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**“Tourism Management, Recovery Strategies and Stakeholder
Collaboration:**

**Approaches for Enhancing the Resilience of the Tourism
Sector”**

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Supervisor: “SPANOS IOANNIS”

Patras, Greece, “June” “2026”

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Abstract

The present dissertation examines the tourism sector of the Peloponnese region in Greece and investigates strategies for post-crisis tourism recovery. The research addresses five key questions: (1) to what extent the resilience practices identified in tourism destinations can be transferred and adapted to other Greek regions facing similar challenges; (2) Which contextual factors could explain why practices that build resilience in the Peloponnese do not have the same effects in other Greek regions; (3) what long-term structural effects have emerged from tourism practices developed during the COVID-19 crisis; (4) how stakeholders’ different priorities influence tourism destination governance at various levels; and (5) how stakeholder participation within governance structures can improve governance effectiveness and resilience. In order to address these questions, the dissertation employs a structured literature review combined with a case-study approach. The Peloponnese region serves as the principal case study of the research. Secondary data sources are utilised, including tourism statistics, policy documents, and relevant scientific studies.

The findings indicate that resilience practices in the Peloponnese combine agrotourism activities, cultural heritage resources, and well-developed multi-stakeholder networks. Practices of value that are occurring in other parts of the region could be transferred and applied to other tourist destinations in Greece. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the adoption of digital technologies and sustainable tourism practices, several of which became increasingly institutionalised during the post-crisis recovery period. The results further indicate that one of the principal governance challenges affecting tourism resilience in the region relates to high coordination costs and conflicting development priorities among stakeholders. Finally, the dissertation provides practical recommendations for Destination Management Organisations (DMOs) and policymakers, while also identifying directions for future research.

Keywords:

tourism resilience, stakeholder collaboration, COVID-19 recovery, Peloponnese, sustainable tourism, crisis management

Περίληψη

Η παρούσα εργασία εξετάζει τον τουριστικό τομέα της περιφέρειας Πελοποννήσου στην Ελλάδα και διερευνά στρατηγικές για την ανάκαμψη του τουρισμού μετά την κρίση. Η έρευνα θίγει πέντε βασικά ερωτήματα: (1) σε ποιο βαθμό οι πρακτικές ανθεκτικότητας που εντοπίστηκαν σε τουριστικούς προορισμούς μπορούν να μεταφερθούν και να προσαρμοστούν σε άλλες ελληνικές περιοχές που αντιμετωπίζουν παρόμοιες προκλήσεις· (2) Ποιοι παράγοντες πλαισίου θα μπορούσαν να εξηγήσουν γιατί οι πρακτικές που ενισχύουν την ανθεκτικότητα στην Πελοπόννησο δεν έχουν τα ίδια αποτελέσματα σε άλλες ελληνικές περιοχές· (3) ποιες μακροπρόθεσμες διαρθρωτικές επιπτώσεις έχουν προκύψει από τις τουριστικές πρακτικές που αναπτύχθηκαν κατά τη διάρκεια της κρίσης COVID-19· (4) πώς οι διαφορετικές προτεραιότητες των ενδιαφερόμενων μερών επηρεάζουν τη διακυβέρνηση των τουριστικών προορισμών σε διάφορα επίπεδα· και (5) πώς η συμμετοχή των ενδιαφερόμενων μερών στις δομές διακυβέρνησης μπορεί να βελτιώσει την αποτελεσματικότητα και την ανθεκτικότητα της διακυβέρνησης. Για την αντιμετώπιση αυτών των ερωτημάτων, η διατριβή χρησιμοποιεί μια δομημένη βιβλιογραφική ανασκόπηση σε συνδυασμό με μια προσέγγιση μελέτης περίπτωσης. Η περιφέρεια Πελοποννήσου χρησιμεύει ως η κύρια μελέτη περίπτωσης της έρευνας. Χρησιμοποιούνται δευτερογενείς πηγές δεδομένων, συμπεριλαμβανομένων στατιστικών τουρισμού, εγγράφων πολιτικής και σχετικών επιστημονικών μελετών.

Τα ευρήματα δείχνουν ότι οι πρακτικές ανθεκτικότητας στην Πελοπόννησο συνδυάζουν δραστηριότητες αγροτουρισμού, πόρους πολιτιστικής κληρονομιάς και καλά ανεπτυγμένα δίκτυα πολλαπλών ενδιαφερομένων. Πρακτικές αξίας που εφαρμόζονται σε άλλα μέρη της περιοχής θα μπορούσαν να μεταφερθούν και να εφαρμοστούν σε άλλους τουριστικούς προορισμούς στην Ελλάδα. Η πανδημία COVID-19 επιτάχυνε την υιοθέτηση ψηφιακών τεχνολογιών και πρακτικών βιώσιμου τουρισμού, αρκετές από τις οποίες θεσμοθετήθηκαν ολόένα και περισσότερο κατά την περίοδο ανάκαμψης μετά την κρίση. Τα αποτελέσματα δείχνουν περαιτέρω ότι μία από τις κύριες προκλήσεις διακυβέρνησης που επηρεάζουν την ανθεκτικότητα του τουρισμού στην περιοχή σχετίζεται με το υψηλό κόστος συντονισμού και τις αντικρουόμενες αναπτυξιακές προτεραιότητες μεταξύ των ενδιαφερόμενων μερών. Τέλος, η διατριβή παρέχει πρακτικές συστάσεις για τους Οργανισμούς Διαχείρισης

Προορισμών (DMO) και τους υπεύθυνους χάραξης πολιτικής, ενώ παράλληλα προσδιορίζει κατευθύνσεις για μελλοντική έρευνα.

Λέξεις – Κλειδιά

ανθεκτικότητα τουρισμού, συνεργασία ενδιαφερόμενων μερών, ανάκαμψη από την COVID-19, Πελοπόννησος, βιώσιμος τουρισμός, διαχείριση κρίσεων

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List of Abbreviations & Acronyms

CAD	Central Archaeological Council
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease 2019
DMO	Destination Management Organisation
DMOs	Destination Management Organisations
ELSTAT	Hellenic Statistical Authority
ETC	European Travel Commission
EU	European Union
EUR	Euro
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GNTO	Greek National Tourism Organisation
INSETE	Institute of the Greek Tourism Confederation
LAGs	Local Action Groups
LEADER	Liaison Entre Actions de Développement de l'Économie Rurale
MIO-ECSDE	Mediterranean Information Office for Environment, Culture and Sustainable Development
MNCR	Ministry of National Economy and Competitiveness Reform
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organisations
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
POX	Hellenic Federation of Hoteliers
SARS-CoV-2	Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2
SETE	Greek Tourism Confederation
SMEs	Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises
UNWTO	United Nations World Tourism Organization
USD	United States Dollar
WWF	World Wide Fund for Nature

1. Introduction

1.1 Background and Rationale

The global COVID-19 pandemic forced the world’s largest and most globalised industry, tourism, to come to a virtual standstill. The pre-pandemic dominance of tourism in generating over 300 million jobs for livelihoods worldwide and yielding around 10% of global Gross Domestic Product (GDP) has been unparalleled. While many perceive resilience as a desirable trait for destinations, under present and foreseeable circumstances, resilience has become a basic condition for the long-term sustainability of destinations which are subject to a wide array of internal and external vulnerability factors including natural disasters, geopolitical issues, health crises and climate change (Bec et al. 2016; Hall et al. 2017).

The spread of the COVID-19 pandemic across the world’s travel destinations in March 2020 was the most serious disruption to overseas travel since the Second World War. Tourist arrivals fell by 74% worldwide in 2020 and the sector suffered an aggregate loss of USD 1.3 trillion in exports. In some countries, such as Greece with one of the world’s most highly developed tourism industries that accounts for some 20–25% of its GDP, there were even further restrictions placed on the entry of foreign tourists to the country.

This dissertation examines policies related to the tourism sector, focusing particularly on Greece, and considers how tourism businesses adapted to the new rules imposed during lockdown. It also examines how the global lockdown affected the so-called “Greek brand”.

1.2 Research Objectives

The primary objective of this dissertation is to examine the resilience of the tourism sector in the Peloponnese region of Greece, with particular emphasis on the recovery strategies and stakeholder collaboration mechanisms developed during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. In pursuit of this overarching aim, the study seeks to: (i) review and synthesise the theoretical foundations of tourism management, resilience, and stakeholder collaboration; (ii) analyse the principal stakeholders, governance structures, and resilience practices of Peloponnese tourism; (iii) evaluate the effectiveness of crisis management strategies adopted at the regional level during and after COVID-19; (iv) identify which resilience practices and collaboration models are transferable to other Greek regions; and

(v) formulate evidence-based recommendations for destination governance and future crisis preparedness.

In addition, the study aimed to:

- Review the theoretical and conceptual frameworks related to tourism management, tourism resilience, and multi-stakeholder approaches.
- Examine the characteristics of tourism, stakeholder involvement, governance structures, and practices that contribute to resilience within the Greek region of the Peloponnese.
- Evaluate the effectiveness of crisis management strategies implemented at the regional level during and following the outbreak of the SARS-CoV-2 (COVID-19) pandemic.
- Assess the transferability and local applicability of identified stakeholder collaboration practices and resilience models.
- Provide evidence-based recommendations regarding destination governance and future crisis management strategies.

1.3 Research Questions

The dissertation was guided by the following research questions:

- What local resilience practices have been implemented in the Peloponnese region, and to what extent can these practices be transferred or adapted to other regions of Greece?
- Which contextual factors could explain why practices that build resilience in the Peloponnese do not have the same effects in other Greek regions?
- Does the resilience observed during the “Black Swan” event of the COVID-19 crisis represent a permanent structural transformation of tourism systems or merely a temporary adaptation?
- How do stakeholders’ perceptions, objectives, and preferences interact during decision-making processes related to tourism destination resilience?
- To what extent does stakeholder participation in local governance strengthen resilience rather than create inefficiencies and delays in decision-making?

1.4 Scope and Limitations

The research focused geographically on the Peloponnese region of Greece, while also considering comparisons with other Greek regions, including the North Aegean, Crete, Epirus, and the Cyclades, in order to identify similarities and differences in perceptions regarding the impacts of crises on tourism. The temporal scope of the study covered the period from 2019 to 2024, including the pre-pandemic years (2019–2020), the peak of the COVID-19 crisis (2020–2021), and the subsequent recovery period (2022–2024).

