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## GASTRONOMY, TOURIST EXPERIENCE AND LOCATION. THE CASE OF THE 'GREEK BREAKFAST'

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*Although in previous decades gastronomy was not considered as an element that could attract tourists, nowadays it is being identified as a 'peak touristic' experience. It acts as a 'pull' factor and can create 'loyal' visitors, thus gastronomy has been used as a core marketing element in different destinations. Gastronomy tourism offers opportunities for communities to integrate tourism and local food systems in order to promote economic development and respond to the specific needs of visitors. It can also be viewed as a source of sustainable tourism which supports local producers and boosts local economies. The 'Greek Breakfast' project is an initiative of the Hellenic Chamber of Hotels, which focuses on the Greek culinary tradition and aims to promote the wealth and authenticity of local agricultural products and gastronomy by uniting hoteliers and local producers. This article aims to investigate the contribution of the use of local agricultural products in tourism as a way to strengthen the tourism sector, enrich tourist experience and promote both the local producers and the cultural tradition of a place. The results of the primary research into the effectiveness of the 'Greek Breakfast' in hotels reveal: a) the strong relationship between agricultural and tourism sector, b) the multiple influences of the use of local products on strengthening (cultural and economic) of local communities, and c) local gastronomy's contribution to the enrichment of tourist experience.*

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**Keywords:** *gastronomy tourism, local products, breakfast, tourist experience, hotels, Greece*



## INTRODUCTION

The connection between tourism and gastronomy is very strong. Not only tourists have to eat when they travel in order to cover their biological needs, but also gastronomy contributes to tourists' quality of experience, thus it can mark the overall travel experience. In 2007, the Travel Industry Association (TIA) emphasized the importance of gastronomy tourism, estimating that 17% of the leisure travel market or 27 million individuals engage in some form of gastronomy activity while travelling (Smith and Costello, 2009). There are a huge number of food-related activities that tourists can develop during their travel, such as: restaurant dining, food festivals, factory tours, farmer's markets, educational seminars, farm visits, etc., just to mention few of them.

Travel for the taste of food is represented in literature by several terms such as: food tourism, cuisine tourism, culinary tourism, gastronomy tourism, and taste tourism. It seems that gastronomy tourism is not easy to define, as a number of authors have attempted to give their own definition (Boniface, 2003; Hall and Mitchell, 2005; Ignatov and Smith, 2006). Even so, the common points between all conceptual approaches are two: first, gastronomic activities can be the primary but also the supporting motivation for travel, and second, gastronomic activities must be unique and memorable.

Etymologically, the word *gastronomy* is derived from Greek *gastros*, meaning stomach, and *gnomos*, knowledge or law. The classical definition of gastronomy is that it is the study of good eating (Scarpato, 2002). The term gastronomy tourism was first proposed in 1998 by Long to express that tourists can experience other cultures via food. By consuming, preparing and presenting food, tourists can actively construct their own unique experiences (Long, 2004). According to Wolf (2002), gastronomy tourism defined as “*travel in order to search for, and enjoy prepared food and drink.... unique and memorable gastronomic experiences*”.

Until recently, food as a tourist attraction was considered as a secondary resource. Currently, however, food tourism has been identified as a primary activity and forms a concrete segment of the tourism industry. As a result, many tourist destinations have begun to focus on their local food and cuisine as an important element and pull factor in the promotion of their destination (Kivela and Crofts, 2005).

On the contrary, in Greece that has an internationally known cuisine, gastronomy does not form a significant element of the Greek tourist product. The variety of dishes, the simplicity of cuisine techniques, the delicious flavors and the high nutrition value of raw materials, have put the Greek cuisine on the map of the most famous ones. Additionally, traditional agricultural products, such as olive oil, feta cheese, honey, yogurt, etc., have been adopted from others national or international cuisines. There are two main reasons why Greece has not yet exploited its gastronomic heritage: first, the unstable quality along the spectrum of the gastronomy providers, and second, the shortage of an effective promotional strategy focusing on the gastronomic wealth of Greece. Due to these weaknesses, Greece cannot compete in the field of gastronomy tourism with other destinations in the Mediterranean region which have used their national gastronomy to enrich the tourism product they supply.

The paper is divided into six parts. Following this introduction, section two presents a literature review on research related to the concept of gastronomy and its connection with tourism. Section three briefly presents the ‘Greek Breakfast’ initiative. Section four introduces the methodology of the research, while section five elaborates on the results, presenting both the demographic characteristics of the respondents and their perceptions regarding the ‘Greek Breakfast’ project. Finally, in section six the conclusions of the study are discussed.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

## **Gastronomy tourism: Models of tourist attitudes and Existential Authenticity**

Research over the past years has revealed an alteration in tourist demand trends. It seems that tourists that are not only interested in visiting significant cultural, historical and environmental sites but also in exploring a destination via new elements like gastronomic resources (Corigliano, 2002). Through the literature review, it seems that this ‘new’ connection between tourism and gastronomy is gaining ground, as it has been analyzed in different papers. A number of studies focuses on the relationship between culture and gastronomy (Chuang, 2009; Everett and Aitchison, 2008; Fields, 2002; Long, 2004; Scarpato, 2002). Another group of research examines gastronomy tourism as a niche market segment and its usefulness as a tool in destination marketing (Green and Dougherty, 2009; Hall, Mitchell and Sharples, 2003; Hashimoto and Telfer, 2006; Kivela and Crofts, 2005; Rand and Heath, 2005). Others researchers have analyzed the gastronomy as a pull factor for the attraction of tourists to a destination (Ad Karim and Chi, 2010; Bessiere, 1998; Green and Dougherty, 2009; Hall, Mitchell and Sharples, 2003; Hiller, Belhassen and Shani, 2013) or the gastronomy and its connection to agricultural products and rural areas (Everett and Aitchison, 2008; Lopez and Martin, 2006; Montanari and Staniscia, 2009; Torres, 2002). A significant part of the literature deals with the profile of gastronomy tourists and the tourism experience they ‘savor’ in a destination (Fields, 2002; Hjalager, 2003; Quan and Wang, 2004; Ignatov and Smith, 2006; Kivela and Crofts, 2006; Sims, 2009; Smith and Costello, 2009).

