



The Degrowth of Tourism Industry in the Island of Crete, Greece. Is it Desirable and Feasible?

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ABSTRACT: The concept of degrowth has been developed recently as an alternative paradigm to continuous and unlimited growth which prevails nowadays. The degrowth of tourism industry has been proposed in overcrowded tourism destinations balancing the satisfaction of tourists and local residents with the sustainability of the natural ecosystems. The island of Crete, Greece is located in eastern Mediterranean basin hosting an increasing number of visitors every year. The tourism industry in the island is well developed having a high economic impact. The prosperous tourism industry in Crete has surpassed the carrying capacity of the island threatening its fragile ecosystems causing phenomena of overtourism with undesired and harmful impacts in the local societies. The degrowth of the local tourism industry can be conceived as an alternative paradigm of the current growth model of tourism which threatens its long-term sustainability. It rejects the current model of continuous and unlimited growth of tourism promoting the values of locality, development of small-scale enterprises, quality of life, environmental sustainability, reduction of carbon emissions, decommodification of tourism activities and smaller production and consumption. The adoption of tourism degrowth in Crete requires the mobilization and the active participation of the multiple stakeholders of the tourism industry in the island while it promotes their long-term interests which are currently threatened by overtourism, climate crisis and overconsumption of the limited natural resources.

KEYWORDS: carrying capacity, Crete-Greece, degrowth, sustainability, tourism

1. INTRODUCTION

The increase of the global tourism industry and the high inflow of tourists in several popular destinations have surpassed their tourism-related carrying capacity causing undesired and harmful impacts to the fragile natural ecosystems and to local societies [1], [2],[3], [4], [5]. The concept of degrowth as a sustainable alternative to conventional continuous unlimited growth is broadly debated nowadays. The same concept is also discussed in overcrowded tourism destinations for the achievement of environmental sustainability and better quality of life in the local societies [6], [7], [8], [9], [10]. The island of Crete, Greece is located in eastern Mediterranean basin and it is a well-known global tourism destination accepting an increasing number of visitors energy year. However, overtourism and climate crisis cause many problems threatening its popular tourism industry [11], [12].

The aim of the current research is to explore the possibility of degrowth in the tourism industry in Crete.

The text is structured as follows: After the literature review the tourism industry in Crete is mentioned followed by an analysis of the concept of degrowth. In the following two sections the concept of degrowth in tourism industry and the degrowth in the Cretan tourism industry are discussed. The text ends with discussion of the findings, the conclusions drawn and the citation of the references used.

The current study is innovative since there are limited studies so far related with the degrowth of the tourism industry in Crete. It covers an existing gap regarding the degrowth of the tourism industry in Greece. It could be useful to policy makers and to multiple stakeholders of the tourism industry in Crete as well as to other Mediterranean islands facing similar problems with overtourism and environmental degradation like Crete.

2. LITERATURE SURVEY

The degrowth of tourism has been studied [1]. The author stated that tourism's managers claim that the harmful impacts of tourism development can be mitigated or eliminated by decoupling "growth" with "resource use". He mentioned that tourism degrowth is necessary while he also stated the required types of policies and the challenges involved in approaching tourism degrowth. The degrowth of tourism industry has been explored [2]. The authors stated that the consequences of the exponential growth in tourism