Several limitations were identified. Due to the reliance on secondary data, the study was limited in its ability to obtain in-depth stakeholder perspectives. The inclusion of primary qualitative data, such as semi-structured interviews with regional stakeholders, could have provided richer insights into the issues examined. Furthermore, there is a limited number of empirical studies focusing specifically on the Peloponnese compared with more widely researched Greek tourist destinations. In addition, tourism-related statistical data in Greece are often less detailed than those available in many Northern European countries. Comparisons with other Greek regions are indicative rather than fully systematic, given the uneven availability of region-specific empirical data.

These limitations are discussed further in the methodological section, together with recommendations for future research.

1.5 Methodology

This dissertation employed a qualitative research methodology, with a particular focus on literature review and case study analysis. The methodological approach was based on a careful evaluation of relevant scholarly literature.

The academic literature was retrieved from major scientific databases, including Scopus and Google Scholar. The search strategy combined terms and concepts such as “tourism and resilience,” “stakeholder collaboration in tourism,” “tourism and COVID-19,” “tourism recovery,” “destination management,” “tourism in the Peloponnese,” and “sustainable tourism in Greece.” The analysis included publications from 2010 to 2024, while key works published before 2010 were also included where they were necessary for establishing the theoretical framework of the study.

The research used secondary information. Additional sources included reports and statistical material from international and national organisations, as well as educational

institutions. These included the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), the Hellenic Statistical Authority (ELSTAT), the Institute of the Greek Tourism Confederation (INSETE), the European Travel Commission (ETC), and the Region of the Peloponnese.

The methodological design adopted a case study approach, consistent with the principles of case study research established by Yin (2018). The case study was defined both geographically and chronologically. Geographically, it focused on the Peloponnese region of Greece, while chronologically it covered the period 2019–2024. This period included the pre-pandemic baseline, the acute crisis phase, and the recovery trajectory.

Each of the five research questions was examined through a distinct analytical approach integrated into the chapter structure. RQ1, which concerns whether locally based resilience practices can be applied to other Greek regions, was analysed in Sections 3.6 and 4.3 through a typological examination. This examination distinguished place-specific assets, such as distinctive cultural and scholarly heritage and widespread agricultural products, from transferable practices, such as online booking implementation and trail connection development.

RQ2, which concerns which partnership approaches were successful in the Peloponnese but unsuccessful in other regions, was examined in Sections 3.4, 4.1, and 4.5 through a cross-destination analysis using information from both the Peloponnese and the Cyclades.

RQ3, which investigates whether COVID-19-related adjustments represent lasting structural change or temporary coping mechanisms, was analysed in Sections 4.2 and 4.3 by evaluating the durability of these adaptations beyond 2022. INSETE (2022) and ETC (2023) recovery data were used as reference points.

RQ4, which examines the impact of diverse stakeholder objectives on collaborative decision-making, was addressed in Chapter 4, particularly in Section 4.5, using stakeholder theory (Freeman, 1984; Mitchell et al., 1997; Ansell & Gash, 2008).

RQ5, which explores whether extensive stakeholder participation facilitates or hinders resilience governance, was assessed in Section 4.5 and in the Conclusion. The analysis balanced coordination costs against the advantages of legitimacy and co-production, following Provan and Kenis (2008).

Chapter 2 relied on peer-reviewed research from Scopus and Google Scholar, with emphasis on publications from 2010 to 2024. Significant works published before 2010 were

also included when they were conceptually fundamental. Regional policy documents were drawn from the Region of the Peloponnese (2022, 2023). Regional demographic and economic data were obtained from ELSTAT (2021), while sector-specific tourism statistical information was drawn from INSETE (2020, 2021, 2022). International benchmarks were provided by UNWTO (2020, 2021), and recovery trajectory data were obtained from ETC (2023). Chapter 4 integrated information from both streams in order to assess stakeholder strategies and provide evidence-based recommendations.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Tourism Management Theories

2.1.1 Strategic Tourism Planning Theory

The planned dimension of tourism, or strategic tourism planning, was recognized as an important area of tourism research and practice in the late 1980s. Since then the subject has grown in terms of theory and practice, and this book updates the theory and explores best-practice models that destinations can follow to achieve sustainable tourism. Inskeep (1991) provided the early tourism planning framework at the national and regional levels. He described an integrated approach to tourism planning and specified how the overall vision might be translated into practice. This is followed by Godfrey and Clarke (2000) and Hall (2008) who have provided a more detailed cyclical model of destination planning and a tourism-governance model which highlights a number of the political and institutional factors that influence planning. Strategic tourism planning has recently been conceptualised in a dynamic sense given the complex systems in which tourism operates. It is now clear that a static strategic plan is no longer sufficient to cope with uncertainties and change, and particularly with the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Adopting an environmental governance perspective, Brouder (2020) discussed strategic tourism planning from an adaptive management perspective, involving an ongoing learning process of trial and error. A number of influential models have been developed to explain destination competitiveness within the tourism field, most notable of these include those proposed by Dwyer and Kim (2003) and Ritchie and Crouch (2003). These models incorporate factors such as destination management, planning and development, and inherited and created resources.

2.1.2 Theories of Tourism Development

Models of tourism development have evolved from the early modernisation perspective, which viewed tourism as a means to economic modernisation and the transfer of 'modernity' to the periphery (de Kadt, 1979), to more critical perspectives which have identified and highlighted the social, cultural and environmental costs of accelerated mass tourism development (Sharpley, 2009). Alternative perspectives have argued for a more

pluralistic view of tourism development which recognises both the positive and negative aspects (Mowforth & Munt, 2016).

In Tourism Geography, a model to describe the lifecycle of a destination was first proposed by Butler (1980). The Tourism Area Life Cycle (TALC) model attempts to graphically illustrate the S-shaped progress of a vacation destination from discovery to stagnation. The model follows an S-shaped trajectory initially growing very rapidly through the exploration and involvement stages and entering a period of rapidly accelerating development, which is subsequently followed by a period of consolidation. Eventually, the destination reaches stagnation, or alternative rejuvenation or decline. The model has been heavily critiqued on the grounds of determinism and its linear approach. Nevertheless, the TALC model retains some relevance as a model to describe the trajectory of a destination, and as a means to gauge the timing of intervention or strategic action. Over the last two decades, theories and models of product diversification and experience economy (Pine & Gilmore, 1999) have influenced the practices of tourism development. In particular, these theories have relevance for alternative types of tourism such as ecotourism, cultural tourism and rural/ agrotourism.

These approaches to tourism are moving beyond simple commodity and service provision to tourists and are seeking to provide tourist experiences that are authentic and which incorporate local practices and participation in activities that are important to local communities. The case of the Peloponnese with its long gastronomic traditions and products (olive oil), its medieval settlements and Byzantine monuments, monasteries, historical castles and museums offer diverse experiences that can be based on many different sectors of local economies.

2.1.3 Destination Management and Coordination Theory

Tourism planning does not end with strategic decisions about quality and appropriate levels and types of tourism for a given destination. Of equal importance at the operational level is destination management, encompassing all the activities and services that go towards meeting the needs of visitors. Buhalis (2000) comments that a large number of destinations are managed by Destination Management Organisations (DMOs), and the roles that they perform vary significantly from country to country and from region to region. This

variation also extends to the organisation's resources and powers. Involvement of local stakeholders in destination management: A case study on the performance of a DMO. Stakeholders' involvement in destination management has received growing attention in recent years. While previous research has characterized destinations mainly in terms of their competitive positionality in terms of destination competitiveness (Ritchie and Crouch, 2003), more recent studies have adopted a governance perspective when analyzing DMOs, examining Destination Management Organizations' authority, resources and decision-making processes (among others, Presenza et al., 2005; Ruhanen et al., 2010). Although a centralised DMO may offer some advantages in terms of efficiency (i.e. decision-making process), a distributed approach can lead to greater legitimacy and meaningful co-production among stakeholders from public, private and civil society organizations. However, it is a highly complex approach to manage and co-ordinate stakeholders. Research on destination governance from a network perspective addresses collective action problems along the value chain of tourism. Drawing on the work of Provan and Kenis (2008), this dissertation maps the prevailing forms of network governance of tourism in Greece and highlights the persistent structural governance problems caused by the involvement of several ministries, administrative regions, and municipalities.

2.1.4 Visitor Behaviour and Demand Theory

The understanding of the behaviour of actual and potential visitors is a key element of management of tourism destinations and organisations. While the early approaches to tourism segmentation proposed by Plog (1974), which divided tourists into allocentric (novelty seekers) and psychocentric (family oriented), recently more in-depth, complex analyses of tourist behaviour have appeared. These studies refer to such elements of tourist behaviour as cultural capital, risk (Cohen, 1972; Urry, 1990), experiential value (Crompton, 1979).

In today's digital age, there is no denying that tourism destinations are greatly affected by the rapid growth of digital media. In addition to the websites of destinations and tourist service providers, the social media accounts of travel companies, user generated contents in online travel information sources, and travel apps for mobile platforms are becoming more important sources of travel information that tourists consult before and during their trips. (Cohen, 1972; Urry, 1990)

2.2 Stakeholder Theory in Tourism

2.2.1 Core Principles and Basic Idea of Stakeholder Theory

Stakeholder theory was developed in the late 1980s as a response to previous business theories that largely concentrated on stockholders. Stakeholder theory includes in its considerations all individuals and organizations affected by the activities of a company, such as investors, customers, suppliers, partners Freeman (1984) first proposed the Stakeholder theory in the context of corporate strategy arguing that organisations have obligations to all stakeholders not just the owners / shareholders. In tourism terms stakeholders could include tourists, local residents, businesses, public authorities, non governmental and community organisations, media and other international organisations all with their own interests, resources and potential influences on the destination (Sautter and Leisen, 1999; Donaldson and Preston, 1995).

While a substantial amount of research has been undertaken into how stakeholders groups can be identified, organised, prioritised and managed by various stakeholders for balanced tourism objectives, this is also true of tourism destination management for tourism. While all stakeholders of a business are important in their own right, research has looked at how to classify and measure stakeholders by stakeholder salience, based on three attributes: power, legitimacy, and urgency (Mitchell et al., 1997). Tourism development is characterised by several distributional conflicts, such as mass tourism against local culture, large tourism operators against small tourism producers or tourists from the home country against tourists from visiting countries. While stakeholder management aims at aggregating the stakeholders' preferences, their deliberative negotiations are required in order to find a solution for the conflicts caused by competing interests (Timur and Getz, 2009; Byrd, 2007; Jamal and Getz, 1995).