In this fourth dimension of the literature, a dilemma is raised. Some authors believe that all gastronomy tourists are the same: food consists for them either a necessity for their living or something deeper as a means of understanding the cultural and historical features of a region. On the other hand, based on tourist attitudes to food during their travel, some authors have

distinguished them into different groups (Fields, 2002; Hjalager, 2003; Quan and Wang, 2004; Kivela and Crofts, 2006). Fields (2002) categorizes tourists according to their culinary motive to those led by: a) **physical** drives, i.e. a desire to discover new tastes, b) **cultural** drives, i.e. a desire to learn about traditional local food, and c) **inter-personal** drives, i.e. a desire to visit fashionable restaurants.

Similarly, Hjalager (2003) has examined how tourist preferences for food influence their culinary tourism experience. The proposed model is composed of four categories of gastronomy tourists: (a) recreational, (b) existential, (c) diversionary, and (d) experimental gastronomy tourists.

The **existential** gastronomy tourists search for experiences that boost their knowledge about gastronomy. For such tourists food does not only cover their biological needs but mainly satisfies their desire to be in an authentic contact with the local cuisine and peasant food that has been prepared with respect to traditional recipes. For this reason, existential tourists are likely to be found in places where only locals gathered instead of a typical tourist restaurant.

In contrast, for the **experimental** gastronomy tourists, food is part of their lifestyle. At a destination they are attracted by the 'fashion' restaurants with innovative elements in the design, the menu, and the service. They are well informed about the current trends in food, ingredients and recipes, which they adopt as long as there are in fashion. Experimental tourists cannot be characterized by loyalty in food and eating habits. For these tourists gastronomy forms a part of their social image and prestige.

For **recreational** gastronomy tourists, food has not a crucial role when they visit a destination. Actually, they seek for familiar food and drinks as they offer them the safety of their home. They are not willing to taste foreign foods, except from those that are part of their everyday eating habits.

The main characteristic of **diversionary** gastronomy tourists is that they want to escape from the routine of everyday life

by cooking for the family. For this reason, they do not make any effort to try any special food when they are in vacations. The diversionary gastronomy tourists can be found in well-known chain restaurants or rustic places which offer an idyllic atmosphere for socializing with friends.

From the above analysis is obvious that for some tourists gastronomy is the vehicle to come into contact with the culture of a region and to establish a tie with its past, its traditional and its cultural heritage (Fields, 2002). These tourists are usually looking for authenticity in their lives, and more specifically the existential authenticity.

The existential authenticity as a concept derives from the philosophical tradition and deals with what it means to be human, to be oneself, to be happy (Steiner and Reisinger, 2006). Some aspects of the existential authenticity focus on self-identity, individuality, and meaning-making. Heidegger (1996), supports that existential authenticity is experience oriented, thus the existential self is not permanent, it changes from instant to instant. Consequently, we cannot characterize a person authentic or inauthentic all the time. People can only instantaneously be authentic in different situations. For this reason, the distinction between authentic and inauthentic tourists does not make sense. All tourists have can change from being authentic to being inauthentic.

When people project different identities they bring to light different possibilities which lead to different experiences. If people project themselves as ‘they-self’ they will have the same experience as anyone else. But if they project their authentic self ‘my-self’ they will have unique possibilities and a different tourist experience than other tourists. People forced by the conformity of the ordinary life, have the tense to ignore their own possibilities and adopt the common possibilities, thus making the experiences of just anyone rather than their own experiences. Tourism provides activities outside of everyday life, so it can bring to the surface our authentic identity (Steiner and Reisinger, 2006).

According to Heidegger (1996), authenticity has three characteristics: (a) mineness, meaning that individuals have possibilities of their own that are not shared with others, (b) resoluteness, referring to the courage it takes to make one's own possibilities, and (c) situation, referring to special experiences in which tourists find themselves in their unique place in the world, in a unique situation. Within the tourist experience framework, mineness includes a desire to understand the tourist experience by myself rather than to interpret it through others, for instance, tour guide's explanation. The resoluteness, connected with the desire to visit remote places, less popular to tourists, away from crowds. Authentic tourists would regard every experience as a unique situation valuable in itself (Steiner and Reisinger, 2006).

Gastronomy tourism and existential authenticity have a strong relationship. Some people, in order to find meaning in their lives and understand their selves, dig to the past. History gives people their possibilities, which define them. So, gastronomy as part of the heritage of a destination can be a fertile field for finding our place in the world. Gastronomy tourism includes unique activities which lack conformity, such as harvest fruits and tasting local ingredients, thus it offers rare experiences which permit our authentic self to be projected.

Gastronomy tourism is compatible with Heidegger's characteristics of authenticity. The gastronomy experience itself is not a common tourist activity but rather a unique situation. Additionally, tourists have the opportunity to understand by themselves what is going on with the tourist experience.

### **Contribution of Gastronomy Tourism at a Local Level**

According to Butler (1992), alternative tourism offers a number of presumed economic benefits to local hosting communities. Gastronomy tourism is an alternative form of tourism which offers opportunities to communities to integrate tourism and local food systems in order to promote economic

development, responding at the same time to the specific needs of customers/tourists such as the demand for quality food and dining experiences (Kivela and Crofts, 2006; Sims, 2009). As a result, tourist gastronomic experiences build on the cultural heritage of the region (Bessiere, 1998). This form of tourism is strongly correlated not only with the most of the other special or alternative forms of tourism (e.g. cultural tourism, agritourism, civic tourism, etc.), but also with the mass tourism. In addition, gastronomy tourism seems to have high positive impacts on local economy systems in several sectors such as farmers, retail establishments, restaurants, hotels, etc. (Green and Dougherty, 2009).

