, i.e. the individual components that will make their stay easier and more pleasant. Question 12 refers to the price of the tourist product and how visitors judge it. Finally, 11 and 13 and 15 are related to the image, the feeling and the degree of liking they have for Athens.Finally, the question about the city's image and impression is based on the study of Kock (2021) who argues that considering a tourist city as "cool" strengthens the intention to visit it. In his study, the characteristics that define a city as "cool" are authenticity, vitality and defiance in the sense that it has a revolutionary spirit (Kock, 2021).

Table 2: Theoretical model: determinants of destination image, attractiveness, and loyalty

Image	Monuments&Cultural Heritage Festivals Travel Safety Restaurants & Local gastronomy	Entertainment & Night Life Urban & Natural Landscape Casino &Resorts

Attractiveness	Traditional and Modern Markets Urban structure &Transports Pollution& noise pollution	Accommodation (Hotels) Climate & Weather
Loyalty	Accessibility pricing Accessibility time Access points & entry process into the country Quality of services	Local Hospitality Image destination Personal perception of destination

Source: Moreira & Iao (2014).

Qualitative research occupies the smallest part of the work and its character is mainly informative and complementary to secondary and quantitative research. Its aim is to make a brief reference mostly to promotion strategies that were designed and implemented as a means of resistance and recovery to Covid-19 by public or private agencies dealing with the tourism product of Athens. The method used is semi-structured personal interviews to four participants. All participants were asked four questions with slight variations.

4 Results

4.1 Secondary research

At the secondary research we compare the international arrivals at the airport of Athens from the first quadrimester of 2019 to first quarter of 2023. The reason is because Athens international airport is the main gateway for incoming visitors to Athens and the only one by air. Of the landing at the airport passengers, a small percentage doesn't include Athens as their final or intermediate destination. So, we observe that in 2023 international arrivals there is a very large increase compared to 2022. Compared to the year 2019 (1,391,023m.) which we are interested in, after three years there is a 10.63% increase (Table 3).

Table 3: International arrivals at Athens International Airport. 1st quadrimester 2019, 2022, 2023

JAN.-APR.	**Arrivals**	**Change percentage to 2019**
2019	1.391.023	-
2022	898.635	-35,4%
2023	1.538.965	+10,63%

Source: INSETE (2019-2023) Ikkos & Lamprou (2019-2023) and own elaboration.

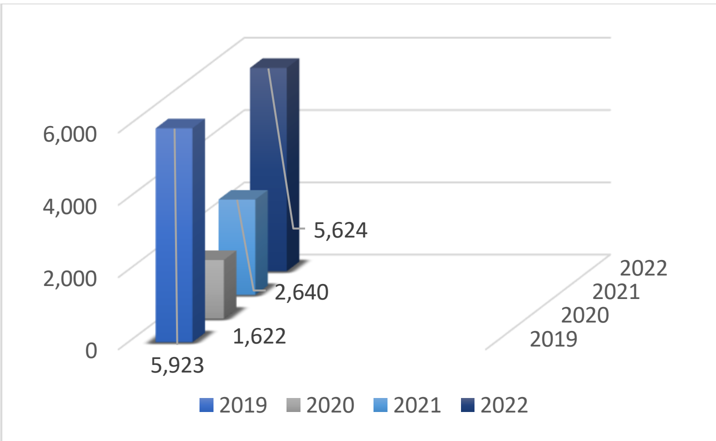
Regarding the inbound tourism according to the studies by Ikko & Lamprou (2020, 2021a, 2022, 2023c) in the Attica region after the end of 2020 and the downward trend of all tourism sizes, in 2021 a gradual increase in incoming tourism begins. In 2022 visits were 5% below those of 2019 (Table 4) and (Graph 1).

Table 4: Inbound visitors in Attica

Year	*Inbound visitors in thousand*	*Percentage change to 2019*
2019	5.923	
2020	1.622	-72,6%
2021	2.640	-55,4%
2022	5.624	-5,0%

Source: Lamprou & Ikkos (2020, 2021, 2022, 2023) and own elaboration.

Graph 1: Inbound visitors in Attica



Source: Lamprou & Ikkos (2020, 2021, 2022, 2023) and own elaboration.

According to Dubois (2020) where ref. in Liang et al. (2021) the necessary component of tourism trips is accommodation and it is considered representative of tourists' behaviour. For this reason, data related to the accommodations have also processed and are presented. The hotel potential in the central area of Athens, according to the data from XEE (2023), increased in 2022 to 292, from 287 in 2019 despite the mediation of the shutdown due to Covid-19 (INSETE, 2022b,2022c). For the year 2022 the occupancy levels at hotels decreased by 10.7% compared to 2019. For the first four (4) months of 2023 occupancy was 5.9% below 2019 levels (EXAA, 2023b). The occupancy of the hotels is not proportional to the arrivals as 43% of the beds in Athens are non-hotels, which means that a significant number of visitors are also distributed in these (Research Institute for Tourism, 2022).As far as the overnight stays and receipts for the Attica region in 2022 as seen in 5 the number exceeded those of 2019.

