

A FUTURE FOR MESSINIA

AN EXAMINATION OF THE PROSPECT OF A UNIFIED COMMUNICATION STRATEGY IN A REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT CONTEXT

Dr. Mikael Andéhn
Stockholm Business School, Stockholm University

Abstract: The report outlines the result of a preliminary field-study carried out over the month of May 2014. Based on the results of the study a number of general recommendations for how sustainable development in the areas of tourism and agriculture, as well as their potential synergic overlaps, can be ascertained, are given. In summary the report indicates that the bulk of the results point towards that Messinia is poised for a benign economic development albeit with a number of challenges. One of the key results is the finding that institutional representation of the region as a whole is lacking and that numerous venues to solve problems and leverage on potential in the region cannot be accessed due to problems stemming from a dearth of coordinated efforts among the various stakeholders in the region.

Table of contents

- 1. Background Brief 2
- 2. Sustainable competitiveness in agricultural exports..... 2
- 3. Tourism, Authenticity and Lasting Growth 10
- 4. Tourism, Agriculture and prospect of a Place Brand..... 17
- 5. Concluding remarks and suggestions for future research 22
- 6. A short digression on challenges, crisis and readiness..... 24
- 7. Acknowledgements 25
- 8. Reference Literature..... 26

1. Background Brief

The region of Messinia is on the cusp of subtle but far-reaching changes. The recent growth of tourism and the continued development of the agricultural industry appear to bode for a promising future for the region, but challenges abound. Greece sits at the epicenter of the Eurozone crisis and Messinia while relatively unaffected must meet threats from increasing competition on the global agricultural produce market and the proliferation of choices available to both international and domestic tourists.

In order to meet these challenges the region must take steps to becoming a more visible, attractive and indeed viable place which people will want to live, work, and invest in as well as visit and consume products from. Given this background a preliminary study aimed at exploring the potential for and viability of a unified communication strategy for the region was conducted. The study, carried out in the month of May 2014, featured on-site field observations as well as a number of interviews with stakeholders in the region.

The results, in the form of themes, narratives and ideas about the future of the region and potential challenges facing it are presented in the report. The report is structured by themes ranging from the development of agriculture to crisis management readiness.

The ultimate objective of the present report, as it constitutes the outline of a preliminary study, is to identify key topics of interest for further study. In the concluding section of the report a number of such topics will be listed and their potential for study will be expounded in brief.

2. Sustainable competitiveness in agricultural exports

Messinia boast a range of conditions in terms of geology and climate that makes it ideal for growing a number of different crops. However, the basic organization of the agribusiness in Messinia makes the prospects of competing on prize quite unappealing. One pivotal reason being the simple fact that the size of the average agricultural operation in Messinia is simply too minute to compete with other European, or even Greek, as these competitors emerge as vastly superior in terms of being able to leveraging on scale-effects.

The wages of Greece are also relatively high compared to for instance Turkey, and the infrastructure is arguably not well-developed compared to other European nations rendering the logistics of exporting agricultural produce less than ideal. These factors and numerous others also in play, suggests that competing on price is not a viable option for Messinian agriculture in the long term.

The competitiveness on the market also features several processes that offer further challenge to Messinian agriculture. Ongoing changes in how financial support from the European Union is be disseminated are likely to do away with a crucial advantage long enjoyed by the Greek agricultural industry. Several pre-transitional economies in the

“third world” are also entering the fray of competition. These nations often boast a great advantage in terms of wage costs as compared to Greece. The looming free-trade agreements between North America and the EU provide another factor to an already crowded marketplace. It should be noted that the North American agricultural industry enjoys several advantages to its European counterpart which renders it far superior in terms of being able to compete on price. The big picture thus appears quite clear, if Messinian agriculture is to become competitive on international markets competing on price is simply not a viable option.

Conventional market strategy wisdom dictates that if competitiveness cannot be achieved through competing on price, the most readily available option is to focus on differentiation through improving the quality of ones products. On the level of the end-consumer of agricultural products the determining of a products quality is naturally contingent on an overall assessment of any information available. The origin, branding, price, certification and various metrics of quality all become important determinant of perceived quality.

The nature of the antecedent conditions that evoke a positive response from consumers have been a matter of some dispute and the definition of quality has constituted a key problem in business literature for quite some time (see Garvin 1984 for a historical review). The quality that appear to matter most directly to end-consumer remains a holistic estimate of the perceived overall superiority of the product by those that consume it (Zeithaml, 1988).

Competitiveness is achieved through a “quality strategy” by, simply put; instilling the notion that one’s product is superior. Any means that achieve this end will have an effect on the end-consumer level but the focus must be on how the products come to be perceived as objects of consumption writ large as opposed to focusing only on some objective criteria of quality. In a common consumption situation the consumer may not be competent to determine the quality of agricultural produce in an “objective” sense unless the difference between products is not pronounced. Additionally it may be difficult for consumer to evaluate food items in a pre-purchase situation; they are left to infer such quality through reliance on cues such as price, marketing narratives and similar information which is extrinsic to the product in the strict sense.

To summarize this argument, quality is not only a product of excellence in production, but also a product of believable marketing and communication of excellence. This is one instance in which “place” comes to play a vital role. Narratives and mythology related to a place often serve as a pivotal means by which consumers are provided a means of inferring product quality. The product category for which this phenomenon is perhaps the most pronounced is the case of wine. Wine has a very long and storied history of being marketed through provoking inference of quality from a place, Bordeaux or Sonoma are places which allows for a significant price-premium on wine without a

corresponding dip in demand. Here, reference to place constitutes a strong positive cue for quality.

This practice of reference to place as a means of marketing is highly prevalent in contemporary marketing practice (Verlegh and Steenkamp, 1999; Magnusson, Westjohn and Sdravoic, 2011). Agricultural products are known to be particularly sensitive to this form of marketing, as the nature of the product is often thought of as sensitive to the characteristics of the place in which they were manufactured. This tendency is amplified in cases which there are an instance of risk involved in the consumption of the product, food is inherently linked to health risk and origin information has been showed to play a crucial role in how consumers evaluate the risk associated to their consumption of food products (Loureiro and Umberger, 2007).

These factors emphasize the need for effective reputations management in agricultural export practices, not only as a means by which a competitive advantage can potentially be cultivated but also as a means by which crisis of negative events can be attenuated. Hypothetically a single botched shipment of products can harm the reputation of all products from an entire country, as consumers are affected by information as it is made available to them. The example of the mad cow disease and the lingering difficulties it brought to the exports of beef from Ireland and Great Britain here serve as an illustrative case (Pennings, Wansink and Meulenberg, 2002).

