Research Paper Maritime

Tourism and Marine Protected Area Management

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ABSTRACT

The last decades have seen an increasing shift towards ecotourism as compared to mass tourism, leading to the development of many forms of alternative tourism. Marine tourism based on high environmental quality, features strongly in these novel forms of tourism, especially in countries with access to the sea. The need for conservation and management of the natural environment has been recognized by the international community and it is now both timely and topical to integrate the quality of the environment itself into tourism planning also developing and applying appropriate environmental management systems. As far as the Mediterranean Sea is concerned only 3.8% is under protection, whereas the percentage of coastal regions that are protected is just 0.4%, of the total Mediterranean surface (2.510.000 km2). Researchers consider both percentages very small, being unable to conserve valuable ecosystems that are important for the commercially viability of tourism, fishing and ecosystem services. Marine reserves as well as marine protected areas (MPA) have proved to be important tools in abating the multiple threats to the marine ecosystem, as well as providing a sustainable base to plan novel tourist destinations and services. Over the years these protected areas have become very popular tourists destinations, providing sustainable development to coastal and island communities that where already facing serious environmental deterioration due to mass tourism. It is well established however, that in order to deliver continuous improvement of overall environmental quality as well as sustainable economic activity, we have to address the often conflicting challenges of commercial imperatives and the increasing demands and expectations of an ever-widening range of stakeholders compared to integrated environmental management systems that also involve all interested parties.

KEYWORDS Ecotourism, marine tourism, Marine Protected Areas, sustainable tourism, environmental management systems, natural resources management

INTRODUCTION

Over the last 20 years a significant shift from mass tourism to newly developed alternative forms of tourism, characterized by an awareness and appreciation of nature and culture of a region, has been recorded. These forms are characterized by an ecosystems approach, i.e. activities based in ecologically important and valuable areas that do not exceed the carrying capacity of the region and promote the protection of the natural and cultural environment, in accordance with legal and integrated management schemes. The International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN) in an attempt to define the concept of ecotourism, states "The environmentally responsible travel and visit in relatively undisturbed natural areas which aim to delight and appreciation of nature (and cultural assets of the present and the past) and promote conservation, have low visitor's impact, and provide useful active socio-economic involvement of local populations". (Ceballos-Lascuráin H., 1993)

The growing environmental awareness in general and of tourist market in particular, combining efforts for a viable and sustainable tourism industry development pursued by several players i.e. international market, national policies, government bodies and business initiatives, are considered to be key drivers of ecotourism. Ecotourism, besides offering pleasure, enjoyment, knowledge and experiences to visitors, also maintains and enhances the welfare of local communities

Sustainable tourism is a model promoted by the European Union (COM, 2007), and refers to a framework structured around the triptych: economy, ecology and society and the promotion of competitiveness.

The relationship between the environment and tourism is well established today. The Declaration of Manilas for World Tourism (1980), Agenda 21 as adopted by the Rio Summit on Environment (1992), and incorporated into the EU Treaty of Maastricht and recently the Global Code of Ethics for Tourism (1999), all adopt and promote the principles of sustainable development highlighting the international tourism community's obligations pertinent to the protection of the environment. It is clear to the tourism business that a healthy tourism industry depends on a healthy environment and sustainable tourism development is synonymous to environmentally prudent tourism (Robert P., 2012).

The most prevalent types of ecotourism/alternative tourism are the following: marine tourism, religious tourism, recreational fishing, diving, therapeutic or medicinal, conference and meetings, nautical including yachting, environmental and nature appreciation, athletic, agricultural, hiking and walking, etc. These forms can serve as a basis for independent tourist destinations and packages, also enriching other packages of the traditional tourism. The advantages to the tourist industry can be summarized as follows:

- Broadening of the tourist season
- Improvement of the quality of tourism demand
- Protection of the environment
- Sustainable tourism development
- Promotion of culture and environment

Marine tourism is a form of alternative tourism that aims to highlight the marine wealth of a country, attract tourists by offering the contact with the sea and its environment, in the form of varied recreational activities related to the sea and the coast, thus ensuring the sustainability of the country's marine wealth. Marine tourism includes cruises, yachting and sailing, all water sports, diving and snorkeling, sea animal (mammals) spotting, fishing, swimming, waterskiing and surfing, wind-

surfing, rowing and canoeing, tours with tourist boats, sea walking-tours, scientific expeditions and information gathering, etc.

