

BUSINESS TRAVEL MOTIVATIONS AND OBJECTIVES OF TRADE FAIRS VISITORS: EXPERIENCE FROM THE TRADE FAIRS IN THESSALONIKI, GREECE

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Abstract: This research investigates the motivations and objectives of visitor participation in trade fairs in Thessaloniki. In particular, the trend of combining professional goals with the entertainment of visitors is investigated. The aim of the research is to determine whether the inclination to blend economic goals with entertainment is a shared characteristic among attendees of all trade fair events, or if it varies in any manner. Mixed methods research was used: quantitative research (1,066 participants) and in-depth interviews (51 participants). In order to comprehensively understand phenomena and ensure validity, the triangulation approach was used. The results showed that the type of trade fair is related to visitors' participation objectives. Specifically, the reason for visiting the trade fairs addressed to the general public is mainly entertainment, while those of the specialized sectoral trade fairs are mainly business-related. However, even in the sectoral trade fairs there is a significant percentage in several cases that mentions fun-entertainment as an objective. These results are of great research importance, but also of managerial importance, both for the trade fair organizers and for the local tourism development agencies.

Keywords: MICE, Trade Fairs, Events, Business Tourism, Bleisure Tourism, Business travelers' objectives, Trade Fair visitors

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INTRODUCTION

The trade fair sector has a significant economic impact worldwide (UFI, 2022), and although the COVID-19 pandemic has negatively affected the industry to the point of questioning the physical presence at such events with the help of digitization (Süygün, 2021), the post-covid era confirms their irreplaceability. Personal contacts through physical presence are still considered important by event participants (Kostopoulou et al., 2023; UFI, 2023; Müller and Wittmer, 2023). The business tourism market is experiencing substantial expansion and is projected to continue its growth trajectory. Specifically, global business travel reached a value of US\$ 1.1 trillion in 2023. According to IMARC Group (2024), this market is anticipated to reach US\$ 1.9 trillion by 2032, indicating a growth rate of 6.6% from 2024 to 2032.

Trade fair research has traditionally come from the field of management and marketing. However, in recent years studies in the field of business administration, economic geography, sociology and other disciplines have begun to understand and explore the role that trade fairs play in creating and disseminating key flows of knowledge, connecting collective actors, institutions, businesses and geographies in different parts of the world (Bathelt et al., 2014).

Also, trade fairs, which belong to the wider M.I.C.E. (Meetings – Incentives – Conferences – Exhibitions) sector, are a key part of the business tourism literature (Kourkouridis and Frangopoulos, 2022, Kourkouridis et al., 2017). The findings show that trade fairs contribute to the development of a destination, as they bring significant socio-economic effects at the local level (Kim and Chon, 2009; Oxford Economics, 2012; Lee et al., 2013; Kumar et al., 2014; Wallstam et al., 2020; Kourkouridis et al., 2023). However, the question that arises is what are the objectives of trade fair attendees and why do they ultimately choose a trade fair over the many others available. There are many findings related to economic objectives (Berne and Garcia-Uceda, 2008; UFI, 2017), but the factor of the destination itself has not been extensively studied. Although, business travel is usually quite rigid, and choosing a destination is frequently difficult for travelers, destinations with leisure opportunities are generally preferred for business travel (Buhalis, 2000; Ezeuduji, 2024). After all, the clear distinction between business travelers and leisure travelers seems to have been questioned in recent years, as it is found that these two concepts often overlap (Kachniewska, 2016). We attempt to fill this research gap with the present research, which aims to investigate the “entertainment” factor in the visitors' choice of trade fairs, specifically in the case of trade fair activity of Thessaloniki. Thessaloniki is an interesting case study, as it has a long history of trade fair activity, and continues to hold an important position in the industry (Tsiftelidou et. al, 2017).

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The question we attempt to answer with this research is whether the tendency to combine economic objectives and entertainment is common to visitors to all trade fair events or is it differentiated in some way. In a highly competitive environment, organizers and local agencies will benefit greatly by understanding the factors that motivate trade fair visitors, resulting in better destination marketing. Since the new generation of visitors tends to combine business with entertainment, this new trend should be explored further.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

1. Business Tourism

Business tourism generally includes any business-related travel (Davidson and Cope, 2003) that is travel with a business purpose (United Nations Statistical Division, 2010). These travels are primarily motivated by the need for business communication (Müller and Wittmer, 2023; Gebesmair and Musik, 2023). Trade fairs in particular are an important sector of business tourism based on networking incentives (Silva and Moutinho, 2022). The physical contact with products and services, as well as the socialization offered by business events, are undeniably fundamental human needs (Getz, 2012; Seraphin, 2021). Recently, the COVID-19 pandemic has challenged business-to-business events, coupled with the evolution of technology, to the point where the need for personal contact is being questioned (Süygün, 2021).

However, while technology can be a useful tool, it doesn't seem like it can actually replace a physical presence (Seraphin, 2021), especially at M.I.C.E. events (Kostopoulou et al., 2023; UFI, 2023; Müller and Wittmer, 2023). The pandemic experience has revealed a deficiency in establishing trust with buyers and enhancing connections in virtual trade fairs (Yu and Benson-Rea, 2024). Therefore, business tourism demonstrated notable resilience, adapting to the circumstances and swiftly reverting to pre-Covid levels (UFI, 2023). An important characteristic of business travelers that differentiates them from leisure travelers is that although they stay for less time in the destination, they spend larger amounts (Kumar and Hussain, 2014; Ezeuduji, 2024), a key motivating factor for business tourism promotion. However, although there is a conceptual dichotomy between work and leisure (Unger et al., 2016), business tourism is often transformed into or combined to leisure tourism (Marques and Santos, 2016). The line between business travelers and leisure travelers is not as clear as it used to be, as the boundaries between life and work seem to be blurred in modern times (Kachniewska, 2016).

This hybrid model of travelers has been characterized by Uriely and Reichel (2000) as “working tourists”. Uriely (2001) advanced the reasoning, distinguishing another type of travelers: “travelling workers”, that are more business oriented during their trip than “working tourists”. Later, a body of literature has emerged regarding “bleisure” tourism, a term that describes business travelers who also participate in leisure activities at the destination (Lichy and McLeay, 2018; Aydın and Özgürel, 2021; Sohaili et al., 2022; Unger and Uriely, 2022; Batala and Slevitch, 2024).