Table 5: Region of Attica. Overnight stays and receipts

Year	*Overnight stays (thous.)*	*Change Percentage to 2019*	*Receipts (million)*	*Change Percentage to 2019*
2019	34.028		2.592	
2020	12.466	-63,4%	0.761/761χιλ.	-70,6%
2021	21.432	-37%	1..466	-43,4%
2022	35.135	+3,2%	2.846	+9,9%

Source: Lamprou & Ikkos (2020, 2021, 2022, 2023) and own elaboration.

At the sector of short-term rental market accommodation, the occupancy cannot interpret. During the pandemic the owners had been able to adapt and change their operation. Sequera et al. (2022) mentioned that the short-term rental in Spain despite the initial shock especially on the Airbnb platform coped with the crisis with a change in the type of rental. It addressed the long-term rental, seasonal and month-to-month rental market. Also, the platforms turned to a new target group, the "city roamers", citizens whose status and desire allow them to live in different cities at intervals (Sequera et al., 2022). InAthens until 2019, the number of accommodations for rent on short-term rental platforms and mainly on the Airbnb platform amounted to 15,837 thousand, while in July 2015 it was only 2,116 (Ikkos & Rasouli, 2020;Krinis, 2022). According to EXAA (2023a) in 2020 and 2021 there was a decrease in the number of units in operation and their recovery began in 2022, where in the 2nd quarter there was a 7% decrease compared to the corresponding quarter of 2019 (INSETE, 2022b). In September 2022, the available rooms on the Airbnb platform amount to 12,165 (Krinis, 2022) and despite the percentage increase of 25% compared to December 2021, the decrease compared to 2019 is still valid.

Another instrument used to observe the fall and rise of the offered products of the tourist package is the difference per year in the profits of the businesses in accommodation. For the years 2022 and the 1st quarter of 2023 there are data for all of Attica. Because, as mentioned above, 76% of the rooms in the Attica region are located in the central area of Athens, they are considered representative of the city of Athens. In 2022 the profits of accommodation businesses in the Attica region as shown in Table 6 and Chart 2 exceeded those of 2019 by 24.8%. Similarly for the 1st quarter of 2023 (Tables 7) there is an increase in the profits of accommodation businesses in the Attica Region of profits by 33.7% compared to 2019.

Table 6: Receipts of Business Accommodation (Attica)

Year	*Receipts*	*Change to 2019*
2019	1.685.543.694	-
2020	722.116.422	-57,1
2021	1.221.695.737	-27,5
2022	2.105.005.790	+24,8

Source: ELSTAT (2023a, b) and own elaboration.

Table 7: Attica: Receipts of Business Accommodation1st semester (division 55 of NACE Rev. 2 classification)

1° Semester	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	Change 2023/2019
Receipts	133.655.038	108.156.241	36.054.074	123.487.455	178.675.074	33,7%

Source: ELSTAT[5] and own elaboration.

Finally, in terms of cultural attractions, we mention the change in the archaeological site of the Acropolis, as it is the most visited monument in Athens (Asprogerakas, 2007). Visits to the archaeological site of the Acropolis for 2022 fall short of those of 2019 by 16%, while to the Acropolis Museum by 20.4% (Tables 8 & 9).

Table 8: Total visitors at Acropolis Monument

Year	2019	2020	2021	2022	Change % 2022/2019
Visits	3.593.586	620.132	1.219.717	3.019.841	-16%

Source: ELSTAT[6] and own elaboration.

Table 9: Total visitors at Acropolis Museum

Year	2019	2020	2021	2022	Change % 2022/2019
Visits	1.755.435	325.969	547.908	1.397.353	-20,4%

Source: ELSTAT[7] and own elaboration.

[5] See https://www.statistics.gr/en/statistics/-/publication/SBR03/2020-M04 and https://www.statistics.gr/en/statistics/-/publication/SBR03/2023-M02
[6] See https://www.statistics.gr/documents/20181/bf9b5b56-2bbd-43d8-af00-b85558144ff7, https://www.statistics.gr/documents/20181/d15c6812-61aa-64d1-47f8-930f516c2e8b and https://www.statistics.gr/documents/20181/b54295a5-3d98-9371-cee6-af2a084f0e82
[7] See https://www.statistics.gr/documents/20181/bf9b5b56-2bbd-43d8-af00-b85558144ff7, https://www.statistics.gr/documents/20181/d15c6812-61aa-64d1-47f8-930f516c2e8b and

4.2 Quantitative research

Data Analysis Technique

The SPSS program (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) was chosen for the analysis of the data. Initially, a descriptive analysis of the data was carried out and its presentation with tables and graphs and cross-checking of variables where deemed important. In specific variables that were considered important for the research, a reliability and validity test was carried out through the Cronbach's alpha index, which is a reliability coefficient and a measure of internal consistency of the tests and measures, to ensure valid research results and is used if the answers of a questionnaire consist of questions with a Likert scale.[8] In the Cronbach's alpha index, the reliability scale is measured with values from 0.000 to 1.000. The closer the value of the coefficient is to 1.000, the greater the internal consistency. A value equal to or greater than 0.7 is considered acceptable.