Conversely one can see Tuscany as a best-in-class example of how a narrative about a place, backed up by effective certification practices, product development and reputations management, may result in a highly potent means of positive differentiation. Tuscany, as a symbol can be leveraged to sell a vast variety of different products such as wine, cheese, olive oil or dried ham. For the place in the spatial sense, this symbolic conveyance has translated into increases in real-estate prices, a highly profitable tourism industry and visibility on the global stage.

Tuscany's reputation was not built overnight and any attempts to emulate the success of this striking example would entail far-reaching action, investment and other circumstances which is not a feasible possibility for most places like it. Yet the example of Tuscany can teach us a lot about how a place can attain sustainable competitiveness based on product development in the agricultural sector and how this may translate into synergic effects in the context of tourism.

The situation in Messinia at the present time is a far cry from this example, the hallmark product of the region, the olive oil, is often sold wholesale, unbranded, unbottled, and uncertified for as little as 2€ per liter. This price is not necessarily the outcome of power asymmetry hurting farmers but olive oil in the low-quality segment can sell for as little as 3.50€ retail in for instance Italy, leaving very little room for buyers to offer farmers a higher price for their product. This situation has led some farmer to simply dump their product, or resorting to a variety of smaller scale strategies to avoid having to sell their product at this very low price. One interesting example is illustrated below.



Figure 1: “Home-bottled” olive oil sold in hand-painted bottles in a restaurant at a price of 10€.

Approaches like home-bottling may work well for the individual farmers. Perhaps not in the sense that viable profit is made from the sales of this oil, but that the oil can be used to introduce an extension of product offerings in local businesses and restaurants which may be appreciated by tourists. They do have a limited effect on improving the overall situation for the stakeholders of the production of olive oil. Additionally, the lack of institutional oversight may result in a loss of control of the quality of the oil sold in the region which may in the worst case scenario have a negative impact on consumer perception of products from the region.

The lack of institutional oversight means that certification efforts remain exceedingly challenging and that a large potential of knowledge exchange and the development of relevant expertise which can lead to improvement of the reputation of products from the region overall is lost. This issue was raised by some of the wholesale purchasers of olive oil who stated that much of the development of best practices on the level of olive production occurs on an ad-hoc basis and is typically the result of individual enterprise rather than institutional guidance.

Taken together that the market for olive oil has evolved rather quickly the situation have made for a complex commercial environment. One respondent with long experience in the olive oil market outlined the situation:

“The situation has changed, right, it’s very important for [understanding] today’s picture of the market and what companies here can do and what they have to do. The quality standards have risen extremely, people all over the world know much [more] about olive oil and it is more difficult to get quality olive oil because [what is considered] quality olive oil is here {holding hand up} and five years ago quality olive oil was here {lowers hand}, and this... it has to... there has to be big cooperation and understanding also from the producers [*referring to the olive pressers*] side and also from the farmers side... [] ...We try to maintain close relationships with the farmers and the oil pressers

and tell them what to do but there are many things that have to be learnt, especially with [regards to] the oil presses.

– Respondent 4a, Manager of an olive oil bottling and export business.

It is interesting to note that the process of improving the quality of olive oil is ongoing; it occurs as a result of private initiative. Given that olive oil is a complex product and that its status as the hallmark produce of the entire nation of Greece should incite interest to make its quality a matter of relevance to the government entities. The lack of established institutional oversight of olive oil production remains a challenge.

A possible means to address this problem would be through oversight on the national level. A viable example can be found in the relatively recent boom in production of wine in Germany, where a national certification system of quality assurance rating has served to establish a basis for an increasingly beneficial reputation, particularly in the case of white wines. The labelling schema employed in the German case provides a means for consumers to quickly grasp the level of quality they can expect from a given product and makes it clear to producers what they need to achieve in order to attain a certain level of certification. This system could be adjusted for use for other product categories, such as for instance olive oil. A possible analogue to the German wine accreditation system could be formulated as follows:

1. “*Uncertified*” (no label), the oil has failed to reach the minimum requirements of quality for the accreditation, or it has not been subjected to trial.
2. “*Certified Quality Oil*”, the oil meets the requirements set up for mid-level olive oil.
3. “*Certified Superior Quality*”, the oil meets a higher standard of quality – this level should be used as a means to differentiate between the mid-level quality oil and higher quality oil as the mid-level could be made to be quite forgiving initially to facilitate incentivisation of subjecting one’s oil to trial.

Raising the quality of olive oil is not a trivial endeavor; the product itself being exceptionally sensitive to minute details in the production process. It is also not likely to lead to a linear increase of profitability in time. Reputation takes time to be established and the positive effects of investments to improve quality will only pay off after the consumers have become aware of the improvements, a process that entails years of work on both production practices and marketing efforts. Certification can come to serve as a viable starting point of this process.

A crucial success factor for certification of this kind is to achieve transparency as well as consensus as to what these different levels should entail, as the institution responsible for accreditation would have to attain a high degree of legitimacy. Arguably, accreditation should pay heed to the needs and preferences of actors on the wholesale level as they, naturally, would be the key beneficiary in the short term for this type of

certification. In this context the question of scale emerges as a pivotal issue, for the certification to attain a high level of impact on the consumer level the certification will have to be both visible and accessible to the end-consumer. It should be noted that this strategy has a relatively long time-line in terms of when it can be expected to yield detectable effects. Based on the data collected during the interviews, the issue of certification as well as its potential benefits is certainly not foreign to the stakeholders involved. Not the least to address the situation of the very low wholesale price, the sentiment offered below is quite characteristic of what some respondents feel can be achieved through certification and collaboration. It should be noted that many of the farmers interviewed project a sense of not being adequately reimbursed for their work in the production of olives.

“... We must be well organized, to make the packaging and good presentation. ‘till now the Greek farmers has not been this [organized]. The young people they must start. Because the business eh... mafia comes to buy as cheap as possible, to make more money. But we must be organized to answer them that it is not possible [to maintain this situation].”

– Respondent 8, Farmer and Restaurateur.

It should be noted, however, that multiple sources cite a perceived tendency of unwillingness to initiate action on a larger scale. This notion of minding one’s own business, or looking after the interests of one’s own smaller commune is a recurring theme, it appears that the unwillingness to organize may be rooted in the notion that any action one would undertake to benefit the entire region, or industry on the national level, would not be reciprocated by other actors in the region. This notion, in and by itself, presents an obstacle for anyone interested in organizing activities such as certification efforts. This is doubly problematic given the fact that many successful historical examples of such certification grew out of initiatives on the grass root level with for instance a conglomerate of wineries or other industrial actors acting in unison to develop standards and best-practice guidelines for their production efforts.