activity throughout the world have been increasingly questioned. They overviewed the applications of degrowth perspectives for the achievement of sustainable tourism development. The overtourism and tourism degrowth have been investigated [3]. The authors explored the evolution of tourism degrowth among social movement activists in Barcelona, Spain. They also studied a paradigm shift from “tourism growth” to “tourism degrowth” due to touristic monoculture in the city. The relation of tourism and degrowth has been examined [4]. The authors stated that despite the global efforts to achieve sustainable development socioecological conflicts and economic inequalities have increased in tourism destinations. They mentioned that although the concept of growth is in the heart of capitalism the concept of “tourism degrowth” could probably facilitate a truly sustainable tourism. The implications and challenges in tourism degrowth have been studied [5]. The authors stated that the question of degrowth is highly related to one’s philosophical and political views. They also mentioned that the concept of tourism degrowth so far is focused on places that have overgrown regarding tourism development than dealing with the global system. The concept of degrowth in Mediterranean islands based on values of slowness, moderation and conviviality has been explored [6]. The authors focused on the Greek islands Ikaria and Gavdos located in the Greek Archipelago and the development of the southern thought related to the values that Serge Latouche and others call “de-growth”. The paradigm of degrowth in the tourism context has been analyzed [7]. The author stated that the natural limits to growth in many destinations have been surpassed and their carrying capacity levels have been reached. He also mentioned that as a philosophical concept degrowth is revolutionary directed to sustainable change based on the interests of locality, small and medium enterprises, employment generation, reduction in working hours, ecology and quality of life, decommodification of tourism activity, carbon reduction and changed pattern of production and consumption. The degrowth of tourism has been analyzed [8]. The authors stated that the current paradigm of tourism development has many harmful impacts. They mentioned that redefinition and rethinking of tourism is necessary promoting equity, the rights of local communities, the rights of tourists to enjoy during their vacations and the rights of tourism enterprises to make profits. The evolution towards sustainable tourism has been investigated [9]. The authors stated that sustainable tourism aims to strengthen the environmental, economic and social pillars of sustainability. They also mentioned that responsible tourism is focused on the protection of the natural environment and the natural resources, respecting religions, cultures and traditions at the destinations and emphasizes the economic and social benefits for the residents. A survival guide for humanity 50 years after the report of the club of Rome in 1972 titled “The limits to growth” has been developed [10]. The authors proposed radical changes in the global system for the achievement of global prosperity within the limits of our planet. The impacts of overtourism and climate crisis on tourism in Crete, Greece have been studied [11]. The author stated that both have undesired and harmful impacts on tourism industry in the island. He also mentioned that the stakeholders of the local tourism industry should collaborate in developing appropriate policies minimizing the adverse impacts of overtourism and climate crisis on the prosperous tourism industry in Crete. The nexus between climate change and tourism industry in Crete has been examined [12]. The author stated that climate change alters several environmental conditions and causes damages in the local infrastructure. He also mentioned that the local tourism industry contributes in GHG emissions positively affecting climate change. The concept of growth has been studied [13] The author argues that we should voluntarily live within the limits of our planet taking into account the finite resources in earth. The concept of growth has been explored [14]. The author stated that growth based on intangible ideas is more important than growth based on the limited natural resources in our planet. The overtourism and its local impacts in Fiords, Norway have been studied [15]. The authors stated that maximization strategies based on higher number of tourists cause conflicts with local residents. They examined whether local, small-scale and more sustainable activities can contribute to economic growth without increasing the number of arrivals. The growth in Greece based on tourism during the period 1960-2020 has been studied [16]. The authors stated that there is a positive long-term relationship between tourism and growth in Greece. The degrowth of tourism has been explored [17]. The authors stated that tourism and degrowth are two notions that have been increasingly discussed worldwide. They also mentioned that the global tourism industry is the source of millions of jobs contributing significantly in the increase of gross domestic product (GDP). The degrowth of tourism focused on the Kichwa Anangy community, Ecuador has been analyzed [18]. The author stated that the community owns and operates two lodges. He also mentioned that the community considers equally the economic viability of the project with the achievement of “good life” for its members. The paradigm of Covid-19 for tourism degrowth focusing on Barcelona, Spain has been examined [19]. The authors stated that the measures taken for a more sustainable tourism since the start of Covid-19 are mainly of a technical nature. They also mentioned that they believe that a return to growth-oriented tourism is prioritized. The tourism degrowth according to the global-South paradigm which is a movement that includes degrowth and regenerative development has been analyzed [20]. The authors tried to explore the