Socio-Demographic Profile of Respondents

One hundred and fifty-eight (158) travellers - visitors to Athens participated in the questionnaire survey to detect the motivations for visiting the city of Athens, of whom sixty-seven 67 (42.4%) men and ninety-one 91 women (57.6%) of the research sample. The majority of the population belongs to the age groups of 18-25 by (26.6%) and 26-35 by (25,3%). In comparing the results of the present survey with the results of EXAA (2021) for guest satisfaction and hotel performance for 2021, the results for the age groups 25 to 55 have small differences. However, a large discrepancy is observed in the percentage of the sample for the age groups 18-25 where in the present survey the percentage is (26%) while that of EXAA (2021) is 9% and in the age group over 55 where the percentage in the present survey is 15 .8% while that of EXAA (2021) at 26%. However, a better similarity is found with the percentages of the age groups for the global city-break market as presented in the study (INSETE, 2021b) where the 15-24 age group shows a remarkable percentage of 36.3% and the 25-56 percentage is 43 .5% with the corresponding 57.6% of the working population and finally 17.6% for the over 55 age group.

Most of the respondents were in relationship (29,1%) followed in a small difference by married with children (28,5%). The majority of the responders have a college or university degree (46%) and (29%) have a master’s degree. Most of them work at the private sector (39,2%). Regarding the country of origin of visitors first five are the United Kingdom, with a percentage of 13.9% (twenty-two people), followed by the United States of America with a percentage of 11.4% (eighteen people), Germany with a percentage of 8.9% (fourteen people), France with a percentage of 7% (eleven persons), Austria with a rate of 6.3% (ten persons) and Italy with Spain have the same rate of 5.1% (eight persons).These findings confirm the thattheboost for the city tourism recovery in Europe came up

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https://www.statistics.gr/documents/20181/b54295a5-3d98-9371-cee6-af2a084f0e82

[8] See also https://eclass.hmu.gr/ and https://www.statisticshowto.com/

from by intra-regional movements and the simultaneous increase in arrivals from the USA (UNWTO, 2023; Popova et al., 2022).

In general, through the bibliographic overview and our findings we conclude that of the main markets of origin of visitors to Attica and Greece for the years 2019-2022, the countries of the United Kingdom, the USA, Germany, France and Italy are always mentioned in the top five (EXAA, 2023a; INSETE, 2022a,2023).

Attributes of the sample's journey and travel type of the respondents

The 3 main reasons for visiting Athens were first for holiday and recreation: one hundred thirty-five (135) people, secondfor visiting cultural architectural monuments one hundred and nine (109) and third for natural attractions fifty-five (55) (Table 10). The reasons for the visit are consistent with the results of the EXAA (2021), where the main reason for visiting Athens 74% is vacation-leisure and that of the leisure travelers, 46% have as their main reason for visiting cultural interest and visiting archaeological sites.

Table 10: Reasons of visit to Athens

Reasons of visit to Athens								
	Holidays-Recreation	Nightlife	Business	Education	Visit friends & Relatives	Cultural& Architectural Monuments	Physical Attractions	Another reason
Yes	135	12	1	9	8	109	55	10
No	23	146	157	149	150	49	103	148
Total	158	158	158	158	158	158	158	158

In order to check in the present research whether the percentage of visitors who came for leisure also visited cultural monuments, a cross-section of the variables was carried out, between the reasons for visiting Athens holidays-leisure and visiting cultural architectural monuments. From the one hundred and thirty-five (135) who visited Athens for vacation-leisure, eighty-nine (89) also chose to visit cultural architectural monuments. It can therefore be observed in this work that more than half of the leisure visitors had the visit of a cultural monument as an additional motivation for their trip. It is impressive that of the twenty-three (23) who have not chosen Athens for vacation-leisure, twenty (20) have chosen to visit cultural architectural monuments (Table 11).