If the entire region of Messinia should organize around initiatives, such as certification of a particular product, the institution responsible for doing so must attain wide-spread acceptance and legitimacy and the benefits of such initiatives for those involved must be communicated clearly and succinctly. This presents a considerable challenge in a context in which the production of a good may be steeped in a long tradition or history of practices that may not always coincide with, or be conducive to, maximizing quality.

At this point it may be appropriate to dedicate a segment to the divergence of relevance of certification across various segments of products such as olive oil. It should be stated that for the purposes of promoting the various segments certification holds value across the board, albeit in some cases indirectly. The premium segment, albeit very small, appears poised for more easily attainable success as it primarily caters to “expert”-consumers who will seek out high quality olive oil, which means that these consumers

can be catered to in a completely different manner. Here the lack of certification and national standards is of little consequence as the consumers are typically driven by their expertise or the conspicuous nature of the product.

For the premium and ultra-premium segments certification may seem to be redundant, as these products are often brand-driven, but improving the reputation for all products across the board in the region may prove to have positive long-term benefits even for these segments. A strong reputation in the mid-level segment may result in increased visibility that may ultimately result in more potential consumers becoming interested in the higher-segment products. For the mid-level segment however the direct benefits are more palpable, stakeholders involved in wholesale indicate that, for instance the PDO for Kalamata olives and derivative products do entail a noticeable increase in demand. It is possible that effective certification for the entire region could yield a similar outcome if successfully implemented.

The PDO raises a number of issues, it is for instance interesting to note that where it actually applies and what exactly it entails in terms of procedure is not a well-known fact among relevant stakeholders in the region. The strong reputation of Kalamata as a source for high quality olive products seems, however, to be well established. A highly pertinent issue is if and if so how this reputation can be leveraged to benefit the entire region of Messinia. A communication strategy which both leverages on the reputation of the established Kalamata brand while encompassing a greater region linked to a certification initiative may be a viable means to ascertaining that olive producers are incentivized to improve the quality of their product as well as being made the beneficiary of these improvements in the form of being able to demand a higher wholesale price for their products.

Establishing Messenia's reputation as the site or origin of high quality olive products would also likely lead to positive spillover-effects on other similar agricultural products such as currants, figs, tomatoes or grapes. Ideally the production of these crops would be coupled with on-site processing into derivatives of these products as to ensure that the benefit of this production remains in the region throughout their value-chains. The role of entrepreneurship emerges as a central factor in this context; new agricultural industries and related initiatives is a means by which agriculture in the region can be sustained and remain competitive in the face of increasing competition. Several historical examples of the development of more processed products exist in the region, one of the more notable ones in the form of balsamic vinegar made from currants. The potential for similar initiatives having success in the marketplace is contingent on entrepreneurship, investment and not least education. An issue which emerged with some regularity during the interview on this particular topic was the difficulty to maintain long-term relationships that may be conducive to maintaining a successful export of processed agricultural produce.

The allure of selling to the highest bidder and by so doing limiting the continuity of one's ability to sell one's produce is highly understandable. But it is not unlikely that this practice ultimately leads to a loss of income when surveyed across a longer time-frame. The recent initiative of introducing local farmers to the possibility to seek loans for investment in their establishments appears to hold some promise of development, but it remains to be seen how this initiative will be received. It is possible that this type of loan may incentivize farmers to become more open to forging long-term relationships with businesses involved in processing their crops for example in the form of so-called contract farming. This type of continuity has the potential to facilitate a number of business endeavors including virtually any business involved in exports which need to ascertain viable long-term relationships with international partners.

A number of specific issues which affects the implementation of various initiatives that may help develop Messenia's potential as a site of successful exports of agricultural products abound. It would be highly relevant to further survey issues related to for instance how farmers view the implications of contract farming. The present study has scraped the surface of this issue but there is much more to be learnt about this issue, further study may also serve as a means by which farmers and other stakeholders of the agricultural industry in the region can be brought to dialogue.

It is interesting to note that some of the agricultural business operations in the region rely heavily on informal personal contacts, both when deciding who to do business with and how quality assurance operates. One respondent stated the following:

"I have not my [own] production for the moment... [] ...For the moment I buy olive oil from people I know have the best olive oil here, I know the people, I know their trees, I know the way they product [produce the olive oil]"

- Respondent 6, Owner and operator of a soap factory which sells and produce soaps made from olive oil.

Interpersonal trust as the basis of business is hardly something unique to Messinia, but this means of organizing business when taken to the fore is also associated with a number of problems. It may, for instance, make the business climate unattractive to outside investors looking to establish a foothold in the region in the absence of other means to establish business relationships. It may also hamper developments in the sense that difficult decisions may be made even more difficult if there are strong personal relationships involved. Even more importantly, if social connections are the basis of business relationships there is a risk that market competition moves away from a competitive logic based on meritocracy. That is that performance, quality and price would act as determinants of securing business and become matters of priority to all producers.

If Messinia is to cultivate a reputation as "geography of quality" for agricultural produce it could be a good idea to establish intermediary institutions that can assist in the

organization of business between agriculturalists and other stakeholders in the agribusiness value-chain. These institutions could serve to disseminate “demand intelligence” and communicate best-practices and raise the overall quality of agricultural production across the region.

Returning to the core issue, what does a situation in which Messinian agriculture can remain competitive and attain success on the export market entail? This section has outlined a situation in which the conditions for doing business in the agricultural sector would become characterized by more formalization of quality assurance, use certification as a means of not only raising quality of key products but also to communicate quality to the end-consumer. It has called for entrepreneurial initiative to develop industries that export processed derivatives of the high quality agricultural produce that the conditions in Messinia allows for and the facilitation of such initiatives through the institutionalization of processes related to such activities.

Overall these initiatives should be geared not only to actually developing best practices but even more importantly – to establish Messenia’s reputation as a site of rich agricultural tradition and excellence in agriculture. The timeline for this work is by necessity a long one, but if successfully implemented and communicated it could provide a means by which Messenia’s agricultural tradition can be sustained, developed and made to have a number of positive spillover effects on other sectors that may at glance seem unrelated to agribusiness.

3. Tourism, Authenticity and Lasting Growth

Messinian tourism has been a commercial factor for some time, but recent developments, in many ways ushered in by the establishment of the Costa Navarino complex, has opened the door to a wider commercial relevance of tourism in the region. It goes without saying that for a region like Messinia tourism presents an exceptionally promising means of economic development. Indeed numerous respondents herald the effects the establishment has had on the region, citing increased availability of flights in and out of Capitan Vassilis airport, the establishment of new peripheral industries and numerous other smaller scale hotels opening for business in the region as some of the things that can be traced back to the increased visibility and commercial relevance left in the wake of the Costa Navarino establishment.

