

# Development of Greece as a Sustainable Destination: The Case of Mykonos Island

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**Abstract:** Mykonos Island is one of the most well-known tourist summer destinations. Every year, especially during the summer period, Mykonos hosts a plethora of tourists that arrive from different countries, such as Italy, France, the United Kingdom, Germany, Spain, and the United Arab Emirates. More specifically, according to Fraport Greece Traffic Data Management, in 2022, there have been 1,668,538 domestic and international arrivals at Mykonos Airport. Mykonos attracts, every year, several types of tourists due to the provided facilities, such as Greek traditional restaurants as well as fancy restaurants with international gastronomy, bars-cafeterias and glamorous clubs and beach clubs, 4 and 5 star hotels, beautiful beaches and beach bars and last but not least a wonderful climate and magnificent scenery. The aim of this paper is to examine the touristic profile of Mykonos Island over the past decade. The tourism industry has been seriously “injured” over the past years (financial crisis, Covid-19 pandemic). This paper will investigate the development of Mykonos Island over the past decade, through data which will be collected by statistical institutes (for instance SETE Institute) and Greek-authorized organizations (such as the Greek Ministry of Tourism). Also, the purpose of the current paper is to examine the case of Mykonos Island as a sustainable destination. Apart from the fact that Mykonos is globally famous for its luxurious image for summer vacations, the island of Mykonos has amazing geographical treasures and a unique environment. Thus, sustainable development needs to be implemented for Mykonos Island, in order to protect the unique environment, improve the existing infrastructure and create a better quality of life for residents and visitors. Hence, this study will focus on the opportunities and the obstacles which could arise from the development of Mykonos as a sustainable destination.

**Keywords:** Sustainable destination, Tourism industry, Development, Mykonos Island

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## 1. Introduction

The negative effects of mass tourism (Lundberg and Ziakas, 2018), have led the academic community to pay extra attention to the development of sustainable tourism (Gao et al., 2016; Aramberri, 2017). One of the major disadvantages of mass culture was its negative effect on the natural environment as well as on the local communities (Belias et al., 2017).

More specifically, there are two types of disadvantages: the one which is related to the construction of tourist infrastructure and the other one which is related to various tourist activities (Podhorecka and Dudek, 2019). The development of every type of tourist infrastructure (hotels, restaurants, bars, and shops) can lead to the reduction of habitat areas and it is usually connected with deforestation. Furthermore, tourist resorts are usually related to an increase in water demand as well as plastic waste. Besides, large hotel units would cause light pollution as they use extensive artificial lighting during the night, which can cause disruption to the flora and fauna which is located in the coastal zone of the islands (Kamrowski et al., 2012).

Regarding the disadvantages that are related to various tourist activities, one of the most important negative impacts is the irrational usage of cosmetics, such as sunscreens. According to Wood (2018) up to 14,000 tons of sunscreen lotion are exposed to the natural environment every year. In terms of water sports (such as motorboats, and water-ski), tourists often scare or even kill animals accidentally with the usage of engine boats, jet – ski, and other forms of water sports infrastructures.

Mykonos Island has managed during the last decades to create a brand name (image) that is connected with a luxurious – lifestyle and intense nightlife. As a result, there has been an increase in tourist inflows (Sarantakou,

2020). Although this increase has created a lot of opportunities for the tourist development of the local community, it has also alienated the traditional tourists of the island. To be more specific, a lot of tourists (old ones and potential ones), such as families and middle – income tourists, have categorized Mykonos as one of the most expensive destinations worldwide and additionally as a destination for party and wild lifestyle rather than a destination for relaxing holidays (Skagias et al., 2022; 2021).

This fact is far away from the truth. Mykonos can host several types of tourists who would appreciate all the aspects that this Cycladic Island may offer. From busy crowded luxurious beaches (such as Psarou and Super Paradise) to quiet beaches (like Fokos and Mirsini). Therefore, Mykonos stakeholders should focus on a strategic plan that would help the island to expand its brand name from a luxurious mass tourist destination to a sustainable one.