Table 11: Cross section of variables: Holiday-Recreation * Visit Cultural & Architectural Monuments

Cross Section of variables: Holiday-Recreation * Visit Cultural & Architectural Monuments				
		Visit Cultural & Architectural Monuments		Total
		Yes	No	
Holiday-Recreation	Yes	89	46	135
	No	20	3	23
Total		109	49	158

Most of the responders visited Athens for the first time (82,9%). Half of them (51,3%)81 respondents have combined their visit to Athens with their visit to another destination and 48.7% (77 people) have not. There is an agreement with the EXAA survey (2021) where 57% of visitors stayed in other areas besides Athens. Half of the visitors to Athens combine their visit to it with a visit to some other destination in Greece. For the majority of the respondents 136 people (86.1%) Athens is not the first urban city/environment visiting after the Covid-19 pandemic. We conclude that all visitors had already started traveling to urban destinations, contrary to the initial studies for 2020 and the first months of 2021 according to which there was an intention to travel to destinations in the countryside and in more sparsely populated areas. According to their response in the question which another city they have already visited the most dominant of these is Paris, followed by Berlin, London, New York, Amsterdam, Madrid and Prague. The findings are in line with Euromonitor's (2023) list of the world's top 100 destination cities for 2022 where Paris is ranked first while New York, Berlin, Amsterdam, Madrid round out the top ten of thirty (30) Top Destinations-Cities for 2022.

Fifty (50) (31.6%) answered that had chosen Athens as a substitute to another city and (108)68.4% no. The average of the totally overnight stays is 3,81. The largest percentage of visitors have chosen either 3 (52) respondents or 4 (40 respondents) nights. Most of the respondents were travelling either with a family - children seventy-one (71 people) with a percentage of 44.9%orwith a spouse-partner fifty-one (51 people) and a percentage of 32.3%. Finally, the majority of them were individual travelers and not with an organized group. The main part of the research’s questionnaire, investigates analytically the motivations and reasons for visiting Athens as a holiday destination, as well as the degree of satisfaction and the visitor’s impressions. Last it examines if the visitors took into account the dispersion of Covid-19.

The first six motivations that come up through the summary of all the categories for the attractions (natural, cultural, built-architectural and social) by the mean and the median are first the:Ancient Greek and Greco-Roman monuments mean:4,62, second the architecture of the city’s buildings mean:4,23, thirdthe urban and natural landscape mean:4,05 fourth the museums mean: 3,98 fifth the climate 3,96 and sixth the gastronomy mean: 3,93 (Table 12).

Table 12: First six motivations of visit

Athen's Attractions	Mean	Median	Frequency of Total Agreement
Ancient Greek and Greco-Roman monuments	4.62	5	110
Architecture	4.23	4	76
Urban and natural landscape	4.05	4	54
Museums	3.98	4	45
Climate	3.96	4	51
Gastronomy	3.93	4	38

The main choice at the attraction category for cultural and architectural attractions is the Ancient Greek and Greco-Roman monuments, followed by architecture and then museums, art, festivals and events and finally religion. Specifically, in Table 11 is presented the percentage of agreement and disagreement for each attraction as well the mean. The results partially agree with the research of Vitouladiti et al. (2018) where the most important advantages of Athens are considered by the visitors to be the archaeological attractions, the monuments and the cultural events, but also of EXAA (2021) where for both 2020 and 2021 culture as a reason for visiting came first with a percentage of 46%. In the present research, however, cultural attractions have been separated into monuments, architecture and museums and it is observed that despite the abundance offered, museums come third in preferences.

Table 13: Cultural and built attractions percentage of choices

	Cultural and Built Attractions					Mean
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Disagree nor Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree	
Greek Ancient and Greco-Roman Monuments	1,3	0,6	1,9	26,6	69,6	4,62
Architecture	1,9	2,5	13,9	33,5	48,1	4,23
Museums	3,2	2,5	15,8	50	28,5	3,98

Art	11,4	6,3	32,9	28,5	20,9	3,41
Festivals and Events	20,9	22,2	38,6	10,1	8,2	2,62
Religion	24,7	24,1	31,6	13,3	6,3	2,52

The reliability and validity of the variable is attempted through Cronbach's alpha. Table 14 shows the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient with a value of 0.715 which is acceptable.

Table 14: Reliability statistics

Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
,715	6

In the Item-Total Statistics Table 15 for Cultural and Built Attractions we notice that whatever variable we remove our coefficient will not increase.

Table 15: Item-total statistics

Item-total Statistics				
	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
Greek Ancient and Greco-Roman Monuments	16,7785	13,588	,345	,706
Museums	17,4241	12,462	,386	,694
Architecture	17,1709	11,595	,535	,654
Religion	18,8797	11,164	,408	,693
Festivals and Events	18,7785	11,053	,436	,682
Art	17,9937	9,650	,616	,616

The main reason for choosing Athens for natural attractions is the urban and natural landscape, followed by the climate third the proximity to the beaches of Attica as it is presented in Table 16. Based to Bausch et al. (2021) and Kapetanakis et al. (2022) destination climate and weather conditions are taken into account by visitors but also according to the study of Vitouladiti et al. (2018) where climate is presented as the second most important advantage for visitors to Athens, we also found out that approximately seventy (70%) of the respondents agree or totally agree that the good climate strengthens their decision to visit Athens. However, a bigger percentage of agreement wax expected. Regarding the proximity to the beaches, 1/3 of the respondents, less than half, agree or completely agree with the choice of Athens for the proximity to the beaches, a lower percentage than the EXAA survey (2021,2023a) where the beach front in 2021 was visited by about half of the visitors to Athens and in 2022 was visited by the 63% of the hotel's residents. Based on the results of the present work for the beach front we could conclude in combination with the period when the questionnaires were collected (April, 2023) that the respondents did not wish to spend their time visiting the beach.