However, if left unchecked, a boom in tourism may have a number of adverse effects. The promise of economic development through the attraction of great masses of tourists can also carry with it problems of gentrification, over-exploitation, strain on the environment and if these effects become too pronounced “ghost-resort” syndrome may rear its unappealing face. It seems that Messinia is on the verge of a steady growth in the tourism sector, the issue of focus should arguably be how the region can be guided into strong growth without harm done to its environment, culture and extant commercial ecology. The dystopian reality faced by numerous booming destinations is a few years

of explosive growth in the tourism sector, the establishment of a plethora of all-inclusive hotels, centralization of services such as super-markets, price cartels among restaurants, taxi-services and kiosks. These processes leading to dramatic increases in price that may even render these services unavailable to the local population. The final culmination of this process is the commercialization of new services, epitomized by the dreaded 10€ per day sun chairs on the newly privatized beach.

Finally the price, combined with the lack of any experience of authenticity, increase will have driven the tourists away, the services geared towards them no longer sustainable and having driven local business out the region starts becoming depopulated due to a lack of jobs and opportunity for the local population. This scenario is all too common when exploitation and development is left to operate without guidance beyond market demand. Indeed ghost-resorts and their early stages in the form of highly standardized experience-products can be found all over Greece, Tunisia, Bulgaria, Turkey, Spain, Thailand and Egypt. It should be noted that certain aspects of this process have a tendency to creep into regions in which a burgeoning tourism industry rears its promise of economic development. Extant cultural events and practices, interesting to tourists, may at first be acknowledged in their commercial significance, continued to be made more accessible to tourists and finally running the risk of losing the authenticity, through a streamlining process aimed at maximizing their accessibility and profitability, that made them attractive in the first place. One respondent expressed her concerns for the prospects of unchecked development in tourism sector as follows:

“The thing is, that for me, because I worked in tourism and I saw the terrible, terrible things that tourism can do to a country, this idea of agritourism to me is the ideal, it is a sustainable form of tourism I don’t know if you’ve been to very touristic areas, in Greece we have a terrible place called Lagana, on the island of Zakynthos, or Malia in Crete, where erm... the local environment has been completely destroyed and the eh... the village, there was a village many years ago for example in Lagana it does not exist any more, and if you go to Lagana in January or February its dead, it is a ghost town, and this is, you know, this is, we don’t want that in Messinia, we don’t want it anywhere in Greece really... ”

- Respondent 1a, Manager of an Agritourism-based SME

Authenticity is a highly difficult concept to pin down; it also presents a great challenging the context of regional development in the tourism context. Allowing tourists to feel like they’ve gained access to a non-commercialized, genuine and intimate experience of a place holds an interesting analogue to the example of agricultural exports outlined in the previous section. The availability of the standardized resort experience outlined above is enormous and this means that the risk of situation in which prize becomes the primary means of attaining competitiveness is imminent. For a tourist destination the prospect of competing on some other means of differentiation versus the competition presents a path which is without question a more viable means to sustainable growth. In order to achieve this, authenticity, or a feeling or notion that the tourism product allowed access

to a genuine form Messinian and Greek culture is paramount. Smaller scale agricultural tourism operations already leverage to a great extent on this characteristic in their marketing efforts.

“...I really feel that the agriculture [In Messinia] is perfect for the tourism, that it stays in a sustainable way that the tourism stays sustainable that we don't ruin the environment and [that] we keep the young people in the area...”

- Respondent 1a, Manager of an Agritourism-based SME

But the roles of agriculture, in terms in providing an interesting and authentically Greek tourism experience pertain to any tourism operation.

“For example: every year we are doing out wine harvesting, or grape harvesting, tours with the guests so we depart from the hotel and go to the northern areas of Messinia, where we have our own wine yards, so we go to the wine yards err... actually the agronomists working there give many details and explanations about what is actually going on there and there is a tour of the wine yards and the varieties that are cultivated there and the guests actually participate in the harvesting.

Interviewer: ...so they cut the grapes?

Respondent: They cut the grapes and, I don't know, but they love it, they take a lot of satisfaction out of this, it is very interesting to watch... [] You can see with how big satisfaction they gain there like wow! [Laughs]... [] A similar thing we are [also] doing with the olive groves during the olive harvesting season...”

- Respondent 15, Costa Navarino employee with a focus on customer relations management.

The ability to convey a more authentic tourism experience, in the sense that Greek culture, and agricultural practices, can be experienced directly represents a potential for synergy between agriculture and tourism and also a competitive advantage versus other destinations that may not be able to offer this experience. It is of great importance that this ability to convey an experience that feels authentic is safeguarded for this process to work.

The question of retaining authenticity manifests itself in many different forms, it is clear that Messinias coastline hold immense potential for development, but what development is desirable and how can it be safeguarded? The region of West Mani stands out as an interesting example here; its scenic coastline featuring a dramatic fall from mountains into the Mediterranean features a characteristic organization. Houses, typically owned by members of an extended family are built huddled together on the hillside forming small villages around a single road. More and more people from places like Germany and other regions in Greece have relocated to the region, not in itself a problem but rather an excellent opportunity for development. Their means of relocation and their taste in housing risk altering the very nature of the region, some extreme

examples include contemporary style villas which stand out as islands of modernity that rob the region of some of its atmosphere.

If this trend continues the risk of the atmosphere of the region changing into something different is palpable, the loss of the ability of being perceived as a manifestation of the ancient history of the region may be a very real issue in just a few decades of liberal building permit issuing. There are institutions in place that serve as a means of incentivizing new construction projects to maintain the style and feel of the region, one such organization is ANMES which conducts a diverse range of project including, for instance, overseeing the implementation of government projects. One function of direct relevance to tourism ANMES is involved in is the evaluation and in the decision making regarding the issuing of government co-funding of construction projects. One representative describes a key aspect of this process related to the possibility to support a particular architectural style in the context of new resort development.

“Because each area has its own traditional characteristics we try to maintain and keep it that way, so somebody who has, let’s say meets, these qualifications get an extra bonus and credits.”

– Respondent 12a, ANMES representative

This function is an interesting means at incentivizing those planning new construction projects to fashion their projects in a manner which is consistent with for instance a certain architectural style. In essence this is one means by which a “loss of authenticity” can be counter-acted, if only to a certain extent. ANMES has no regulatory power a construction project which has obtained to appropriate permits from the government has little or no resistance if they would build something that could be argued to alter the atmosphere of a particular region.