2.2.2 Governance and Stakeholder Engagement Mechanisms

Approaches to the study of tourism destinations governance abound, with the multi-level governance (Marks & Hooghe, 2001), collaborative governance (Ansell & Gash, 2008) and network governance (Provan & Kenis, 2008) approaches being particularly prominent. All these perspectives to tourism destinations governance rest on the fundamental premise that effective governance is an inclusive and participative process which encompasses all stakeholders and whose scope extends to planning, decision-making, management and evaluation. Using collaborative governance theory, Ansell & Gash (2008) identify a number of factors that facilitate successful multi-stakeholder collaboration, including prior successful cooperation, relatively equal power, a clear rules of the game, and enabling leadership. Conversely, factors such as unequal power, a lack of trust, inadequate incentives, and ambiguity concerning roles and responsibilities are reported to be impediments to effective collaboration. Such impediments appear to be an endemic feature of governance of tourism in Greece (Andriotis, 2002; Papageorgiou, 2017).

2.3 Resilience in Tourism

2.3.1 Approaches to Resilience in Tourism Research

Resilience as a research topic in tourism systems started gaining momentum in the late 2000s. Resilience is broadly defined as the ability of a system or network to withstand or absorb change, and either maintain or rapidly restore most function, structure, and identity (Walker et al. 2004). The concept of resilience was first developed within an ecological context (Holling 1973), but has also been applied within a social-ecological context (Folke 2006) as well as within an engineering context (Woods 2006). From a tourism perspective there are three key viewpoints on resilience, with the engineering perspective viewing resilience as a matter of returning to original form following perturbation, ecological resilience as a matter of reorganizing following perturbation, and social-ecological resilience encompassing both adaptive and transformative resilience of coupled social-ecological systems (Folke 2006; Lew 2014).

Biggs et al. (2012) distinguished between ‘specified resilience’ (the resilience of particular components to particular disturbances) and ‘general resilience’ (overall adaptability to a range of unpredictable disturbances). While awareness of resilience in tourism has grown, there is a specific need to note that managers tend to overinvest in specified resilience while underinvesting in general resilience. General resilience in

particular, is critical in dealing with unknown unknowns, such as the COVID-19 global health issue that at time of writing, continues to impact travel to destinations. Much of what has transpired has exposed the limitations of destinations that have optimised for efficiency rather than adaptability (Hall et al., 2020).

2.3.2 Main Factors of Destination Resilience

Whilst case studies of more resilient versus less resilient tourism systems continue to have value, cross-cutting factors emerge. Moving from case studies to more generalised empirical observations is important for destination resilience. Biggs et al. (2012) conclude that economic diversification can reduce vulnerability of tourism-dependent communities. Diversification into tourism activity, or indeed diversification of tourism to include other sectors such as tourism and agriculture, could be relevant to sustainable tourism development in the Peloponnese, utilising the region’s rich agricultural production, notably high quality olive oil and wine.

While social capital has been previously identified as a determinant of community resilience in the face of natural disasters (Aldrich, 2012), there are also applications of social capital in tourism contexts (Prayag et al. 2013). While Bonding social capital may serve to encourage residents within homogeneous groups to assist each other before formal emergency relief teams arrive, it is Bridging social capital, comprised of links to heterogeneous actors that facilitates collaborative partnerships and organised post disaster reconstruction initiatives that seek to build more sustainable livelihoods, thus transforming the system as a whole (Adger, 2003).

2.3.3 Destinations’ adaptation and recovery capacities

Destinations’ adaptation and recovery capacities are not fixed but are influenced by several determinants. Understanding the determinants of tourism destination resilience requires an analysis of the interaction of the key structural factors influencing resilience—destination life cycle stage, tourism products and tourism dependence—and governance factors—quality of stakeholder relations, destination management organisation performance, public-private collaboration—and the impact of individual and collective human agency. Case studies and observations from a range of tourism destinations world-wide, demonstrate mature, diverse destinations will continue to command strong demand even in times of crises due to their established market position, including large tourism service providers. In contrast, emerging destinations with limited governance capacity and

a mono-product tourism-based economy are more likely to see a decline in tourism demand (Wang & Ritchie, 2012).

A growing body of research has highlighted the leadership at organisational and community level during such times. Crisis leadership is presented as strategic change management, characterised by proactive communication, engagement of diverse stakeholders to achieve recovery goals and even taking advantage of opportunities to reposition the organisation during the disturbance caused by a negative shock (Wooten & James, 2008; Wang & Ritchie, 2012).

2.4 Crisis Management and COVID-19 in Tourism

2.4.1 Theoretical Approaches to Crisis and Risk Management in Tourism

Crisis and risk management have become increasingly important areas of research within tourism studies, particularly due to the growing frequency and intensity of global crises affecting tourism systems. Existing research on tourism crises and disasters has largely been driven by major international events and real-world disruptions. Ritchie (2004) argued that health-related crises are particularly damaging to tourism because they directly affect travellers' perceptions of safety and mobility. Similarly, Pforr (2006) emphasized that several tourism studies failed to adequately address the broader dimensions of travel-related crises and their long-term implications. In response to these limitations, more holistic approaches to tourism crisis management have emerged, focusing not only on crisis response but also on strategic planning, stakeholder management, and destination recovery. One of the most influential frameworks is the disaster management model proposed by Faulkner (2001), which conceptualizes crises as a process consisting of three interconnected phases: the pre-disaster phase, the during-disaster phase, and the post-disaster recovery phase.

Within tourism literature, an important distinction has been made between “crises” and “disasters” (Prideaux et al., 2003; Scott et al., 2008). Crises are generally associated with internal organizational or managerial failures, whereas disasters are external events that occur beyond the control of tourism organizations and destinations. The COVID-19 pandemic represents one of the most severe external disasters experienced by modern tourism systems. However, the degree and pace of tourism decline varied significantly across destinations, depending on a range of internal factors such as tourism dependence,

governance capacity, destination diversification, and crisis preparedness (Gössling et al., 2021).

Although considerable attention has traditionally focused on communication strategies during crises, more recent research highlights the importance of organizational learning and the lessons destinations can derive from crises in order to improve future preparedness and resilience. In this context, the present study examines whether the Peloponnese region has been able to learn from the unprecedented COVID-19 crisis and whether such learning has resulted in long-term structural transformations rather than temporary adjustments (Gössling et al., 2021).

2.4.2 Socioeconomic and Operational Impacts of COVID-19 on Tourism

The COVID-19 pandemic had severe socioeconomic and operational consequences for the global tourism industry. International tourism experienced an unprecedented decline, with global tourist arrivals decreasing by 74%, from 1.5 billion arrivals in 2019 to approximately 400 million in 2020 (UNWTO, 2021). As a result, tourism's contribution to global GDP declined significantly, while the hospitality and food service sectors experienced substantial financial losses, permanent business closures, widespread unemployment, and major disruptions to tourism supply chains (Gössling et al., 2021; OECD, 2020).

The tourism sector in Greece was also heavily affected by the pandemic. According to INSETTE (2021), Greece experienced a 76% reduction in tourism flows during 2020, with tourist arrivals declining from 31 million visitors in 2019 to only 7.4 million in 2020. These losses corresponded to an estimated economic loss of approximately EUR 12.6 billion. The impacts of the crisis, however, were not evenly distributed across the regions of the Peloponnese. Coastal destinations heavily dependent on international package tourism experienced the greatest economic losses, whereas inland destinations oriented toward cultural, nature-based, and alternative tourism demonstrated comparatively greater resilience (INSETTE, 2021).

At the same time, providers of alternative tourism activities, including hiking guides, agrotourism hosts, and cultural tourism enterprises, demonstrated a relatively positive adaptation to the conditions created by the lockdown period by redirecting their services

toward domestic tourism demand. This adaptation highlights the importance of flexibility, diversification, and local market orientation in strengthening tourism resilience during crises.

The COVID-19 pandemic also accelerated significant operational transformations within the tourism industry. Health and hygiene protocols, visitor capacity restrictions, and contactless services became essential components of tourism operations during the pandemic period. Furthermore, digital technologies acquired a central role in maintaining tourism activity during travel restrictions. Online booking platforms, virtual tourism experiences, and social media marketing emerged as important tools for communication and customer engagement during the crisis. In this context, the ability of tourism businesses to utilize digital infrastructure and develop relevant technological skills became a critical determinant of organizational performance and post-crisis recovery. Businesses capable of rapidly adopting digital tools and flexible operational practices were generally better positioned to adapt to changing market conditions and maintain competitiveness during the recovery period (INSETE, 2021).

2.5 Sustainable and Alternative Tourism Practices

2.5.1 Principles and Policies of Sustainable Tourism

Tourism policies at international, national, and regional levels are increasingly shaped by the principles of sustainable tourism development. The concept of sustainable tourism originates from the broader framework of sustainable development, which was formally introduced in the report of the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED), commonly known as the Brundtland Report (1987). The report established the three fundamental pillars of sustainable development: economic sustainability, social sustainability, and environmental sustainability.

Bramwell and Lane (1993) identified a wide range of policy instruments associated with sustainable tourism development, including environmental carrying capacity assessments, eco-certification schemes, visitor management plans, benefit-sharing mechanisms for local communities, and environmentally responsible investments in tourism infrastructure and services. More recently, sustainable tourism policies have also been strongly influenced by European Union initiatives, including the European Green Deal and

the Tourism Transition Pathway (2022), as well as by the sustainable development objectives guiding the allocation of European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) for regional development in Greece.

Despite the increasing prominence of sustainable tourism policies, significant criticism has emerged regarding the gap between the theoretical objectives of sustainability and the practical realities of tourism development. Sharpley (2009) argues that tourism development often continues to prioritize economic growth over broader sustainability objectives. As a result, sustainable tourism practices may be implemented selectively and fail to address the full economic, social, and environmental dimensions of sustainability. In some cases, sustainability initiatives may even function as forms of “greenwashing” that primarily serve marketing purposes rather than producing meaningful long-term benefits for local communities and stakeholders (Wheeler, 1993; Buckley, 2012).

2.5.2 Alternative Tourism Modalities: Ecotourism, Cultural Tourism, and Agrotourism

Alternative forms of tourism, including ecotourism, cultural tourism, agrotourism, health tourism, and gastronomy tourism, have increasingly been promoted within tourism literature as mechanisms for sustainable tourism diversification. These alternative tourism modalities can contribute to reducing the pressures associated with mass tourism while simultaneously extending the tourism season and supporting regional development (Weaver, 2006; Richards & Wilson, 2006).

