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LitusGo Manual

Module 3

**Sustainable tourism –
carrying capacity**



Lifelong Learning Programme

Editor: Isotech Ltd, Environmental Research and Consultancy
www.isotech.com.cy

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Preface to the LitusGo Education Manual

The LitusGo Manual is part of the LitusGo educational package which is included in the LitusGo portal: www.litusgo.eu. LitusGo aims at the training and capacity building of Local Authorities and local stakeholders in Integrated Coastal Zone Management issues and the reaction to the impacts of climate change.

This Manual consists of 20 autonomous, self-contained and inter-related modules. The modules are available in four languages, Greek, English, Maltese and Turkish and in three different forms: the dedicated wiki application in the LitusGo portal, the dvd and the hard copy version. This hard copy version of the LitusGo Manual consists of 20 self-contained booklets, one for each module, kept in a hard collective case.

List of modules of the LitusGo Educational Manual

- Module 1: European legal framework
- Module 2: Stakeholder involvement/Public participation
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- Module 17: Droughts
- Module 18: Desertification
- Module 19: Energy use, consumption and management
- Module 20: Green buildings

Credits

The LitusGo Education Manual has been developed by the LitusGo Educational Manual Working group:

Modules 1, 2, 6, 7, 8, 9, 12, 13, 14, 16, 17, 18, 19 have been prepared by the scientific team of the beneficiary/coordinators ISOTECH Ltd. Major authors: Michael I. Loizides, Chemical/Environmental Engineer and Xenia I. Loizidou, Civil/Coastal Engineer. Constantinos Georgiades (MSc in ICZM) is responsible for the overall editing. The hard copy of the educational Manual is designed by Anastasia Georgiou.

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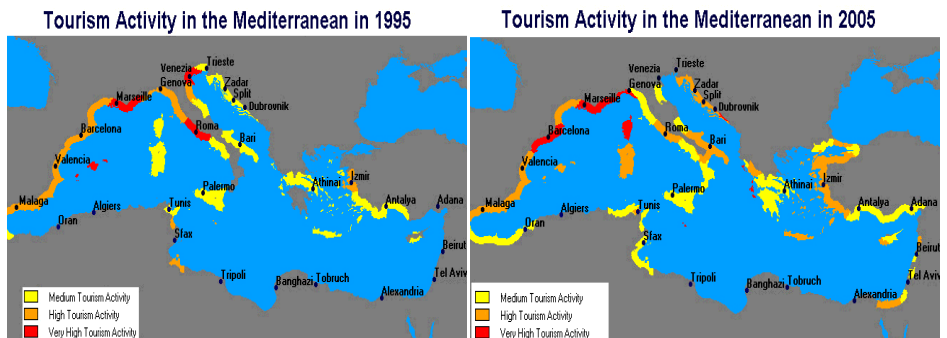
Module 3

Sustainable tourism – carrying capacity

1| Theoretical background

A. General information

The Mediterranean is one of the main tourist destinations in the world and most of the tourism activity is concentrated in the coastal areas (30% of international tourist arrivals) [2]: 63% of the Europeans choose the coast for their holiday (UNEP/MAP, 2009).



Picture 1. Tourism activity in the Mediterranean.

In 2007, 275 million international tourists arrived in coastal areas [2], and according to projections of national and international tourist visits, it is estimated that this number will increase by 137 million (compared to 175 million tourists in 2000) to 312 million tourists in 2025. [4].

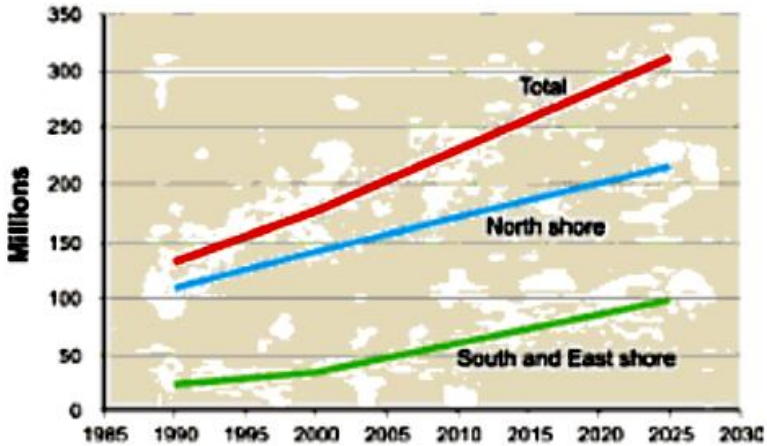


Diagram 1. Domestic and international tourist visits in coastal regions 1990-2025 [4].