Many researchers have shown that gastronomy tourism can generate multiplier effects favorable not only for the tourism sector and the tourist destinations but also for tourists themselves (Bessiere, 1998; Everett and Aitchison, 2008; Green and Dougherty, 2009; Kivela and Crofts, 2006; Lopez and Martin, 2006; Quan and Wang, 2003; Sims, 2009; Tikkanen, 2007). In particular, the consumption of the local products and traditional food (culinary cuisine) can enrich tourist experience; provides knowledge about local culture, habits and nature, offers awareness about food/ products preparation or production, gives the opportunity to explore traditions and emphasizes the authenticity of the experience.

In addition, local food and drink products can improve via gastronomy tourism both the economic and social environment of tourism destinations (Torres, 2002). According to Hall, Mitchell and Sharples (2003), there are several practical components to a strategy for local development which can maximize economic and social leverage between producers and tourism industry, such as: reducing economic leakage by using local renewable resources rather than external sources, e.g. use local materials for packaging, recycling financial resources by buying local products and services. An example of the above are hotels and restaurants that purchase and promote local foods and wine or other beverages, use local banks and credit unions, thus adding value to local produce

before it is exported. Moreover, very important is the connection of local stakeholders, the network of confidence between local farmers' and producers' co-operatives, and the development of local marketing networks. In addition, significant element for economic and social reasons is the creation of an immediate relationship between the consumer/tourist and the local producers by selling direct to consumers via farm shops, e.g. by using cellar door or farm door sales, use newsletters, web sites and the Internet, direct mail or organizing local open markets, local events and food/wine festivals. The branding and promotional strategies need to emphasize local identity and authenticity, e.g. place of origin on the label of the products.

In many cases gastronomy tourism gives opportunities for new generations, e.g. jobs and new entrepreneurial ideas, and provides motivation to young people and women not to abandon the countryside (Canavari et al., 2011; Lopez and Martin, 2007). In this context, it provides the correlations and networks between local producers and suppliers and gives to farmers the ability to rethink their production activity taking into account their diversification into new markets and the opportunities to obtain an added value for their products by ensuring that local products and the production methods are not lost in the face of globalization (Mak et al., 2012). Also, food tourism offers an alternative means of local and regional development, with the potential to strengthen identity, encourage the regeneration of local heritage and traditions, enhance the appreciation of rural societies (Everett and Aitchison, 2008), and strengthen the relationships (emotional communication) between local communities and tourists.

Culinary cuisine can rejuvenate the tourism sector, as gastronomy products not only provide reinforcement to the special and alternative forms of tourism - especially to the cultural countryside forms such as: agritourism and mountain tourism - but can also enhance mass organized tourism through the diversification and the enrichment of the tourist experience with elements of local culture. In this way, gastronomy gives the

opportunity to some destinations to surpass the stagnation stage by commencing a new tourism activity (Kivela and Crofts, 2006).

### **Gastronomy Tourism and Sustainability**

Research has shown that gastronomy can connect to sustainable tourism on a number of levels. In particular, local food and drink products can improve the economic and environmental sustainability for the tourism sector and the host community by encouraging sustainable agricultural practices (supporting diversity and ecological practices), supporting local economy (reinforcing local producers in rural areas), improving social life of rural communities, the maintenance of environment and the survival of local communities. Thus, gastronomy helps a destination to build a 'brand' that can help the region by attracting more visitors and investment, and creating a unique/authentic visitor experience that can connect the consumer with the people and places involved in food production. According to Sims (2009: 322), "*By telling the 'story' of food production, it is possible to use the tourist desire for authenticity to encourage the development of products and services that will boost sustainability and promote rural regions to visitors and residents alike*". In this way, developing a thriving 'local' food industry can generate the kind of all-round benefits for hosts and guests that are sought as part of the drive to promote sustainable development.

Gastronomy tourism can also be central to the formation of regional identities, substantiating the theoretical link between identity and food (heterogenization, local consciousness, local culture), offers an alternative means of local and regional development with the potential to strengthen identity (Mak et al., 2012), enhances environmentally friendly practices, and encourages the regeneration of heritage and local economy. As demand for the 'distinctive' is growing, local produce has encouraged the renewal of traditional festivals, inspired the emergence of educational visitor attractions, reconnected

consumers with the countryside, inspired the retention and development of culinary and agricultural skills, and offered dying traditional industries and small businesses a lifeline. Furthermore, the local food consumption can also become part of the 'peak' experience (Quan and Wang, 2004) because it copes with visitors' demands for more authentic tourist experiences (Sims, 2009).

All in all, under certain circumstances gastronomy tourism can clearly contribute to environmental, economic and social sustainability.

## THE 'GREEK BREAKFAST' PROJECT

The 'Greek Breakfast' project (<http://greekbreakfast.gr/en>) that was initiated in 2010 is an initiative by the Hellenic Chamber of Hotels (HCH) and focuses on the Greek culinary tradition and aims to promote the wealth and authenticity of local agricultural products and gastronomy by uniting hoteliers and local producers. The chamber's vision for the 'Greek Breakfast' is to render it the connection between tourism, local communities and local produce. This connection is believed to have multiple positive social and economic impacts on the primary and tourism sectors.

Today, breakfast served by hotels in Greece falls mainly in the following three types: continental breakfast, English breakfast, and buffet style breakfast. These types of breakfast fail to differentiate hotels and regions in Greece providing tourists with the same standardized gastronomic experience. HCH's initiative aims to give to hotel guests the chance to experience the gastronomic wealth of Greece and to taste at their breakfast the innumerable Greek products and dishes. The 'Greek Breakfast' is a combination of 'Greek cuisine' - that is a part of the 'Mediterranean Diet' - and of the many local cuisines as reflected in Greek gastronomic destinations. The Mediterranean diet is not just a modern dietary trend but, according to UNESCO, the "*intangible cultural heritage of mankind*" (HCH, 2015). Towards that direction, the 'Greek Breakfast' will be a part of the Greek 'culinary diplomacy',

contributing to the authenticity of the destination and adding value to the hotel product. The aim is to satisfy the hotel customers through the acquaintance with the local products and local cuisine of every destination in Greece. This acquaintance will be gastronomic, but also cognitive and cultural.