Among the respondents of the present study, however, the typical sentiment appears to be that a maintained atmosphere is an important consideration in their development projects. These initiatives also occur organically with some business owners recognizing the value of their establishment mirroring the particularity of the region in various aspects including the architectural style. The following cite mirrors a typical understanding of the value of the atmosphere of a region in the context of tourism:

“This whole area, Mani, is very pretty and it could be something like, you know, Tuscany, eh... if people would be more cautious in preserving the character in these old villages because there is a lot of small beautiful villages all over the mountains as well, it not only beach and sun here it’s also very nice old buildings and churches and everything, so if eh.. If people would be more careful in, you know, restoring carefully the old buildings it would be erm... A destination for people just to go around and see the good places and eat good food and stay in nice quality places... But we are a little bit... yeah... misbehaving also, I mean when you see the garbage, the garbage it’s... yeah it’s... I think it is one example of things that are not working.”

– Respondent 3, Restaurateur and Hotel owner. [The interview was translated from Greek to English by an intermediary]

The auto-communicative properties of architecture may appear as an issue of limited priority in the context of economic growth but this characteristic pertains more directly to the experience of authenticity than one might fathom at glance. It is also analogous to a greater underlying issue; growth in the tourism sector will change a place. It is highly important to mediate a balance between achieving economic development and retaining the identity of the region. The relevance of achieving a dialogue between various stakeholders is a crucial point here. Certain initiatives may appear to hold immense economic benefits yet their summative load on the environment economic, ecological or social may be negative. The converse is also true, it should be noted that the Costa Navarino establishment, while seen as very beneficial to the region now when it has operated for several years was originally met with some opposition from the local population.

The issue of how a regions future should be decided upon is also often a matter of controversy within the academic literature. It is true that a democratic process involving a large number of stakeholder may lead to inertia, it is also true that autocratic decision making may steamroll stakeholders, be detrimental to their life and business and also fail due to simply being seen as a problem or an attack on the local community rather than an attempt to attain development.

When discussing the issue of the value of authenticity it should be noted that with a growth in tourism a palpable risk is the establishment of businesses that overwhelm local business while at the same time, long term, may be less than available to the local populace due to pricing. This may cause problems for the prospects of making the region a “livable” place for locals which may simply move out whilst taking their cultural influence on the region with them – potentially also harming the chance of conveying an authentic experience to tourists. Without local people it is obviously difficult to retain any semblance of local culture.

However, the means by which the local populace may be driven away are sometimes subtle and occur gradually, which heightens the need for tracking local opinion as an aspect of tourism business intelligence gathering.

The extreme case, which for this discussion may serve as a point of departure of the nature of this phenomenon, can be found in Venice. To many tourists Venice represents the embodiment of a romanticized ideal of Italian culture. The city itself, however, while beautiful is in its appeal so geared towards meeting the immense demand from tourists that vital services required to sustain normal life for the local population have been pushed out. Souvenirs are readily available on every street but groceries can hardly be found within the city limits. The city is rapidly being de-populated and turned into a theme-park tourist attraction, in this particular case this process may not lead to a dramatically lowered appeal of the city as a destination. As a place of residence,

however, the place appears to be in free-fall. This example captures a crucial point of any regional development initiative – development how, and for whom? One respondent hinted towards the issue of not developing in the right way whilst still staying competitive:

“Regarding the development erm... the touristic development, one of the main threats is not to develop in the right way er... so that’s one of the main... I would say key issues, having you know having too many hotels not in the right architectural approach many... you know this type of thing erm... [] [we must] to be able to keep up, always, with the erm... new things and the competition, because, you know, we have managed to place Costa Navarino, Messinia, on the world map I think that’s great we have managed, in a sense, to position it as a sustainable, prime, new, destination, a magical place, so we need to be able to keep up, deliver new experiences, new things, and always increase our quality, increase our services, increase [better] our approach, these type of things...”

- Respondent 11, marketing executive working to promote and develop Costa Navarino.

The quote illustrates, in a sense, an issue of how development must be geared towards the improvement of quality, sustainability, while at the same time illustrating the issue of some types of development, by all means still a path to economic growth, potentially presenting path towards a future in which the key service offering of the region may be threatened. Even with a vision of how a region may be developed in a sustainable way the challenge remain to anchor this vision with the public.

A means of anchoring public perception of development efforts could be to involve local teaching institutions and artists who can present concept-developments for projects. An interesting case is the suggestion for a boardwalk, reaching from the village of Yalova to Pylos, which was met with some resistance from the local population fearing for the continued viability of their business in the presence of such a landmark tourist attraction. In this case competitions at local colleges for the design of the structure coupled with public demonstrations of the best examples could trigger dialogue of the meaning and implications of such efforts. This may help support a democratic process of development as well as display the potential advantages of building such a structure to the wider public. The crass reality is that in some cases of regional development the interests of a vocal minority may triumph over the public good, involving the public to a greater extent may serve as one potential strategy to rectify this problem. These issues are highly interlinked, and it is vital that the public in Messinia are given a chance to understand the value of maintaining authenticity and sustainability even when these concepts may appear to stand in the way of short term growth.

Monitoring developments in the region emerges as a vital point of intelligence in this context, demographic, economic and permit data should be made available so that it can be triangulated for an overview of what is happening in the region. Commercial

relevance remains intertwined with any and all large scale development in the region and without a wider understanding of the entire ecosystem of commercial activity planners will find themselves in a continuous state of being surprised by the developments as their effects are exerted rather than meeting them as they emerge. This need can be traced to all levels of commercial activities and range from the banal to the crucial, yet if it remains uninvestigated efforts to act upon change will be far more demanding when the processes are already far gone.

The question of who visits Messinia, what they do when they are here and what they think about their experience may serve as very practical guidance for what investment may exert the greatest positive influence. This intelligence gathering, however, requires some centralized and formalized structure to reach its full potential. A key means by which intelligence related to tourism can be gathered is through the use of new media, particularly user-generated, and application-based media has risen to the fore as a means of collecting data on a previously unprecedented level of detail and accuracy. This form of data generation initiative typically occurs on a highly organic basis, i.e. through the personal initiative of a smaller number of enthusiasts; which offers a challenge in how the data can be effectively compiled. Again, the potential benefit of some institutional representation concerned with this activity rears its head. An application which offers some ideas to tourists as what to see and do in the region already exists and it would be highly interesting to see what can be learnt from the use of this application that may be of use for planning efforts related to tourism.

At the present time multiple respondents in smaller tourism related enterprises indicated that they rely heavily on advertising in specialized media but even more so on word-of-mouth. Respondents on all levels of tourism enterprises indicated that they enjoy a large proportion of repeat customers among their clientele and that word-of-mouth was the primary form of communication that enabled the expansion of the clientele:

“We advertise, in er... webpages, booking platforms, we have our own webpage, and er... also we have a... Let’s say which is loyal, they will tell their friends, their relatives.”

