

2020

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Recommended Citation

Mitropoulou, Angeliki and Spilanis, Ioannis (2020) "From Insularity to Islandness: The use of place branding to achieve sustainable island tourism," *International Journal of Islands Research*: Vol. 1: Iss. 1, Article 5.

Available at: <https://arrow.tudublin.ie/ijir/vol1/iss1/5>

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From Insularity to Islandness: The use of place branding to achieve sustainable island tourism

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This paper aims to outline the role that place branding plays in shaping a new framework for sustainable island tourism. Islandness, as a contemporary context, underlines that islands share a set of unique features and they need to be studied on their own terms; they combine elements of urban and rural regions at the same time. Place branding is evolving as a crucial element for differentiated marketing that conditionally can also form an alternative tool to achieve sustainability for island regions. Therefore, policy makers need to examine tourism policies for island regions through the lenses of Nissology.

It is commonly accepted that globalisation has intensified the competition between countries, cities and regions to attract investment, high quality human capital, various potential audiences and visitors. Several factors play a significant role in shaping the context in which places develop nowadays: climate change, new technologies, tourism pressures are just a few to highlight from the public discussion and academic debates. A growing number of researchers argue that place branding could be the strategic planning procedure needed, able to achieve multifaceted sustainability of an island destination. One very important issue raised often by both academics and practitioners is the role of stakeholders and local governance in such strategic processes like sustainable tourism development of a destination.

The literature review, in this paper, explores why islandness and place branding have become significant for islands' sustainable tourism development. Therefore, building on existing cross-discipline theoretical foundations, the present paper aims to (a) highlight the link between islandness and contemporary place branding, (b) emphasise the need to establish the term 'island branding', and (c) suggest a potential framework deriving from this linkage as a proper solution for contributing to the next era of sustainable tourism development for island regions.

Key Words: islandness, island tourism, place branding, sustainable development

Introduction

Tourism accounted for 10% of the global economy in 2016 and was projected to continue by nearly 4% annually until 2030 according to a 2019 report by UNWTO (Epler Wood *et al.*, 2019:1). The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has caused an abrupt reversal of the increasing numbers regarding tourism. Relevant reports mention that UNWTO (2020) in May 2020 expected a fall of between 60-80% over the whole year. Indeed, according to the Organization, international tourism was already down 22% in Q1. The unprecedented situation created by the COVID-19 pandemic

places millions of livelihoods at risk and threatens to roll back progress made in advancing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (UNWTO, 2020).

As if the current crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic was not dramatic enough, globalisation has already changed the way we view locality, leading to a new era for places, products and even experiences. The competition among places and especially cities is a result of globalisation according to Fierro and Aranburu (2019). Nowadays, places and products having original features that relate to their locality play a significant role in standing out (Baldacchino & Khamis, 2018).

This paradox leads us to rethink how we view places and their main developmental strategies. Other alarming tendencies like ‘overtourism’ bring islands into the spotlight: according to an extensive report by the TRAN Committee (Peeters *et al.*, 2018:16) the findings show that the most vulnerable destinations are not necessarily cities, but rather coastal, islands and rural heritage sites.

The effort to create sustainable tourism that genuinely delivers on the promise of protecting assets for the future generation has been weak (Wood, *et al.*, 2019). Tourism is also, in a growing number of islands all around the world, the main economic activity, as traditional activities (farming, fisheries, livestock and craft) have declined under the pressure of the global market. A key position presented in this paper argues that contemporary place branding that incorporates the values of sustainable development and islandness is the key to reinventing tourism development and destination management. How prepared are nations and smaller regions like islands, for example, to tackle pressures upon local society and environment and to establish an effective framework for tourism development?

This paper draws on opinions from existing literature and published research; it adopts a qualitative thematic analytical process in identifying key themes and synthesising research evidence in order to reach new forms of understanding and working theories based on diverse evidence in the field of island studies (Steward, 2004:495). The paper’s aim is to bring together evidence and theories from different times, places, and disciplines to inform professional theory and practice about sustainable tourism development for islands.