The differentiation lies in the fact that recreation was considered as a secondary product on business trips, while recent approaches consider it an important element of business trip (Unger and Uriely, 2022). Although there are time restrictions due to the tight timetable of bleisure travelers, they seek short leisure activities that are pleasing to them as they help them relax before returning to work responsibilities (Batala and Slevitch, 2024). This is an important research finding for destination management. In a fiercely competitive market, business event destinations must find ways to differentiate themselves, not so much through individual parts of the tourism product, such as venues and event facilities, but as an integrated whole for visitors (Buhalis, 2000; Ezeuduji, 2024).

2. Business travel motivations and objectives

Studies in management and marketing, which date back to the late 1960s, generally approach trade fairs as a means of promotion or sales (Carman, 1968; Cavanaugh, 1976; Shoham, 1992; Gopalakrishna and Lilien, 1995; Smith et al., 2004). Research interest is mainly focused on measuring trade fair effectiveness, where researchers mainly use two approaches. The first approach emphasizes sales performance and uses objective indicators such as sales (Gopalakrishna and Williams, 1992) and number of visitors from the target audience (Dekimpe et al., 1997). Research shows that attending trade fairs has a significant positive effect on overall business performance (Khongsawatkiat and Agmapisarn, 2023).

The second and more widespread approach leverages exhibitors' subjective evaluation of the effectiveness of their efforts at trade fairs. In this case, significant benefits are found, beyond sales, such as establishing international business relationships (Kreivi et al., 2011; Kellezi, 2013; Karabulut, 2014), receiving information about competitors and buyers (Kreivi et al., 2011; Sasaka, 2012; Kellezi, 2013; Karabulut, 2014), exploring new markets (Karabulut, 2014) etc.

However, in addition to the participating exhibitors, important stakeholders in this multidimensional knowledge transfer relationship are also the trade fair visitors. In a particular competitive environment with a multitude of available trade fairs worldwide (Berne and Garcia-Uceda, 2008), the reasons for choosing the trade fairs they visit is an important research question. Literature review conducted by Berne and Garcia-Uceda (2008) shows that visitors' main motivations for choosing the trade fairs they attend are: the information they have about the specific event, the marketing goals of their business, and the cost they estimate their participation will have. Nevertheless, the sample size in this specific survey was confined to retailers and also limited geographically. Moreover, according to UFI (2017), the largest percentage of trade fair visitors in the international experience visit these events to see new products, services and innovations, followed by those who mention as a reason for visiting information on new trends and innovations, but also those who mention meeting with prospective new suppliers as the reason for their visit.

As can be seen in Figure 1, all the reasons/objectives for visiting trade fairs worldwide are purely economic. UFI's interest in this research was purely business-oriented; after all, this is the orientation of the specific organization. However, in a subsequent report by UFI (2019), it appears that the exclusive focus on meeting business needs does not

apply to younger visitors. Specifically, Millennials (individuals born between early 1980s and the mid-1990s) and Gen Z visitors (those born between late 1990s and early 2000s) exhibit a significantly higher propensity to prioritize entertainment alongside business objectives. This trend is also confirmed in the literature, where it seems that bleisure tourism is a trend of the younger generations (Caicedo-Barreth et al., 2020; Dragomir et al., 2021; Ezeuduji, 2024).



Figure 1. Visitors’ objectives worldwide (Source: UFI, 2017: 17)

This trend, combined with the fact that trade fairs are events with complex socio-spatial dimensions (Kourkouridis et al., 2023), lead to significant impacts on host areas, that are mainly economical (Kim and Chon, 2009; Oxford Economics, 2012; Lee et al., 2013; Kumar et al., 2014), but also social and political (Wallstam et al., 2020; Kourkouridis et al., 2023; Chen, 2023). Although a significant part of the literature shows that the reasons for attending trade fairs are strictly economic, there is evidence to suggest that a destination offering leisure opportunities may be preferred (Buhalis, 2000; Ezeuduji, 2024). Sohaili et al. (2022) literature review shows that bleisure travelers’ main motivations to participate in leisure activities are: (a) seeking knowledge and novelty, (b) escape, and (c) fun and resting. Thus, the quality and leisure opportunities of the destination seem to influence their satisfaction with the business trip, while significantly contributing to their desire to revisit the destination in the future (Aydın and Özgürel, 2021). Ezeuduji (2024) characteristically mentions that many academics choose the conferences they attend based on their preferences for the destination and the leisure opportunities it offers. However, the topic of business travelers' motivations and objectives has not been explored in depth. For the visitors of the trade fairs in particular, there is no research investigation of the subject, apart from the UFI reports that mentioned above. Thus, we identify an important research gap, which we aim to address with the present research.

RESEARCH METHOD AND DESIGN

In order to examine our research questions, mixed methods research was used as it integrates the strengths of both methodologies (qualitative and quantitative) (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004). After all, the nature of events is such that it favors the application of multiple and creative methods that lead to more comprehensive results (Crowther et al., 2015). Figure 2 shows a diagram of the research process. In order to comprehensively understand phenomena and ensure validity, the qualitative research utilized the triangulation approach. Initially, three researchers participated in the study to provide diverse observations and conclusions. This type of triangulation, known as investigator triangulation, serves to authenticate findings and provide varied perspectives, thereby enriching the depth of comprehension. Additionally, both the qualitative and the quantitative research involved gathering data from multiple sources (data triangulation) to obtain diverse perspectives and validate the data (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Specifically, visitors from various trade fairs with different characteristics were chosen to participate in the research. A structured questionnaire of ten questions (Appendix 1) was created for the quantitative research, which was completed face-to-face.