- Respondent 7, - Manager of an Agritourism-based SME

“Interviewer: ...A client of yours how would they come to know about this place?”

Respondent: Large part word of mouth, it is very important I... I, again, maybe I should collect some statistics instead of talking about other people collecting statistics, but very often I have people send me an e-mail – our friends stayed with you last year, our friends stayed with you two years ago...”

- Respondent 1a, - Manager of an Agritourism-based SME

“People come here 80 or more, 80%, come again and again they stay here for many years [in a row] some people [have been coming] for 12 years now, same people every

year, some, every year or... friends of these people, this is eh... something very, very good... It is a token of good quality.”

– Respondent 3, Restaurateur and Hotel owner. [The interview was translated from Greek to English by an intermediary]

Word of mouth is a means of marketing that in the tourism context could be argued to promote steady growth, but perhaps even more importantly also allow for a reliable means of developing the quality of the tourism service offering as a stable relationship with ones clientele enable a small enterprise to gage and respond to consumer needs and wants. Here centralization would offer a means of exchanging knowledge and to address issues that lie beyond the direct control of any individual enterprise. As one respondent laments the lack of customer intelligence in a more formalized way most respondents also report appreciating the input they receive from their customers and report a high level of inclination to respond to such intelligence. A more centralized means of collecting consumer data may provide more solid ground for improving the tourism offering, not only enterprise by enterprise but to extend quality development to cover the entire region at large.

4. Tourism, Agriculture and prospect of a Place Brand

As outlined in the previous sections, whatever action will be taken it appears more likely that it will come to fruition, as well as reach its potential, if efforts are coordinated across the region. A creation of a place brand in some form can fill this role.

Commonsensical wisdom would suggest that a place brand is a means of communication a places claim to identity to an outside public and, if successful serve to sway their opinion of the place. However, studies of the place branding phenomenon shows that this is not necessarily the case to be made for the virtues of place branding. Instead, place branding should be thought of as means of creating dialogue and coordination to the internal audience (Kornberger, 2010). It is in this context that its effectiveness shines through. The case of Messinia constitutes an example of a region where increased dialogue would be very welcome as a means of coordination. A place brand may come to serve to as a symbolic representation of an ideology of Messinias future.

In many ways Messinia is already being marketed using managerial techniques typically associated with branding, the narrative sometimes referred to by some respondents as “the Captains dream” bear a great semblance to the narrative mythology of a brand story. A place has a history, a present and a future, to brand it is to selectively present the past to evoke a vision of the future.

A key finding of the herein heralded preliminary study has been the notion that “nobody seems prone to organize, even less initiate organized effort of any kind”. Some respondents going so far as to characterize a will to mind ones’ own business as a fundamental trait of Greek culture. Whether this statement holds any basis in reality is

beyond the scope of the present study, and it seems unlikely that it would, the mere notion that organization is hindered by some cultural particularity offers a challenge to coordination initiatives as it presents an ideological trope that may facilitate participants opting out of organization initiatives. A place brand could serve to counter-act this phenomena by allowing dialogue either in support of or in resistance to the point of reference the place brand narrative would provide. The brand can be a banner to unite under or a monster to come together in opposition towards, either way dialogue is initiated, and a means by which public opinion can be assessed is achieved.

A crucial take-away from the discourse of branding is that a brand can never be everything, if this is attempted the brand will be nothing; instead a focused communication approach is needed. The challenge here is to build a story of Messinia that benefits all of Messinia. At this point it should be stated that an important step to take before proceeding is to define what place should be branded. Is it Messinia, the prefecture, in a strict sense? Is it a number of regions within Messinia? Should it be extended beyond Messinia? These are questions that need answers before proceeding, simply due to the fact that the question that immediately follows is how can all of the relevant area be benefited by what we do?

As has been the focus of the present study, the development of the particular industries of agriculture and tourism could serve as an initial focus. Among the respondents the notion that things that happen across all of Messinia can come to benefit the individual, smaller, regions appear to have become a more palpable notion in the wake of the establishment of the Costa Navarino complex. Below are some examples of how the changes brought about by Costa Navarino are understood as something that had relevance far beyond the short stretch of coastline north of Pylos the hotels actually occupy, first by means of setting an example of excellence in tourism for others to follow:

“This region, the Mani region, was more known... was more successful in... as a tourist destination even before Costa Navarino but the close-by places, the hotels and restaurants, because of the quality standards of Costa Navarino has put out... or pushed to perform better and they have become more known, perhaps it is more profit in the close by business [meaning close to Costa Navarino] than for the business here, but off course due to more flights and people generally coming around it helps everyone. Everywhere happen this [this happened] I remember Kalamata some time last year, it was kind of new, they opened the first coffee shop with good quality, everything changed in Kalamata, and after a while they opened a bar with good cocktails... [] Everything changed because people understand that something new [is happening], everybody try to make things better and better, they want to copy a good business [practice]. It's like this in all business.”

– Respondent 3, Restaurateur and Hotel owner. [The interview was translated from Greek to English by an intermediary]

Some respondents also herald the more direct effect, the fact that the marketing in connection to Costa Navarino actually serve to herald the entire region of Messinia and that this in turn provides a lesson to business beyond tourism.

“...I really appreciate, for example, that Costa Navarino for example when they came here they er... advertised the whole of Messinia... Always, and it seems in a... later step that they er... that it was good for all the area, it was good for Kalamata, it was also good for us, here for this area as a touristic region. That’s why I’m saying, if you look a little bit further its... it might be more important to promote and help the whole area so that the image of the whole production is erm... promoted, right?...”

– Respondent 4a, Manager of an olive oil bottling and export business.

Other respondents also donned an even wider view on how the establishment might change the region, citing infrastructural improvements in the wake of the establishment of the hotel complex as something that may have a more profound impact on the region.

“Tourism affects everything... [] There is an immediate effect and the non–immediate effect so when you have a... Southern... Kalamata was an isolated area that er... there were no flights the flights were only during the peak period and those were charter flights, so suddenly in the last three years people from Messinia were able to travel very cheaply to Italy, to Germany, to Russia, this is a... a huge, I would say, a revolutionary effect on the mentality of people, you had people who, you know they had never travelled outside Messinia at all, or Greece, and suddenly the airport of Kalamata is connected, throughout the year with all the European cities. This is a huge thing because one... the first effect is that it brings a lot of people from Sweden, from you know Germany, and you have interaction, but at the same time it allows the Messinian people to go out and I mean, this is huge this suddenly you can become a citizen of the world. In the next ten, fifteen years the impact of this is going to be tremendous...”

