

(SP) CHALLENGES AND POTENTIAL OF THE PROPOSED SPORTS TOURISM FORMS WITHIN THE TOURISM PRODUCT REGENERATION PROCESS – THE CASE STUDY OF SEA-SPORTS TOURISM IN GREECE

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Introduction

The economic and social activity within the Hellenic area has always been closely interrelated with the sea and coast. The so called ‘Sea Tourism’ (sailing, yachting, windsurfing, scuba diving, boating, dinghies, canoeing, windsurfing etc.) has long been one of the most prestigious and profitable ingredients of the Greek tourism product. With annual receipts reaching more than one billion dollars from sea tourism activities, this travel mode has attracted the interest of both policy makers and the commercial sector, both recognising its potential to provide a competitive and quality tourism product (GNTO, 2000). The present study examines sea-sports tourism as a particularly advantageous form of tourism with a number of characteristics well-suited to assisting in the tourism product regeneration and quality enhancement processes through a sustainability perspective implying environmental sensitivity and local government active participation in policy making.

Methodology

In the course of this study, qualitative research was considered vital in collecting data on the ‘meaning’ people place on the events, processes and structures, and connecting these meanings to existing tourism policy. As the purpose of the study is the examination of sea-sports related tourism policy issues, the need to include all levels of policy dictated the need for representation of all relevant bodies at both public and private sector levels, securing simultaneously the validity of the research. This involved official semi-structured interviews with representatives of the Greek National Tourism Organisation (GNTO) producing tourism policy at central government level i.e. the Minister of Tourism and relevant departments i.e. Department of Research and Policy, Sea Tourism Department and the Department of Tourism Policy. The private sector perspectives were also reviewed through the Presidents of the Association of Yachting Owners, Association of Tourism Enterprises, and sea-sports tourism operating companies.

Results

Despite the great degree of privatisation evident in the new policy plans, the GNTO characteristically defending its centralized role, underlines its status as the central co-ordinator for coastal development and marinas, (both public and private), at the national and regional levels. In this context, the new developmental regulations strongly emphasise the described differentiated implementation procedures and the strict application of sustainability principles driving new development towards less tourism developed regions. However, private sector investment interests suggested that marinas for development are virtually all concentrated within traditional tourism zones, avoiding the risk of investing in under-developed regions and therefore widening the gap between

published public policy and private sector objectives. Additionally, the legislation is still failing to fully consider local development plans, and is therefore ignoring the knowledge of local actors which is relevant to different types of marina and coastal sporting activity development.

Despite the favourable statutory conditions offered by the GNTO for the development of Sea Tourism activity, such as the leasing of public marinas to the private enterprises, and favourable subsidies, the private sector identifies structural and managerial weaknesses in the proposals, which affect their commercial advantage (Weed and Bull, 1998). But while at least some extension to provision in peripheral areas seems likely, the quality of leisure experience in sea-sport tourism and its sustainability are potentially at risk from this multi-functional and non-integrated nature of the agencies responsible for its provision, including: land owners, occupiers, residents, businesses and users of an area.

Discussion

Public policy makers strongly emphasise the potential qualities of sea tourism and the characteristics which make it an ideal type to satisfy the goals of quality differentiation of tourism services, including: high spending clientele, an enhanced image for the whole tourism profile within the international market, and sustainable credentials. As a highly political activity, the planning for differentiated tourism development is an activity which involves many conflicting interests, with a complex range of development issues, in this case including land and water use/ownership (Jackson and Morphet, 1999). As well as not overcoming the concentrated, centralised nature of development, nor the power of existing commercial interests, the present policy plan fails to demonstrate a significant level of local government participation, restricting the responsibilities and influence of the centre and private sector entrepreneurs. The inclusion of a perplexing range of different groups in the development process, suggests that coordinated and sustainable tourism development of this type will be difficult.

References

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