This paper is a literature review. Thus, the authors will seek secondary data via publications retrieved from a famous scientific database, such as Google Scholar, Web of Science, and Elsevier Scopus. These data will present evidence regarding the development of Mykonos Island during the past years, as well as suggestions about the ways that Mykonos can become a sustainable tourist destination.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Description of Mykonos Island

Mykonos Island is widely known as the island of the winds and it is located in the heart of the Cyclades group (Figure 1). Mykonos is considered to be one of the most touristic islands of Greece. The total surface of Mykonos island area is 105.5 km<sup>2</sup> and the length of its coastline is 89 km. The permanent population of Mykonos was 9,802 inhabitants according to the last census in 2021 (Municipality of Mykonos, 2023). Unfortunately, the inhabitants of Mykonos were 3.3% reduced in comparison with the previous census in 2011 (10,134 permanent inhabitants), despite the fact that Mykonos was estimated to have 12,675 inhabitants in 2021 (Municipality of Mykonos, 2023). This phenomenon can be explained since Mykonos is a tourism destination that is fully providing hospitality and tourism services during the spring and summer periods (April - October). All the other months, most of the hospitality companies (hotels, bars, restaurants, beach bars, and activities) are closed. As a result, many inhabitants stay unemployed for several months. This phenomenon has led the permanent inhabitants (especially the younger ones) to move to the urban centers in order to seek a permanent job (MykonosSticker, 2021).



Figure 1: Mykonos Island Map. Source: Lonely planet (<https://gr.pinterest.com/pin/153333562292790271/>)

Regarding the climate and the meteorology of Mykonos Island, the type of winds in the area are usually north (38.2% percentage) and northeast (16.3% percentage). The intensity of winds varies from 2 to 6 Beaufort. The climate conditions of Mykonos Island are favorable for the development of agricultural products since Mykonos stays free of frost for most all the year. Unfortunately, a limiting factor that can cause the decrease

in agriculture on this island, is the extended dry period especially in the summer months (Municipality of Mykonos, 2023).

The Island of Mykonos provides thousands of guests with several tourist and hospitality services which usually impress them with their sheer beauty and style. The guests of the island can walk through the narrow backstreets, watch the traditional white – painted houses with small wooden balconies, visit little churches and museums, shop for local products and souvenirs in the traditional modern shops as well as shop in the modern shops that host several world-wide luxurious products, and finally dine at some of the most fine-dining restaurants of the world. Some of the most highlighted sightseeing are the following: Panagia Paraportiani Church, Castle on the Hill, Archaeological Museum, Aegean Maritime Museum, Matogianni, Traditional Windmills, Little Venice, and Delos Island (Visiting Greece, 2023).

## 2.2 Sustainable Tourism During the Past Years on the Island of Mykonos

The development of sustainable tourism has attracted the attention of scholars and practitioners who are involved in the tourism and hospitality industry for the past 30 years (Zolfani et al., 2015). During these years, several definitions of sustainability have been introduced by academics. One of the first definitions is the following: *“Sustainable development is defined as the development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”* (WCED, 1987).

In addition, according to World Tourism Organization (WTO, 2001): *“Sustainable tourism development meets the needs of present tourists and host regions while protecting and enhancing opportunities for the future. It is envisaged as leading to management of all resources in such a way that economic, social, and aesthetic needs can be fulfilled while maintain cultural integrity, essential ecological processes, biological diversity, and life support systems”*.