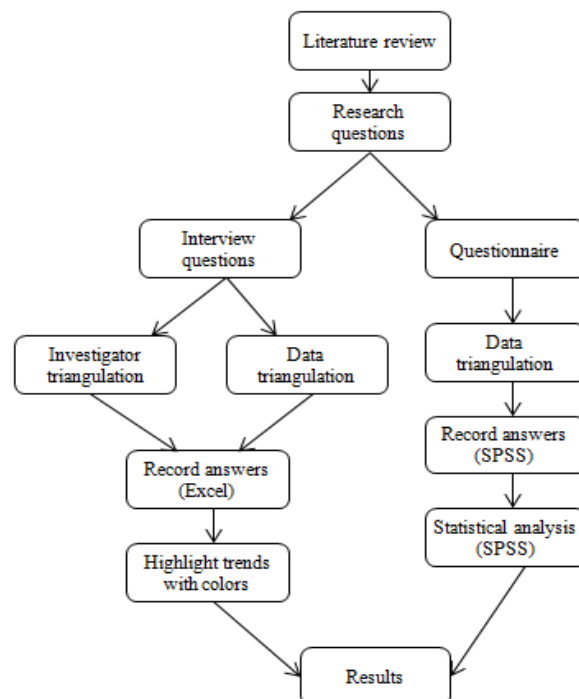


Figure 2. Research process

The target group of the quantitative research was the general population of the city of Thessaloniki and the sample size was 1,066 (population size: 767,933; margin of error: 3%; significance level: 95%). The sampling method used is Stratified Random Sampling. The 1,066 responses were recorded in an Excel file and then followed by statistical analysis in the software SPSS. Regarding the qualitative research in-depth interviews were chosen as a method of collecting qualitative material and information. The interviews conducted were semi-structured, i.e., there was a set of predetermined questions, which were organized into sections (Appendix 2). The questions and the interview guide in general were used flexibly. In total, 51 interviews conducted with visitors to the Zootechnia (28 interviews) and Detrop (23 interviews) trade fairs were collected. Appendix 3 lists the interviews conducted and the main characteristics of the interviewees. Following the collection of qualitative research data through interviews, the key points from each interview were documented in an Excel file. Responses were organized into groups to identify patterns or consistencies, visualized using a color-coded table. Specifically, recurring trends were highlighted with matching colors to emphasize prevalent response patterns (Glesne, 2016). Subsequently, the three researchers coded the responses post-interviews, followed by a cross-validation process among the three perspectives.

Empirical context: trade fair activity in Thessaloniki

Thessaloniki is a metropolitan area of Northern Greece and the country's second largest city (Frangopoulos et al., 2009). The city has a long exhibition history, as the 1st Thessaloniki International Fair (TIF) was organized in 1926 (Pozrikidis, 2013). The national entity for the organizing of exhibitions, congresses, and cultural events, TIF-HELEXPO S.A., began its operation in 1925 and since 1940 has been operating in the existing facilities: the International Exhibition and Congress Centre of Thessaloniki. The Centre covers a total area of 180,000 sq.m., of which 62,000 sq.m. are covered exhibition space distributed in a complex of 17 Pavilions (TIF-HELEXPO, 2023). An important milestone in the history of the city's trade fair activity was the launching of sectoral trade fairs in the 1970s. In this context, during this period, parallel to TIF which continued to be organized every year, sectoral trade fairs with a more specialized orientation were developed. These sectoral trade fairs gathered the interest of thousands of professionals in each sector. Essentially the interest, on a commercial and economic level, transferred to sectoral trade fairs and TIF maintains a relative momentum (less than in the past) as a political, social and entertainment event (Kourkouridis, 2019). Today TIF-HELEXPO organizes more than 25 international trade fairs in Greece. For example, in 2023 the following trade fairs were organized: Zootechnia, Detrop/Oenos, Freskon, Book Fair, Beyond, Forward Green, TIF, Kosmima, Philoxenia/Hotelia etc. During the financial crisis of 2009 and until 2012-2013, the trade fair activity suffered a blow. From that point onwards, the trade fair activity gradually tried to regain its momentum, showing signs of improvement. However, the conditions created by the covid-19 pandemic drastically changed the evolution of trade fair activity worldwide and of course in Greece as well (Kourkouridis, 2024). The trade fair activity in Thessaloniki stopped completely from February 2020 until September 2021. In 2022 a decrease in visitor numbers was recorded, compared to the pre-pandemic years, as was also the case at the exhibition events in other European countries. This reduction in trade fairs participation in Thessaloniki varied according to the sector to which each trade fair is addressed and also the characteristics of the organization. Trade fairs that are purely professional and have a B2B character had smaller decreases in visitor numbers, while trade fairs more open to the public had higher percentage losses as people were still psychologically affected by the feeling of insecurity created during the pandemic period. Thus, sectoral trade fairs with an emphasis on B2B had the highest participation in 2022, e.g., "Freskon", "Kosmima". However, trade fairs such as "Agrotica", which has a more open character, but also TIF, faced reluctance on the part of visitors (TIF-HELEXPO, 2023).

Table 1. Participation by trade fair type

	Trade Fair Type	N	%
TIF	B2C	705	89.7%
Agrotica/ Zootechnia	B2C & B2B	124	15.8%
Detrop/Oenos/Artozoma	B2C & B2B	75	9.5%
Freskon	B2B	23	2.9%
Philoxenia/Hotelia	B2C & B2B	118	15.0%
Infacoma	B2B	38	4.8%
Kosmima	B2B	49	6.2%
Book Fair	B2C	157	20.0%
Sportexpo	B2C	47	6.0%
Art Thessaloniki	B2C	83	10.6%
Other	-	45	5.7%

RESEARCH RESULTS ANALYSIS

1. Participation by trade fair type

The trade fairs that are most preferred by the citizens of Thessaloniki are the Thessaloniki International Fair (TIF), as well as the large sectoral trade fairs that are of interest to the general public as well, such as the Agricultural Trade Fair (Agrotica), the Tourism Trade Fair (Philoxenia) and the Book Fair. In particular, as shown in Table 1, 89.7% of respondents have visited TIF, 20.0% Book Fair, 15.8% Agrotica, 15.0% Philoxenia, 10.6% ART Thessaloniki, while smaller percentages are shown by the rest of the sectoral trade fairs organized at the TIF facilities. It should be noted that 5.7% of the sample reports that they have visited some other trade fair or event. In this category, the respondents mentioned that they visited, mainly, the theme parks that have been organized in recent years, such as for example the "Chocolate Factory and Museum", "The Secret Worlds of Eugene Triviza" and "The 12 Athletes of Hercules", as well as smaller sector trade fairs

of third organizers. From the responses described previously, it appears that the participants mainly visit TIF, which has a Business-to-Consumer (B2C) character, and secondarily the sectoral trade fairs with the same character. On the contrary, the more specialized trade fairs that have a Business to Business (B2B) character are of clearly less interest to citizens.

