Identifying Drama’s Prefecture as a tourism destination through the presentation of its natural environment in the Internet.

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Abstract
This paper aims in the exploitation of the potential of the Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), through the World Wide Web as a means for regional development, especially through the identification of a region as a tourism destination. Its purpose is to bring forward a website environment for promotion of the natural environment of a Greek prefecture in eastern Macedonia, the prefecture of Drama. The software used, in order to develop this website, is Microsoft Publisher 2003 which provides great possibilities in designing a friendly format and easy navigated site. Not only does the development and maintenance of this website on the Internet intent to present the natural beauties of Drama, but to encourage the tourist development of the region as well.

Keywords
Internet, Regional development, Tourism destination, Elatia forest, Nestos River, Falakro Mountain

1. Introduction
The constant progress in Information Technology and networks has made practicable the direct access in massive quantities of information (Hawisher and Selfe, 1997). Lately, Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) have a key role in all aspects of life, as ICT applies to many issues of modern life and supplies information practically and simply, since everyone seeks for easy information retrieval (Feng et al, 2005). The Internet act as the provider of numerous- yet continuously increasing and renewable- services and knowledge through the World Wide Web that constitutes an open society of servers and users on the Internet. Within that framework, the Internet can play a key role within the identification of regions in wide audiences worldwide. Further, the promotion of local advantages, such as the enhanced natural environment of a region can be the means to identify the region as a tourism destination for various target groups.

Greece offers a lot of natural beauties to the visitor including remarkable and unique forestlands. For the last few years, there has been an effort aiming in the nomination of these natural beauties, within the development of the mountainous tourism and the improvement of general infrastructure. The Prefecture of Drama in East Macedonia in Northern Greece includes several natural landscapes. Local development planning aims in the improvement of the attractiveness of the region that upcoming will lead in rise of the standard of living, thus regional development will be enhanced. However, the course of action for areas of environmental significance must consider all the consequences upon the natural environment.
Drama’s prefecture, located in northeastern Greece, possesses a variety of ecosystems of natural sights of extremely wild beauty like Elatia forest, Frakto forest, Nestos River and Falakro Mountain.

The development and maintenance of a website that promotes the natural environment of Drama aims in the recognition of the area as an important tourism destination, as it contains reliable information about the available tourist activities, the natural history and the natural resources. All these goals are promoted by this website, which is called “Dramafysi.gr” and it is appropriately designed to facilitate potential users to easily find the needed information and study the material (Ackermann, 1996).

2. Methodology

2.1 Materials

The information and material used for the development of the website (text, pictures, maps, graphs) derived from books, available multimedia applications (CD-ROM), personal photo archives, printed editions originated from the Prefectural Administration of Drama, from local institutes and unions and also from other relative websites (Ekaterinidis, 1997, GoDrama 2002, Mavridis and Pitsioras, 2000, School.gr, 2005, Prefecture of Drama, 2006).

In order to be introduced in the website, the material that was initially collected such as texts, pictures and maps were elaborated using various software programs. It was used a text editor-MS Word, a photo processing software -Adobe Photoshop- and a computer-aided design software -AutoCAD 2004 correspondingly.

2.2 Implementation

The web-based application “Dramafysi.gr” was designed by using a specialized HTML (Hyper Text Markup Language) editor such as Microsoft Publisher 2003. Apart from that, an FTP (File Transfer Protocol) client or an HTTP (Hypertext Transfer Protocol) client is needed in order to upload the page to the web server.

Microsoft Publisher 2003 disposes a lot of designing capacities and allows the development of a friendly format and well constructed website. Moreover, these websites are recognizable by all popular web browsers like Internet Explorer and Netscape Navigator. To increase effectiveness in the information supply, all texts, pictures and maps were programmed in this website using Microsoft Publisher 2003 in order to make the navigation more efficient, an important feature so that the user will keep its interest (Nielsen, 2000).