B. Definitions of main concepts

Sustainable development as defined by the Brundtland Report Our Common Future is the “responsibility of the present generations to meet their needs in a manner which ensures that the ability of future generations to meet their needs is not compromised by irreversible resource depletion” [5].

Sustainable tourism is “tourism that aims to provide equitably distributed benefits (meeting the needs of current generations) whilst minimising the negative environmental and cultural impact generally associated with tourism development: i.e. to combine development and conservation” (Wild, 1994, cited in Ponting, 2001).

Swarbrooke suggests that there are three equally important

dimensions to sustainable tourism. Namely (Swarbrooke, 1999, cited in Ponting, 2001)

- The environment, both natural and built;
- The economic life of communities and companies;
- Social aspects of tourism, in terms of its impacts on host culture and tourists, and the way in which those employed in tourism are treated.

A definition of tourism carrying capacity of a tourist resort is proposed by the UNWTO as the following: "The maximum number of people that may visit a tourist destination at the same time, without causing destruction of the physical, economic and socio-cultural environment and an unacceptable decrease in the quality of the visitors' satisfaction" [3].

It is important to distinguish tourism growth and tourism development. Both of these terms are measured through the use of certain indicators (i.e. the first is measured by the number of arrivals, overnight stays, etc. and the latter by the increase in local income and employment, environmental benefits, and it implies the presence of development planning in accordance with the carrying capacity of the receiving environment). Tourism growth doesn't always result in adequate economic prosperity [3].

Over the past years, tourism growth has been the main objective, but in the last years, after having reached its peak, all the impacts on environmental and cultural resources of coastal areas, as well as the social, economic and cultural patterns of tourist destinations have been made clear [3].

Nowadays there has been an emerging trend in increasing awareness by those who manage and invest in tourism that a well preserved natural and built environment contributes to sustainability. Tourism expectations and demand are diverting from the traditional model of sea – sun – sand towards more complex products that include cultural and natural attractions, gastronomy, sports, etc. all this in a well-preserved and distinctive natural environment [3].

At the same time, people living in traditional tourist destinations are increasingly aware of and concerned about their natural, historic and cultural heritage [8].

[C. Europe, Mediterranean Sea and tourism development](#)

Tourism is one of the strongest economic sectors in the member states of the European Union (EU). Tourism activities in all member states involve around 2 million businesses (mostly small and medium-sized enterprises). These are currently generating up to 12% of the GDP (directly or indirectly), 6% of employment (directly) and 30% of external trade. All of these figures are expected to increase further as tourism demand is expected to grow. An analysis of changes in tourism in the EU over the past 20 years shows that the numbers of bed-places and overnight stays have increased by almost 64% whilst the population rose by only 6,2% (EC 2002) [8]. International tourism receipts, presenting over the past 40 years an overall rising trend, totalled US\$ 208 billion in 2006 for the whole of the Mediterranean countries, which represents an average expenditure of US\$ 803 per international tourist [2].

D. Carrying capacity

Where is the limit to this kind of development? What is the carrying capacity of the coastal zone, i.e. how many people and how much human activity can be hosted by a coastal area before the coastal ecosystem collapses together with all human activity? Several coastal ecosystems in Europe and the Mediterranean are already collapsing: 19% of known Mediterranean species are threatened both locally and worldwide [2].

- Fishing seems to have reached its limits. 63% of the fish and 60% of the mammals listed in the Protocol concerning Specially Protected Areas and Biological Diversity have endangered status, from increasing pressures (construction / disappearance of such ecosystems as lagoons, grassbeds), coastal erosion, over-exploited marine resources and expansion of invasive species. These zones are submitted to stringent pressures from land-based pollution, urban development, fishing, aquaculture, tourism, extractions of materials, sea pollution, marine biological invasions [2].
- Constructions currently cover 40% of the coastal surfaces [2].
- Water demand has doubled over the past 50 years (280km³/year in 2007) [2].
- The urbanisation rate in 1995 was 62%, forecasted to grow to 72% in 2025 [2].
- But the biggest problem in continuing growth in population and infrastructure is the linear nature of coastal urbanisation resulting in nearly 40% of the total length of the coastal area already being occupied [2].