Table 16: Natural attractions. Percentage of choices

	Natural attractions					Mean
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Disagree nor Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree	
Urban and Natural Landscape	2,5	1,3	1,91	43	34,2	4,05
Climate	3,2	1,9	22,2	40,5	32,3	3,96
Vicinity with Attica's beaches	7,6	19,6	38	20,9	13,9	3,13

The main reason for choosing Athens for Social life and Facilities is: restaurants - gastronomy and they follow in order, lifestyle, accommodation-hotels, infrastructure and urban means of transport, shopping and finally sports as it is presented in Table 17. The predominant reason for choosing Athens for Social life and Facilities is the restaurants - gastronomy and it is in agreement with the view of Zhu et al. (2022) that eating during a trip apart from being a basic human need has evolved into a tourist experience and by Ab Karim & Chi (2010 where ref. in Karagiannis & Andrinos, 2021) that there is a significant relationship between the image of the destination for its gastronomy and the intention to visit the destination. It also responds to the opinion of Kalpidis (2014) that in recent years there has been an upgrade of Greek cuisine and this is proven in the online reputation (Net Sentiment Index) for gastronomy 1st quarter (Q1) of 2023 which together with hospitality has the highest rating with culture, the environment and hygiene to follow in that order(INSETE, 2023).

Table 17: Social attractions and facilities. Percentage of choices

	Social Attractions and Facilities					Mean
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Disagree nor Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree	
Restaurants/Gastronomy	2,5	0,6	22,2	50,6	24,1	3,93
Way of life	2,5	10,8	34,2	41,8	10,8	3,47
Hotels/Accommodation	2,5	8,9	48,1	34,8	5,7	3,32
Urban infrastructure and city transports	7,6	24,7	44,3	18,4	3,2	2,81
Shopping	9,5	24,7	44,3	18,4	3,2	2,81
Entertainment and Nightlife	19	25,9	34,2	15,2	5,7	2,62
Sports	23,4	29,1	37,3	7,6	2,5	

The Reliability Statistics (Table 18) shows the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient with a value of 0.805 which is quite good.

Table 18: Reliability statistics

Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
,805	7

At the variable which examinespersonal perception and feeling about Athensin calculating the reliability and internal consistency for the variable Cronbach's Alpha has a value of 0.528 which is below the limit of tolerable. Because the reliability index is below the tolerable limit, statistical analysis and control by removing variables was attempted. If the two variables calm and nostalgic personal perception are removed the Cronbach's Alpha will become 0.720 within the tolerable limit. Therefore, the statistical analysis was performed on the 4 variables: Honest. Lively. Exciting. Friendly Predominant personal perception and feeling for Athens is friendly. The mean shows that the most preferred answer is agree, with a value of 4.2848, and the median is the middle value of the distribution which is 4 (agree) followed by minor differences in order, lively, honest and exciting. The results are in agreement with Vitouladiti (2018) where Athens gives the impression of a welcoming city with the friendliness of the residents being the 6th advantage out of 12 options. Similarly in the report of INSETE(2021b,2022b,2022c) for the last quarter of 2021 and the first two of 2022 for Athens and Greece the online reputation (Net Sentiment Index) for hospitality had the best score and still has it together with gastronomy as already mentioned in the 1st quarter (Q1) of 2023(INSETE, 2023). Regarding how exciting it is considered, the percentage of 48.1% who agree is in agreement with the research of Hanna and Rowley (2019) where the projected personality of Athens through its official websites is projected as exciting at a rate of 50%. Last in our findings a total of 74% of the respondents state that they do not agree that Athens is rude.

Regarding the level of satisfaction to the accessibility (movement) of Athens, a total of 72.2% are satisfied with the accessibility (commutability) of Athens and our findings agree with the EXAA survey (2021) where the evaluation of the public transport experience for 2021 has been rated 7.2/10.