- Respondent 11, marketing executive working to promote and develop Costa Navarino.

As it appears from this quotes and the opinion of numerous other respondents the establishment of Costa Navarino in a way opened eyes to the potential of promoting all of Messinia and the effects such promotion may have. Once this notion is instilled one may ask how the region can be promoted in a way that benefits many different kinds of business in the region. The present report have already outlined how tourism and agricultural exports can interact to promote a place, the next few paragraphs will delve deeper into this issue and offer some observations pertaining to small scale strategies already practiced in the region.

It is very interesting to note that Costa Navarino employs a number of strategies that reside at the horizons of contemporary marketing practice, particularly in how a product-to-destination oscillation of services are attempted (cf. Nadeu et al. 2008). The

following quote outlines how products are being used to promote the destination Costa Navarino:

“We have actually many different series of branded products... []... We have a line of product called Navarino Icons... []... Like our olive oils and other Messinian delicacies and also a series of objects like art objects, that are inspired by archeological findings in the area of Messinia, we call them icons because we think that they embody, and they carry the identity of the region... []... In every place we place [sell] them we also present the destination through them...”

- Respondent 15, Costa Navarino employee with a focus on customer relations management.

The same principle is essentially also already at work for some regions of Messinia writ large, in the sense that products and tourism function in tandem to evoke a consumer response. A purveyor of premium olive oil observed the following:

“The name Mani, they associate it with good olive oil, I mean these particular customers who are buying from delicacy stores, they are quite educated about the product... []... In the first place, in the beginning, around 1979, approximately there were [olive oil] producers here, and there still are, from er... Austria a company here in the region, and some others, Germans, who started olive oil business here in '79, 1979, and er... these people err... made a very big advertising for Mani because they were the first who exported olive oil from the Mani [region] to Austria, to Germany and since then this region is very well known. So these people did a very good job in advertising [not only olive oil] but the whole region.”

- Respondent 2. SME-level exporter of premium olive oil.

It appears that agriculture and tourism to a great extent already interact to help generate visibility for Messinia and to a great extent generate synergies that can come to aid development of both areas of business. As respondent 2 suggests Mani became known to many of the tourists that later came to the region, some who even settled there, first as a place from which premium olive oil came. Both the above quotes illustrate a practice which in its present, and historical, form markets a more delimited place, the destination Costa Navarino and the region of Mani, respectively. A priority of truly generating a larger scale synergy between agriculture and tourism for all of Messinia would be to apply this principle to the entire region. This may sound like a fairly straightforward endeavor, but it may indeed be a challenging prospect, a place branding initiative that spans the whole region could serve as a possible platform to start the process towards a more encompassing form of this synergy.



Figure 2. Shelf in a small delicacy store in Pylos, purveying artifacts that could be refashioned to herald all of Messinia?

This report has dealt with, at length, the various more direct potential benefits of coordination. There is another category of issues that serve as a less direct area of possible improvement in which a unified communication strategy can come to play an important role. Numerous historical cases of place branding campaigns have shown that this sort of initiatives can come to serve as a means by which local interest can be coordinated as to leverage a formative effect on political decision making in the region. In some cases dire need of political action can be given credence due to it being communicated through an institution that has attained legitimacy through representing a wider group of stakeholders. One respondent outlined this problem:

“Yeah, there is a discrepancy between what politicians, you know, are pushing forward and what the business men need in the area, like for example the garbage situation is one of the problems that are on the rise off course and er... instead of, you know, hiring professionals that would give you a proper suggestion and solution of how to handle these infrastructural things, like how to make available parking for your customers when there is lots of people around and how to deal with er... taking care of your garbage and other stuff, it’s... err... its often, you know, very fast solutions and not correct, and thought over, err... it’s not working so ehm... Even if you try to do a good job you lower the quality as a result due to these... side-things... and everything should work to keep this image at the proper level. ”

– Respondent 3, Restaurateur and Hotel owner. [The interview was translated from Greek to English by an intermediary]

A place branding initiative as a platform may in a way serve as a potent lobby-like entity, demands that may be swept under the rug become issues of credence due to the simple fact that demands are being presented as a coordinated wish of multiple stakeholders. This is an aspect that should not be overlooked when considering a more unified approach to organizing regional development writ large and if

anything the data obtained through the present study demonstrate that the need for this function may be exceptionally high in the case of Messinia.

5. Concluding remarks and suggestions for future research

Numerous means by which tourism and agriculture can be synergized are already practiced in Messinia. If anything the study outlined in the present report has shown that a vast variety of interesting and ambitious activities which are helping to develop business in the region is already under way. It appears, however, as if one piece of the puzzle is missing at the moment - coordination.

Reviewing the interviews reveals one central trope in the narrative of doing business in Messinia reiterated by almost all respondents: Problem X or potential Y exists, the solution or leverage requires coordination, coordination requires some form of centralized mediation, and no entity that could provide such mediation exists. This trope extends across issues pertaining to wide field of issues including quality assurance in agriculture, the marketing of exports, development of tourism-related services and their many overlapping areas of relevance. Sometimes this trope is paired with a notion that lack of coordination and unwillingness to organize is somehow endemic to Greek culture, a notion which is dangerous in the sense that it risks to perpetuate itself through references to it.

A notable exception to this tendency can be seen in the case of Costa Navarino which is often held up as an entity which adopts various initiatives beyond the mainstream of its own business and have leveraged a formative effect on the entire region of Messinia. This is a laudable effort which appears to be based on a high level of understanding of how a tourism product operates as a part of a greater system of services. However, Messinias needs extend beyond that which is directly relevant to tourism and it is perhaps too much to expect Costa Navarino to foot the responsibility for developing business in the region.

For the reasons outlined throughout the present report it is suggested that a special interest group is formed to investigate the potential for unleveraged synergies between agriculture and tourism in the region. Initially this group could act as a forum to conduct research and to gather intelligence on several business related issues in the region. Membership could also be conditioned on the use of uniform use and presentation of the regional identity – i.e. to form the antecedent conditions for a place branding initiative through the use of a symbolic representation of the region a logo or form.