current reflections regarding tourism degrowth in contemporary societies. The question of degrowth of tourism has been studied [21]. The author stated that after the Covid-19 pandemic and the following economic recession the question of tourism degrowth has been discussed. He believes that the concept of green tourism and a stable economy should be developed prioritizing happiness rather than the growth-based economy. The concept of degrowth and self-limitation examining two types of tourism-related natural events in Jämtland, Sweden has been explored [22]. The authors analyzing 50 questionnaires found that there are difficulties related with self-limitations. They mentioned that the convivial idea of visiting nature is combined with undesired environmental impacts. The economic impacts of tourism's degrowth in an overcrowded tourism destination like Balearic Islands, Spain have been analyzed [23]. The authors stated that the decrease of tourists' inflow will result in a decrease of the GDP. They also mentioned that the increase of the average spending per tourist will offset the undesired impact on GDP. The perceptions and behaviors concerning tourism degrowth have been examined [24]. The authors analyzed 261 questionnaires to explore tourists' attitudes towards sustainability and degrowth. They stated that the concept of degrowth remains unfamiliar among tourists while young tourists appear less inclined towards degrowth. The sustainability and degrowth of tourism for achieving societal well-being has been explored [25]. The author stated that traditionally tourism was seen as a positive phenomenon but nowadays the uncontrolled growth of tourism exceeds the limits in tourism destinations causing undesired impacts. She analyzed the shift of the conventional tourism paradigm focusing on the needs of visitors to a new paradigm focusing on the living space of local inhabitants. The multiple crisis of tourism capitalism focusing on Spain has been studied [26]. The authors stated that the crisis of tourism is related to the structure of tourism capital accumulation through space and time. They proposed the active engagement and intervention of citizens in the economic sphere of tourism. The degrowth of tourism has been analyzed [27]. The author stated that according to "The Limits to Growth" report in 1972 the endless material growth on a finite planet is impossible. He mentioned that the concept of degrowth allows the rethinking of tourism within the social and ecological limits. The tourism degrowth focusing on Balearic Islands, Spain has been explored [28]. The authors stated that these islands suffer from overtourism while there is a continuous debate about degrowth and promotion of sustainable tourism. They mentioned that there are different views about tourism management. The first view promotes tourism expansion with better management of tourists' inflow avoiding tourists' congestion while the second view does not want the hegemonic role of tourism in the local society and economy. A global overview of tourism on the way towards 2030 has been published [29]. It is stated that by 2030 1.8 billion people will travel for holidays compared to 1 billion in 2012. It is also mentioned that on average the tourism arrivals are increasing by 43 million annually in the period 2010-2030. The overtourism phenomenon in the island of Crete, Greece has been evaluated [30]. The author estimated the tourism density at 4,120 bed-nights per km² and the tourism intensity at 55.63 bed-nights per resident. He also mentioned that the high number of tourists in Crete threatens the fragile natural ecosystems as well as the cultural and historical monuments. The global system investigating the interconnections and interdependence among population, natural resources, industrial production, food availability and pollution has been analyzed [31]. The authors stated that there are limits to growth which should not be surpassed in order to avoid the collapse of our societies.

3. TOURISM INDUSTRY IN THE ISLAND OF CRETE

Crete, the largest and most populous of the Greek islands, is a cornerstone of Greece's tourism industry. Renowned for its rich history, diverse landscapes, and vibrant culture, Crete attracts millions of visitors each year. The island seamlessly blends ancient heritage with modern hospitality, making it a unique destination for tourists from around the globe.

3.1 History and Culture

One of Crete's most significant draws is its rich historical and cultural heritage. The island is the cradle of the Minoan civilization, one of Europe's earliest advanced societies, dating back to 3,000 BCE. Iconic archaeological sites like the Palace of Knossos and Phaistos attract history enthusiasts eager to explore remnants of ancient grandeur. Venetian-era forts, Ottoman mosques, and Byzantine monasteries reflect Crete's multicultural past, adding layers of depth to its historical narrative. Cretan culture is another cornerstone of its tourism appeal. Traditional music, dance, and festivals provide visitors with an authentic experience of island life. The locals' legendary hospitality, often referred to as "philoxenia," ensures that tourists feel welcomed. Visitors frequently enjoy sampling local cuisine, such as dakos, lamb with stamnagathi, and the world-famous Cretan olive oil, which is an integral part of the Mediterranean diet.