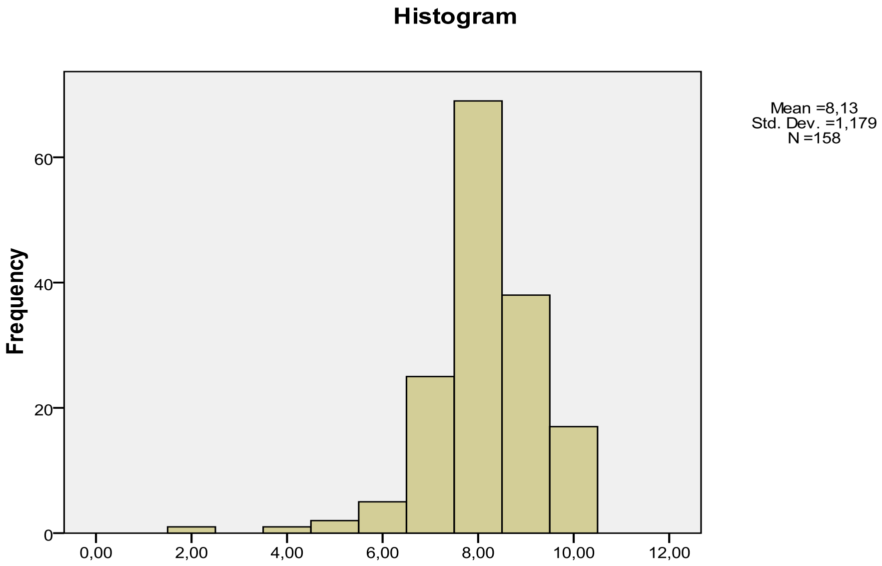
As far as the value for money in Athens the respondents answered: Very cheap 3.2%, cheap 29.1%, neither cheap nor expensive 63.9%, and expensive 3.8% (Table19). The most preferred answer is neither cheap nor expensive as the mean value is 2.6835 and this is confirmed by the median which is the middle value of the distribution which is 3.00. So the most prevalent answer is, neither cheap nor expensive with the 2nd most prevalent being cheap with the percentage reaching 1 third of the sample. The results of the present research are in agreement with the research of Vitouladiti et al. (2018) according to which Athens is considered quite an economic city. However, it was expected that they would have a larger percentage in the cheap option as from 2021 onwards, when the increase in the number of visitors to Athens begins (INSETE, 2021b), the quality to money relationship proves to be satisfactory to the visitor as in the EXXA survey (2021) the degree of satisfaction for hotels, restaurants and coffee-bars is 8.7 and for shopping and taxis less 8.1 and 8 respectively. According to INSETE (2022b,2022c), in the discussions on the internet in September 2022, the perception prevails that Athens is one of the cheapest and at the same time beautiful cities in Europe (INSETE, 2022b,2022c) and the score for the value for money) stands at 8.9 higher than the total for Greece (8.7) while in the corresponding survey for the 1st quarter (Q1) of 2023 it stands at 9.1 above the European average (8.4) (INSETE, 2023).

Table 19: Value for money

	Frequency	Percentage
Very cheap	5	3,2
Cheap	46	29,1
Neither cheap neither expensive	101	63,9
Expensive	6	3,8
Total	158	100,0

In the present study the average liking of Athens as a travel destination is 8.13(Graph 2). The degree of liking corresponds to the overall satisfaction rating of travelers for 2022 with an average of 8.4 at EXAA (2023a) survey.

Graph 2: Liking of Athens as a travel destination



The order of preference regarding the activities during the respondents' visit to Athens is as follows: The three most prevalent options are visiting monuments with a percentage of 74.1% choosing it, visiting museums with a percentage of 49.4% and sightseeing with a percentage of 47.5%. This is followed by participation in cultural activities with a percentage of 44.3%, sea swimming and sunbathing with a percentage of 26.6%, recreation with a percentage of 22.8%, shopping with a percentage of 14.6%, night entertainment with a percentage of 8.9%, attending festivals and events with a percentage of 1.9% and last choice water sports with a percentage of 1.3%. The finding that visiting monuments and museums are the first two activities in choice is in agreement with the results of question two (2) of this paper regarding the reason for visiting Athens where culture and visiting monuments are the 2nd reason of travel, but also of the 135 who stated as a reason holidays-leisure, 89 also stated culture. The findings of the literature view are confirmed. Culture is undoubtedly the main driving force of the urban tourism system in Athens. As we saw in Chark (2021), visitors like touring among sites and old streets that have preserved past architecture. Archeological sites continue to attract visitors in Athens (Kasimati & Sideris 2015; Kostopoulou, 2022) as before the Covid-19. Last about the preferable activities a larger percentage was expected in the choice of swimming and sunbathing due to the increase in the legibility of the beach front (EXAA, 2023a).