2. Objectives - Expectations

Regarding the objectives and expectations of visiting the trade fairs, as shown in Figure 3, the respondents as a whole state that the main reason for their visit is to obtain information at a rate of 73.3% and fun-entertainment at a rate of 70.7%. This is followed by direct purchases with a percentage of 31.2%, networking and contact with partners with 22.8% and commercial reasons with 6.7%.

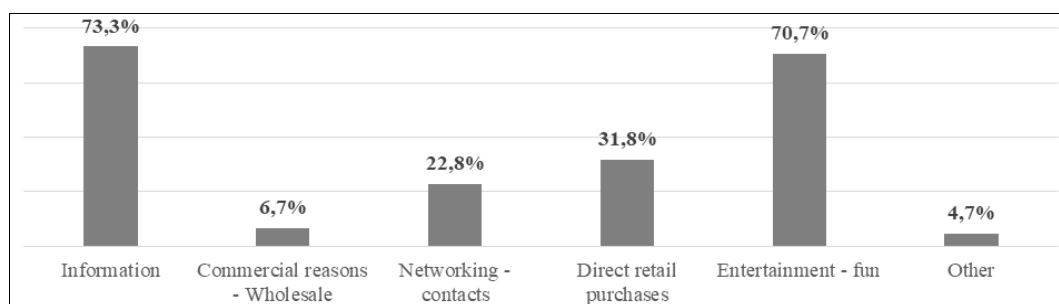


Figure 3. What was the reason/objective of your visit to these trade fairs?

3. Objectives –Expectations in relation to the type of trade fair

Then by specifying the analysis of the visitors' objectives/goals per trade fair, it appears that the responses are shaped according to the nature of each trade fair. Therefore, the reasons for visiting the general trade fair (TIF) and the trade fairs addressed to the general public (Book Fair, ART Thessaloniki, etc.) are different from those of the specialized sectoral trade fairs (Detrop, Freskon, etc.). As can be seen in Table 2, the respondents visit the TIF for fun-entertainment (69.5%), for information (66.7%) and for direct retail purchases (20.2%). On the contrary, in the sectoral trade fairs organized in Thessaloniki, the majority of respondents state that the reason for their visit is information. A typical example of this trend is the large percentage gathered by information as a reason for visiting Detrop/Oenos/Artozymba (80.5%) and Freskon (78.3%). An exception to this general trend is the Sportexpo in which the main reason for visiting is fun-entertainment (60.4%).

Table 2. Objectives per trade fair

	Information		Commercial reasons-Wholesale		Networking-Contacts		Direct retail purchases		Entertainment-fun		Other	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
TIF	498	66.7%	23	3.1%	61	8.2%	151	20.2%	519	69.5%	18	2.4%
Agrotica/ Zootechnia	102	76.7%	17	12.8%	21	15.8%	7	5.3%	27	20.3%	7	5.3%
Detrop/ Oenos/ Artozymba	62	80.5%	8	10.4%	23	29.9%	3	3.9%	19	24.7%	1	1.3%
Freskon	18	78.3%	3	13.0%	8	34.8%	2	8.7%	0	0.0%	1	4.3%
Philoxenia/ Hotelia	87	70.2%	10	8.1%	50	40.3%	7	5.6%	17	13.7%	5	4.0%
Infacoma	31	72.1%	2	4.7%	17	39.5%	4	9.3%	6	14.0%	2	4.7%
Kosmima	21	39.6%	4	7.5%	7	13.2%	26	49.1%	8	15.1%	2	3.8%
Book Fair	117	70.5%	5	3.0%	18	10.8%	78	47.0%	57	34.3%	2	1.2%
Sportexpo	21	39.6%	2	3.8%	5	9.4%	3	5.7%	32	60.4%	2	3.8%
Art Thessaloniki	53	60.9%	2	2.3%	19	21.8%	11	12.6%	44	50.6%	5	5.7%
Other	24	51.1%	2	4.3%	4	8.5%	17	36.2%	26	55.3%	1	2.1%

From the qualitative research we found that for Zootechnia's visitors the reasons for visiting are usually many. Most of them said that they visit the trade fair to catch up with developments in the industry, to get to know new products and machines, to be informed and to make new acquaintances with exhibitors - potential partners. Some, in addition to general interest, also had special commercial interest, as they had prearranged meetings with specific exhibitors. There were few visitors who had a scientific interest and intended to attend the workshops and conferences organized alongside the trade fair. Also, there were quite a few visitors who intended to combine business interest with entertainment. Characteristically on this issue, one of the visitors with a rather patriarchal perspective stated: "We come to see machines and to get away from our wives for a while! Of course, it would be useful to attend some of the events-conferences that take place here, because they say useful things that help us, but we do not have good information about these events and we do not have the time. In two days coming from Grevena, we can't do everything..." (IN.VI.14, Male, Grevena, Farmer).

For Detrop's visitors, the reasons for visiting are purely professional. Most aim to discover new products and meet new suppliers that may lead to new partnerships: "I am here as a hosted buyer and the goal is to find new suppliers, new products to be able to introduce to the New Zealand market. Generally, in New Zealand they are looking for differentiated quality products and Greece has such products to offer. I'm looking for these products at the fair" (IN.VI.39, Male, Auckland, New Zealand, Trade of Greek Products in New Zealand). Several also stated that the objective of their visit was to renew contacts with existing suppliers. One visitor stated that he comes to the trade fair for

professional networking not only with exhibitors but also with other visitors. Finally, no visitor stated that they were coming for entertainment, except for one who was not a professional in the industry.