During the past years, there has been a systematic effort to improve the condition of sustainable tourism on the island of Mykonos. First of all, four green hotels are operating on Mykonos Island (Archipelagos Hotel, Koukoumi Vegan Boutique Hotel, Mykonos Theoxenia, and The Wild by Interni) (Eco-tourism Greece, 2023). More specifically, Mykonos Theoxenia is the first hotel in Mykonos that has a sustainable way of operating, besides preserving the architectural heritage. This hotel has undertaken several steps in order to build a green image, such as hot water which is powered by natural gas, and recycling of several elements (for example kitchen oil and leftover soaps). In addition, Koukoumi Vegan Hotel is the first and only Vegan hotel in Greece (Koukoumihotel, 2023). This hotel promotes a new life philosophy without harming any animals or the environment. As it is explained in the hotel’s vision: *“Respecting the principles of Authenticity, Simplicity, and Balance we offer an impeccable standard of service while allowing the guest to lie back, relax and enjoy a healthy and harmonious accommodation”*.

Moreover, Mykonos has created the opportunity to explore the culture of the island. There are two museums on the island (Aegean Maritime Museum and Archaeological Museum of Mykonos) where a tourist can discover several folklore elements of the island (such as collections of icons, furniture, musical instruments, and sculptures) as well as ancient historical discoveries, such as sculptures, vases and tombs which were located on the island of Mykonos as well as the nearby island of Rhenia (Odysseus Culture, 2012).

Finally, Mykonos offers several experiences that can help the visitors to discover the island in a more gentle and intriguing way in which a tourist can value the island’s traditions and respect its unique natural environment. Visitors can sail and dive with local divers and fishers instead of yachting; also, they can attend Mykonos cooking classes of local specialities instead of eating fast food or traditional barbeque experience at a traditional farm in Mykonos; tourists can have a private walking tour on the highlights of Mykonos or they can have a romantic cycling tour with a private picnic at the beach (Eco-tourism Greece, 2023).

Even though Mykonos Island is starting to become a sustainable tourism destination, there are a lot of improvements that need to be done. This paper aims to explore several opportunities that are created for Mykonos to become a truly sustainable tourism destination over the next few years.

## 3. Research Methodology

### 3.1 The Method

The methodology that is used in this paper, is a literature review in combination with critical analysis. All the data were collected by high-quality scientific journals, books, papers, proceedings, business reports, government – public reports. The scientific database used were the following: Google Scholar, Web of Science,

Science Direct, and Elsevier Scopus. The data were selected based on the relevance to the terms which were examined by the paper as well as the date of the publishing; the majority of the collection of data was up to date (maximum 10 years since the March of 2023). The authors used keywords for their literature research such as the following: “Sustainable Tourism”, “Mykonos”, “Development of Mykonos”, and “Sustainable strategic plan”. All the sources that were used, contained some of the keywords in their topic, abstract, or keywords.

### 3.2 The Development of Mykonos Island Over the Latest Years

Over the past 30 years, Mykonos Island is worldwide recognized as one of the most cosmopolitan and luxurious islands for summer vacations (Kamenidou, 2009). More specifically, the Mykonos brand name has succeeded in attracting tourists who travel from several areas of the world in order to experience Mykonos facilities, such as the long coastline with safe and clean beaches, cosmopolitan environment, intense nightlife, famous landscapes (for example, Chora and Little Venice), very high-quality accommodation with VIP services.

As a result, according to the Traffic Report of Mykonos Airport (Figure 2) the number of international flights has been increasing during the past 6 years (Jmk-airport, 2023); besides, most passengers visited Mykonos airport in 2022 (1,688,037 visitors), while fewer passengers (409,060) visited Mykonos on 2020. This is justified by the fact that Corona – Virus (Covid-19) pandemic broken out and measures, such as lockdowns, were enforced in all countries worldwide (Belias and Trihas, 2022a; Belias and Trihas, 2022b; Belias and Trihas 2022c; Ntalakos et al., 2022a; Ntalakos et al., 2022b).



Figure 2: Passengers in Mykonos Airport per Year (2017 – 2022). Source: JMK – Mykonos International Airport (Jmk-airport.gr, 2023)

In addition, the number of passengers who visit the islands through shipping (ferry ships, cruising ships) has been increasing over the last 5 years (Figure 3), except for the year 2020 when there was a sudden decline (Municipal Port Fund of Mykonos, 2023) due to Covid-19 pandemic effects.