The initiative brings together hoteliers, chefs, farmers, producers, representatives of chambers of commerce and local governments of Greek regions. The challenge is for them to agree on a 'local quality pact' that would lead to the adoption of the 'Greek Breakfast' philosophy by hotels. The 'local pact' is the organizational structure set up by HCH in every region of Greece, which seeks to bring together the goods, services, people and the accumulated knowledge of the places, with the aim of highlighting local gastronomy. The main objective of the pacts is the formation of the Local Portfolio of each region. The Local Area Portfolio is composed of tangible and intangible goods, and is enriched by the human resources of each site associated with gastronomy. All culinary data (culinary history, products, foods, recipes, producers, literature, culinary personalities, culinary myths) are recorded in an open information system. Twenty nine portfolios have been completed until today (October, 2015); those of East Macedonia, Thrace, North Eastern Aegean Islands (Lesvos, Limnos) Western Macedonia (West Macedonia, Imathia), Dodecanese (Astipalea, Kos, Patmos, Rhodes), Continental Greece (Epirus, Magnesia), Thessaloniki, Crete, Cyclades (Mykonos, Naxos, Santorini, Sifnos, Tinos, Folegandros), Aegean Islands (Aegina, Skiros), Ionian Islands (Corfu, Zakynthos, Lefkada), Peloponnese, Central Greece (Evia, Fokida), Halkidiki.

The choice of ingredients is designed according to the philosophy of the 'Greek Breakfast' in order to correspond to modern consumer trends in diet (Mediterranean diet, organic products, etc.), highlight the materials and recipes of each individual area as additional local features, and utilize the elements of each area's local culture that are related to the Greek origins and history. A key element in the selection of materials and products

for the 'Greek Breakfast' is representing in a significant percentage (not less than 50%) the productive and cultural identity of regions-destinations, creating both diversification and added-value for the destinations. The local, regional, national and Mediterranean identity and the origin of the materials form the central element and stigma of the 'Greek Breakfast'. Products that compose the 'Greek Breakfast' are to be chosen between specific premium Greek products, e.g. Protected Designation of Origin (PDO) products, Protected Geographical Indication (PGI) products, Traditional Specialties Guaranteed (TSG) products, traditional products and organic products.

The chamber aims to establish the 'Greek Breakfast' throughout all hotels of the country. Today, the project includes 561 hotels (of all classes) and 68 local producers (October, 2015).

## **METHODOLOGY**

The purpose of the research is to investigate the relationship between local gastronomy, tourism and local economy. The research objectives and questions concerned the examination of the contribution of the use of local cuisine and traditional agricultural products by hotel accommodations. This contribution has been analyzed from different points of view, such as: a) tourism enterprises, b) tourist destinations, and c) tourist experience.

The approach of the above objectives took place through a primary survey which aimed to record the perceptions of managers of hotel accommodations which have joined the project 'Greek Breakfast' of the Hellenic Chamber of Hotels, on the program's benefits both from the point of view of companies and destinations (direct estimation) and from the point of view of tourist experiences (indirect estimation).

The survey was conducted via a quantitative approach and for this reason the questionnaire was chosen as the most appropriate tool for data collection. The quantitative survey gives the opportunity to use common questions for all respondents, thus

enabling researchers to classify them and draw conclusions. Furthermore, the questionnaire as a research tool is characterized by high levels of reliability and validity, as researchers have limited influence to the respondents and do not affect their behavior (Bird et al, 1999).

A structured questionnaire was used for the collection of the data, which consisted of 25 questions, the vast majority of which in were close-ended ones (there was only one open-ended question). The questionnaire used a five-point Likert scale, dual and multiple choice questions, a nominal scale, etc., and was divided into four sections. The questions of the first section concerned the ‘Greek Breakfast’ project and its contribution to: a) hotel accommodations (image, promotion, cooperation, economic benefits, etc.), b) tourist destinations (at a cultural, economic, social and environmental level), and c) tourist experiences (enrichment, acquaintance with tradition, etc.). The next group of questions concerned the characteristics of the cooperation between hotels and local producers. The questions of the third section aimed to assess the acceptance of the program by tourists (clients of hotel enterprises) but also to provide a total evaluation of the program. The last section of the questionnaire included questions referred to the characteristics of the hotel enterprises.

The research sample included the total number of hotels which have joined the ‘Greek Breakfast’ project until the time period that the survey was conducted. This corresponds to 399 hotel accommodations (HCH, 2015). The questionnaire was sent by the authors to hotel accommodations via e-mail. At first, due to the nature of the survey (electronic transmission of questionnaire) a limited responsiveness was observed, thus the authors decided to resend the questionnaire. During the period March to May 2015 the questionnaire was sent to the respondents three times. Finally, a total number of 110 valid questionnaires were collected, which means a 27, 5% of the total population. Taking account of the nature and the difficulties of the survey, the percentage of the sample is considered as an acceptable one.

The collected data were statistically analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 22.0. The methodology adopted for the data processing, included:

- Descriptive statistic measures in order to outline the profile of the sample, the elements of the participation in the program, and the perceptions of the managers of the hotel accommodations of the benefits derived from the use of local cuisine products as part of the hotel product offered.
- Non-parametric statistic in order to investigate correlations between the characteristics of the sample and that of the ‘Greek Breakfast’.

## **FINDINGS**

### **Sample’s profile**

As mentioned above, a total of 110 questionnaires were collected. Table 1 presents the demographic information of the respondents. Out of the 110 hotels that participated in this survey, 22 hotels are 5-star hotels (20%), 37 hotels are 4-star ones (33.6%), 33 hotels are 3-star ones (30%), 16 hotels are 2-star one (14.5%), and just 2 of them are 1-star ones (1.8%). Consequently, hotels ranked to the upper classes are dominant in this survey. Furthermore, the vast majority (80%) of the hotels are operating as independent hotels rather than as chain hotels (20%). Concerning the type of hotels, more than half of the respondents (57.3%) are resort hotels, followed by city hotels (26.4%) and rural hotels (16.4%). Of particular interest is the data analysis on the number of beds. Specifically, almost half of the sample’s hotels (46.4%) are small units with 1 to 50 beds, while big units are a minority in this survey. In terms of operation period, the percentages are almost equally divided with 51.8% being ‘seasonal’ hotels and 48.2% being ‘all-year-round’ hotels. When studying the geographical distribution of the hotels, it comes to light that the highest percentages are noted at the Prefectures which comprise the

backbone of the ‘Greek tourism product’, i.e. South Aegean (21.8%) and Crete (17.3%). In the rest of the Prefectures the corresponding percentages are limited.