From the above answers it is observed that any differences in the goals of the visitors from the trade fairs and the different spatial practices they follow have to do with the different nature of each industry and its professionals. For example, professionals in the agricultural-livestock sector, as more simple people, try to combine visiting trade fairs with entertainment and fun activities. On the other hand, people in the food and beverage industry, as more technocrats, executives of large companies, visit the fairs purely for professional purposes only. After all, they have to be accountable to their business, evaluating their visit to the trade fair, their goals and achievement, but also the contacts they made.

In order to make the differentiation of the objectives/goals of the visit even clearer, the trade fairs organized in Thessaloniki were grouped into three categories according to their nature, as follows:

- Trade fairs addressed to the general public (Business-to-Consumer - B2C): TIF, Book Fair, Sportexpo and Art Thessaloniki.
- Trade fairs addressed to Businesses in the sector (Business to Business - B2B): Freskon, Infacoma and Kosmima.
- Mixed trade fairs (B2C & B2B): Agrotica/ Zootechnia, Detrop/Oenos/Artozymba and Philoxenia/ Hotelia. These trade fairs in the first days of operation are usually purely commercial events for trade visitors only and in the last 1-2 days they are open to the general public.
- Other Fairs or Events, such as theme parks, smaller sectoral trade fairs and festival-events.

As can be seen in Figure 4, respondents visit B2C trade fairs mainly for fun-entertainment (39.4%) and for information (37.3%). On the contrary, they visit B2B trade fairs, which are purely commercial events, mainly for information (43.7%), followed by networking-contacts with partners (19.1%) and direct purchases (19.1%). Also, they visit trade fairs with a mixed nature (B2C & B2B), mainly for information (53.4%) and secondarily for networking-contact with partners (19.8%).

Finally, in the other fairs/events, due to the range of events classified in this category, the responses show dispersion. Specifically, 34.4% of respondents state that the reason for visiting such fairs/events is to get information, 31.1% for direct shopping/retail and 23.3% for fun/entertainment.

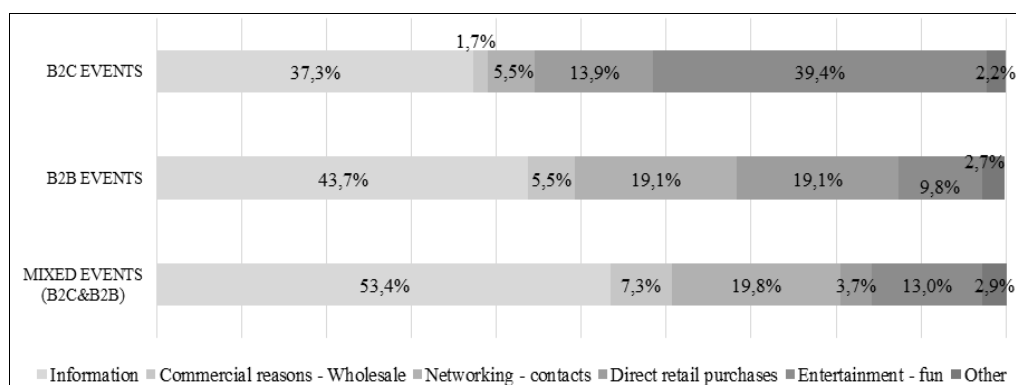


Figure 4. Objectives (grouped answers according to the nature of the events)

At this point, the paradoxical finding identified in our research should be clarified, which essentially highlights an informal practice. First of all, we must mention that direct purchases at B2B trade fairs are not allowed, but the respondents give this answer in a significant percentage of 19.1%. Possibly they see a product and after the end of the trade fair they turn to the company to buy it. This common practice appears to be captured by our survey participants as direct/retail purchases.

In order to fully clarify the specific practice that may be against the official policy of the trade fairs, but is an existing and usual practice in the trade fairs of Thessaloniki, four interviews were conducted with those involved on the specific subject. In particular, three interviews were conducted with executives of the TIF-HELEXPO Trade Fairs Department, two of whom are Project Managers of major trade fairs that are organized annually in Thessaloniki. From these interviews, it emerged that this specific practice is common, despite the fact that the organizer tries in various ways to prevent it, as retail sales within trade fairs creates malfunctions in the trade fair itself, while in many cases it also involves tax violations. Specifically, on these issues, an interviewee specifically stated:

“We are aware of this specific issue and we are trying to prevent it. There is an express ban on retail sales within the trade fair regulations and we emphasize this to our exhibitors. In fact, in order to avoid retail sales, all exhibitors together with their declaration of participation sign a responsible declaration that they will not carry out retail sales during the trade fairs”.

Also, when asked how they manage to get into the trade fairs that are closed to the general public and only professionals are allowed to enter (only by showing a Business Card), the interviewee said the following:

«Non-professional visitors come to trade fairs either with invitations given by exhibitors or with some other person's business card that they find on their own».

In addition, the interviewees were asked about the way in which the retail sale is carried out, as well as the receipt of the goods during the trade fairs. On these issues, one interviewee stated:

«Retail sales can be conducted in many ways within the trade fair. The visitor should agree with the company to have the product sent to him, or to pick it up on the spot, if it is a small item, such as e.g. a piece of jewelry. Especially for on-site sales, it is common for the delivery to take place on the last day of the fair».

Finally, in order to cross-reference the above information from the other side, the citizen-buyer who visits the trade fairs in Thessaloniki, an interview was conducted with a citizen who follows such practices, who mentioned:

«I go to these kinds of trade fairs when I want to buy something specialized and get it at a wholesale price. I will mention the example, when I wanted to buy a cross for a baptism that I was the godfather of, I visited the jewelry fair in Thessaloniki to see crosses. Inside the trade fair I chose a cross, closed it on the spot and after the trade fair closed, I went and got it from the merchant's shop. This way I achieved the best quality at the best possible price».