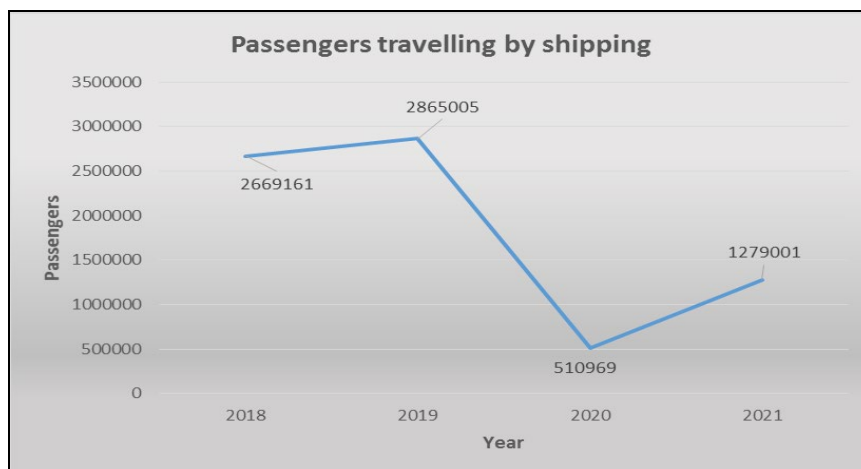


Figure 3: Passengers in Mykonos Ports per Year (2018 – 2021). Source: Municipal Port Fund of Mykonos (Mykonosports.gr, 2023)

The accessibility and connectivity to Mykonos Island are achieved in two ways: a) through its airport and b) through its ports. The renovation of Mykonos Airport (Jmk-airport) was completed in 2021 by Fraport Company which is responsible for the operation of the airport. Thus, the new Mykonos airport was expanded by 3,450 m<sup>2</sup> while the existing terminal and the runway were refurbished. In addition, a new fire station and a new guard house were constructed as well as there was a 33% increase in the number of check-in counters, a 20% increase in departure gates, and a 25% increase in security lanes. Finally, a new modern baggage handling system was installed and the existing forecourt and parking were redeveloped (Fraport-Greece, 2023).

Mykonos Island is connected by sea via its two major ports: the New Port and the Old Port. Both ports consist of several zones where different types of ships (such as cruise ships, fishing boats, and sailboats) can dock 24 hours per day/7 days per week (Mykonosports, 2023). New Port is connected via ferry with most of the major harbors of Greece such as Piraeus, Rafina, Crete, Cycladic Islands, and Thessaloniki (summer seasonality) (Mykonosports, 2023).

According to the INSETE - Institute of Greek Tourism Confederation - (INSETE, 2023), Mykonos Island offers services/products regarding several types of tourism, including the following:

- Beach tourism/Leisure Tourism: *There are several safe and clean beaches (such as Psarou Beach, Elia Beach, and Paraga Beach) in this island destination, with a cosmopolitan environment and intense nightlife which offer high-quality VIP services (Kamenidou et al., 2009).*
- Maritime Tourism: *Mykonos Island is composed of a small island cluster with suitable conditions for the development of yachting which has the infrastructure and specifications which allow cruise ships to dock. Unfortunately, it needs upgrading as it lacks suitable facilities for the mooring of yachts (INSETE, 2023).*
- Cultural and Religious Tourism: *One of the most famous cultural destinations is Ancient Delos. Ancient Delos bears traces of the Aegean ancient civilizations, from the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium B.C. to the Palaeochristian era. This sightseeing is very reached and it reveals the great of an ancient cosmopolitan port. The archeological site of Delos is protected by UNESCO as a world heritage monument (Unesco, 2023). Apart from Ancient Delos, Mykonos Island consists of traditional settlements in which they have not lost their traditional Cycladic architecture and character through the years, as well as it consists of folklore museums.*
- Agritourism: *The island of Mykonos offers its visitors the opportunity to discover its local agricultural production, via farms and agricultural units which are open to visitors. Thus, it is created the opportunity of connecting the agrifood sector with production and tourism in order to enrich the Mykonos product (Moira et al., 2018).*
- Ecotourism: *Mykonos Island environment allows the development of outdoor activities which enrich the tourism products of the islands (Sakellari, 2019).*
- Sport Tourism: *Mykonos weather conditions and landscapes are suitable for the development of water sports activities, such as seabob, fly board, jet-ski, water ski, flite board, and tubes (Mykonosyachting, 2023).*
- Food Tourism: *Mykonos Island exhibits a rich gastronomic tradition, which includes high-quality dining/food as well as experiential gastronomic activities such as visits to wineries or visiting restaurants with tasting menu experiences (Etcheverria, 2014; Moira et al., 2017).*
- Wellness Tourism: *There are selected luxurious four and five star hotels that provide specialized spa services with treatment rooms, appropriate equipment, and trained staff (Skagias et al., 2021).*

In conclusion, the island of Mykonos is considered to be one of the top destinations with a worldwide reputation and visibility; in fact, Mykonos is one of the top 20 (ranking 10/20) cosmopolitan and luxurious destinations worldwide (INSETE, 2023). Additionally, according to the world-famous travelling magazine "Conde Nast Traveller", Mykonos was awarded as one of the top 35 best islands in the world ("Readers' Choice Awards 2020") (Conde Nast Traveller, 2020). Moreover, several hotels of Mykonos have been awarded in the 31<sup>st</sup> Annual Awards of the magazine "Conde Nast Traveler" ("Readers' Choice Awards 2018") (Conde Nast Traveller, 2018). Specifically, Archipelagos Hotel was ranked 45<sup>th</sup> position the top hotel in the world, Myconian Imperial Resort was ranked in 11<sup>th</sup> position among the top European hotels, Santa Marina – A Luxury Collection Resort was ranked in 15<sup>th</sup> position among the top European hotels, Mykonos Blu was ranked in the 21<sup>st</sup> position of the top European hotels and Royal Myconian was ranked on the 15<sup>th</sup> position of the top European hotels. Furthermore, Mykonos Island was named best Star LGBTQ+ Destination, receiving the first prize at the Travel Bulletin Star Awards 2019 (GTP, 2019); thus, Mykonos Island has become world-wide famous, as a

pleasure LGBTQ destination, through the global LGBTQ community (Apostolopoulou, 2016). Finally, the digital touristic platform of Trip Advisor hosts more than 370 sights of interest (such as sightseeing, museums, restaurants, bar, and hotels) where thousands of visitors have posted, mostly, positive reviews about Mykonos services (TripAdvisor, 2023).

### **3.3 Mykonos Future Development as a Sustainable Destination**

During the past decades, sustainable tourism has been developing in some of the top holiday destinations all over the world, since there is widely accepted that the development of a tourist destination can co-exist with the protection of the natural environment and for the culture of a destination (Belias et al., 2017; Skagias et al., 2021).

Likewise, there has been developing a plan for sustainable tourism development on the island of Mykonos. According to Greek Tourism Minister Vassilis Kikilias and Mykonos Mayor Konstantinos Koukas, Mykonos acquires for the first time an integrated strategic plan for the sustainable development of the island. This strategic plan (which has been implemented since the February of 2022) includes 15 key areas where action needs to be taken, in order to protect the island's distinctive characteristics and stellar reputation among visitors who are looking for a high-end experience (Mykonos.gr, 2022; Ministry of Tourism, 2022).