3.2 Natural Beauty and Outdoor Activities

Crete's stunning landscapes are another major factor in its tourism success. The island boasts diverse geography, ranging from pristine beaches like Elafonissi and Balos to dramatic gorges such as Samaria, one of Europe's longest. Tourists flock to Crete to enjoy hiking, snorkeling, and exploring the countryside. The White Mountains, or Lefka Ori, provide opportunities for mountaineering and offer breathtaking vistas. For beachgoers, Crete's crystal-clear waters and golden sands are unparalleled. Many of these beaches, awarded Blue Flag status, provide excellent facilities while preserving natural beauty. In addition to relaxation, the island offers numerous water sports and diving excursions, allowing tourists to explore marine life and underwater caves.

3.3 Economic Importance

Tourism is a cornerstone of Crete's economy, accounting for a significant portion of its GDP and employment. The island's extensive network of hotels, resorts, and restaurants caters to diverse budgets and preferences, ranging from luxury seekers to backpackers. Furthermore, the influx of tourists supports local industries such as agriculture, handicrafts, and transportation. Olive oil, wine, and handmade textiles are popular souvenirs, boosting local production and preserving traditional crafts. Seasonal tourism, however, poses challenges. The majority of visitors arrive between May and October, leaving many businesses dependent on a limited peak season. To counter this, efforts are being made to promote year-round tourism by emphasizing activities like cultural tours, culinary experiences, and eco-tourism.

3.4 Sustainability and Future Prospects

As tourism grows, sustainability has become a pressing concern. Overcrowding at popular sites and environmental degradation threaten the island's charm. The local government and businesses have started implementing measures to balance tourism with conservation, such as promoting sustainable practices among tourists and investing in renewable energy. Looking ahead, Crete has immense potential to remain a top global destination. With its unique blend of history, culture, and natural beauty, coupled with a commitment to sustainability, the island is well-positioned to attract future generations of travelers. By fostering eco-friendly practices and diversifying its offerings, Crete can ensure that its tourism industry thrives while preserving its unique identity. Crete's tourism industry is a vibrant and vital part of the island's economy and culture. Its historical treasures, scenic landscapes, and welcoming people make it an unforgettable destination. By addressing sustainability challenges and expanding its tourism offerings, Crete can continue to enchant visitors for years to come. Several characteristics of Crete and its tourism industry are presented in table 1.

Table 1. Several characteristics of Crete and its tourism industry

Surface of Crete	8,336 Km ²
Length of coastline	1,040 km
Residents in Crete (Census 2021)	617,360 residents
Average annual air temperature (Heraklion city)	18.9°C
Annual hours with sunshine (Heraklion city)	2,780 hours
Average annual precipitation (Heraklion city)	460 mm
Average annual sea temperature (Heraklion city)	20.1°C
Tourist's beds (2021)	193,928
Arrivals in Crete in 2023	6,327,366 tourists
Number of airports for tourists' arrivals	3
Number of seaports for tourists' arrivals	6
%, arrivals in Crete to arrivals in Greece in 2023	17.7 %
Overnight staying of tourists in Crete in 2023	34,342,891 (bed-nights)
%, overnight staying in Crete to overnight staying in Greece in 2023	23.3 %
Average days of staying in Crete in 2023	5.43 days

Source: [11]

4. THE CONCEPT OF DEGROWTH: REDEFINING PROSPERITY IN A FINITE WORLD

In recent decades, the concept of degrowth has emerged as a radical yet increasingly relevant critique of traditional economic paradigms centered on perpetual growth. Degrowth challenges the assumption that continuous economic expansion is necessary or desirable, proposing instead a deliberate downsizing of production and consumption to achieve ecological sustainability, social



equity, and improved well-being. At its core, degrowth questions the very metrics by which success is measured, urging societies to prioritize quality of life over quantity of output.