Islands are not static; they are complex and dynamic systems with specific natural and spatial boundaries (Petridis, 2011; Stratford, 2008). One of the main aims of this paper is to contribute to the discussion of *Nissology*, which is the field that studies islands on their own terms (McCall, 1994:106). To redefine island tourism, researchers need to go back and re-examine how academics, practitioners and local authorities view islands. In recent decades several phenomena, tendencies and changes have occurred that demand a rethink of tourism and islands together. Environmental and tourism pressures, demographic and social changes all have direct consequences for island communities (Ratter, 2018).

This paper proceeds with a parallel re-examination of islandness, tourism development and place branding, while urging researchers and decision-makers to include cross-disciplinary knowledge in order to build theories and models within a more sustainable framework. Finally, the paper attempts to critically combine and examine existing literature and establish new terms like ‘island branding’.

The contemporary role of place branding

Places are simultaneously places of residence, work, visitation, leisure, entrepreneurship, financial investment, social interaction, social activism, emotional attachment and many more (Kavaratzis, 2017:98). First and foremost, places are about people who live there and the social relations that exist therein (Stubbs & Warnaby, 2015:102). Branding is a technique to promote the special features of an object, product, or place. In brief, place branding is the use of branding theories, models, and techniques on places. Neacșu *et al.* (2006:950 - 951) provide us with an updated definition:

place branding [is defined] as a deliberate, premeditated process for correcting/optimizing the natural image towards an official image to be communicated, to insure distinctiveness [uniqueness] towards other places, with the purpose of producing mutations in the attitude and behavior of the ‘consumers’ of places (residents, tourists, investors etc.).’

So, the key for any place branding strategy to be effectively developed is first to identify all relevant stakeholders and engage them into the project.

A review of literature demonstrates that place branding strategies usually apply a top-down approach under the leadership of governments through their agencies for economic and/or economic development (Aitken & Campelo, 2011:917). This is the common procedure in companies branding under the client’s initiative. Hankinson (2010) has presented a scheme with three domain phases that depict the evolution of the mainstream and place branding domains. These are: domain origins, domain deepening and domain widening. In the latter phase, Hankinson includes the sub fields of place branding: destination branding, nation branding, regional branding and city branding. Two very significant arguments arise based on this inclusive model. Firstly, city branding has

been a very popular topic for research. However, not all places are cities and share various differentiated features, we need to reflect on testing and generalising some arguments, theories, and models in other cases like towns, villages, islands and various territories. It is interesting that place branding can be practiced at different spatial scales from the neighbourhood, through the city to the region, national/state, or continental scale (Ashworth & Kavaratzis, 2018:425), even though city is the preferred spatial scale for place branding.

Moreover, it should be emphasised that place branding should be closer to product branding in the sense that it should better reflect the place through a specially designed spatial planning which must certainly involve stakeholders. A crucial difference is that unlike employees in the cases of product branding, stakeholders like citizens and visitors in the case of place branding do not have to be engaged or even to follow the guidelines necessary for the materialisation of the project. Maybe it is high time that the implementation of bottom-up procedures with more participatory elements were examined. The matter is how to make locals and visitors own the place brand, and also how to achieve it is through active participation in the place branding process based on a shared vision of what constitutes a place's potential for development (Kavaratzis, 2017). In a shared situation, the place (as a brand) becomes closer to residents because it is not seen as imposed from above (the authorities) or from the outside (some highly paid consultant) but based on the reality of the place as lived by the place's residents and experienced by its visitors. Locals should no longer be excluded from branding strategies. Such disjoint is highly incompatible because place marketing and branding takes place in governance networks of actors that interact with each other (Eshuis *et al.*, 2014).

Ashworth and Kavaratzis (2018:435) recognise that, despite the various critical voices in relation to place branding practice, it has been consciously and unconsciously present for as long as cities have competed for trade, populations, wealth, prestige and power. Indeed, Baldacchino and Khamis (2018:371) argue that this is also the case for islands, as they

have been 'branded' long before the concept found its way into management schools and contemporary marketing discourse.