4. Fulfillment of Visitors' Objectives – Expectations

The degree of satisfaction of the respondents' objectives/goals for their participation in the Thessaloniki trade fairs seems to be quite high, as the majority of the sample answers positively, while the percentages of respondents who answer negatively are small. Specifically, as shown in Figure 5, 54.2% of the respondents state that the objectives/goals of their visit to the trade fairs in Thessaloniki were achieved to a large extent, 22.2% to a moderate extent and 20.8% to a very large extent. On the contrary, the percentages of negative responses are extremely low, as 2.1% state that their objectives were achieved a little and only 0.7% that they were not achieved at all. These responses show the high degree of satisfaction of the general public with the trade fairs organized in Thessaloniki, with the mean score equal to 3.93 (S.D.=0.75).

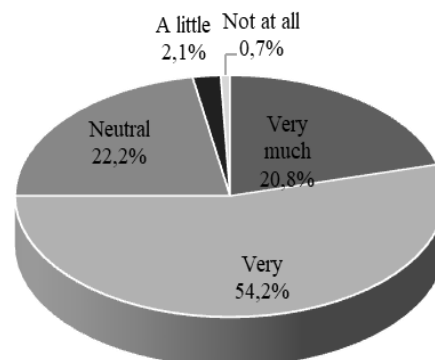


Figure 5. Objectives achievement

From the qualitative research we found that the degree of achievement of the interviewees' goals from their visit to Zootechnia, shows a generally positive trend. In particular, most of Zootechnia's visitors appear quite satisfied with the achievement of the objectives of their visit: *“For the most part yes, we are satisfied. We see the machines and tools, which we need in our work. Things evolve; we see new things so that we too can improve the quality of our lives and our work”* (IN.VI.06, Man, Karditsa, Livestock Farmer). On the contrary, a small part of the visitors declared moderately or slightly satisfied, which considers that the event is smaller than other years with fewer exhibits: *“I'm 80% happy with what I saw. I would like a few more things on my field, namely animals. Of course, I made some contacts and gathered a lot of information. Now at home we will study all this...”* (IN.VI.18, Man, Kilkis, Livestock Farmer).

A similar trend, and even stronger, is shown by the visitors of Detrop, the vast majority of whom are satisfied with the achievement of the objectives of their visit. At Detrop, industry professionals are given the opportunity to see producers, suppliers and products mainly from Northern Greece, gathered together: *“We are quite satisfied. Because we work with several producers throughout Greece, so it's an opportunity to see them all gathered together at the trade fair and especially those suppliers from Northern Greece who are all here”* (IN.VI.31, Woman, Stockholm, Oil Wholesale). At the same time, the change in attitude of the producers-suppliers regarding their flexibility in cooperation is commented positively: *“I am very pleased. Producers have also changed, compared to a few years ago when their attitude was different. For example, now they also translate the products into French. The mindset has changed. Change due to crisis. The crisis helped to move the world a little and open its minds and eyes because the markets are unlimited. We have a great product like Greece; it's a sin not to have a brand name”* (IN.VI.40, Male, Brussels, Greek Restaurant Owner). Finally, the percentage of those who appeared little or not at all satisfied was small.

From the above responses, a positive trend can be seen for both trade fairs in terms of the achievement of visitors' goals. This shows that the visitors found what they were looking for in the particular trade fairs. This trend is also evident from the degree of repeatability of visits. It seems that visitors attend these trade fairs consistently at almost every event. Specifically, from the sample of interviewees of Zootechnia, the majority visit the trade fair without fail, in fact many visit both Zootechnia and Agrotica, the two most important trade fairs in the agricultural sector, every year. The rest have visited the trade fair other times in the past, while only one visitor stated that he is coming for the first time. Correspondingly, from the sample of Detrop visitors, most of them visit the trade fair continuously and several have visited the trade fair in the past. The number of those visiting the trade fair for the first time was small. From the above answers, it follows that the Zootechnia and Detrop trade fairs are an institution for each industry, steadily gathering the interest of people in the industry, even in a form of tradition. Also, the steady participation of people in the industry suggests that the two specific trade fairs meet the expectations of their visitors, or part of them.

5. Reasons for rejection and non-attendance of Thessaloniki trade fairs

Respondents who have not visited a trade fair organized in Thessaloniki in the last five years were asked to explain why they did not visit any of them with an open-ended question. The respondents cited as the reasons for their non-participation, the lack of interest on their part. For example, one respondent said: *“the subject matter of today's trade fairs does not concern me”*. Moreover, the respondents mention other reasons that have to do with more subjective issues such as lack of mood and health problems: *“I no longer feel like visiting trade fairs and being in crowds”*, and *“due to health problems I can't visit trade fairs and walk through the hall area with a lot of people”*. Also, the difficulty of accessibility to the trade fair center is mentioned as a reason for non-participation, and more specifically, issues related to the lack of parking spaces, difficulty in moving and the distance from the place where they live. For example: *«I don't visit the trade fairs because it is difficult to access the area with so many people, there is nowhere to park the car...”* and *“I don't visit the fairs because I have to use the buses which I avoid because of overcrowding, if I use the car I will struggle to park”* and *“I live in an area*

that is far from the fair and it takes a lot of time to come and this seems like a hassle to me". At the same time, the lack of time is mentioned: *"I don't have the required time to visit trade fairs. A visit to a trade fair takes a lot of time that I don't have to spare"*. Finally, another reason mentioned is that the trade fairs are exclusively for professionals: *"trade fairs are only of interest to businesses, to the public most trade fairs are of no interest"*.

From these answers it appears that the city population that does not visit the city fairs, follows this practice as a combination of subjective and objective factors. The subjective factors that lead to such practices, such as lack of personal interest, discomfort from crowds, long distance from the residential area, etc. cannot be addressed, but objective factors, such as difficult accessibility, the cost of visiting, etc. can be addressed in order to attract more citizens of the city to Thessaloniki's trade fairs. In addition, the respondents who do not currently visit the trade fairs organized in Thessaloniki state that they would be interested in a car trade fair, a fashion trade fair (clothing-shoes), a trade fair about new entertainment technologies and electronic games, as well as an event with activities for children. From these answers, a general trend can be seen that Thessaloniki lacks more trade fairs and events that have to do with the free time of the modern family.