**Table 1** Respondent’s profile

		N	%
Classification	*	2	1.8
	**	16	14.5
	***	33	30.0
	****	37	33.6
	*****	22	20.0
Ownership	Chain hotel	22	20.0
	Independent hotel	88	80.0
Number of beds	1-50	51	46.4
	51-100	26	23.6
	101-200	14	12.7
	201-300	6	5.5
	301-500	7	6.4
	501+	6	5.5
Type	City hotel	29	26.4
	Resort hotel	63	57.3
	Rural hotel	18	16.4
Period of operation	All year	53	48.2
	Seasonal	57	51.8
Prefecture	Attica	7	6.4
	East Macedonia and Thrace	6	5.5
	North Aegean	4	3.6
	West Greece	5	4.5
	West Macedonia	4	3.6
	Epirus	7	6.4
	Thessaly	7	6.4
	Ionian Islands	6	5.5
	Central Macedonia	8	7.3
Crete	19	17.3	

	South Aegean	24	21.8
	Peloponnese	10	9.1
	Central Greece	3	2.7
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>110</b>	<b>100.0</b>

## **The Greek Breakfast**

The Hellenic Chamber of Hotels introduced the ‘Greek Breakfast’ project in 2010. The vast majority of hotels (70%) participating in this study launched the project during the years 2013 to 2014 (29.1% and 40.9% respectively). The rest of them joined in 2011 (8.2%), 2012 (5.5%) and 2015 (16.4%). Apart from the ‘Greek Breakfast’, other types of breakfast offered to hotels’ customers are mainly the ‘American Breakfast’ (54 hotels), followed by the ‘Continental Breakfast’ (49 hotels) and the ‘English Breakfast’ (17 hotels). A noteworthy point is that, while the majority of hotels offer more than one breakfast choices to their guests, 20 hotels are serving exclusively the ‘Greek Breakfast’. The majority of those 20 hotels are independent small units with a capacity of 1 to 50 beds. Additionally, the dominant breakfast serving method adapted by the hotels is the ‘buffet style’ (70.9%), while other methods such as ‘table d’hote’ and ‘a la carte’ record lower percentages (10% and 6.4% respectively). In most cases, the price of the breakfast is included in the room rate (74.5%). Only 7 hotels (6.4%) do not include the price of the breakfast in the room rate, while 19.1% of the hotels apply both pricing methods – leaving the choice to their guests. Within the framework of the ‘Greek Breakfast’, the products that hotels have included in their menu are special products with a strong connection to the place of their production, such as: Protected Designation of Origin (PDO) products (75 hotels), Protected Geographical Indication (PGI) products (58 hotels), Traditional Specialties Guaranteed (TSG) products (38 hotels) and finally organic products (49 hotels). From this point of view, it seems that one of the main goals of the

Hellenic Chamber of Hotels upon launching of the ‘Greek Breakfast’ project – that of highlighting the materials, products and recipes of each individual area and at the same time corresponding to modern consumer trends in diet (Mediterranean diet, organic products etc.) – has been achieved.

Subsequently, the participants were asked to indicate on a scale from 1 to 5 their perceptions regarding eighteen statements concerning the contribution and the benefits of the ‘Greek Breakfast’. It should be noted that all of these aspects constitute important objectives of the project, as these have been set out by the Chamber. Overall, the participants rated high most of those aspects. Specifically, 93.7% of the respondents found that the ‘Greek Breakfast’ contributed much or very much to the promotion of the local products and local cuisine of each region, 91.8% felt the same for the project’s contribution to the promotion and enhancement of the country’s culinary heritage and identity, 90.9% highlighted the contribution to the diversification and enrichment of the tourist product offered by the country, and 88.2% recognized the important contribution of the project to the exploitation of the cultural gastronomic wealth of Greece. Table 2 provides also the mean evaluation of the eighteen different aspects. It turned out, that –according to the respondents’ opinion- the lowest level of project’s contribution concerned the ‘job creation’, followed by the ‘acquaintance of producers and consumers’, and the ‘achievement of sustainable development’.

**Table 2** The level of contribution of the Greek Breakfast to various aspects

	Not at all	Slightly	Quite enough	Much	Very much	Mean	SD
Creation of a unique and authentic experience for visitors	0.0	2.7	12.7	30.9	53.6	4.35	0.808

Diversification and enrichment of the tourism product offered by the country	0.0	0.0	9.1	32.7	58.2	4.49	0.660
Promotion and enhancement of the country's culinary heritage and identity	0.0	0.0	8.2	30.0	61.8	4.54	0.645
Visits to production premises of local products and familiarization with traditional production method	0.9	1.8	23.6	31.8	41.8	4.12	0.896
Diversification and promotion of specific characteristics and competitive advantage of destinations	0.0	3.6	17.3	40.9	38.2	4.14	0.829
Promotion of local products and local cuisine of each region	0.9	0.0	5.5	26.4	67.3	4.59	0.681
Enhancement of local producers	0.0	2.7	14.5	29.1	53.6	4.34	0.827
Enhancement of local economy	0.9	3.6	19.1	29.1	47.3	4.18	0.930
Acquaintance of producers and consumers	4.5	12.7	29.1	33.6	20.0	3.52	1.090
Stimulation of links between	0.9	6.4	23.6	41.8	27.3	3.88	0.916

hotel businesses and local producers (collaboration between primary and tertiary sector)							
Preservation of traditional ways / processes of production	0.0	4.5	30.0	38.2	27.3	3.88	0.865
In the exploitation of the cultural gastronomic wealth of Greece	0.0	0.0	11.8	37.3	50.9	4.39	0.692
Change of tourism entrepreneurs' attitudes towards quality	0.0	1.8	11.8	34.5	51.8	4.36	0.763
Development of gastronomic tourism and other alternative forms of tourism	0.0	1.8	14.5	39.1	44.5	4.26	0.774
Achievement of sustainable development	0.9	4.5	35.5	38.2	20.9	3.74	0.874
Attraction of more qualitative tourists	0.9	11.8	22.7	34.5	30.0	3.81	1.027
Job creation	3.6	20.0	36.4	23.6	16.4	3.29	1.078
Promotion of a healthy and Mediterranean diet	0.9	1.8	16.4	35.5	45.5	4.23	0.853