Ecotourism is generally defined as responsible travel to natural or semi-natural areas that promotes environmental conservation, ecological education, cultural exchange, and sustainable interaction with local communities and ecosystems. Ecotourism emphasizes environmental protection, community participation, and investment in local development. In the Peloponnese, ecotourism development could capitalize on the region’s diverse natural landscapes, including the Taygetos and Parnon mountain ranges, the Mani Peninsula, and the Laconian Gulf. However, international research demonstrates that successful and sustainable ecotourism development requires several important conditions, including effective governance, trained and knowledgeable guides, assessments of environmental

carrying capacity, and the equitable distribution of tourism benefits to local communities (Tsartas et al., 2014; Iliopoulou-Georgudaki et al., 2010).

Agrotourism represents another important alternative tourism strategy, particularly for rural regions characterized by strong agricultural identities and traditional local products. In the Peloponnese, agrotourism experiences are closely connected to agricultural production, gastronomy, local culture, and community life. Tourism products are often based on primary production activities involving olive oil, wine, figs, and Kalamata olives, thereby creating unique, place-specific, and non-standardized tourism experiences. (Tsartas et al., 2014; Iliopoulou-Georgudaki et al., 2010)

Nevertheless, the development of agrotourism in the region faces several structural challenges. Previous studies (Tsartas et al., 2014; Iliopoulou-Georgudaki et al., 2010) identify problems such as fragmented agricultural land ownership, limited marketing resources and tools, and the general institutional weaknesses of rural areas. Addressing these challenges is essential for enhancing the long-term sustainability and competitiveness of agrotourism development in the Peloponnese. (Tsartas et al., 2014; Iliopoulou-Georgudaki et al., 2010)

3. Tourism in the Peloponnese

This chapter explores tourism in the Peloponnese with a dual purpose: first, to establish the empirical foundation for the analysis in Chapter 4, and second, to clarify the main challenges connected to the research questions. The evidence discussed in this chapter highlights four key issues of analytical importance.

First, the strong seasonality of tourism and the uneven geographical concentration of tourist activity contribute to structural economic vulnerability, which is directly related to RQ1 and RQ3. Second, tourism governance in the region is divided among multiple public, private, and civil society actors, without a unified coordinating body. This fragmentation is particularly relevant to RQ2 and RQ5.

Third, although the Peloponnese has important natural and cultural resources, the implementation of sustainable and alternative tourism practices remains uneven, a point connected to RQ4. Fourth, the COVID-19 crisis affected sub-regions and categories of tourism operators in different ways, producing varied recovery patterns that relate to RQ3 and RQ4. Together, these four challenges shape the stakeholder analysis and the proposed responses developed in Chapter 4.

3.1 Overview of the Region

The Peloponnese is one of the largest geographical regions of Greece, covering an area of approximately 21,379 square kilometres. Administratively, the region includes the prefectures of Argolis, Arcadia, Corinthia, Laconia, and Messinia, as well as important urban centres such as Nafplion and Sparta. According to ELSTAT (2021), the total population of the region is estimated at approximately 575,000 inhabitants.

The Peloponnese constitutes a destination of significant historical, cultural, and environmental importance. Its historical heritage extends from prehistoric civilizations to the Byzantine period, while several sites within the region have been designated as UNESCO World Heritage Sites, including Mycenae, Epidaurus, and the medieval city of Mystras. In addition to its cultural wealth, the region is characterized by extensive agricultural activity, traditional settlements, and diverse natural landscapes. The production

of olive oil, Kalamata olives, Corinthian currants, wine, and figs represents an important component of the regional economy and cultural identity.

Over the last two decades, tourism has developed into a major contributor to the regional economy. Significant investments have been made in tourism infrastructure, particularly in coastal destinations, while efforts have also focused on the development of cultural, heritage, and nature-based tourism products. Furthermore, tourism development strategies in the region have increasingly attempted to respond to the growing demand for authentic and meaningful tourism experiences linked to local culture, gastronomy, and natural heritage.

According to INSETTE (2021), total overnight stays in the Peloponnese reached approximately 2.5 million in 2019, with international visitors accounting for nearly 40% of total overnight stays. Nevertheless, one of the major challenges facing the region remains the relatively short duration of visitor stays and lower average tourist expenditure compared to other established island destinations in Greece. Consequently, regional tourism policies have increasingly emphasized tourism product diversification and quality upgrading as mechanisms for enhancing competitiveness and sustainability.

3.2 Key Tourism Destinations and Attractions

The Peloponnese offers a diverse range of tourism products and attractions, with cultural tourism and short-break tourism representing some of the region’s most significant tourism segments. Nafplion, the first capital of modern Greece, is considered one of the region’s most important tourism destinations due to its historical architecture, cultural heritage, and strong tourism identity. Nearby, the archaeological site of Epidaurus hosts one of the most renowned ancient theatres in Greece and serves as the venue for the annual Athens-Epidaurus Festival.

Another internationally recognized attraction is Ancient Olympia, the birthplace of the Olympic Games and one of Greece’s most visited archaeological sites. Despite attracting visitors throughout the year, the broader area faces limitations related to accommodation capacity and supporting tourism infrastructure.

In Messinia, the development of Costa Navarino represents one of the most important large-scale tourism investments in Greece. The destination combines luxury tourism, premium accommodation, sports facilities, and sustainable tourism principles, offering an alternative to overcrowded mass tourism destinations in the country.

At the same time, alternative forms of tourism have gradually expanded throughout the region. The Mani Peninsula, characterized by its tower houses, traditional settlements, and rugged natural landscapes, has increasingly attracted cultural tourists and visitors seeking “off-the-beaten-track” experiences. Similarly, the Taygetos and Parnon mountain ranges have become important destinations for hiking and outdoor tourism. The development of the Peloponnese Trails network, extending over 2,000 kilometres, has further strengthened the region’s position as a destination for nature-based and adventure tourism.

3.3 Tourism Statistics and Economic Impact

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, tourism represented a major pillar of the regional economy in the Peloponnese. According to INSETE (2020), tourism activity generated approximately EUR 1.1 billion annually, accounting for nearly 18% of the regional GDP. The region offered more than 100,000 accommodation beds and directly supported approximately 25,000 jobs within the hospitality sector, in addition to around 15,000 indirect jobs in related sectors such as restaurants, retail trade, museums, travel agencies, and cultural sites.

Table 1: Peloponnese Pre-COVID (2019)- COVID-19 Impact (2020)

Indicator	Pre-COVID 2019	COVID-19 Impact 2020
Tourism Revenue	EUR 1.1 billion (INSETE, 2020)	~EUR 0.3 billion est. (INSETE, 2021)
Overnight Stays	~2.5 million (INSETE, 2021)	~0.7 million (–72%) (INSETE, 2021)
International Arrivals	~40% of overnights (INSETE, 2021)	Near zero due to travel restrictions
Direct Employment	~25,000 hospitality jobs (INSETE, 2020)	–35–40% seasonal jobs (ELSTAT, 2021)
Accommodation Capacity	>100,000 beds (INSETE, 2020)	Utilisation dropped below 20%
Regional GDP Share	~18% of regional GDP (INSETE, 2020)	Severely contracted

Despite the economic significance of tourism, the region faces important structural challenges associated with sustainable tourism development. One of the most significant challenges is tourism seasonality, as approximately 65% of overnight stays occur during the summer months between June and September. This high concentration of tourism demand

creates difficulties related to year-round employment, business sustainability, and the efficient utilization of tourism infrastructure during the off-season period.

The COVID-19 pandemic had a severe impact on the tourism economy of the Peloponnese. According to INSETE (2021), overnight stays declined by approximately 72% in 2020, while hotel revenues decreased by nearly EUR 800 million. However, the post-pandemic recovery has been uneven across destinations and tourism segments. Domestic tourism recovered more rapidly than international tourism, while smaller destinations oriented toward alternative tourism experienced a faster recovery compared to destinations heavily dependent on international package tourism.

By 2023, overnight stays had recovered to approximately 90% of 2019 levels. In addition, higher average visitor expenditure indicated a shift toward higher-spending tourism segments, suggesting changes in the composition and characteristics of tourism demand in the region (ETC, 2023).

3.4 Main Stakeholders in Peloponnese Tourism

3.4.1 Identifying Key Tourism Stakeholders in the Region

The various stakeholders of the tourism system of the Peloponnese interact in complex ways, often competing or cooperating at the same time. They belong to the three levels of the social space, i.e. public, private and civil society. The stakeholders are distinguished into three categories of categories of stakeholders in terms of salience according to Mitchell et al. (1997). Stakeholders of definitive power (M1), i.e. stakeholders of tourism of the Region of the Peloponnese, major tourist operators, including the Ministry of Tourism of Greece, stakeholders of expectant power (M2), i.e. municipal authorities and organisations of tourism, trade associations and NGOs and stakeholders of latent power (M3), i.e. local communities, individual farmers, owners of small accommodations etc.

Table 2: Stakeholders in Peloponnese Tourism

Category of Stakeholder	Key Actors	Primary Role	Salience
Public Sector	Region of Peloponnese, Municipalities, GNTA, Ministry of Tourism	Strategy, funding, regulation	Definitive

Private Sector	TEMES S.A. (Costa Navarino), Hotel chains, Tour operators, SETE, POX	Investment, product development, market access	Definitive
Private Sector (SMEs)	Family hotels, agrotourism units, restaurants, guides, artisans	Service delivery, local employment, cultural experience	Expectant
NGOs / Environmental	WWF Greece, Paths of Greece, Goulandris Museum, MIO-ECSDE	Sustainability advocacy, trail management, monitoring	Expectant
Local Communities	Residents, farmers, fishers, cultural associations, LEADER LAGs	Co-production, cultural identity, social resilience	Latent

3.4.2 Public Authorities (Region, Municipalities)

The Region of the Peloponnese is the second level of administration in Greece and is responsible for the planning of tourism in the region, investments in tourism infrastructure and the application of the national tourism policy at a regional level. The Region also has its own organisation responsible for tourism promotion and advertising throughout the region. Municipalities also have a role to play in areas such as destination management, visitor information points and control of tourist enterprises. Kalamata, Nafplion, Sparta and Corinth municipalities are most involved in this area.

Governance of tourism in Greece is impeded by a fragmentation of authority across levels of government and organisational boundaries. Decisions about access to sites of cultural importance are made by the Central Archaeological Council (CAD), while agricultural tourism is regulated by the Ministry of Rural Development and Food, ecotourism and natural environmental protected areas are managed by the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change, and national policies for tourism are set by the General Secretariat for Tourism Policy. Past assessments of tourism governance in Greece have documented instances of poor co-ordination among these governmental actors (OECD, 2014; Papageorgiou, 2017).