4.1 Understanding Degrowth

Degrowth is not simply about shrinking economies but represents a broader cultural and systemic shift. It is an intentional process aimed at reducing the material and energy throughput of affluent societies while ensuring that human needs are met equitably. Advocates argue that the fixation on Gross Domestic Product (GDP) as the ultimate indicator of progress has led to environmental degradation, resource depletion, and social inequality. Degrowth seeks to dismantle this growth imperative by promoting alternative ways of organizing economies and societies. The origins of degrowth can be traced to ecological economics and critiques of industrial capitalism. Several thinkers have highlighted how unrestrained economic growth exacerbates environmental crises, such as climate change and biodiversity loss. Degrowth advocates argue that the planet's finite resources cannot sustain infinite expansion and that scaling back human demands on the Earth is essential for long-term viability and prosperity. Kallis, 2019 [13] argues that we should voluntarily learn to live within limits in order to achieve freedom and liberty in a planet with limited resources. He proposes that we should reject the mainstream model of consumerism and choose the values of simplicity and self-restraint. Andriotis, 2014 [7] argues that the natural limits to growth in many tourism destinations have been surpassed and the carrying capacity has been reached. Therefore, the only solution is the reorientation to a smaller economy with less production and consumption.

4.2 Key Principles of Degrowth

The key principles of degrowth include:

Ecological Limits: Degrowth emphasizes the need to respect planetary boundaries. Human activity has already surpassed several ecological thresholds, including carbon emissions and biodiversity loss, jeopardizing the stability of Earth's systems. Degrowth advocates propose reducing resource consumption and transitioning to renewable energy sources to mitigate these impacts.

Social Equity: A central tenet of degrowth is redistributing wealth and resources more equitably, both within and between nations. This involves addressing the overconsumption of affluent populations while improving access to essential goods and services for marginalized communities. Degrowth challenges the notion that prosperity requires material abundance, emphasizing instead the value of sufficiency and solidarity.

Redefining Well-being: Degrowth calls for a shift away from consumerism toward non-material measures of happiness and fulfillment. It encourages investments in public goods, such as healthcare, education, and green spaces, as well as fostering community connections and cultural enrichment.

Democratic Transformation: The degrowth movement advocates for participatory decision-making processes to ensure that societal changes reflect diverse perspectives and priorities. It seeks to empower communities to take control of local resources and governance.

4.3 Implementing Degrowth

Achieving degrowth requires systemic changes across multiple domains. This includes adopting policies like universal basic income, work-sharing, and progressive taxation to reduce economic inequality and enable more leisure time. Urban planning focused on walkability and public transport can reduce dependence on cars, while initiatives like repair cafes and sharing economies promote sustainable consumption. Additionally, degrowth emphasizes the importance of challenging cultural norms that equate success with material accumulation. Media, education, and art can play pivotal roles in reshaping societal values to embrace simplicity, cooperation, and mindfulness.

4.4 Criticisms and Challenges

Critics of degrowth often highlight potential economic and political obstacles. For instance, shrinking GDP could lead to unemployment and social instability, particularly in growth-dependent economies. However, degrowth proponents argue that these challenges can be mitigated through careful planning and the reallocation of resources. Others worry that degrowth may be politically unfeasible due to entrenched interests and resistance to change. Susskind, 2024 [14] argues that our finite planet has limited tangible resources. However, he says, what really matters for growth are the intangible ideas for combining these finite resources in new and valuable ways. Economic growth is not driven by using more finite resources but by discovering better and



better ways to combine these finite resources which are available to us. Fortunately, he adds, there are infinite intangible ideas in our planet which can be used for combining our finite resources to improve our lives triggering the growth.

4.5 A Vision for the Future

Despite these challenges, degrowth offers a compelling vision of a sustainable and equitable future. It urges societies to rethink their relationship with the natural world and prioritize collective well-being over profit. As the global community grapples with mounting environmental and social crises, degrowth presents a bold alternative to business as usual. By embracing this paradigm shift, humanity has the opportunity to create a world that thrives within ecological limits while fostering shared prosperity and resilience.