DISCUSSION

The survey results showed that the reasons/objectives for visitors to attend trade fairs are a mix of different factors. Therefore, the trade fairs in the Greek reality are not treated exclusively as a sterile economic event where only commercial transactions are carried out, but are treated as a simulation of the market in the broadest sense. According to Weber (Fragopoulos, 2008, p. 17), the market is the core of the urban phenomenon. Since ancient Greece, the concept of the market included and combined broader features, such as gathering, democracy, political discussion that accompanied the purchase of necessary products, financial transactions and even entertainment.

These results are in contrast to previous findings (UFI, 2017), where trade fair visitors state exclusively financial parameters as the reason/goal for their participation in the trade fairs, in contrast to the variety of reasons/goals declared by Thessaloniki trade fair visitors. This differentiation highlights the "hybrid" nature of Thessaloniki's trade fair activity, which moves beyond the narrow limits of the economic events prevailing internationally. Therefore, trade fairs in Thessaloniki combine many different features and play a broader and multifunctional role.

However, it is also important to note that the reasons/objectives of visitors to the trade fairs of Thessaloniki differ depending on the nature and targeting of each trade fair: the main reason for visiting the trade fairs addressed to the general public is entertainment, while those of the specialized sectoral trade fairs are mainly business-related. However, even in the sectoral trade fairs there is a significant percentage in several cases that mentions fun-entertainment as an incentive. So, the well-noticed trend of bleisure travelers who seek entertainment during their business travel (Kachniewska, 2016; Lichy and McLeay, 2018; Aydın and Özgürel, 2021; Sohaili et al., 2022) is confirmed, while it appears to be closely related to the type of trade fair, although it is evident to a greater or lesser degree in all trade fairs.

This finding is a step forward in research efforts, as it confirms the tendency of business travelers to participate in leisure activities, with differences in the degree of participation depending on the type of trade fair. Thus, we distinguished three different types of bleisure visitors with a decreasing degree of participation in leisure activities: a) visitors of B2C trade fairs; b) visitors of B2B trade events; and c) visitors of mixed events (B2C and B2B). Of course, there are some underlying factors that influence these incentives, such as industries, participant demographics, and event planning. However, these factors are directly linked to the type of the trade fair. It certainly deserves further investigation in future research.

The survey's findings are of practical importance, firstly for the organizers of the trade fairs, as they have to satisfy a specific need of the visitors in order to achieve the objectives of the trade fairs, but also for the local tourism development agencies, who can exploit this market for tourism development of host areas. The need for fun-entertainment can be met both within the venues and in the host area, as for example in the context of familiarization trips which will give the visitors the opportunity to get to know the wider area. But also within the context of the events themselves, the organizers should take into account the needs of their visitors.

Moreover, a paradoxical practice of retail sales at trade fairs was also found. This informal practice goes against the official policy of trade fairs, but it happens at the Thessaloniki trade fairs. Such practices demonstrate the hybrid nature of the trade fair activity in Thessaloniki, where in the midst of the crisis citizens adopt informal practices and visit trade fairs with the aim of finding the best product at the lowest possible price. Finally, the need for more trade fairs related to the leisure time of the modern family was highlighted, another sign of the hybrid character of the trade fair activity in Thessaloniki.

CONCLUSION

The present research reveals some interesting cues for both research and managerial purposes. Understanding the motivations of trade fair visitors primarily concerns organizers and the realization of trade fair goals. At the same time, it is useful information for the host regions that can take advantage of an important tourist market. The tendency to combine business trips with leisure is confirmed, while it is found that the type of trade fair has an effect on this tendency. This finding is important both at the level of organizing trade fairs, but also at the level of managing the tourism development of destinations that host trade fairs.

However, the results cannot be generalized, as the research was conducted in a specific spatial and temporal context. These are the main limitations of the study, along with the need to include underlying factors associated with the type of the trade fair (type of industry, demographic characteristics of attendees, event design, etc.). The study should continue in this direction, as the hybrid nature of the trade fair activity of Thessaloniki is of great research interest.

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Appendix 1. Questionnaire
A. Demographics

1. Gender: Male Female

2. Age: 15-24 25-29 30-44 45-64 65+

3. Education Level:

- Primary Education and below Secondary Education (Junior High School, High School, etc.)
 Post-secondary Education (Institute of Vocational Training etc.) Higher education (University, Technological Educational Institute)
 Postgraduate Studies-PhD

4. Profession:

- Student Freelancer/Self-Employed
 Private/civil servant Housekeeping/Retired
 Unemployed Other

5. Area of Residence:

- Eastern Suburbs (Thermi, N Raideostos, Rysio, Tagarades, Panorama, Hortiatas, etc.)
 Eastern City Areas (Malakopi, Toumpa, Papafi, Depo, Charilaou, Analipsi, Faliro, Ag. Triada, Kifisia-Voulgari, Trochiodromika, Triandria, Kalamaria, Pylaia, etc.)
 City Center (Center, Saranta Ekklisies, Dioikitirio, Port, Station, Xirokrini, Fix-Lachanokipi, Ano Poli-Eptapyrgio, Agios Dimitrios, Agios Pavlos, etc.)
 Western City Areas (Ampelokipoi, Menemeni, Kordelio, Evosmos, Neapoli, Polichni, Stavroupoli, Sykies, etc.)
 Western Suburbs (Sindos, Diavata, Kalochori, N. Magnesia, Pefka, Retziki, Asvestochori, Efkarpia, Oreokastro, etc.)

B. Visit to Trade Fairs of Thessaloniki

6. Have you visited any trade fair organized in Thessaloniki in the last five years?

- Yes No

6.1. If so, which of the following trade fairs did you visit (multiple answers possible)

- TIF Agrotica/Zootechnia Detrop/Oenos/Artozymba
 Freskon Philoxenia/Hotelia Infacoma Kosmima
 Book Fair Sportexpo Art Thessaloniki Other

6.1.1. What was the reason/objective of your visit to these trade fairs? (multiple answers possible)

	Information	Commercial reasons-Wholesale	Networking-Contacts	Direct retail purchases	Entertainment-fun	Other
TIF	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Agrotica/ Zootechnia	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Detrop/Oenos/ Artozymba	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Freskon	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Philoxenia/ Hotelia	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Infacoma	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Kosmima	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Book Fair	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sportexpo	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Art Thessaloniki	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

6.1.2. To what extent were the reasons/objectives of your visit achieved?

- Very much Very Neutral A little Not at all

6.2. If not, why don't you visit any of the trade fairs organized in Thessaloniki?

.....