At the question about which factor has more influenced their decision to visit Athens, international reputation and image of the destination have mostly affected them with mean 4,02. Overall personal perception follows with 4,02 mean and less have affected visitors the impressions and recommendations from acquaintances and friends, social media and advertising campaign. According to Echtner and Ritchie (2003 where ref., in Chi & Phuong, 2022, and Moreira & Iao, 2014) the percentage of visitors who choose a destination increases because of the strong positive image they have of it. According to Karachalis (2015), Athens has a strong image due to its cultural heritage and is popular as the birthplace of democracy (Kyrtata & Ragou 2012). Also, the image of the destination and the satisfaction of it influence the loyalty to a destination and encourage its revisit (Frangos et al., 2015).

Finally, regarding the influence of Covid-19 on their decision to visit Athens, the respondents were not worried about the transmission of the virus. The spread of the virus did not affect their decision with a percentage of 64.6% one hundred and two (102) disagreeing that the took them into account. Also, neither the taking measures against the virus (63.3%) nor social distancing with 59.5% disagreement was taken into account. Only the best outdoor dining conditions with agreement of 19.6% of participants and the climate with agreement (56%) of participants were considered.

4.3 Qualitative research

From the qualitative research it is also concluded that cultural tourism is the dominant form of tourism in Athens and is also combined with visits to other important cultural destinations in Greece. According to the: “Marketing Greece” association Athens is considered as “a must see” destination. On the part of the official agencies, there was an adjustment in the, strategy promotion of the product. The official organization of Athens Municipality “This is Athens” initially promoted the safety of the destination in relationship to the Covid-19at the first year of pandemic. They also target at locals through festivals andredefined their image in social media & their relationship with residentslike the four cities of Italy: Rome, Milan, Florence, Venice (Pasquinelly et al, 2021). In additional they targeted on Digital Nomads and in inbound tourism from Europe due to travel restrictions in USA. Ultimately the marketing management of the organization “This is Athens“ to target not only the domestic tourism as London, Paris and other European cities but also the European market was correct because the intra-regional movements between the European countries began first. So, they communicated Athens after the end of the first lockdown as a safe destination in relationship to Covid-19.The aim of keeping the interest of future visitors for the city and the reinforcement the destination image using social media was also applied successfully by creating feelings of nostalgia.

5. Discussion and conclusions

From the secondary research, it appears that while the beginning of 2020 predicted another upward trend for tourism in Athens, it was stopped by the Covid-19 pandemic. In 2020, the largest drop is observed in all tourism figures. The recovery of inbound tourism is observed in 2021 in small percentages. In 2022 there is a significant and large recovery ofthe international tourism arrivals, accommodation and visits to archaeological sites and museums compared to 2021.Also in 2022, compared to 2019, there is an increase in overnight stays and hotel receipts, but not in their occupancy. Even in the 1st quarter of 2023 occupancy remains lower than in 2019 despite the increase in arrivals. Finally, with regard to the tourism recovery for 2023, from the available data analyzed for the first quarter of 2023 for Athens and the wider region, an equalization or increase compared to 2019 is predicted.City of Athens keeps up with the post Covid growth of tourism to the European and Mediterranean cities according to the research of Popova et al. (2022) and the data for Paris 2019.[9] The primary research confirms the prior researches of), Kasimati and Sideris (2015), Vitouladiti et al. (2018) and Kostopoulou (2022) that the greatest asset of Athens and generally the growth of city tourism in Greece and Athens are the archeological and cultural sights. Also, it comes in line with the view of Andries van der Arka & Greg Richards (2006) that culture is undoubtedly the main driving force in the urban tourism system.

As it comes up from the secondary from the data of the Hellenic Statistical Authority and the primary qualitative research, a comparatively greater number of visitors is observed to visit Acropolis compared to other monuments and museums, a problem which was also referred by Karachalis (2015). However, while the visitors will include in their program the visit to archaeological monuments, they will also look for the enjoyment of other activities with the primary purpose of recreation. The more often selected activities, as observed, are connected to the forms of cultural, culinary-food, wondering and walking at the physical and urban landscape and the rising of sun and sea tourism at the coasts of the city. Weather conditions in our findings are also a very important and competitive selection factor over other reasons. As far as the sun and city preference according to EXAA (2023a)the last years there is also a greater recognition and promotion of the coastal front and the Argosaronic Islands and in our findings approximately a third of the participants have included the visit at the coastline as a main reason.This preference could be enriched by promoting the coastal line in order to augment the tourist product of Athens and attract more segments of the market as well as to stimulate the tourism economy of the rest of the region.

Athens in general has a positive international image as a destination and the survey visitors perceived it as a lively and friendly city and are satisfied with the quality-price ratio (value for money) in line with Vitouladiti et al. (2018) and INSETE (2022a). Regarding their behavior in relation to the pandemic, it is observed that they no longer take into account the spread of the pandemic as a factor to visit the city. As we saw for 86% of the respondents Athens was not the first city which they visited after Covid-19 and 64,6% was not worried about the virus's spread. The problems thatemerge from our research are that the area around the Acropolis, the Acropolis Museum and the commercial triangle receive the volume of visitors as also mentioned by Karachalis (2015) to the exclusion of other notable attractions & museums. Also, there must be more promotion of the connection of Athens with the Argosaronic Sea and utilization of the coastal front, which until today is under used. It is concluded that Athens meets the demands of visitors satisfactorily and the findings of the paper agree with Ikko & Koutsos (2021) according to which a successful city-break destination satisfies a wide range of options.

