Does special interest tourism lead to sustainability? Place vs. destination branding breaking the myth in the case of Mount Olympus, Greece [abstract only]

KLADOU, Stella <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-4144-8667>, KARAGIORGOS, Thomas, POLYAKOVA, Olga <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-6947-2394>, POMFRET, Gill <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-1161-7703>, NTOVOLI, Apostolia and ALEXANDRIS, Kostas

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Despite their similarities, the differences among place and destination branding remain evident, as well as the need to prioritize place rather than destination branding strategies in pursue of sustainability (Kladou & Usakli, 2025). To be specific, overtourism and overcrowding have long been analyzed for their negative impact on destinations and, in response, destinations may turn from mass to special interest tourism. Still, with tourists being the key stakeholder of branding decisions, what happens when a special interest tourism destination becomes as popular as to again lead to overcrowding, how do special interest tourists respond to the popularity of the destination, and how should the place prioritize sustainability through brand development?

In an attempt to shed light into such aspects, this study builds on the responses provided by hikers of Mount Olympus, Greece, i.e. a special interest tourism destination which has started being overcrowded. Particularly, the purpose of the study is to explore the relationship between perceived destination adaption and destination satisfaction by using the overtourism awareness perception as a moderator. The respondents will be recruited on-site and/or online via link. Data collection takes place during the main season of the mountain huts in the national park (July-September 2025). The research instrument reflects a three-concept combination of: a) Perceived destination adaptation with six items adapted from Jacobsen (2004), b) Tourists' overtourism awareness with three items as proposed in Papadopoulou et al. (2023), and c) Tourist satisfaction with three items adapted from Kim et al. (2016). The validity and reliability of the scales will be tested; descriptive and inferential statistics will be used to analyze the data. The study provides information about the level of destination adaption of Olympus as a destination, hikers' overtourism perception of the place and overall satisfaction of their experience. Implications help us advance place and destination branding research and facilitate practitioners' understanding that a place is not a destination merely seen as a landmark in tourists' bucket list but part of a larger ecosystem for which Olympus is part of a larger 'story'; and this ecosystem connects to a sustainable place brand.

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