The value and importance of these forms of ecotourism are especially important when referring to Greece. Greece is a Mediterranean country with good weather conditions and a long coastline of over 15,000 km washed with friendly and clean waters, including many islands. Greek seas are considered safe in terms of maritime risks, distances between islands are relatively small and access is easy, while equally favorable are the conditions related to the volume of the wind and the temperatures of the ambient and sea.

Marine tourism is a large section of the tourism industry, since 90% of Greek tourism investments are concentrated in the coastal zone and interacts as a feeder to other categories. From national aspect, marine tourism helps in maintaining of cohesion of the Greek islands. Its importance is reflected by the fact that the industry of sea tourism covers 3.8% of the 18% of the total contribution of all sectors of tourism, to the GDP of Greece, through the creation of local development projects, increased employment opportunities and stabilizing the population movements from rural areas and islands to urban centers (urbanization) (Becker N., Chorosh Y., 2010).

MARINE PROTECTED AREAS

Numerous studies and reports indicate that oceans and their livelihood are under serious threat, due to the increased human intervention in the coastal zone, usually causing significant damage to marine ecosystems, such as the depletion of many marine fish stocks. The threat of further damage to marine habitats and the potential loss of species and genetic diversity are already high on the environmental agenda (Binet T., Lutchman I., 2008). It is been proven without doubt that Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) represent a successful management tool for the protection and conservation of biotic and abiotic elements (Naidoo R. *et al.,* 2006), while at the same time, allowing several activities and services to function thus attaining sustainable development and benefiting local communities. Marine Protected Areas are defined as areas whose boundaries include part of marine or ocean waters. The term is used to describe marine areas under protection from human activity, and typically include live, abiotic or historical and cultural resources. The marine protected areas, depending on their importance, include either limits on growth, fishing and access, or a total prohibition of exploitation of the region. (Boersma D.P., Parrish J.K., 1999). The effectiveness of MPAs as a tool for environmental protection is also highlighted by the fact that the Convention on Biological Diversity, also known as the Convention of Barcelona – CBD, has set as a target of 10% of the Mediterranean Sea's surface to be under a MPA regime by the end of 2013.

Marine Protected Areas have also proved to be popular tourist destinations in recent years, taking as examples the Illes Medes and Cabrera National Park in Spain, Port-Cros National Park in France and several others in Italy and Croatia. Although Greece is one of the richest countries in biodiversity, since 447 out of the 579 species of fish living in the Mediterranean can be found in the Greek seas, being home to a significant number of endangered species at a European and global level (Badalemaenti F. *et al.*, 2002), only recently initiatives have been initiated in order to develop marine protected areas accompanied by tourism activities (Millazo M. *et al.,* 2008).

MANAGEMENT OF MARINE PROTECTED AREAS

IUCN has classified MPAs into six types in order to facilitate the management of the areas (Dudley N., 2008). These categories include:

Class I - Protected areas that manage mainly the protection of wildlife. (Strict Nature Reserve / Wilderness Area)

Class II - Protected areas that manage mainly the ecosystem protection and recreation (National Parks, Marine Parks)

Class III - Protected areas that manage mainly the conservation of specific natural features (Natural monuments, reefs, rocky shores)

Class IV - Protected areas that manage principally conservation through intervention management (delimited and controlled human intervention in these areas of great natural importance) (Klein C.J. *et al.,* 2008)

Class V - Protected areas that manage principally landscape conservation / seascape and recreation (Protected Landscapes)

Class VI - Protected areas that manage principally the sustainable use of natural ecosystems (Management of the resources of the protected area)

CONCLUSIONS

It is clear from the above that the management of Marine Protected Areas is of the outmost importance in order to ensure a balance between environmental protection and economic development of local communities mainly based on tourism. The Management Bodies endowed with implementing the appropriate management plans will depend heavily on community support especially in the field of enforcement provided mainly by the professional fishermen's association, since they are always present in the wider area. In the Mediterranean region much experience in developing and implementing management plans exists (Weeks R. *et al.,* 2010), assisting local authorities in cooperation with local stakeholders to successfully manage the sustainable viability of coastal areas with significant environmental and biological interest (Palumbi S., 2009).

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