However, by looking closer it appears that there is not any clear and unanimously accepted established definition for island branding! According to Baldacchino,

islands are now, unwittingly, the objects of what may be the most lavish, global and consistent branding exercise in human history. They find themselves presented as locales of desire, as platforms of paradise, as habitual sites of fascination, emotional offloading, or religious pilgrimage (2010:374).

It is this kind of image that lie at the core of destination marketing. Given that, when choosing and visiting a place, one consumes not only a destination and a space, but images of that place (Aranburu *et al.*, 2016).

Freire (2005) argues that tourism destinations, such as islands, help people to express themselves, their identity, and their lifestyle. So, if tourism destinations have symbolically transformed into something more than a spatial entity or a visiting location, and a greater significance is attributed to them in contemporary society, one interesting conclusion could be that places, like other types of consumer goods, should be managed as brands, through a well elaborated policy, having vision, objectives and goals. All relevant stakeholders need to discuss how communities and local authorities can use place branding as a strategic tool to achieve sustainability for islands. As Freire (2005:348) has stated, a place will always mean something, it has a place name which will function as a brand, even if it is not managed under a branding conceptual framework. On top of this, it is more important for a place to stay sustainable (to progress and not to decline or 'disappear') than it is for a company or a product. Thus, place branding is more than just a name, a logo, and an ad campaign (Van Ham, 2008).

It is important to not oversimplify the essence of place branding. Any marketing of the vision of any place, i.e. its branding strategy, must be supported by the appropriate policy. Freire (2005) has made two very significant arguments. Firstly, brands in general tend to be more and more important and this is not the result of clever and creative publicists who are manipulating consumers, but it is linked to greater changes in society. In a semiotic society there is an inevitable demand for brands because they give meaning to objects and experiences and are in a sense a tool for self-identification

in society. Secondly, place branding, can be a strong tool to protect locality and culture, and can act as the basis for sustainable development. However, practitioners and local authorities who are mainly responsible for the design and implementation of place branding strategies need to incorporate sustainability into their designs because in every single case there is a risk for a place to be destroyed due to its overwhelming success as a preferred destination.

Islands as places: The need to study islands on their own terms

For a long time, insularity has been used as the term to describe

the connecting link, the common characteristic of all islands regardless of their size, population and development level. Insularity expresses 'objective' and measurable characteristics, including small areal size, small population (small market), isolation and remoteness, as well as unique natural and cultural environments. However, it also involves a distinctive 'experiential identity', which is a non-measurable quality expressing the various symbols that islands are connected to (Spilanis et al., 2011:9).

Researchers that have been exploring the debate between two concepts; insularity and islandness, argue that islandness was not always the preferred term. At the very beginning of the academic exploration of this topic, the prevailing term used to be 'insularity'. Pons and Rullan (2014:6) affirm this difference in how islands are viewed and where the term insularity is used, it typically focuses on 'a source of disadvantages'. Navinés (2010:14) adds that one of the most negative effects that 'insularity' entails is that it represents a rift from continental territory. Spilanis et al. (2011:11) also identify that insularity negatively affects accessibility, regardless of the point of view of the islander or the visitor to an island. Indeed, insularity as a term carried too much negativity and a burden that did not do justice to the essence of island characteristics (Baldacchino, 2004). This paper adopts the use of the term 'islandness' to emphasise the dynamic nature of islands and not merely the premise that they are a source of negativity.

Islands can learn from each other because they share several unique characteristics that can be described under the term 'islandness'. Indeed, in the words of Bourgeault

what counts on islands, is that community has to work together. Island life is rigidly communal. ... Decision making on an island reflects this communal dimension ... (1990:36-37). ...

Conkling (2007:200) argues that

islandness is often considered as a metaphysical sensation deriving from the heightened experiences that accompany the physical isolation of island life ... [He thinks of islandness as] ... an important metacultural phenomenon that helps maintain island communities in spite of daunting economic pressures to abandon them (Conkling, 2007:200).

McCall (1994:106) makes an interesting argument about what it means to be an island resident, and that is *second class citizen*, meaning that islands and islanders do not get the attention they need in terms of public policies and professionals. Now the question that rises is where we stand today on that matter? Are islands today places in need of saving? And if this is the case, how can various stakeholders manage problems and challenges that arise due to islandness?