5. DEGROWTH IN THE TOURISM INDUSTRY

The tourism industry, a cornerstone of the global economy, has long been celebrated for its ability to generate revenue, foster cultural exchange, and create employment. According to the [29] World Tourism Organization's (UNWTO) long-term forecast, "Tourism Towards 2030," international tourist arrivals are projected to reach 1.8 billion by 2030. This represents an average annual growth rate of 3.3% from 2010 to 2030, equating to approximately 43 million additional tourists each year. The rapid expansion of tourism has come at a significant cost, including environmental degradation, resource overuse, and the commodification of cultural heritage. The concept of degrowth in the tourism sector offers a compelling framework for addressing these issues by advocating for a more sustainable and equitable approach to travel and hospitality. By rethinking growth-centric models, degrowth in tourism aims to balance the needs of people, communities, and the planet.

5.1 The Need for Degrowth in Tourism

Tourism's exponential growth has placed immense pressure on ecosystems and local communities. Over-tourism in popular destinations, such as Venice, Barcelona, and Bali, has led to overcrowding, pollution, and the displacement of local residents. Additionally, the carbon footprint of the tourism industry—largely due to air travel—is a major contributor to climate change. These challenges underscore the unsustainability of a growth-oriented tourism model and the urgent need for alternatives that prioritize environmental stewardship and social equity. Degrowth in tourism challenges the industry's reliance on ever-increasing visitor numbers and revenue. Instead of maximizing profits, it advocates for minimizing harm by reducing the scale of tourism activities and focusing on quality over quantity. This involves limiting the environmental impact of travel, protecting local cultures from commercialization, and ensuring that the benefits of tourism are equitably distributed.

5.2 Principles of Degrowth in Tourism

The principles of degrowth in tourism include:

Sustainable Practices: Central to degrowth in tourism is the adoption of sustainable practices that minimize environmental impact. This includes promoting eco-friendly transportation options, reducing waste, and encouraging travelers to adopt responsible behaviors, such as respecting local customs and ecosystems.

Community-Centric Tourism: Degrowth emphasizes the empowerment of local communities. Tourism initiatives should be designed and managed by residents to ensure that they align with local values and priorities. Revenue from tourism should be reinvested in community development rather than extracted by external corporations.

Slow Travel: Degrowth advocates for "slow travel," a philosophy that encourages travelers to spend more time in fewer destinations. By prioritizing meaningful experiences and local engagement, slow travel reduces the environmental impact of frequent, short-term trips and fosters deeper connections between visitors and host communities.

Equitable Access: Degrowth in tourism seeks to make travel accessible to a broader range of people while avoiding the overexploitation of specific destinations. This involves diversifying tourism offerings to reduce pressure on popular sites and promoting off-season travel to distribute visitor numbers more evenly.

5.3 Implementing Degrowth in Tourism

Transitioning to a degrowth model in tourism requires systemic change at multiple levels. Governments can implement policies that regulate tourist numbers, impose environmental taxes, and incentivize sustainable practices. For instance, cities like Amsterdam and Bhutan have introduced tourist caps and eco-tourism fees to manage visitor impact. The private sector also has a critical role to play. Tour operators, hotels, and airlines can adopt greener practices, such as using renewable energy, reducing waste, and supporting



local businesses. Additionally, marketing strategies should focus on promoting responsible travel and authentic experiences rather than mass tourism packages. Travelers themselves can contribute by making conscious choices, such as opting for public transport, choosing eco-friendly accommodations, and prioritizing destinations that actively promote sustainability. Educational campaigns and awareness initiatives can help shift consumer attitudes toward more mindful travel practices.

5.4 Challenges and Opportunities

The transition to degrowth in tourism is not without challenges. Resistance from industry stakeholders, who benefit from the status quo, and travelers accustomed to cheap and convenient options may hinder progress. Additionally, regions heavily dependent on tourism revenue may face economic difficulties during the shift to a smaller-scale model. However, degrowth in tourism also presents significant opportunities. By prioritizing sustainability and local well-being, it can create more resilient and diversified economies. Reduced environmental impact and preservation of cultural heritage can enhance the long-term appeal of destinations, ensuring their viability for future generations.