What would be the theme of a trade fair that, if organized in Thessaloniki, would attract your interest?

.....

.....

.....

Appendix 2. Interview Guide

A. Visitor Profile

A.1. What is your profession; / What do you do for a living?

A.2. In which area do you live?

B. Trade fair visit - Effectiveness

B.1. For what reason (objectives) did you visit the trade fair?

B.2. To what extent are these reasons / objectives achieved?

B.3. Do you visit other similar trade fairs?

- If so, which ones in Greece and which ones abroad?

B.4. Are the objectives of your visit to this trade fair different from other trade fairs you visit?

B.5. Is this the first time you are visiting this trade fair?

- If not, do you regularly visit this trade fair?

Appendix 3. Interviews with Visitors at the Zootechnia and Detrop Trade Fairs

id	Gender	Area	Profession	Trade Fair	Date
IN.VI.01	Male	Thessaloniki	Agriculturalist, Animal Feed Trade	Zootechnia	1/2/2019
IN.VI.02	Male	Goumenissa	Livestock farmer	Zootechnia	1/2/2019
IN.VI.03	Male	Ioannina	Veterinary, Public Servant	Zootechnia	1/2/2019
IN.VI.04	Male	Igoumenitsa	Farmer-Livestock farmer	Zootechnia	1/2/2019
IN.VI.05	Male	Thessaloniki	Veterinary, Municipal Employee	Zootechnia	1/2/2019
IN.VI.06	Male	Karditsa	Livestock farmer	Zootechnia	1/2/2019
IN.VI.07	Male	Kozani	Livestock farmer	Zootechnia	1/2/2019
IN.VI.08	Male	Skopje	Director of Insulating Materials Factory	Zootechnia	1/2/2019
IN.VI.09	Female	Amyntaeo	Farmer	Zootechnia	1/2/2019
IN.VI.10	Male	Serres	Livestock farmer	Zootechnia	1/2/2019
IN.VI.11	Male	Preveza	Livestock farmer	Zootechnia	1/2/2019
IN.VI.12	Female	Katerini	Farmer	Zootechnia	1/2/2019
IN.VI.13	Male	Thessaloniki	Owner of a Biogas Unit	Zootechnia	1/2/2019
IN.VI.14	Male	Grevena	Farmer	Zootechnia	1/2/2019
IN.VI.15	Male	Katerini	Livestock farmer	Zootechnia	1/2/2019
IN.VI.16	Male	Thiva	Agriculturalist	Zootechnia	1/2/2019
IN.VI.17	Male	Kilkis	Farmer-Livestock farmer	Zootechnia	1/2/2019
IN.VI.18	Male	Kilkis	Livestock farmer	Zootechnia	1/2/2019
IN.VI.19	Male	Cyprus	Agriculture student	Zootechnia	1/2/2019
IN.VI.20	Male	Xanthi	Farmer-Livestock farmer	Zootechnia	1/2/2019
IN.VI.21	Female	Serres	Organizer of Agricultural Conferences	Zootechnia	1/2/2019
IN.VI.22	Male	Trikala	Farmer	Zootechnia	1/2/2019
IN.VI.23	Male	Chalkidiki	Livestock farmer	Zootechnia	1/2/2019
IN.VI.24	Male	Thessaloniki	Agriculturalist	Zootechnia	1/2/2019
IN.VI.25	Male	Athens	Animal feed	Zootechnia	1/2/2019
IN.VI.26	Γυναίκα	Thessaloniki	Veterinary	Zootechnia	1/2/2019
IN.VI.27	Male	Thessaloniki	Farmer-Livestock farmer	Zootechnia	1/2/2019
IN.VI.28	Male	Xanthi	Livestock farmer	Zootechnia	1/2/2019
IN.VI.29	Male	Glasgow	Representative of German Food Products	Detrop	4/3/2019
IN.VI.30	Male	Kassel	Wine importer in Germany	Detrop	4/3/2019
IN.VI.31	Female	Stockholm	Wholesale of Oil	Detrop	4/3/2019
IN.VI.32	Female	Rotterdam	Export Development Consultant	Detrop	4/3/2019
IN.VI.33	Male	Belgium	Trade in Organic Foods	Detrop	4/3/2019
IN.VI.34	Male	Thessaloniki	Chemical engineer	Detrop	4/3/2019
IN.VI.35	Male	Thessaloniki	Food Trade	Detrop	4/3/2019
IN.VI.36	Male	Kavala	Trade of Confectionery Products	Detrop	4/3/2019
IN.VI.37	Female	London	Trade of Greek Products in Great Britain	Detrop	4/3/2019
IN.VI.38	Female	Volos	Trade of Greek Products in Russia	Detrop	4/3/2019
IN.VI.39	Male	Auckland, New Zealand	Trade of Greek Products in New Zealand	Detrop	4/3/2019
IN.VI.40	Male	Brussels	Greek restaurant owner	Detrop	4/3/2019
IN.VI.41	Female	Moscow	Trade of Greek Products in Russia	Detrop	4/3/2019
IN.VI.42	Male	Thessaloniki	Food trade	Detrop	4/3/2019
IN.VI.43	Male	Serres	Food trade	Detrop	4/3/2019
IN.VI.44	Female	Thessaloniki	Restaurant owner	Detrop	4/3/2019
IN.VI.45	Male	Kavala	Food wholesale	Detrop	4/3/2019
IN.VI.46	Male	Athens	Food wholesale	Detrop	4/3/2019
IN.VI.47	Male	Ioannina	Food trade	Detrop	4/3/2019
IN.VI.48	Female	Athens	Food trade	Detrop	4/3/2019
IN.VI.49	Male	Drama	Wine trade	Detrop	4/3/2019
IN.VI.50	Male	Thessaloniki	Food and beverage trade	Detrop	4/3/2019
IN.VI.51	Male	Thessaloniki	Food and beverage trade	Detrop	4/3/2019

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