[9] See https://pro.visitparisregion.com/chiffres-du-tourisme/conjoncture/bilans/bilan-de-l-annee-touristique-2022-a-paris-ile-de-france-mars-2023

At the present research an extension of the time period could be done. The collections of the questionnaires could be done during the last from one to three years. The results from long-time research would allow a better interpretation of the motives and the reasons of the visit in corelation to the weather conditions and the trends which prevail through the years. Another research could be triggered by the results of this work according to which Athens is established as a destination with a good quality-price ratio and is not considered as an expensive destination. It is suggested to identify the market segment with the specific view and the reasons that support it. The results of the study will help to improve the Athens product so that it can appeal to visitors who will spend more during their visit and will result better economic impacts to the tourism enterprises. From the secondary research it comes up that the recovery after the Covid's implication has almost succeeded. A newest research in order to find out if the increase of these tourism inflows have affected positive or negative the area around Acropolis the could be done. There are already earlier researches from Gourzis et al. (2019) and Karachalis (2015) for the negatives implications at the quality of resident's life and the capacity of overflow areas. On the other hand, new research may be occurred if there are any positive implications at the quality of resident's life and the Improvement of the degraded areas of Athens which are located near to archaeological monuments or other sights.

One of the parameters the paper analyses is the finding of the main reasons for visiting Athens after Covid-19. The primary research confirms that cultural tourism continues to be the leading motivation for visiting Athens. But visits are increased only around the Acropolis which is a must-see monument and the new museum of Acropolis as we also found out by the secondary research (Karachalis, 2015;ELSTAT, 2019, 2021, 2023b). In this regard the results of this study can be used to support the application of marketing strategies for promoting cultural tourism by emphasizing visits to other monuments and museums less popular but with exceptional history and exhibits. Although before the application of the marketing strategy, policies for renovation and remodelling of these attractions must take place with the responsibility the state. Another finding of the research which the stakeholders of tourism can take advantage of, is that the visit in monuments is combined with other forms of tourism. The most popular forms from four findings are culinary tourism, sightseeing tourism especially the act of "wondering around ", the participation in cultural activities and last the increase of sun and sea tourism. Local authorities and private companies could take advantage of these preferences and promote visits and actions which are combined to these forms of tourism. Because wondering around is an important option as significant number of participants stated it as an option it is important to preserve the elements that make up the intangible and material cultural heritage because they are the main reason for this activity. There is the need to be an improvement of the cultural resources and policies of controlling the urbanization Gourzis et al. (2019) with the aim of not altering traditional characteristics. Last but not least the region of Attica must take advantage of her exceptional coast line and the public construction of the unification of the coastal front which has already began must be completed well in order to serve both visitors and residences. As it came up from our findings half of the respondents (51,3%) had combined their visit to Athens with a visit to another destination in Greece and although the spring season a third of the participants had chosen “the sun and sea” variable. The promotion of this coastline and her vicinity to Argosaronic islands could expand the duration of the visit and keep the visitor’s accommodation in the area of Attica. It is worth referencing the promoting action of the tourism organization “Marketing Greece” who has started the campaign of advertising the combination of the visit to Athens with the visits to the islands of the Argosaronic gulf one our distance from Athens with the slogan: :“An island escape one hop from Athens” (Marketing Greece, 2023).

Limitations are related to the season and the sample of the questionnaire. The collection was carried out in the spring during the time period from 30 March of 2023 to 10 April of 2023 a time when “sun and sea tourism” is not by its nature a primary visit purpose. Therefore, the narrow time frames where the study was done probably do not reflect the magnitude of the demand for sun and sea in Athens and the wider region of Attica. Already in the present survey one third of the questionnaires were answered by visitors who were located on the coastline between the residential area of Paleo Faliro and Alimos 10Km from the centre of Athens. In additional the demographic profile could be more enriched because when the questionnaire was distributed the visitors in the older age groups 56-65 and 66+ refused to participate due to the difficulty of understanding English. However, a percentage of the 56-65 age groups completed the questionnaire with the help of relatives-fellow travellers. Finally, a reluctance to fill in the questionnaire was observed on the part of visitors originating from the countries of the Middle East, with the exception of visitors from Israel. Thirdly another limitation came up because the reliability index Cronbach's Alpha was below the tolerable limit to some variables or some variables were not properly completed, so they were excluded from the results. For example, which reason for visitors had chosen Athens instead of another city.

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