5.5 A Vision for Sustainable Tourism

Degrowth in the tourism industry represents a transformative vision that aligns economic activity with ecological limits and social justice. It calls for a shift from profit-driven mass tourism to a model that values environmental integrity, cultural authenticity, and community empowerment. As global challenges such as climate change and over-tourism intensify, embracing degrowth offers a pathway to a more sustainable and equitable future for travel. By reimagining tourism through the lens of degrowth, the industry can evolve to become a force for good, enriching lives while safeguarding the planet.

6. DEGROWTH IN THE TOURISM INDUSTRY ON THE ISLAND OF CRETE, GREECE

Crete, the largest island in Greece, is renowned for its stunning landscapes, ancient history, and vibrant culture. As one of the most popular tourist destinations in the Mediterranean, Crete has benefited significantly from tourism—contributing to local economies, creating jobs, and fostering cultural exchange. However, the rapid and unregulated growth of tourism has also brought substantial challenges, including environmental degradation, cultural commodification, and strain on local resources. The concept of degrowth in the tourism industry offers a pathway to address these issues by promoting a more sustainable and equitable model tailored to Crete's unique context.

6.1 The Need for Degrowth in Crete's Tourism Sector

Crete's tourism industry has expanded dramatically over the past few decades, with millions of visitors arriving annually. While this influx has boosted the economy, it has also placed significant pressure on the island's ecosystems and infrastructure. Overcrowded beaches, excessive waste generation, and water shortages are some of the pressing environmental concerns. Additionally, the proliferation of large-scale resorts and tourist complexes has often sidelined local communities and traditional ways of life. Degrowth in Crete's tourism industry emphasizes the need to prioritize ecological integrity and social well-being over unrestrained economic expansion. By scaling down the volume of tourists and focusing on quality over quantity, the island can reduce its environmental footprint, preserve its cultural heritage, and foster a more inclusive tourism model that benefits residents and visitors alike.

6.2 Principles of Tourism Degrowth in Crete

The principles of tourism degrowth in Crete comprise:

Preserving Natural Ecosystems: Crete's rich biodiversity and unique landscapes, from the Samaria Gorge to its pristine beaches, are key attractions. Degrowth calls for stringent measures to protect these ecosystems, such as limiting visitor numbers in fragile areas, regulating coastal development, and promoting eco-friendly tourism activities like hiking and agro-tourism.

Empowering Local Communities: Degrowth advocates for community-centered tourism in Crete, where local residents have greater control over tourism initiatives. This involves supporting family-run businesses, traditional crafts, and local food production, ensuring that tourism revenue remains within the island's economy.

Slow and Sustainable Travel: Encouraging longer stays and more immersive experiences can reduce the environmental impact of short-term, high-volume tourism. Visitors can engage more deeply with Crete's culture, history, and natural beauty through activities like learning traditional cooking, exploring archaeological sites, or participating in village festivals.



Reducing Over-Tourism: To alleviate overcrowding in popular destinations like Elafonissi Beach and Knossos, degrowth strategies can promote alternative attractions and off-season travel. Diversifying tourism offerings across the island can help distribute visitor numbers more evenly and relieve pressure on high-traffic areas.

6.3 Implementing Degrowth in Crete

The implementation of degrowth in Crete's tourism sector requires collaboration among governments, businesses, and communities. Local authorities can introduce policies such as eco-taxes, limits on new hotel construction, and caps on visitor numbers in sensitive areas. Initiatives like waste reduction programs and renewable energy adoption in tourism facilities can also contribute to sustainability. Businesses play a crucial role by adopting environmentally friendly practices and promoting authentic, locally rooted experiences. For instance, boutique hotels and guesthouses can highlight Crete's traditional architecture and cuisine, providing an alternative to mass-market resorts. Additionally, travel agencies can design packages that emphasize cultural and ecological appreciation rather than volume-driven itineraries. Tourists themselves are key stakeholders in the degrowth movement. By choosing responsible travel options, supporting local enterprises, and respecting the island's environment and customs, visitors can contribute to a more sustainable tourism model. Educational campaigns and awareness initiatives can encourage such behaviors and reshape consumer expectations.