The application of ANOVA to investigate the significant effects of the demographic characteristics of the responding hotels (classification, ownership, number of beds, type, period of operation, prefecture) on their ratings of the eighteen aspects of the contribution of the 'Greek Breakfast' (see Table 2), revealed some statistically significant effects in a number of cases. In particular, the *classification* appeared to have some influence on respondents' perceptions of the project's contribution to 'the diversification and enrichment of the tourism product offered by the country' ( $p=0.003$ ), 'the diversification and promotion of the specific characteristics and the competitive advantage of destinations' ( $p=0.037$ ), 'the development of gastronomic tourism and other alternative forms of tourism' ( $p=0.023$ ), 'the achievement of sustainable development' ( $p=0.020$ ), and 'the attraction of more qualitative tourists' ( $p=0.001$ ). In all cases, the managers of 5-star units tend to be more negative than the managers of lower rating hotels (1-star and 2-star). However, this finding is not very reliable because of the low representation of 1-star hotels in the sample (2 hotels). Moreover, the *ownership* seems to affect managers' perceptions of the contribution of the 'Greek Breakfast' to 'the enhancement of local producers' ( $p=0.001$ ), with the managers of chain hotels being more positive than the ones of independent hotels. The *type of hotel* (city, resort, rural) is another factor that appears to influence managers' feelings about the benefits of the 'Greek Breakfast', mainly regarding its contribution to 'the diversification and enrichment of the tourism product offered by the country' ( $p=0.049$ ), 'the enhancement of local producers' ( $p=0.016$ ), 'the exploitation of the cultural gastronomic wealth of Greece' ( $p=0.024$ ), 'the change of tourism entrepreneurs' attitudes towards quality' ( $p=0.015$ ), and 'the development of gastronomic tourism and other alternative forms of tourism' ( $p=0.026$ ). The managers of the resort hotels evaluated these aspects more positively than the managers of rural hotels, who differentiated slightly, whereas the managers of city hotels differentiated even further. Following that, some significant effects ( $p<0.05$ ) were

detected concerning the managers' perceptions of hotels with a different *period of operation* (all-year-round and seasonal). More specifically, the aspects with these significant effects are 'the diversification and enrichment of the tourism product offered by the country' ( $p=0.006$ ), 'the promotion and enhancement of the country's culinary heritage and identity' ( $p=0.011$ ), 'the promotion of the local products and local cuisine of each region' ( $p=0.010$ ), 'the enhancement of local producers' ( $p=0.006$ ), 'the enhancement of local economy' ( $p=0.000$ ), 'the acquaintance of producers and consumers' ( $p=0.036$ ), and last but not least 'the exploitation of the cultural gastronomic wealth of Greece' ( $p=0.002$ ). The managers of seasonal hotels rated these aspects more positively than the managers of the hotels operating all-year-round. Finally, significant effects ( $p=0.040$ ) were recorded in the perceptions of managers from hotels with different *numbers of rooms*, especially as regards the contribution of the 'Greek Breakfast' to 'the development of gastronomic tourism and other alternative forms of tourism'. It is interesting to say that the managers of very small hotels (1-50 rooms) and those of very large units (more than 300 rooms) are more positive towards this aspect than all the other managers representing hotel units with 51-300 rooms.

In the next question, the respondents were asked to evaluate the possible benefits for their hotels from the use of the 'Greek Breakfast' project on a scale from 1 (not important) to 5 (extremely important) (Table 3). In most cases, the perceptions of the managers seem to be quite restrained and neutral. They mention that the most important benefit from their participation in the project is the 'diversification and enrichment of the product they offer' (Mean=4.26), followed by the 'increased customer satisfaction' (Mean=4.23), and the 'improved image and reputation of their enterprise' (Mean=4.15). Other benefits that the respondents recognize as quite important or very important for their hotels are the 'promotion of their hotels through the Hellenic Chamber of Hotels' promotional actions (website, social media, exhibitions, etc.)' (Mean=3.93), the 'competitiveness

reinforcement' (Mean=3.89), the 'attraction of new customers of culinary interest' (Mean=3.58), the 'customer loyalty' (Mean=3.51) and the 'increased bookings' (Mean=3.25). On the other hand, it seems that they do not feel the same about the 'cost reduction' (Mean=2.46) and the 'creation of new partnerships with tour operators' (Mean=2.91), which they rate lower than the other aspects. However, some of the respondents mentioned that it is still early to evaluate the benefits, as they joined the project recently (2015) and for that reason they are cautious in their answers.