3.4.3 Private Sector (Hotels, Travel Agencies, Alternative Tourism Operators)

All tourism activities in the Peloponnese region are conducted by the private sector; almost all hotels and tourist establishments are run by thousands of small family run hotels,

guesthouses and agrotourism properties as well as by large international tourist resort operators. The private sector tourism associations are actively involved in consultations with Government and other public bodies and include the Hellenic Hoteliers Federation (POX), the Association of Greek Tourism Enterprises (SETE) and the region's Chambers of Commerce and Industry.

Although the large number of SMEs (over 95%) in tourism in the region hampers quality management, marketing and crisis management at enterprise level, at the same time tourism reinforces the social dimension through embedding it into local communities and offering authentic and customised quality experiences to quality seeking visitors. The digital revolution has levelled the competitive playing field making it easier for small tourism operators to access the market partly because they do not have large budgets to invest in marketing (Papageorgiou, 2017).

3.4.4 NGOs and Environmental Observatories

In addition to local government, a number of NGOs and community organisations exist at national level operating in the region of Peloponnese in areas related to tourism such as environment and culture. Some of these organisations promote sustainable tourism and have been involved in the debate over the sustainability of tourism at national level through the Mediterranean Information Office for Environment, Culture and Sustainable Development (MIO-ECSDE) network. At regional level, a number of environmental observatories have been established through the EU Life and Interreg programmes to monitor a variety of indicators linked to tourism carrying capacity. Also operating in the region are a number of national and local organisations and groups such as WWF Greece, the Goulandris Natural History Museum and a variety of local environmental and cultural groups (Papageorgiou, 2017).

3.4.5 Local Communities and Residents

Tourism beneficiaries, contributors and stakeholders are local communities and local residents. The attitudes of local people towards tourism development have been a subject of study in various destinations around the world including several Greek regions. Positive attitudes towards tourism development were found to prevail, especially among those directly dependent on it for their livelihood. On the other hand, concerns regarding

crowding, environmental degradation, higher prices and cultural homogenization were also reported. This special issue focuses on the attitudes and contributions of local residents, as well as other aspects related to quality tourism development in the Peloponnese region during the COVID-19 period, for whom tourism activities offer special benefits for the local economy. Local communities are eager to develop sustainable and community-oriented models of tourism (Papageorgiou, 2017).

3.5 Tourism Management and Strategy in the Peloponnese

3.5.1 How Tourism Strategies Operate in the Peloponnese

The Peloponnese Regional Tourism Strategy 2021–2027 constitutes a strategic plan designed to guide the future development of tourism within the Peloponnese region. In alignment with the Greek National Tourism Strategy and in order to satisfy the requirements of the EU Structural Funds, the Strategy seeks to support tourism development in the region through a series of strategic priorities. These priorities emphasise product diversification, quality tourism, the extension of the tourist season, and digital tourism through the development of cultural-tourism routes connecting UNESCO sites, Byzantine monuments, and monuments of the post-Byzantine era with gastronomy and agrotourism products and services associated with local produce. The strategy further proposes the development of outdoor tourism infrastructure, including hiking trails, cycling routes, and mountain refuges, in order to attract high-value international markets through targeted marketing initiatives and quality certification schemes (Tsartas et al., 2022).

The administrative and financial capacities of municipalities, together with the difficulty of attracting private-sector investment for less economically viable areas, continue to represent barriers to effective spatial planning for tourism. As previously highlighted, governance fragmentation across regions also affects the overall spatial tourism strategy. Regarding the implementation of new tourism infrastructure, the principal source of funding has been derived from EU structural funds, with the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) serving as the primary funding mechanism allocated to regional development in Greece. Although these funds have positively contributed to investment in critical areas of regional development, experience to date has produced mixed results and suggests that the requirements imposed on project managers concerning accountancy procedures, together

with the regulations governing the procurement of services and contracts, have in many cases resulted in delayed disbursement and slow implementation (Papageorgiou, 2017).

3.5.2 Existing Digital Tools Used for Tourism Promotion in the Peloponnese Region

The digital promotion of quality tourism products and services in the Peloponnese has evolved steadily in recent years. The regional tourism portal (visitpeloponnese.gr) functions as the official platform providing information regarding destinations, accommodation, tourism packages, and hiking itineraries for visitors to the region. This digital presence is further complemented and promoted through the official social media channels of the Peloponnese region. Furthermore, three archaeological sites—Mycenae, Olympia, and Nafplio’s Palamidi—can now be explored through virtual tours on Google Arts & Culture, following the restrictions imposed during the COVID-19 outbreak. In addition, a new digital platform, Peloponnese Trails, enables hikers to plan and navigate trekking and cycling routes throughout the region (Tsartas et al., 2022).

In terms of online booking systems and channel management technologies at the business level, large hotels and resorts tend to utilise advanced revenue management systems, whereas smaller hotels and tourism enterprises continue to rely primarily on direct sales and/or a single Online Travel Agency (OTA) channel. In relation to strengthening tourism competitiveness, the Digital Transformation Programme for Tourism, funded through the Greek Recovery and Resilience Plan (2021–2026), is currently underway. The programme aims to equip small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) with digital capabilities, including e-commerce competencies, digital marketing skills, and cybersecurity awareness. The rapid implementation of this programme is considered critical for the regeneration of tourism activity in the post-pandemic period (Papageorgiou, 2017).

3.6 Resilience of the Peloponnese Tourism Sector

3.6.1 Local Resilience Practices in the Peloponnese

Several resilience practices have been identified within the Peloponnese tourism system. Some practices relate to addressing “shocks” or “negative extreme events,” whereas others involve longer-term structural transformations. One practice that exemplifies resilience-building is the development of multi-day trekking routes, such as the long-distance Peloponnese Trails (E4 extension) and the network of routes included within the Taygetos

Trails initiative. This practice may also prove relevant to other Greek regions, particularly those characterised by mountainous terrain and significant cultural and natural heritage resources. The transferability of this practice demonstrates its potential to increase tourism during the off-season, attract visitors who remain longer and spend more, while simultaneously generating lower environmental impacts and benefiting municipalities not traditionally associated with tourism activity. However, the effectiveness of this practice depends significantly upon appropriate governance structures and maintenance capacity (Tsartas et al., 2022).

Food tourism also possesses the capacity to strengthen the regional tourism product by highlighting olive oil estates open to visitors, wine tourism routes, including the Nemea wine region, and gastronomy festivals. Furthermore, the adoption of online booking systems by small accommodation providers, which accelerated during the COVID-19 period, has continued to function as a transferable resilience practice. Certain practices based upon the region’s comparative advantages—including its culture and geography, such as the tower-houses in Mani, Byzantine monuments in Mystras, and Kalamata olive groves—are inherently non-transferable. Nevertheless, the broader model of integrating built heritage into tourism activities may provide valuable lessons for other regions.

3.6.2 How Local Tourism Businesses Maintain Resilience

Although resilience at the individual business level has not been extensively studied within the Peloponnese context, the strategies employed by small enterprises during periods of crisis have been explored in tourism literature by researchers including Dahles and Susilowati (2015) and Orchiston et al. (2016). Within small tourism enterprises, cost flexibility is frequently demonstrated through seasonal staffing arrangements and shared services, while product flexibility is commonly reflected in reduced operating hours and the diversification of products and services, including accommodation, activities, and food services. While some smaller operators in the region have adopted such practices, the more commercially adaptive businesses have additionally developed alternative accommodation options such as glamping and expanded their range of activities and food services.

The literature further highlights the significance of customer relationship management and the development of loyal domestic repeat-visitor markets, often achieved through personalised services and direct communication with customers. Within the context of the Peloponnese, agrotourism operators possessing a strong domestic customer base were able

to recover more rapidly to pre-pandemic activity levels compared with operators dependent upon overseas intermediaries. Moreover, several agrotourism operators utilised the lockdown period to successfully expand direct-to-consumer food product sales, thereby diversifying income streams and strengthening their food-tourism brand identity (Tsartas et al., 2022).

3.6.3 Environmental Resilience

Environmental resilience within the tourism sector of the Peloponnese region is supported through a broad range of measures, including regulations, EU-funded projects, and programmes related to environmental management and tourism sustainability, as well as voluntary sustainability initiatives undertaken by tourism operators. A significant proportion of the Peloponnese is included within the Natura 2000 network of protected areas, which provides habitats for numerous endemic species while simultaneously limiting environmental development pressures in ecologically sensitive areas. Several initiatives that have obtained sustainability certification are promoted to tourists as environmentally responsible tourism products and services, meeting clearly established environmental standards through schemes such as the Blue Flag beach certification and the Ecolabel programme.

Water scarcity associated with climate change represents an emerging challenge for environmental resilience in several areas of the Peloponnese. Furthermore, waste management, particularly during the peak summer season, continues to constitute a significant issue in many tourist destinations throughout the region. From a long-term perspective, visitor management strategies and carrying-capacity approaches will remain essential for preserving the key environmental assets that support the region’s dominant tourism sector.

3.7 Regional Crisis Impacts and Recovery Pathways

3.7.1 Regional Consequences of COVID-19

The impact of the COVID-19 outbreak on tourism within the Peloponnese was both significant and unevenly distributed across destinations. The spring lockdown coincided with the pre-season tourism period, resulting in the loss of an important revenue-generating

phase. However, following the partial lifting of restrictions in June 2020, a limited summer tourism season emerged, focused almost entirely on domestic tourism in accessible tourist destinations and cultural sites. Consequently, certain areas, such as the coastal regions of Argolid, experienced comparatively smaller losses than usual, whereas destinations more dependent on international tourism markets, including Porto Heli and the Navarino area, suffered considerably greater economic losses.

Although tourism in Greece managed to recover relatively quickly from the initial two-month lockdown and reopen during May and June 2020, the pandemic nevertheless generated substantial social and economic consequences, particularly concerning employment within the tourism and hospitality sectors. According to several studies (ELSTAT, 2021), the reduction in tourism-related employment during the peak seasonal months was estimated at approximately 35–40% in the regions most heavily dependent on seasonal hospitality employment. In addition, many farmers and rural producers experienced income losses associated with the contraction of the food-tourism market. Furthermore, managers and employees within tourism enterprises faced considerable stress and uncertainty due to the rapidly changing conditions created by the pandemic.

At the same time, the transition to the so-called “new normal” encouraged regional stakeholders and local authorities to reconsider existing tourism development models and discuss alternative approaches, including sustainable tourism, community-based tourism, and low-density quality tourism. These approaches have increasingly appeared within recent strategic planning documents and public consultations conducted since late 2020.