2| Objective

There is still a lack of training, capacity building and skills in local authorities and NGOs on the issue of sustainable tourism. The interests (financial) are high, and even if local decision makers want to promote sustainable forms of tourism, the lack of competences, technical support and capacity building is a major drawback in their effort. LitusGo opens the discussion on this issue. Through this training tool, workshops and training sessions, LitusGo aims at contributing in filling this gap and support local decision makers and local stakeholders in developing skills through knowledge in order to promote sustainable tourism as the only kind of tourism that can guarantee the future prosperity of Mediterranean tourist coastal areas.

3| Problem

Tourism activity peaks in the summer, coinciding with the time when natural water availability is at its lowest [9]. During peak seasons, population densities may rise up to high levels (2,300 people/Km² on the Mediterranean coast of France and Spain, which is more than double the winter number) [3].

The relationship existing between tourism and environment is best qualified as a relation of mutual dependence: not only tourism is highly dependent on environmental quality but environmental quality is also highly vulnerable to tourism development.

The problems/impacts from non-sustainable tourism can be summarised in three axes:

- **Environmental impacts**, such as natural resources deterioration, air pollution from the means of transportation, landscape deterioration, traffic etc, as mentioned in chapter 1 of this module,
- **Social impacts**, such as traditional professions abandonment, xenophobia, traditional architecture deterioration [7] and
- **Economic impacts**, such as inflation rise and cost of living, creates low quality employment, seasonality in employment.

4| How to deal with the problem

The first step towards sustainability is proper planning. According to UNEP “as an interrelated system, it is important that tourism planning aims at the integrated development of all these parts of the system, both the demand and supply factors and the physical and institutional elements” [3].

Coastal tourism can be enhanced by ICZM, since it can play an important role in resolving conflicts and enabling cooperation among all the sectors taking place on the coast as well as helping with the overlapping responsibilities of involved agents on the coast [3].

In order to implement sustainability actions Local Authorities need to have the capacity and the knowhow. A well informed and trained Local Authority can have a positive and upgraded role in the promotion of sustainable tourism. The key persons in Local Authorities and local stakeholders should go through dedicated trainings, aiming in acquiring new skills and capacities in order to comprehend and support new methods and practices.

- Capacity building and awareness raising:
 - The local authority should organise awareness raising campaigns, training projects, on-the-job trainings and other information and educational activities in order to increase the level of knowledge of the local key stakeholders, the local society in general, and the capacity of local stakeholders on sustainable tourism.
 - The local experts, practitioners (engineers, architects,

planners) and stakeholders (e.g. people working in tourism etc) should be trained in the new methods and approaches for sustainable tourism.

Tourism development planning should take into account the following goals, notions and policies:

- to integrate tourism planning into the general planning of an area [3]. This has to do with central and local decision makers and it is important for local authorities to insist on this integration.
- to maintain indefinitely the natural and cultural resources so as to cover the needs of today and future [3].
- to optimise and balance the economic, environmental and social benefits of tourism, with the equitable distribution of these benefits to the society, minimising at the same time the possible problems of tourism [3].
- to involve the community in the planning and development process to the maximum degree, and make the most out of its contribution on developing the types of tourism which benefit the locals [3]. E.g. avoid full board cheap tourism in large hotels and promote agro, cultural and nature tourism.
- to invest on quality tourism. This doesn't necessarily imply expensive tourism, but is mostly referring to tourist attractions, facilities and services, that can be valued as they should, to protect tourism resources, and attract the kinds of tourists who will respect the local environment and society [3].
- to diversify the tourism offer (ecotourism, cultural, urban and rural tourism) [2].

- to combat high seasonality and extend the tourist season (i.e. Côte d'Azur in France, that invested in business, fair and festival tourism) [2].

Local Authorities should allocate funds to support the implementation of sustainable tourism practices. Only when implemented case studies are available local stakeholders will be persuaded and support sustainable tourism.

Local Authorities should avoid studies that stay in the drawers, avoid non implementable suggestions that consider locals as the "enemy" of sustainable tourism: sustainability is team work, is a team task and a team "dream". It is the solution, the way out of the dead-end of conventional tourism development. So, Local Authorities have an important role to play, to structure a participatory framework strategy and proceed with the implementation of focused and practical actions and activities.

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