First and foremost, we need to pinpoint the features that constitute islandness. Conkling (2007) in a rather literary view, briefly describes islandness as 'a construct of the mind, a singular way of looking at the world'. It is either being on an island or not. However, in the present paper, it is crucial to mention a set of characteristics that McCall (1994) identified about 25 years ago that are often used to describe islandness from a more practical standpoint.

The first, rather undoubted characteristic is the physical limitation of islands and its impact both socially and culturally. Their limits operate like physical borders. This physical limitation is relevant because it usually goes hand in hand with limited natural resources, which is the second typical island feature. The third one pinpoints the tendency that islands often are claimed by continental states, like the Aegean archipelago. The fourth feature relates to the scarcity of resources that can be found on an island, especially when the distance of the island from the mainland increases. The fifth, and quite interesting

feature, is the fact that island cultures are self-defined in a very distinct way which is quite different for continental cultures. The sixth characteristic is that people living on islands do not necessarily view an island's scale as an isolation barrier or feeling excluded because of an island's size. Seventh, the relationships between people living on islands do not follow the patterns of those formulated in larger places where there is anonymity and isolation. The eighth feature relates to the fact that due to land limitation various forms of migration are more obvious on islands and may have more intense impact on them.

Additionally, Spilanis *et al.* (2011:35-36) stress that islands can be thought of as objects 'of the mind' as well as 'physical' objects but, with the emphasis being on the inherent negative impact that those characteristics have on islands, resulting in them adopting the term 'insularity'. According to their theory there are four main characteristics that seen in combination define insularity, which are not actually far from McCall's axes. These are:

- **Small Size:** Often, islands are small both in terms of areal size and population compared to 'the mainland'. Their small population results in a limited internal market and constrained local demand for commodities and services, as well as limited workforce. This, in its turn, limits scale and concentration economies. Concurrently, small size means that islands tend to have precious few -if any- land resources for extensive agriculture, whilst they also regularly lack key natural resources, including adequate water supplies, fossil fuels but also non-fuel minerals. In cases where raw materials may have been available in the past, often, these have now been exhausted. The islands' small size has meant their environmental balance is regularly seriously endangered and this trait, in turn, makes environmental management a necessity.
- **Remoteness and Isolation:** This results in high installation and operating costs for companies, households and the state.
- **Special Experiential Identity:** The particularities of insular space affect perceptions, behaviours and actions. As has already been mentioned, islands are 'objects of the mind' in addition to being physical

objects and they are viewed in different ways by visitors – tourists and mainlanders – compared to long-term local inhabitants. While for the visitor, islands can be places to 'escape' from everyday life and live 'utopias', local inhabitants may have highly different views.

- **Rich and Vulnerable Natural and Cultural Environment:** Because of their small size and their isolation many islands have witnessed the evolution of unique endemic species and, as a result, have valuable terrestrial and marine ecosystems. Additionally, numerous islands have a rich historic past due to their strategic position on maritime routes, which is presently highlighted through monuments, settlements and landscapes; many of these have been classified as national, regional, or even world cultural heritage sites. This unique natural and cultural capital has been used until now mostly for the development of tourism - and in the case of the majority of Mediterranean islands mass tourism.

Due to the above described features having direct effect on the attractiveness of islands in comparison to the mainland, the depletion of the economic and social basis of the islands, as high production costs and isolation are very clear disadvantages in a world of mass and low-cost production. So, using the term 'insularity' for describing their situation, has given the term a rather negative connotation. The change of the global context in recent years, where locality and special features have taken on more importance, these same characteristics of the islands have been transformed from disadvantages to potentialities to be explored. The term 'islandness' has come to describe this new standpoint regarding specific island features.

Islands can continue to work towards moving away from insularity and closer to islandness by adopting contemporary place branding frameworks and models but without leaving aside the need to rethink in parallel about sustainability and alternatives to existing tourism development patterns. Achieving sustainable tourism is a continuous process which requires constant monitoring of impacts, introducing the necessary preventive and/or corrective measures whenever necessary. Sustainable tourism should also maintain a high level of tourist

satisfaction and ensure a meaningful experience for the tourists, raising their awareness about sustainability issues and promoting sustainable tourism practices amongst them. After all, an effective place brand is one that incorporates authentic and sustainable attributes that will appeal to a range of visitors into the future (Jarratt *et al.*, 2019:417).