Moreover, some significant effects ( $p < 0.05$ ) were detected concerning the respondents' evaluation of various benefits for their hotels by their participation in the 'Greek Breakfast' project (Table 3). Specifically, 5-star units tend to be more negative regarding the 'increased bookings' ( $p = 0.000$ ) and 'customer loyalty' ( $p = 0.026$ ). Independent hotels rate the 'customer loyalty' ( $p = 0.042$ ) higher than chain hotels, while the opposite occurs in the 'attraction of new customers of culinary interest' ( $p = 0.038$ ). The number of rooms also appeared to have some influence on respondents' perceptions of the project's benefits for their hotels, namely 'increased bookings' ( $p = 0.048$ ), 'customer loyalty' ( $p = 0.001$ ), and 'better promotion through the Hellenic Chamber of Hotels' promotional actions' ( $p = 0.006$ ). With regard to 'increased bookings' and 'customer loyalty', all respondents consider these to be quite considerable benefits for their hotels. Nevertheless, it seems that in both cases the managers of the very small units (1-50 rooms) are the most positive (Mean=3.57 and Mean=3.92 respectively), in contrast to the managers of units with 201-300 rooms who have the most negative perceptions (Mean=2.50 in both cases). Furthermore, while all other respondents consider that they can benefit remarkably from the promotion of their hotels through the Chamber's promotional activities, the managers of the very large units of more than 500 rooms disagree (Mean=2.83). A significant difference ( $p = 0.044$ ) was also recorded in the perceptions of different types of hotels regarding the cost

reduction, with rural hotels being much more negative than resort hotels.

**Table 3** The benefits for the hotels from the Greek Breakfast project

	Not important	A little important	Quite important	Very important	Extremely important	Mean	SD
Competitiveness reinforcement	0.0	5.5	27.3	40.0	27.3	3.89	0.871
Image improvement and reputation creation for the enterprise	0.0	1.8	19.1	40.9	38.2	4.15	0.792
Diversification and enrichment of the hotel product offered	0.0	0.0	14.5	44.5	40.9	4.26	0.700
Increased bookings	1.8	20.9	43.6	17.3	16.4	3.25	1.027
Customer loyalty	1.8	16.4	32.7	27.3	21.8	3.51	1.064
Increased turnover	4.5	22.7	45.5	15.5	11.8	3.07	1.020
Cost reduction	26.4	29.1	24.5	11.8	8.2	2.46	1.232
Attract new customers of culinary interest	0.9	13.6	32.7	31.8	20.9	3.58	0.999
Increase customer satisfaction	0.0	1.8	13.6	44.5	40.0	4.23	0.750
Creation of new partnerships with tour operators	10.9	28.2	30.9	19.1	10.9	2.91	1.162
Better promotion of	1.8	10.9	18.2	30.9	38.2	3.93	1.081

the hotel through the promotional actions of the Hellenic Chamber of Hotels							
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### **Cooperation between hotels and local producers**

One of the major objectives of the ‘Greek Breakfast’ project, as it was set by their initiators, is the promotion of the wealth and authenticity of local agricultural products and gastronomy by uniting hoteliers and local producers. This connection is believed to have multiple positive social and economic impacts on the primary and tourism sector. In this section, the questions to the hotel managers focused on their cooperation with local producers. More than half of the participants (53.6%) argued that they cooperate with the local producers not only for the supply of the necessary raw materials for the ‘Greek Breakfast’, but also for the rest of their hotel’s food services. The participants were then asked to evaluate on a scale of 1 (unsatisfactory) to 5 (completely satisfactory) their cooperation with local producers. The majority of the hotel managers rated this relationship as ‘satisfactory’ or ‘completely satisfactory’ (mean=3.90, std. deviation=0.856). However, most of the participants reported that they face multiple problems in their cooperation with local producers. Such problems are the high prices of the products (reported by 64 hotels), less quantity than required (44 hotels), delivery times (28 hotels), product quality (12 hotels), and other cooperation problems (8 hotels). Only 14 respondents stated that they do not face any problem with local producers. Yet, it is quite interesting that many hotels (46.4%) reported that they their synergy with local producers has moved to the next level, as they cooperating with them for the improvement of the production process and the packaging of their products. Moreover, 47 respondents reported

that they have established in their hotels an exhibition of local agricultural products offered in their ‘Greek Breakfast’. That means that local producers significantly increase the chances of making their products known to visitors.

### **Acceptance of ‘Greek Breakfast’ from customers**

Another interesting subject that was investigated in this research is the level of acceptance of the ‘Greek Breakfast’ by hotel customers, as this will partly affect the success of the whole project. Impressively, the results are very promising as more than half (51.1%) of the sample’s 90 hotels which offer the ‘Greek Breakfast’ to their customers along with other types of breakfast (American, Continental and English) reported that the percentage of their customers who choose the ‘Greek Breakfast’ for their breakfast ranges from 76 to 100%. In 31.1% of the hotels this percentage ranges from 51 to 75%, while in 13.3% of the hotels the percentage falls and ranges from 26 to 50%. The smaller percentages (0-25%) are recorded only in 4.4% of the hotels (4 units). In addition, 56.4% of customers who tasted the ‘Greek Breakfast’ place it now as their first choice. Furthermore, the respondents stated that 73.6% of their clients expressed an interest to purchase products they tasted in the ‘Greek Breakfast’. In conclusion, we can see that on the one side the acceptance of the ‘Greek Breakfast’ among customers is high, and on the other side it has created a secondary demand for local agricultural products. In fact, local producers have earned a very effective ‘shop window’ for their products.

### **Success of the project and proposals for improvement**

In the last section of the survey, participants were asked to express their perceptions of, judgments, or feelings about the overall performance and success of the ‘Greek Breakfast’ project, based on their personal experience so far. It turned out that the majority of them (95.5%) agree that the project achieves its

objectives, as they have been set out by the Hellenic Chamber of Hotels. Nevertheless, while most of the respondents argue that the project is an excellent initiative, they also underlined some critical points where the project falls short. First of all, one main weakness of the project is identified in the control process. As one participant claims: *“There is a lack of control mechanisms. Some hotels joined the project for advertising purposes, without actually serving the ‘Greek breakfast’. There is a need for continuous monitoring and evaluation of the participating hotels”*. Another major problem of the project, reported by many of the respondents, concerns the promotion and advertising of the participating hotels and the overall project by the Hellenic Chamber of Hotels. They suggest that a greater emphasis should be put in the communication of the project to tourism markets abroad, tour operators, inbound and domestic tourists, in order to become an international recognizable brand. *“Nowadays, there is just a simple reference to the ‘Greek Breakfast’, which does not mean anything in the international culinary scene”*, as one of the participants stated. Towards that direction, it seems that there is a lack of synergy between the Hellenic Chamber of Hotels and the Greek National Tourism Organisation, according to another respondent. A third major problem highlighted by many of the participants in the survey is the cost of raw materials. *“It is imperative that suppliers (local producers) lower their prices in order to offer more Greek agricultural products in our breakfast, as we are fighting to keep our high quality standards in our services together with a low operational cost, offering our customers value for their money”* a manager argued. Another participant mentioned the need of a better synergy between suppliers (primary production) and hotels (tertiary production). *“Unfortunately suppliers are taking advantage of the demand for their products by refusing to cooperate in wholesale and preferring retail prices, and also they are not interested in ideas and suggestions of different presentation or packaging of their products in order to become more attractive, easier to carry and more competitive with those of other areas”* he