3.7.2 Local Policy Responses and Support Measures in the Peloponnese

Local policy responses addressing the COVID-19 outbreak in the Peloponnese region were implemented alongside broader national government measures and were specifically adapted to local conditions and needs. National initiatives such as “SYN-ERGASIA,” the short-work scheme providing wage subsidies for reduced-hours employees, the temporary suspension of tourism enterprise taxation during the outbreak period, and liquidity support measures through state-backed guaranteed loans formed the central framework of the policy response. These measures were further reinforced through approximately EUR 150 million

in grants allocated to different sectors of the tourism industry as part of the national government’s broader EUR 3 billion tourism support programme.

In order to strengthen communication and support for local tourism businesses, the Peloponnese Regional Authority collaborated closely with municipalities across the region to inform local enterprises about support programmes offered by the Ministry of National Economy and Competitiveness Reform (MNCR) and to develop promotional campaigns targeting the domestic tourism market, particularly residents of Attica and Thessaloniki seeking accessible outdoor tourism destinations.

In response to the increased demand for outdoor tourism activities during the post-pandemic period, regional authorities accelerated the implementation and completion of infrastructure projects related to outdoor tourism, including trail signposting, the renovation and upgrading of mountain refuges, and the promotion of cycling routes throughout the region.

3.8 Alternative Tourism in the Peloponnese

3.8.1 Alternative Tourism in the Region

Alternative forms of tourism have been increasingly developed throughout the Greek region of the Peloponnese. Although a variety of alternative tourism activities exist within the region, cultural tourism appears to offer the greatest potential for future growth, due to the large concentration of archaeological sites and medieval towns such as Mycenae, Epidaurus, and Olympia, which attract significant numbers of day visitors. Nevertheless, ensuring the long-term sustainable management of archaeological landscapes and sites containing important cultural heritage assets presents a complex range of challenges associated with visitor-flow management, site interpretation, and overall governance of heritage destinations.

3.8.2 Eco-Friendly Tourism Practices in the Peloponnese

Numerous tourism operators and tourism-related enterprises in the Peloponnese have adopted sustainable practices within their tourism activities. These practices include environmentally sustainable initiatives such as the use of solar energy, water and energy recycling systems in accommodation facilities, the use of organic and locally produced food in restaurants, as well as the organisation of environmental, cultural, and educational activities including hiking and nature-based experiences.

At the destination level, sustainable tourism practices include beach clean-up initiatives, the management of invasive species within Natura 2000 protected areas, and the promotion of tourism through low-carbon mobility strategies.

Within this framework, the INTERREG Mediterranean Sustainable Tourism project has contributed to strengthening the capacity of small family-run accommodation businesses in several municipalities of the Peloponnese to adopt sustainable tourism practices. The project has provided tourism accommodation providers with practical sustainability guidelines aimed at improving the environmental performance of tourism activities and enhancing waste-management practices.

3.8.3 Rural Tourism through Local Products

The incorporation of local agricultural produce into tourism activities represents one of the most distinctive and economically beneficial approaches for promoting local products and tourism services within the Peloponnese. Tourism experiences such as the Kalamata olive oil route, the Nemea wine trail, the fig-drying centres in Messinia, and the herb-gathering trails in Mani encourage visitors to engage with local traditions and products in a sustainable manner, while simultaneously supporting agricultural activity and local food producers. These tourism products and activities have been systematically organised and promoted for several years under the “Visit Peloponnese” brand, with the support of the Region of Peloponnese and the Greek National Tourism Organisation (GNTO/EOT).

4. Stakeholder Actions for Enhancing Resilience Measures and Sustainable Tourism Development in the Peloponnese Region

4.1 Current Actions by Stakeholders

4.1.1 Public Sector Actions (Regional Authorities, Municipalities)

Regional and local authorities throughout the Greek region of the Peloponnese have implemented a range of initiatives since the outbreak of COVID-19. The Region of the Peloponnese expanded and upgraded sections of the Peloponnese Trails walking and cycling network, while also improving and managing mountain refuges located in the remote and mountainous areas of Taygetos. In addition, several kilometres of new cycling routes connecting heritage sites and major cultural landmarks were developed. These initiatives form part of a broader regional strategy aimed at extending the tourism season and distributing tourism activity more evenly across the region, in response to emerging tourist preferences for outdoor tourism activities (Ansell & Gash, 2008).

Additional improvements have included visitor-oriented services such as directional signage, public-use spaces with free Wi-Fi access, waste-management infrastructure, and the consistent enforcement of environmental protection, public safety, and crowd-management regulations. Several municipalities have also participated in the EU Smart Tourism Destinations initiative and have developed digital governance solutions for monitoring tourist flows and evaluating tourism impacts. Nevertheless, inter-administrative coordination between central administration and municipalities remains problematic. According to programme evaluations conducted in the Region of the Peloponnese (2022), overlapping actions, contradictory objectives, and implementation delays continue to affect governance efficiency (OECD, 2014).

4.1.2 Private Sector Actions (Hotels, Tour Operators, Businesses)

Within the tourism sector of the Peloponnese, private-sector stakeholders have responded to the post-COVID environment through product, operational, and market-related innovations. Hotel owners and management teams have invested significantly in upgrading

outdoor facilities and services, including terraces, outdoor recreational spaces, beach bars, and restaurants, while simultaneously adopting contactless services and digital technologies in order to comply with health and hygiene protocols. Many larger hotels have additionally adopted sustainability policies and obtained relevant environmental certifications. As a result, tourism enterprises are increasingly equipped to respond to growing market demand for environmentally sustainable tourism services, including hotels certified under schemes such as TripAdvisor GreenLeaders, Travelife, and Green Key.

In response to evolving post-pandemic tourism trends, several tour operators have developed new tourism products based on heritage tourism, gastronomy, and nature-based experiences within the Peloponnese, targeting premium international markets such as Germany, France, and the United Kingdom. Furthermore, local producers and artisans—including olive oil estates, wineries, and producers of textiles, leather goods, and woodcrafts—have increasingly introduced tourism experiences centred upon their products and services. These initiatives not only generate tourism revenue but also contribute to strengthening brand visibility within international markets.

4.1.3 Community and NGO Involvement

Community organisations and non-governmental tourism stakeholders maintain an informal yet significant presence within the region. Numerous cultural associations contribute to the preservation of local traditions and the promotion of cultural heritage through music and dance groups. At the same time, environmental NGOs actively engage with issues related to tourism carrying capacity, the expansion of marine protected areas, and the integration of environmental priorities into tourism planning and subsidy programmes (Gosling et al., 2021).

Several community-based tourism projects have also been developed in villages across Mani and Arcadia, where local residents have collectively organised the development and management of tourism products and services at the village level. Such sustainable tourism models require continued institutional support in order to achieve long-term economic sustainability. Many of these projects have received support through the Greek National

LEADER rural development programme, which finances local action groups across rural regions of Greece (Gosling et al., 2021).

4.1.4 Partnership Between Public and Private Sectors

Public-private governance within the tourism sector of the Peloponnese is implemented through various forms of public-private partnerships (PPPs), including formal agreements such as the management arrangement between the Messinia Regional Unit and TEMES S.A. concerning Costa Navarino, as well as informal collaborations involving destination marketing, event organisation, and quality-management initiatives. The Peloponnese Tourism Cluster functions as a strategic tourism-planning body supported by the European Union and includes both public and private tourism stakeholders, including regional authorities, the Greek National Tourism Organisation (GNTO), and tourism trade associations. The objective of this collaboration is to strengthen coordination and facilitate the development of common tourism policies and strategic priorities (Ansell & Gash, 2008).

The establishment of successful tourism partnerships between public authorities and private operators depends upon factors identified within collaborative governance theory, including previous experience of cooperation, the distribution of power and incentives, and the effectiveness of facilitative leadership. Within the Peloponnese, the shared experience of the COVID-19 crisis contributed to increased trust-building between public and private stakeholders and encouraged unusually high levels of cooperation that continued into the recovery period (Ansell & Gash, 2008).

4.2 Effectiveness of Strategies During COVID-19

4.2.1 Health and Safety Measures

Health and safety protocols were implemented throughout the Peloponnese tourism region in accordance with national guidelines established by the Greek Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Tourism in collaboration with the Hellenic National Public Health Organisation

(EODY). These measures included limitations on the number of guests in tourist accommodations, the mandatory use of face masks in public and indoor spaces, enhanced sanitation procedures in hotels, accommodation rentals, and restaurants, as well as requirements for foreign tourists entering Greece to present medical certification prior to arrival. Compliance with these regulations was monitored by the Hellenic Food Safety Authority (EFET) and regional public-health inspectorates (Gosling et al., 2021).

Gosling, Lockhart, Karagianni, and Gosling (2021) examined the effectiveness of several measures adopted internationally to control the spread of COVID-19. Their findings indicate mixed evidence due to difficulties in attributing cases directly to tourism activities and the rapidly changing recommendations issued by health authorities. Particular attention was given to the rapid implementation of the Passenger Locator Form (PLF) digital health system in Greece. Despite the initial impact of the pandemic, Greece succeeded in relaunching tourism during the summer seasons of 2020 and 2021 to a greater extent than many competing European destinations. The study therefore highlights the significance of the PLF system and related public-health measures in supporting the recovery of tourism activity in Greece.

4.3 Evaluation of Resilience Measures

4.3.1 Economic Resilience

As part of the broader effort to strengthen economic resilience in the Peloponnese, national financial support programmes, including wage subsidies, tax relief measures, and business grants, were utilised to support tourism-related enterprises. Collaboration with farmers and fishers also encouraged income diversification through value-added activities associated with food tourism, as well as the development of higher-value tourism products, including premium accommodation, gastronomy, and cultural experiences. The financial assistance provided contributed significantly to maintaining the operation of many tourism businesses within destinations across the region (Hellenic Ministry of Finance, 2022). Nevertheless, concerns remain regarding the increasing dependence of businesses on short-term financial support measures, while deeper structural weaknesses within the regional economy may not have been adequately addressed.

The extension of the tourism season through the development of outdoor tourism activities in certain parts of the region has contributed, although to a limited extent, to enhancing economic resilience against the effects of extreme seasonality. While the tourism season for activities such as hiking and cultural tourism has been extended by approximately two to three months, tourism activity nevertheless remains concentrated primarily within the summer period. Furthermore, winter tourism development in mountainous areas continues to be constrained by insufficient infrastructure and limited tourism products.

4.3.2 Social Resilience

The strengthening of social resilience within the tourism sector of the Peloponnese is considered essential, as it relates to the ability of local communities to preserve social cohesion, social capital, and shared values in times of crisis. Social resilience is also necessary for ensuring the equitable distribution of tourism-related benefits and costs, as well as for safeguarding the social and cultural practices that form the foundation of the region's tourism products and services.