Why sustainability is crucial for islands

According to Spilanis and Vayanni (2004) relevant literature lacks a clear operational definition of sustainable tourism. What it is, how can it be achieved and who can make it happen? Almost 15 years later UNWTO is still working to create a framework to measure sustainable tourism. the UNWTO (2005) definition about sustainable tourism development is currently the following:

Tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities.

It is interesting that according to UNWTO's suggestions (UNEP & UNWTO, 2005:11-12), sustainable tourism development guidelines and management practices are applicable to all forms of tourism in all types of destinations, including mass tourism and the various niche tourism segments. Their report also clearly argues that sustainable tourism development requires the informed participation of all relevant stakeholders, as well as strong political leadership to ensure wide participation and consensus building. Moreover, sustainability should be incorporated as a development goal from the very first step of any place branding procedure. As Spilanis *et al.* (2005) confirm, when discussing sustainability for a specific region, the most crucial is the initial step of identifying the problems that the region faces. We argue that this should not be done without stakeholder participation and especially not without residents.

It is recognised that despite sustainable development and sustainability being terms often used in research, policies, monitoring and planning, it is not very clear how these can be translated into specific policies, measures, and strategies. According to Spilanis *et al.* (2009) and Rodríguez *et al.* (2008), islands can indeed be the best cases to act as 'laboratories' for studying and measuring

sustainability because of their distinct characteristics, which were mentioned in the first section and especially their land limits and size. The strength of islands as prototype cases can also be found in Clarke's (2001:46) argument that on continents, economic and political changes evolve over decades; on islands, a ship appears on the horizon, a seaplane lands in a harbour, a European explorer arrives, and a single day changes everything forever.

Petridis and Fischer-Kowalski (2016:545) pinpoint that heavily populated islands, because of their having quite fragile ecosystems and economies, are heavily dependent on imports for a broad range of goods and suffer from size constraints in the development of resilient water, sanitation, energy and waste management systems. They argue that the challenges faced by this kind of island makes them unique cases for studies that aim at systematically reporting and analysing the interactions between human activities and the environment, to move towards systems and practices that are sustainable in the long term.

Karampela *et al.* (2017:72) argue that all the characteristics of islands can be perceived as a strategic opportunity for sustainable development or a change to redefine and reframe it. The question is, whether islands can be attractive and sustainable at the same time. In addition to all the challenging features which characterise islands, it is important to stress that islands, especially those that are global tourism destinations, face dual problems called overtourism and climate change. Those two, when combined, can be detrimental for places and therefore islands too. Ratter (2018:173) has made a much more clear and alarming statement by saying that islands have been identified as hotspots of global climate change. Overtourism can be defined as

the impact of tourism on a destination, or parts thereof, that excessively influences perceived quality of life of citizens and/or quality of visitors experiences in a negative way (UNWTO, 2018:4).

However serious the tendencies regarding these two phenomena already are, academics, practitioners and authorities still face them with numbness.

Despite tourism being probably one of the most preferred research topics in the context of island development, the literature has not yet adequately covered niche themes like the impact of cruise tourism on islands and their sustainability, overtourism on islands, sustainable island tourism, the role of stakeholders in island tourism development and many other contemporary island tourism issues. While tourism continuously evolves and puts pressure on places, societies and existing development strategies, more research is needed that includes and incorporates sustainability theories, models and tools. In general, one could argue that the academic discussion needs to be enriched with solid research regarding implications, differences and particularities of island tourism, and if and how the practice of tourism and its impacts relate to islandness. Within this framework, two specific research gaps, included in this conceptual paper, are the following.

Firstly, islands need to be compared to each other to contribute more effectively to a deeper exploration of Nissology - according to Karampela *et al.* (2017) there is a lack of comparisons within islands, between islands and similar continental areas in relative literature. Secondly, linking sustainability to islands has its own issues. According to van der Velde *et al.* (2007), it is rather a mistake to assume that classical approaches to sustainability can be applied to islands. Islands demand customised solutions when it comes to sustainability, mainly because of their unique set of features.