said. Other identified problems refer to the “*quite complicated process to join the project*” and the need for “*inclusion of the ‘Greek Breakfast’ in a broader culinary context, where the visitor except of the Greek breakfast has the ability to taste local dishes in the tavernas and restaurants, visit local producers, etc. in the nearby surrounding area of the hotel*”. Finally, a reference was also made to the lack of a legislative framework to strengthen the whole effort, as “*anything local or handmade is prohibited by the health service*”. “*There is an imperative need for an immediate change in the law by the Hellenic Food Authority, a pending issue that has existed since 2011*”, a participant commented.

Subsequently, respondents were asked to select among a number of suggestions, the ones they regard as crucial for the future success of the project. 83 of them agreed that the effective cooperation between all stakeholders involved (hoteliers, local producers, local authorities, chambers, local community, etc.) is very important. A good value for money from local producers is also important according to 77 respondents. Furthermore, 69 of them highlighted the need for extroversions and promotion of the project in international tourism markets (participation in exhibitions, conferences, web, etc.). According to 62 participants, the participation in the project by the majority of the Greek hotels is another crucial factor for the success of the project. In addition, 57 participants consider that it is important to educate (via training seminars) the staff working in breakfast about the products and their quality in order to highlight them during their contact to customers. 53 managers also believe that the Hellenic Chamber of Hotels should provide more incentives to convince hoteliers join the project. Finally, some further suggestions include the need for recognition of the project by tour operators, the need for implementation of more strict criteria for the selection of hotels that will participate in the project – “*what is the meaning of the Greek Breakfast in an ‘all inclusive’ hotel?*” a participant wondered – and finally, the need to highlight the Greek PDO / PGI

/ TSG products in Greek restaurants abroad in order to achieve a better branding.

## **CONCLUSION**

Eating is a necessity of life and as that an inextricable part of every holiday experience, in which every tourist takes part independently of their motives and tourist activities. Over the last few decades, food has become the ideal sign of tourism consumption. Typical/ authentic products of local cuisine act as pull factors, motivating tourists to visit a destination. For this reason, a number of regions use gastronomy as a crucial element of their tourism promotional strategy.

The findings of the survey confirm the evidence of previous researches that the development of gastronomy tourism can have significant benefits for both tourists and tourism destinations (Bessiere, 1998; Green and Dougherty, 2009; Kivela and Crofts, 2006; Quan and Wang, 2003; Sims, 2009). From the findings, it comes to light that gastronomy tourism as it embodied in 'Greek Breakfast' project, has a pivotal role to the creation of unique and authentic experiences. It offers to tourists the opportunity to savor traditional food, explore the culinary habits of the local people and increase their knowledge about local food products. In a sense, gastronomy permits tourists to take a glimpse of the past of a region and understand the tradition and its history in a better way. Thus, it can cultivate a strong cultural connection between hosts and guests. Visitors find themselves in a unique place, take part with all their senses in an exceptional – not an ordinary – tourist experience which marks their memories with local tastes. This process is crucial not only for the evaluation of the total tourist experience but also for the evaluation of our everyday life and the effort to find meaning in it (Steiner and Reisinger, 2006).

Moreover, the research revealed that the benefits from the 'Greek Breakfast' project are also crucial for tourist destinations.

For the economy of a destination, this means establishing a strong relationship between tourism and local agricultural production. Gastronomy tourism adds value to local products, supports local producers and encourages them to continue their traditional economic activities, connects local stakeholders, boosts the recycling of financial resources and reinforces the local economies. Moreover, it is obvious from the survey that gastronomy tourism constitutes a destination's competitive advantage, as it is a pull factor that increases both the number and the 'quality' of tourists. There are multiple benefits for tourism enterprises offering gastronomy tourism products and adopting practices like the 'Greek Breakfast' project. First of all, they can offer an enriched and diversified tourism product to their customers, which is a crucial factor for the increase of their satisfaction. Additionally, gastronomy tourism helps tourism enterprises to improve their image, develop a competitive advantage and expand their reputation as innovative and forward-thinking enterprises.

According to the vast majority of tourism enterprises which joined the 'Greek Breakfast', the project has achieved its main objectives. Still, efforts must be made to overcome some issues which slow down its effectiveness. The identified problems of the project are distinguished into two groups. The first one focuses on the relationship between hotels and local producers. As it seems, local producers were not ready to respond professionally to this new activity; as a result problems some problems were faced, which were related to the prices of agricultural products, the delivery times and the inability to offer the required quantity. The above problems could probably be eliminated by the development of a training program in order for local producers to acquire managerial knowledge to deal efficiently with this challenge. The second group of problems is related to the organizational difficulties of the project itself. The main problems have to do with the lack of standardization in each part of the project, the simplification of the access process, the need for a control mechanism, the development of a supportive framework, and the

promotion of the project in the international and domestic tourism market.

As opposed to other Mediterranean countries, until recently Greece, had not used its internationally well-known gastronomy as a tourism promotional tool. The 'Greek Breakfast' project is an attempt to counterbalance this. The project is expected to add value and improve the competitive position of the Greek tourism product. If Greece wishes to build a strong gastronomic identity in the mind of tourists, it must highlight its differences along with its main motivational attraction. In an increasingly look-alike world, food with a strong national or regional identity can become one of the vehicles for achieving this goal.

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