The website has a plain and friendly structure while the release of data is consecutive. It is bilingual, in an English and a Greek version aiming to increase the target audience. There is a fixed formation of each page with 3 frames and the selections of the user are presented in the central frame, which is the varying area. There are a variety of colorful pictures in a photo gallery type, with medium size texts, aiming mainly to generally inform the visitor and stress on the natural beauty of the area. There are selection options about the preferable analysis to help the user.
The debugging and testing of the application on Windows was a final step in order to eliminate navigational errors, errors in texts as well as programming errors (Coakley, 2002).

3. Results

The introduction page (Figure 1), which initially appears, informs the user about the content of the website and there is a selection for either Greek or English language for navigation. It also contains a map of the area, so that the user can select the preferable analysis (400KB or 100KB) in order to download the map singularly. As far as the English version of the site, it only leads to a brief report with information about the natural environment of Drama, aiming to catch the interest, however there are many pictures.

On the contrary, the Greek language option leads in the main index page (Figure 2) which is divided in three frames. The left frame contains the main categories available in the form of active buttons. The user can select the preferable item that lead in to the specific category of information. The underneath frame has the same categories in the form of active phrases that also lead in to same information. Furthermore, it includes an email-link under the title “communication” for contact with the web designer. Finally, the information is displayed at the central frame.
Figure 3 presents the structure of the website and information flow. The main content categories (active buttons or active phrases menus) include the following allocated themes: Nestos River, Elatia forest, Falakro mountain, Frakto forest, related links and photo gallery (Figure 3). Each category will lead to a separate page with the same fixed structure as the main index page (left, underneath and central frame).

The prefecture of Drama is located in Macedonia of northern Greece, next to the borders between Greece and Bulgaria. The general topography or elevation, slope and exposure, which are the relief of the area, have an influence on climatic, soil and biotic factors. As a result, the natural beauty of Drama is remarkable, not to mention the unique ecosystems and the evergreen forests.
The main feature of Drama’s prefecture is obviously the river of Nestos (Figure 4), which is a factor that acts on the diversity of the flora and fauna of the region. Nestos rises in the mountain range of Rilas in central Bulgaria and flows in Thracian see. The Greek state has utilized Nestos and its stream flows in order to produce electric power and available water quantity for irrigation.

The forest of Elatia is in the center of the prefecture and consists of conifers like Spruce and Fir and hardwoods like Beech, oak and Poplar. In Elatia stands the unique forest of spruce which references to similar forests of Central and northern Europe. Mountain Falakro (Figure 5 – Falakro Mountain)
5) rises on the central part of the prefecture and is considered as a perfect recreation ground appropriate for winter sports and sightseeing.

The forest of Frakto is located near the highest peak of the mountain range of Rodopi, which traverses the northeastern part of the prefecture of Drama. Its main characteristic is the virgin forest, which is the only one in Greece that lacks of any human intervention. It was recorded as preservable monument of nature in 1980 because of its great ecological and historical value.

Finally, by choosing the active button “Photo gallery” (Figure 6), the user is able to view a gallery with images and maps in point of the natural environment of Drama. Links for further information regarding other respective websites are available by clicking the active button “related links”.

4. Discussion

In conclusion, the creation of the website “Dramafysi.gr” intends in the exploitation of a great linkup of data related to the natural environment of Drama’s prefecture. The website also
contains important information resources on the winter and athletic activities and tourism possibilities in the area. There is an inclusive description of the most respectable environmental landscapes such as forests, mountains and rivers, so that this presentation of the natural beauties of Drama could distinguish the region as an important and recognizable tourism destination for a wide audience, not only in Greece but worldwide.

The user-friendly structure and the usability of the website was a primary goal, since the end-users in the target group are not necessarily computer literate. The bilingual type of the website increases the audience that will visit it, probably through search engines within tourism research. Moreover, the inclusion of an extended photo gallery will increase its recognition from extended audiences searching for natural environment photos. Furthermore, basic design principles were adopted aiming in the improvement of the effectiveness of the website (Lynch and Horton 1999, Nielsen 2000). Generally, the website seems to have a simple and pleasant appearance with the necessary items.

As ICTs offer incredible opportunities for development and progress in many sections of life, Forestry and environmental sciences have to exploit these potentialities in order to present themselves to the public and grow environmental awareness.

5. References