Some initial future research projects could entail a variety of activities, some clear cut examples of interest are listed in bullet points below, these include situations more suited for academic study as well as situation of more directly practical initiatives:

- The gathering of tourism marketing intelligence data in order to facilitate effective advertising and communication as well as to give an indication for potential venues of improving the tourism service offer that can be provided in the region. The issues of how tourists come to learn about Messinia, who they are, what they do whilst they are in the region, what they appreciate as well as don't appreciate are crucial pieces of information. Data is already being collected, but not on a regional level, if good data can be collected across the region prediction models could be used to identify key areas of improvement of the tourism service offer in the region.
- Gaging the interest in creating the conditions for a pan-Messinian origin designation for agricultural products, which could be paired with education efforts ranging from farmers, to pressers, to bottlers and exporters. This could also serve as a platform for, for instance, forming share-cooperatives of machinery or other resources that can help counter the negative effects of the very small scale in which agriculture operates in Messinia today. In a very direct sense, this more or less simply entails getting exporters and producers of the region to sit down and map the problems that need to be overcome in order to significantly raise the quality of the produce and how to communicate this change.
- Gaging the possibility for involving local academic institutions in the study of the region and to develop long term relationships between local businesses and these institutions. This is crucial not only for talent retention but also for the continuity of research on the region.
- The forum could also be used as a means of creating a basis for consensus around a uniform communication strategy for the region. Practically, initiatives to, for instance, lengthen the rather short tourism season in Messinia, an initiative that in order to be successful requires significant coordination, could be facilitated through such an initiative.
- The issue of how smaller businesses in the region develop various low-cost marketing strategies (like word-of-mouth marketing, digital marketing etcetera) is highly interesting and has direct relevance for larger scale communication strategies, it would be highly interesting to study what obstacles these business encounter in their marketing efforts and what, if anything, could be gained from a more coordinated effort. I.e. what these business would like to do, but can't due to constraints of scale and budget.

In conclusion, the present report describes a vast variety of issues that was identified during a mere month of preliminary field-research. Further study is most certainly likely to generate a more focused and even larger number of interesting venues of potential

development in Messinia. The institutionalization of a unified communication strategy focusing on identifying potential synergies between different industries and ushering in these practices under the banner of a Messinian place brand is also likely to serve as a means of increased dialogue and communication between the actors in the region. Often times the mere existence of a centralized entity linked to a region can serve as a self-generative process in terms of bringing problems into light and to provide the first step in which they can be addressed. To put it in a crass manner, if stakeholder have somewhere to turn for dialogue and support when they encounter a problem or opportunity the chances of the outcome being some form of coordinated action increases dramatically.

6. A short digression on challenges, crisis and readiness

A development strategy for a region runs the risk of a view in which means by which positive effects can be achieved takes center stage in a manner that obscures other issues that are important in safeguarding the development of the region. One could argue that an equally important aspect is the issue of how the effect of negative events can be mitigated.

While the Eurozone crisis has struck Greece in a profound way, the general opinion among the respondents appears to be that Messinia have been affected by the financial instability to a relatively limited extent. Still the region faces some challenges that should be addressed. A crucial issue is the ongoing process of de-population, which is particularly pronounced in the rural areas in the region. In the sense that Messinia faces challenges, this is perhaps one of the most pertinent ones, it alone serves for a very potent rationale as to why a regional development strategy is needed if nothing else.

Even though there are extant challenges that move relatively slowly, I've taken some space to address the issue of readiness for crisis. It should be said that tourism and agriculture are both industries that are highly sensitive to crisis. There are a great abundance of examples where healthy growth of a region turned into disastrous slow-down due to some catastrophic event and there is a growing scholarly interest on how crisis can be mitigated. It could be argued that crisis management should be incorporated in any business plan including those geared towards regional development, but is commonly overlooked. The fact is that extant knowledge on successful crisis management put a great emphasis on readiness as a crucial antecedent condition of crisis mitigation. Crisis for a region such as Messinia span a variety of topics including risks such as natural disasters, economic processes, criminality or even less dramatic issues such as accidents, fluctuations in demand for various businesses or for instance the issue of problems with garbage and refuse handling raised by some respondents. It should be noted that if a crisis occurs the difference between having the institutional readiness to meet the crisis can make a significant difference in how severe the effects of the crisis becomes.

It is therefore my very general recommendation that the potential for crisis is addressed in any regional development initiative, disaster always seem unlikely before it happens and there are numerous instances in which the un-readiness of the institutions exposed to crisis serve to amplify the negative effects of said crisis. Mapping potential crisis and developing a repertoire of response actions to it should be made into a central part of Messinias regional development plans.

7. Acknowledgements

The author would like to extend his sincerest gratitude to the Capitan Vassilis Foundation, Fontana Food AB and Angeliki Triantafyllou for funding the project which is the basis of this report. Great thanks also to Erica Öjermark Strzelecka, Karin Ulfsson Crépin, Angeliki Triantafyllou, Dionisis Papadatos, Giorgos Maneas and Athanasios Psaroulis for their help in facilitating contacts with the respondents interviewed in the present study as well as their help with various practical matters pertaining to the conducting of the field study.

The author would also like to extend his sincerest gratitude to all the people who participated in the study as respondents and shared their knowledge and opinions about the region, its business and the prospects of its future. Finally, it should be said that numerous findings and issues encountered during the project was omitted in order to ascertain that the report would be accessible and to the point. The author remain at the disposal of the Capitan Vassilis Foundation should there be any additional inquiries or need for any clarification.

8. Reference Literature

Garvin, D. A. (1984). What does "product quality" really mean? *Sloan management review*, October, 25-48.

Kornberger, M. (2010). *Brand society: How brands transform management and lifestyle*. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge.

Loureiro, M. L., & Umberger, W. J. (2007). A choice experiment model for beef: What US consumer responses tell us about relative preferences for food safety, country-of-origin labeling and traceability. *Food policy*, 32(4), 496-514.

Magnusson, P., Westjohn, S.A. & Zdravkovic, S. (2011a) "What, I thought Samsung was Japanese': Accurate or not, perceived country of origin matters," *International Marketing Review*, 28(5), 454-472.

Nadeau, J., Heslop, L., O'Reilly, N., & Luk, P. (2008). Destination in a country image context. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 35(1), 84-106.

O'Shaughnessy, J. & O'Shaughnessy, N. J. (2000) "Treating the nation as a brand: some neglected issues" *Journal of Macromarketing*, 20(1), pp. 56-64.

Pennings, J. M., Wansink, B., & Meulenbergh, M. T. (2002). A note on modeling consumer reactions to a crisis: The case of the mad cow disease. *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, 19(1), 91-100.

Verlegh P.W.J. & Steenkamp, J.-B.E.M. (1999) "A review and meta-analysis of country of origin research," *Journal of Economic Psychology*, 20(5), 521-546.

Zeithaml, V. A. (1988). Consumer perceptions of price, quality, and value: a means-end model and synthesis of evidence. *The Journal of Marketing*, 52(3), 2-22.