Place Branding as a Facilitating Tool for Sustainable Island Tourism Development

Within a period from 1970 until 2000, in most cases reviewed by Tsartas (2003:122) the holistic presence of tourism in the local production structure is a critical factor. Indeed, the tourism sector tends, directly or indirectly, to become the main source of income for almost all social strata, irrespective of their main occupation. This process starts with the gradual abandonment of all other employment sectors, especially agriculture, which traditionally constituted the basic source of income in these areas. This has consolidated tourism as a basic source of income, while occupations in the primary (e.g. agriculture) and secondary sectors (e.g. handicrafts, alimentation) are on the decline.

While mass tourism was blooming, a range of socioeconomic and cultural changes occurred that led to rapid and usually unplanned tourism development. Several academics (e.g. Buhalis, 2001; Tsartas, 2003; Aguiló *et al.*, 2005; Kyriakou *et al.*, 2011) confirm what is rather common knowledge; mass tourism after decades of shaping communities, has ended up being so deeply rooted as the prevailing developmental framework that even in today's discussions it is the main starting point. Lack of integrated planning and in some cases even unplanned tourism activities have led many islands and coastal areas to unregulated development of mass tourism, creating various social and environmental concerns. Mass tourism forms a crucial problem on islands because, during a short period, intense pressures combined with restricted possibilities to manage tourism's impacts exist (Bramwell, 2004; Coccossis & Tsartas, 2001), generating negative impacts on the natural and anthropogenic environment of destination places.

According to UNWTO (2018) report on overtourism, global issues regarding environment, economy and society have become so complex that stakeholders need to rethink their current practices and look for more innovative solutions. Tsartas (2003:129) more than a decade earlier concluded that it was high time tourism policy searched for softer and locally integrated models of tourism development. In spite of sustainable tourism development being introduced to public discussion (e.g. Spilanis & Vayanni, 2004) and considered in governmental agendas for many years, the majority of the proposed or imposed measures lack evidence of its impact. This is true concerning large projects involving hotels and other large developments (Karatzoglou & Spilanis, 2010), but also other projects involving critical stakeholders like small and medium sized tourism businesses, local authorities, tourists and local citizens. The Phenomenon of overtourism, is only new in definition (however overtourism can also be described under terms such as carrying capacity), and thus, authorities still have not agreed on the exact policy measures that need to be taken to protect destinations.

Additionally, tourism is closely linked to place marketing and branding processes because it is used by local and national authorities and governments as a positioning, development, and regeneration tool (Hall, 1997). A

central question that Leseure (2010:464) has highlighted is how islands learn what they are good at in comparison with their competitors, and thus, which sectors should they invest in? Can a more participatory place branding framework help towards aiding islands identify and reinforce their strengths and tackle their problems and challenges? Searching for what constitutes a brand can be more important than finding it, especially when it concerns places. Involving local citizens, authorities and other stakeholders in this peculiar search could be the key to achieving sustainable island tourism because people will be involved in the process.

Regarding tourist behaviour, tourists choose to visit islands to have a break from everyday pressure, to enjoy the local environment and to get to know local culture, like local people, food, and monuments. Karatzoglou and Spilanis (2010:27) argue that undermining this heritage would very quickly lead to a deterioration of the quantitative and qualitative tourist influx. In a practical expression of 'tourism destroying the objects of its desire' (Picard, 1993; Wilson, 1997; Tucker, 2001), tourism has indeed negatively affected a lot of islands, by damaging fragile ecosystems and by threatening cultural heritage monuments, just to name a few of catastrophic impacts tourism has had on islands.

Ratter (2018) argues that researchers need to view sustainable island initiatives with great caution because tourism can prove to be very harmful for island territories, particularly in cases based on simple branding rather than solving rooted sustainability problems in sectors like energy, waste, food etc. Ratter also brings to the spotlight another useful argument; topics such as the blue-green economy, 'green islands' and climate change adaptation discourses can have enormous implications for local power relations and social (in-)equality (Ratter, 2018:188).