The COVID-19 pandemic exposed significant social vulnerabilities, including employment insecurity, increased pressure on local communities, and the deterioration of livelihoods among populations heavily dependent upon tourism activity. At the same time, however, the pandemic highlighted the importance of social-capital assets, including formal and informal support networks among small-scale tourism operators, as well as the economic buffering role played by agricultural households during periods of crisis. Most importantly, the crisis demonstrated the strong sense of place within local communities and their capacity to adapt to changing conditions while continuing to invest in the tourism sector.

Community participation in tourism recovery planning was facilitated by municipalities and regional authorities through participatory meetings and consultation processes within local communities. Nevertheless, substantial differences continue to exist regarding the influence exercised by different stakeholder groups within the governance landscape. Large public and private actors maintain dominant formal governance positions, while the broader

tourism stakeholder community has not yet fully utilised the social resilience potential available within the region.

4.3.3 Environmental Resilience

The evaluation of environmental resilience indicators within the Peloponnese reveals mixed outcomes. The temporary decline in tourism flows during the 2020–2021 period reduced pressure on natural environments, cultural landscapes, and archaeological heritage sites, while also encouraging reflection regarding post-pandemic destination-management strategies. However, the rapid recovery of tourism flows during 2022 across most areas of the region limited opportunities for governance systems to introduce and implement more transformative and environmentally sensitive management approaches for highly visited coastal areas, natural landscapes, historic sites, and archaeological destinations.

Despite persistent challenges, significant progress has been observed among several large tourism enterprises regarding the adoption of renewable-energy practices. In addition, beach-cleaning operations are being implemented more consistently, while ecotourism initiatives within Natura 2000 protected areas are increasingly being supported through visitor-management plans. Awareness concerning climate-change adaptation has also increased substantially, particularly regarding the impacts of rising temperatures, water scarcity, and extreme weather events on natural heritage and tourism enterprises. Nevertheless, there remains considerable scope for improving the translation of environmental awareness into practical implementation measures.

4.3.4 Lessons Learned: What Worked Well and What Did Not

The resilience experience of the Peloponnese during the COVID-19 pandemic provides valuable lessons for destination-management organisations and tourism stakeholders. In order to mitigate potential losses, tourism enterprises within the region rapidly redirected their focus towards the domestic tourism market. At the same time, tourism businesses accelerated the adoption of digital technologies in order to reduce dependence on intermediaries and establish more direct communication with customers. Furthermore,

investments in hiking trails and nature-based tourism products proved particularly important in responding to the increased post-pandemic demand for outdoor activities. The gradual reopening of international tourism markets was additionally supported through the implementation of the Passenger Locator Form (PLF) system and phased travel-management strategies.

However, several interventions failed to produce the intended outcomes or generated unintended negative consequences. Financial support measures were not always distributed efficiently across tourism sub-sectors, while inadequate coordination among key governance actors led to duplicated efforts and missed opportunities for collaboration. In addition, off-season tourism product development remained insufficiently addressed. Consequently, opportunities to further extend agricultural production and marketing seasons, particularly for local food products and vegetables, were not fully realised.

4.4 Sustainable Tourism Projects in the Peloponnese

4.4.1 Hiking Trails: Peloponnese Trails and Taygetos Trails

The Peloponnese Trails project involves the development and signposting of more than 2,200 kilometres of interconnected hiking routes across the Peloponnese peninsula. These trails connect scenic landscapes, areas of natural beauty, cultural heritage sites, traditional villages, and tourism services designed for hikers. The project represents one of the most extensive trail networks in Greece and has benefited from highly successful public–private–NGO partnerships. Financial support has been provided by the Peloponnese Regional Authority, local municipalities, the Greek National Tourism Organisation (GNTO), and private sponsors. The trails are maintained and managed by networks of trained local guides. As domestic and international hiking tourism continues to grow rapidly, the trail network has generated new and steadily increasing income opportunities for rural communities across the region.

The Taygetos Trail constitutes a recently developed multi-day hiking route extending across the Taygetos mountain range from Sparta to Kalamata. The trail aims to function as a premium long-distance trekking destination capable of attracting high-value visitors while

simultaneously encouraging the distribution of tourism expenditure towards economically marginalised mountain communities. Nevertheless, the long-term success of the project depends upon continued investment in maintenance and effective governance structures.

4.4.2 Eco and Agrotourism Projects

Integrated eco-agrotourism initiatives have been developed in several areas of the Peloponnese, offering accommodation within restored stone farmhouses, tower houses, and historic monasteries. These tourism experiences provide visitors with opportunities to participate in agricultural activities, explore rural lifestyles and traditions, sample local products and gastronomy, and engage in guided outdoor activities such as hiking, cycling, boating, and horse riding.

The LEADER programme has contributed financial support for the development of such projects in regions including Arcadia, Laconia, and Messinia, while also assisting small rural entrepreneurs through networking and marketing initiatives.

The Navarino Environmental Observatory (NEO) represents an additional important initiative dedicated to environmental monitoring and sustainability research. NEO was established through collaboration between TEMES S.A., the University of Athens, and the Stockholm Environment Institute. Research conducted by NEO addresses issues including destination sustainability management, the environmental impacts of tourism activity, and the role of tourism enterprises in supporting sustainability beyond legal compliance and standard environmental management practices. In addition, NEO investigates the impacts of climate change on olive groves, rural ecosystems, marine and freshwater systems, and coastal and mountain environments within the Navarino Bay region.

4.4.3 Local Communities and Small Business Involvement

Local communities and small businesses have actively participated in sustainable tourism development initiatives throughout the Peloponnese through mechanisms such as LEADER Local Action Groups, which allocate EU rural-development funding through local governance structures responsible for selecting and financing projects. Additional initiatives include the Peloponnese Tourism Cluster, which enables small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to cooperate in marketing and quality-management activities across a wide range of tourism products and services, as well as the Visit Peloponnese certification scheme, which promotes quality and sustainable tourism products. Municipal visitor-information centres additionally support local businesses by directing tourists towards relevant services and experiences.

Community participation possesses considerable potential to support sustainable tourism development. However, the creation of long-term community engagement requires sustained capacity-building support, equitable benefit-sharing mechanisms, and effective governance structures. Existing research demonstrates that meaningful community involvement contributes positively to sustainable tourism development where appropriate institutional support and facilitative leadership are present. Conversely, in the absence of such support, community participation tends to remain limited and superficial.

4.4.4 Monitoring and Improving Sustainability Results

The monitoring of tourism sustainability outcomes within the Peloponnese relies primarily upon data derived from the ELSTAT tourism statistics system, hotel occupancy surveys conducted by the Greek National Tourism Organisation (GNTO), and sectoral reports published by INSETE and the European Travel Commission (ETC). Economic indicators of tourism, including arrivals, overnight stays, tourism expenditure, and employment levels, are currently monitored more comprehensively than social and environmental indicators.

The Regional Tourism Strategy 2021–2027 aims to address this imbalance through the development of a more integrated destination-monitoring framework. Although progress has been relatively slow, positive developments have been observed. Significant challenges nevertheless remain, particularly regarding administrative capacity and the absence of a

specialised authority responsible for sustainability monitoring within regional governance structures. The municipalities of Nafplion and Kalamata are developing monitoring systems with substantial future potential for broader regional implementation. In parallel, the European Union has introduced a Tourism Dashboard currently being piloted across several European destinations. With appropriate localisation and adaptation, such a tool could also be implemented effectively within the Peloponnese region.

4.5 Stakeholder Collaboration

4.5.1 Importance of Trust and Communication

The COVID-19 crisis highlighted the critical importance of trust and open communication within stakeholder collaboration processes. The rapid and effective communication of national and regional health and safety protocols to key stakeholders through digital media, press announcements, and trade-association meetings contributed to high levels of compliance and strengthened the credibility of the Greek tourism sector within major international tourism markets during the reopening phase following the crisis. Conversely, ambiguity and delays concerning the communication of border-reopening conditions generated uncertainty and led to booking cancellations that ultimately failed to materialise into tourism demand. Consequently, tourism destinations were prevented from fully mitigating the negative impacts of the crisis.

Despite historically low levels of trust between public authorities and private tourism operators within the Greek tourism governance system—largely resulting from excessive administrative burdens, uneven enforcement of regulations, and perceived preferential treatment toward large tourism enterprises—the extraordinary circumstances created by the pandemic encouraged unusually high levels of dialogue and cooperation among stakeholders. One of the principal challenges in the post-pandemic period will therefore involve preserving the trust developed during the crisis rather than returning to fragmented and competitive approaches once normal conditions are restored.

4.5.2 Roles and Coordination

Case studies from the Peloponnese and comparable tourism destinations demonstrate the importance of clearly defined roles and effective coordination mechanisms within collaborative governance systems. Ambiguity regarding responsibilities, monitoring procedures, compliance mechanisms, and official destination representation generates inefficiencies, free-riding behaviour, and stakeholder dissatisfaction.

Several strategic documents, including the Regional Strategic Plan for Tourism 2014–2020, have proposed governance models intended to improve role clarity within tourism governance structures in the Peloponnese. These proposals, together with earlier work conducted by the Regional Authority of the Peloponnese, support the creation of a strong regional Destination Management Organisation (DMO) equipped with adequate staffing and financial resources, improved cooperation between regional government and municipalities, and tourism boards jointly funded by public and private stakeholders operating under transparent rules concerning decision-making, membership, and accountability. Although certain aspects of these governance models have been implemented, further progress has often been restricted by limited financial resources and resistance to organisational change.

4.5.3 Advantages of Collaboration

Despite existing governance weaknesses, several successful examples of multi-stakeholder collaboration within the tourism sector of the Peloponnese deserve recognition. One notable example is the Paths of Greece trail network, an NGO-led initiative supported financially by both public authorities and private-sector stakeholders. Another successful collaborative model is the gastronomy and culinary tourism strategy developed by the Municipality of Kalamata in cooperation with the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Messinia, agricultural and food-production enterprises, and regional tourism businesses. This sustainable tourism model has already achieved national recognition and generated significant tourism and economic benefits for both the agricultural sector and tourism enterprises within the region.

Furthermore, the national Passenger Locator Form (PLF) system introduced during the COVID-19 crisis operated through regional coordination mechanisms involving public-health authorities, tourism-related businesses, regional stakeholders, and the Greek National Tourism Organisation (GNTO). These collaborative governance examples illustrate effective stakeholder cooperation characterised by shared objectives, balanced participation, transparency, and facilitative leadership focused on collective public benefit rather than individual self-interest.