More specifically, the actions that would highlight the sustainable tourism profile of Mykonos are the following (INSETE, 2023):

- The implementation of innovative smart destination technology solutions in order to improve the road network, the provision of complimentary Wi-Fi in the major touristic areas of Mykonos, the implementation of Smart Tourism Destination under the auspices of the Ministry of Tourism which consists of Guide Map applications available for mobile and tablet devices.
- Actions regarding the sustainable management of the coastal and marine environment as well as actions to improve safety on the beaches.
- Actions regarding the support of the sustainable development of the destination via an integrated study which will help in the organization of the tourist facilities in order to reduce the existing anarchic construction of holiday houses and provide spatial, urban, and forestry planning.
- Development of basic reception and hospitality infrastructure in the archaeological site of Delos, such as sanitary facilities, shelter, and refreshment room, and development of its promotion.
- Action to improve accessibility and infrastructure/services at the several beaches including facilities for people with disabilities.
- Energy and water saving programs.
- Actions to promote waste management, environmental upgrading of the marine environment, and reduction of the wider ecological footprint of marine and nautical tourism.
- Improvement of transport infrastructure (ports, airports, etc.) to ensure full accessibility for people with disabilities and reduced mobility.
- Actions to protect and enhance cultural heritage.
- Action to upgrade the road network.
- Actions for the inclusion of the Windmill sightseeing in the list of UNESCO World Heritage Sites.
- Actions to improve basic and complementary infrastructure for Cultural and Religious Tourism (lighting, reception and access areas for cultural resources, signage, equipment)
- Actions for upgrading and increasing the attractiveness of the island's urban center via spatial regeneration, extension of pedestrian walkways, renovation of abandoned historical buildings, redevelopment of building facades, enhancement of public safety, improvements of roads and pavements, and installation of ramps.
- Road cleaning actions, development of walking/cycling routes, and enhancement of public transportation.
- Actions for accelerating the construction of the new Archaeological Museum of Mykonos, adding exhibits in the Folklore Museum and in the Maritime Museum, creating the Museum of Contemporary Art, and developing similar cultural events.
- Actions for organizing cultural and scientific events.
- Actions for upgrading cultural and religious tourism.
- Completion of the project of the Municipality of Mykonos for virtual reality application in order to promote the cultural and touristic heritage of the island.

- Actions to promote local traditional events.
- Creating thematic digital promotion areas at points of tourist interest/high traffic. Creating digital info points at the entrance of the island as well as at points of interest where some information would be provided regarding public services, hotel accommodation, rental vehicles, restaurants, bars, and operating hours.
- Upgrading the health facilities of the Mykonos Health Center and construction of the Mykonos Hospital with capacity and personnel to meet the increased needs, especially during the summer season. In addition, provide actions for increasing the number of float ambulances.
- Actions for promoting the traditional Neolithic Village of Ftelia.
- Development of artistic activities in collaboration with Mykonos Art Group and promotion of the cultural heritage of Mykonos Island.
- Creation of gastronomic museums with the usage of old unused infrastructures.
- Actions for promoting international cooperation between twinned cities in order to upgrade and promote cultural resources.
- Strategic plan to raise visitors' and locals' awareness about environmental and sustainable practices to increase the use of natural resources.
- Creating the necessary small-scale investments that will improve and properly shape the marine environment; actions for improving the inter-island and the intra-regional marine connectivity of the island.

#### 4. Conclusions

The current paper examined the development of the island of Mykonos during the past decade as well as the opportunities that can rise (Skiagias et al., 2022) for Mykonos to be developed as a sustainable destination. The key factor for sustainability tourism is the fact that Mykonos should extend its brand image as a luxurious parting destination to a destination that has to offer more than a fancy lifestyle. A destination that hides environmental, cultural, gastronomical, historical, and natural treasures that a visitor should be aware of in order to experience all these services that would be offered.

Consequently, it is crucial to remark on the lack of research regarding the sustainable profile of Greek well-known tourist destinations, such as Mykonos Island. In conclusion, the authors suggest that future research would be conducted to investigate if the Authorities' strategic plan for sustainable touristic policies (which has begun since February 2022) was successfully implemented.

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