6.4 Challenges and Opportunities

Transitioning to a degrowth model in Crete's tourism industry is not without challenges. Resistance from stakeholders invested in high-growth strategies and the potential short-term economic impacts of reduced tourist numbers are significant hurdles. However, the long-term benefits of degrowth, including enhanced environmental resilience, cultural preservation, and improved quality of life for residents, make it a worthwhile pursuit. Moreover, Crete has the opportunity to position itself as a global leader in sustainable tourism by embracing degrowth principles. By leveraging its unique identity and natural wealth, the island can attract a discerning clientele that values sustainability and authenticity, creating a niche market that aligns with its long-term goals.

6.5 A Vision for Crete's Future

Degrowth in the tourism industry offers Crete a transformative vision for the future. By prioritizing sustainability, cultural authenticity, and community well-being, the island can overcome the challenges of over-tourism and secure a thriving, balanced tourism sector for generations to come. As the world grapples with climate change and the limits of unchecked growth, Crete has the potential to serve as a beacon of sustainable tourism, showcasing how a shift toward degrowth can benefit both people and the planet.

7. DISCUSSION

The aspects of tourism degrowth in the island of Crete, Greece have been explored. Tourism in Crete nowadays is flourishing while the majority of tourists visit the island to enjoy the sun, the sea and its sandy beaches. The current model of continuous tourism development in Crete threatens its long-term sustainability and the fragile natural ecosystems. The carrying capacity of the island regarding tourism has been surpassed with undesired and harmful impacts. The observed overtourism has also adverse impacts on the local societies. It has been indicated that the principles of tourism degrowth require a different paradigm than the current. However, the change of the current tourism paradigm in Crete which is based on continuous unlimited growth requires the consensus among the multiple stakeholders of the tourism industry in the island. The new paradigm of tourism degrowth should be based on the interest of locality instead of development of large tourism facilities in the north coast of the island, promotion of small and medium tourism enterprises, reduction in working hours, environmental protection and quality of life for the tourists and the local residents, decommodification of tourism activities, reduction of carbon emissions and changed pattern of production and consumption. However, the key players for the transition of the current tourism model in Crete, which is based on mass tourism and to unlimited growth, to a new sustainable tourism model based on tourism degrowth have not been identified.

Further work should be focused on: a) analysis of the attitude of the multiple stakeholders of the local tourism industry regarding the concept of tourism degrowth and their willingness to support and promote the new tourism paradigm, and b) developing a plan for reducing the undesired phenomenon of overtourism in the island without exceeding the limits of the finite natural resources.



8. CONCLUSIONS

The possibility of degrowth in the tourism industry in Crete has been explored. The tourism industry in Crete is flourishing nowadays while the island is accepting an increasing number of visitors every year with significant positive economic impacts. Overtourism phenomena are observed in the island threatening the natural ecosystems, the historical and cultural monuments and the local societies. Additionally, the climate crisis which is more intense in Mediterranean region has adverse impacts on the local tourism industry. The continuous growth of tourism in Crete has exceeded the carrying capacity of the island regarding tourism development threatening its long-term sustainability. The current tourism paradigm in Crete based on continuous and unlimited growth, mass tourism, luxury large hotels located on the north coast of the island and overconsumption is not sustainable anymore. The transition to a new sustainable tourism paradigm which should be based on degrowth of the local tourism industry is necessary. The new tourism paradigm in Crete should be based on three pillars comprising: a) environmental sustainability without harming the natural fragile ecosystems and without overconsuming the limited natural resources of the island, b) the well-being of the tourists, and c) the well-being of the local residents.

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