4.6 Recommendations for Future Crises

The following four recommendations are directly derived from the evidence and findings presented in Sections 4.1–4.5. The governance fragmentation identified in Sections 4.1 and 4.5 supports Recommendation 4.6.2, which focuses on institutional cooperation. The inequalities in digital capabilities discussed in Section 4.2.2 provide the basis for Recommendation 4.6.3. The finding that environmentally friendly tourism funding produced more durable recovery benefits than traditional mass-market approaches, as shown in Section 4.3, supports Recommendation 4.6.4. Finally, the absence of a pre-existing regional crisis management plan, which clearly limited coordination at the beginning of 2020, directly supports Recommendation 4.6.1. Each recommendation therefore responds to a specific weakness identified in the analysis.

4.6.1 Develop Clear and Coordinated Crisis Management Plans

All tourism destinations within the Peloponnese should develop comprehensive destination-wide crisis-management plans clearly outlining stakeholder roles and responsibilities, communication procedures, and resource-allocation mechanisms. Such plans should incorporate lessons derived from the COVID-19 crisis of 2020–2021 while also addressing additional forms of crisis, including heatwaves, flooding, wildfires, cyber-attacks, and geopolitical disruptions affecting major tourism source markets. The Peloponnese Regional Authority should coordinate this process in cooperation with the Greek National Tourism Organisation (GNTO), local authorities, trade associations, and civil-society organisations.

Integrating crisis-management planning into broader business and destination-management strategies, while periodically testing these plans through scenario exercises, is essential for ensuring that crisis-management frameworks remain relevant and operational. In particular, communication planning—including identifying responsible spokespersons, target audiences, communication methods, and communication frequency—represents a critical factor influencing stakeholder coordination and public perceptions during periods of crisis. Consequently, crisis-management planning should form an integral component of long-term strategic planning rather than being addressed through ad hoc measures.

4.6.2 Strengthen and Better Coordinate Tourism Organisations

At present, tourism governance within the region is characterised by fragmented institutional structures that, despite performing individual functions effectively, do not sufficiently support the implementation of integrated tourism strategies and policies. This fragmentation additionally limits the participation of a broader range of stakeholders who could otherwise contribute to the adaptability and resilience of the tourism sector. One potential solution would involve the establishment of a Regional Tourism Management Organisation equipped with clearly defined responsibilities, professionally trained personnel, and stable long-term funding.

In the short term, tourism governance could be improved through enhanced coordination among existing organisations by means of joint strategic planning, shared information systems, and cross-sectoral dialogue mechanisms. Considerable experience from comparable tourism destinations demonstrates the effectiveness of regional tourism governance models that could potentially be adapted to the Greek context. Examples include the Andalusia Tourism public enterprise responsible for tourism marketing and promotion in Andalusia, as well as the regional tourism organisations operating in South Tyrol and Rhône-Alpes (OECD, 2014).

In addition to the creation of a DMO, two further coordination mechanisms are proposed. The first is the introduction of a standardised coordination protocol between municipalities and academic bodies. This protocol should require regular joint planning meetings among

the seven Peloponnese interdisciplinary units and should be accompanied by a shared online platform for tracking key performance indicators, such as overnight stays, seasonality index, average visitor spending, and selected environmental metrics.

The second mechanism is the establishment of a permanent interdisciplinary Tourism Advisory Board. This board should consist of appointed representatives from public organisations, large and small tourism businesses, educational institutions, environmental NGOs, and local community bodies. Its role should be to review destination marketing strategies on an annual basis and provide binding recommendations to the DMO.

These mechanisms respond directly to the three governance gaps identified in Section 4.5: the absence of a unified destination voice, unclear authority in crisis response, and the limited participation of smaller stakeholders in strategic decision-making.

4.6.3 Invest in Digital Tools and Skills Development

In order to capitalise on the accelerated digital transformation of tourism resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, continued investment in both physical and human digital infrastructure is required. This objective may be achieved through the development of an integrated regional Destination Management System (DMS) connecting physical and digital tourism infrastructure and incorporating functionalities such as accommodation booking systems, visitor information services, and sustainability-management tools.

Furthermore, existing digital-skills training programmes for SME tourism operators should be expanded in order to strengthen competencies related to social-media marketing, data analytics, and online reputation management. Regional tourism-governance bodies should also develop mechanisms enabling access to tourism-related data currently controlled by private digital tourism platforms.

Investment priorities linked to tourism growth and employment are already included within the Greek Recovery and Resilience Plan. However, the effective implementation and monitoring of these investments remain essential, together with targeted capacity-building initiatives aimed at supporting less digitally prepared operators. Digital transformation

policies should avoid reinforcing inequalities that favour large tourism enterprises possessing advanced digital capabilities at the expense of smaller family-run businesses that constitute the core of the regional tourism economy.

4.6.4 Promote Sustainable and Resilient Tourism Models

The recommendations presented above form part of a broader strategy aimed at developing tourism models that are environmentally, socially, and economically sustainable. The COVID-19 pandemic exposed the vulnerability of tourism models primarily focused on quantitative growth and short-term economic gains through the maximisation of visitor numbers. In contrast, the Peloponnese, with its rich natural and cultural heritage, diverse agricultural production, and strong social identity, possesses the potential to become a model of sustainable, high-quality, and long-term tourism development within the Mediterranean region.

The successful realisation of this potential requires consistent governance reforms, improvements in tourism-product quality, enhanced sustainability performance, and the accurate promotion of the region’s authentic values to emerging tourism markets interested in responsible and sustainable travel experiences. Tourism development within the region should therefore align with broader European and international policy frameworks, including the European Green Deal, the European Tourism Transition Pathway, and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, while also taking advantage of the associated regulatory frameworks and funding opportunities.

5. Conclusions

5.1 Summary of Key Findings

This dissertation examined tourism resilience in the Peloponnese through the perspectives of stakeholder collaboration, crisis management, and sustainable tourism development. The study addressed five research questions concerning the transferability of resilience “best practices,” the effectiveness of collaborative governance models, the long-term structural effects of crisis adaptations, and the opportunities and trade-offs associated with stakeholder collaboration in tourism governance.

The case of the Peloponnese indicates that several resilience practices developed in the Peloponnese may be transferable to other regions of Greece. These include digital booking systems, tourism infrastructure related to outdoor activities, gastronomy-tourism initiatives, and multi-stakeholder governance platforms. Although heritage-based tourism products themselves cannot be replicated, the governance and marketing approaches associated with cultural, natural, and agricultural heritage may serve as valuable models for other destinations. Examples include the Mani tower houses, Kalamata olive-based gastronomy, and the concentration of Byzantine monuments across parts of the region.

The analysis relating to the second research question suggests that agro-gastronomy tourism collaboration models have achieved considerable success in destinations such as Kalamata and Messinia, while producing more limited outcomes in highly developed island destinations such as Santorini and Mykonos. This difference appears to be associated with the dominance of international mass tourism, the limited agricultural-production base, and conflicting stakeholder interests between mass-tourism operators and local actors promoting sustainable tourism development. These findings underline the importance of local governance structures, stakeholder relationships, and market characteristics in shaping the effectiveness of collaborative tourism models.

The findings concerning the third research question suggest that only some of the adaptations introduced during the COVID-19 period have become institutionalised as long-term structural changes capable of enhancing resilience. Certain practices—including digital booking systems, increased orientation toward domestic tourism markets, and investments in outdoor tourism products—have become partially embedded within the tourism system.

However, broader objectives such as reducing seasonal concentration and establishing comprehensive sustainability-monitoring systems remain ongoing challenges constrained by governance limitations and the persistence of existing incentive structures.

The analysis of the fourth research question suggests that stakeholder interests frequently diverge across tourism governance processes, creating persistent tensions in decision-making related to destination resilience. National tourism authorities, private-sector operators, sustainability-oriented NGOs, and local communities often pursue different priorities relating to economic growth, environmental sustainability, livelihoods, and cultural preservation. Consequently, destination governance systems must balance both efficiency and legitimacy in order to maintain effective collaboration among stakeholders.

Regarding the fifth research question, the findings suggest that broad and inclusive stakeholder participation enhances the legitimacy of governance decisions and improves knowledge-sharing processes by reducing the risk of governance capture. At the same time, however, wider participation increases coordination complexity, slows decision-making processes, and raises institutional costs. The findings therefore support the argument that an effective balance must be achieved between stakeholder inclusiveness, governance efficiency, and facilitative leadership.

5.2 Contributions to Tourism Management Literature

This dissertation contributes to the tourism management literature in several important ways. First, it examines resilience dynamics within a regional Mediterranean tourism destination that has received comparatively limited scholarly attention in contrast to more extensively researched island and urban tourism settings. Second, the study applies an integrated theoretical framework combining stakeholder theory, resilience perspectives, and crisis-management approaches in order to analyse destination governance challenges within the Peloponnese context. Third, the dissertation generates practical insights concerning the conditions under which collaborative governance models are more likely to succeed or fail, thereby contributing valuable knowledge for destination managers, policymakers, and tourism stakeholders.

5.3 Limitations of the Study

The study is subject to several limitations. Most significantly, the research relies predominantly upon secondary data sources and existing tourism literature. Consequently, the study is limited in its ability to explore stakeholder perceptions and governance dynamics in the depth that could be achieved through primary qualitative research methods.

In addition, there is a relatively limited body of empirical tourism research specifically focused on the Peloponnese region compared with other Greek tourism destinations. Furthermore, because the study was conducted during the ongoing post-pandemic recovery period, some findings may possess limited long-term relevance as tourism systems continue to evolve. Finally, although the study includes comparisons with other Greek destinations, particularly the Cyclades, its primary focus on the Peloponnese limits the extent to which the full diversity of tourism experiences across Greece can be captured.

5.4 Suggestions for Further Research

Several of the limitations identified in the present study could be addressed through future primary research. Future studies could utilise qualitative methods such as semi-structured interviews with tourism governance stakeholders, focus groups with local communities, and surveys examining visitor perceptions and behavioural patterns.

Longitudinal research investigating the long-term sustainability of post-COVID-19 tourism adaptations over periods of five to ten years would also represent a valuable area for further investigation. In addition, comparative research examining the Peloponnese alongside other Mediterranean tourism regions, including destinations in Spain, Italy, Croatia, and Turkey, could provide additional insights into the factors contributing to tourism resilience. Future research may also explore the role of digital governance technologies in destination sustainability monitoring through the use of big-data analytics derived from mobile devices, tourism platforms, and booking systems.

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