Maheshwari *et al.* (2011) published a very insightful paper entitled *Place branding's role in sustainable development* a few years ago, but their highlighting of the link between place branding and its relationship with sustainable development being under-researched, apart from the research done by Ashworth and Voogd (1988), is still contemporary. One potential path to shed some light in that direction could be to go local. According

to Tsartas (2003) the need to protect the environment, the gradual expansion of alternative forms of tourism and the promotion of 'locality' all set different agendas for tourism policy planning and implementation. Local people now realize that they need to start think differently in terms of local tourism development. Tsartas underlines that the constant pressure of mass tourism established systems are still operating as a considerable limitation factor.

Decision-making about local tourism includes political actors participating in the procedure and playing a rather significant role since they tend to design and implement strategies and policies about how to develop the local tourism industry. These decisions have in fact a great impact on the distribution of local resources. So, residents and local entrepreneurs should be more dynamically and substantially empowered and equipped with the authority to control certain aspects of the procedure, such as planning and financing. Local political institutions should be formed in a way that they can exercise their influence and manage the interests that also emerge from stakeholders outside the community. According to Kotler *et al.* (2002) this is significant for sustainable place development.

Conclusions

Several islands face economic and social development challenges, exacerbated by environmental issues due to anthropogenic activities usually linked to tourism. At the same time, Karampela *et al.* (2017) suggest that all characteristics of islands can also be perceived as a strategic opportunity for sustainable development or a chance to re-define and re-frame it. So, through this conceptual paper that builds on the combination of relative literature, we argue that islandness and island tourism need to be viewed through various filters and to embrace their transdisciplinary nature. Whether tourism is beneficial or not for islands, depends on how islandness and sustainability are incorporated in the local tourism development strategy.

Tourism can have a beneficial impact on island economies, but in parallel can lead to a sense of lost community and altered identity, especially in cases when locals feel outnumbered by visitors who are felt to be

changing or contradicting the island's character. So, all these developments can cause tensions and challenges within an island community (Bates *et al.*, 2019). Islands, besides their common characteristics have historical, environmental and productive specificities due to their isolation, that can be advantageous for branding. Due to islandness, tourism for this kind of region should be re-examined.

It goes without saying that all stakeholders need to be involved in the decision-making of any tourism development strategy, but especially residents need to have a more central role in the policies that are designed and implemented. Islands need an integrated management style to be implemented and tourism development to be operating under such a framework, by taking at the same time into account pressure caused by tourist flows and climate change along with incorporation of contemporary information tools. Tsoukala *et al.* (2018) argue that the transition to this kind of management style for islands should be a fundamental priority for politicians, local and institutional stakeholders and researchers.

One of the most crucial questions is not who owns the place brand but who has a stake in the place brand (Stubbs & Warnaby, 2015:103). Given that 'locals' are one of the most fundamental groups who have a stake in any place brand but are often neglected in place brand activities (Braun & Zenker, 2012; Kavaratzis, 2012), more research needs to be conducted giving emphasis to this stakeholder group. Local people have a crucial role in the formulation and development of tourism in their community and they need to have a say in identifying the strengths and weakness of their place. So, procedures regarding tourism development need to become more participatory towards integrating the views of local people.

It is also high time local governments grasped a firmer sense of what really constitutes a place brand, because especially for small places like islands this is even more important. Those responsible for places' development and management should be open to the widest possible stakeholder participation in terms of brand development (Cresswell, 2004; Stubbs & Warnaby, 2015). Researchers need to go beyond criticism that describes place branding as a development procedure of a visual identity (Cleave

et al., 2016). Place branding is all about identity and so is islandness. But, there can be no effective tourism development strategy unless at its core we can find sustainability as a main pillar. As human geographers always remind us, 'places are fluid, so a successful place brand will need to change over time' (Jarrat *et al.*, 2019:417-418). Because of that fluidity, combined with islandness, successful island branding lies at the heart of the next generation of island tourism and it is high time we worked towards this path so as to have an established term that brings together contemporary theories of tourism development within a sustainable framework by using place branding models and policies.

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