

PROPOSED CERTIFICATION STANDARD FOR THE SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT AND DEVELOPMENT OF MEDITERRANEAN BEACHES

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ABSTRACT

Costal Zones are recognized of strategic importance to all Europeans and in general coastal is perceived as the land sea interface. A land use model is a representation of the interactions between different non-linear systems – biophysical and anthropic, that influence the dynamics of Land Use/Cover Change (LUCC).

This uniqueness, a result of the coexistence of land, sea and air, accounts for the ecological and environmental sensitivity of all coastal zones. They are unfortunately under severe pressure leading to huge environmental impacts due to the intense and unregulated human intervention.

Although the beaches of the general Mediterranean region constituted and still constitute a part of its significant natural heritage, nothing has been done to support the sustainable development of these areas, which would ensure both the protection of the environment and natural resources, and the general progress of the region.

This problem can be solved through the use of a pioneering and innovative tool: the certification standard for sustainable beach management and development called Costa Nostrum® (= our coast), applicable to all Mediterranean beaches.

The main purpose of Costa Nostrum® is the development of a management model-draft and a certification standard, under which sustainable management and development of each beach will be achieved. Through this process the protection of the environment, the economic development of the areas around the beach and general societal prosperity will also be ensured. Upon completion, it will provide a number of sustainability indicators, which should be recorded, as well as several principles and steps that will facilitate the success of the sustainable development of the beach. A classification of all sustainable beaches will also be provided, depending on the criteria and specifications they meet.

This standard can be adopted and implemented either by individual beaches of certain municipalities or regions. It is also directly applicable to beaches that "belong" to private entities-companies, such as hotel units. It is designed in such a way that all beaches, whether organized or not, even those that are considered eco-beaches, can

potentially qualify and be characterized as sustainable, provided they meet the basic criteria of the management plan-standard.

At the same time, each beach has its own unique characteristics, needs and requirements as well as its own specific capabilities in regard to service provision. Therefore, the proposed standard evaluates those services as well as the characteristics of the beach, and ranks it accordingly in one of four categories (only for organized beaches), while also contributing to the upgrade of the provided services.

The benefits of meeting the sustainability standard for one or more beaches, are diverse, important and cover all three aspects of sustainable development (economy, society and environment), thus greatly facilitating the general advancement and progress of the coastal area.

It should be emphasized that the use of the proposed indicators, principles and steps will result in an objective and fair assessment of the standard, which would ensure the sustainable development of the beach.

Keywords: Sustainable Beach Management, Sustainable Development, Sustainable Tourism, Sustainable Indicators

INTRODUCTION

Due to the combination of sea, land and air, the coastal zone is considered a unique and ecologically sensitive ecosystem, which however, since ancient times favoured for a variety of political, social, environmental, economic and defence reasons, the creation and development of great civilizations (Babilis, 2012; Moschovoudi, 2009).

Indicative of the extreme importance of the coastal zones is that although they account for about 15% of the total surface of the planet, 60% of the world population lives on them (Tzouma 2012; Economou, 2007; Moschovoudi, 2009; Mastrodimou, 2010). Indicative of the increasing population pressure on coastal areas is that by 2020 about 75% of the world population is estimated to have settled in a narrow strip of land with a maximum width of 60 kilometres from the coastline (Mastrodimou, 2010).

The main factors influencing and determining coastal regions are (Dimopoulou, Avagianou and Zentelis, 200?):

The density of the population living and working in the coastal zone.

The significant and fragile biodiversity existing in these areas due to the interaction between the terrestrial and marine ecosystems.

Their geomorphological structure.

The physical processes taking place such as the sedimentation mechanisms, and

Finally, the potential for the development of various human activities such as tourism.

THE PROBLEMS OF THE COASTAL ZONES - BEACHES

The intense coexistence of humans with the sensitive ecological parameters and the physical processes taking place in coastal areas has resulted in the continuously increasing pressure on the environment and natural resources contained in this narrow land strip. The problems faced by coastal areas other than environmental are both social and economic, with grave consequences and implications for the wider community, with the major of them being (Mitoula and Economou, 2003; Papaioannou, 2012; Tzouma, 2012; Mediterranean SOS, 200?; Chatzimpiros and Panayotidis, 200?)

The rapid development of these areas results in urban sprawl and infrastructure and services problems.

The massive migration towards coastal areas may result in increased unemployment and social instability

Destruction of cultural heritage due to the intense urbanization and development of economic activities.

Attraction of a large number of visitors - tourists, greater in many cases than the carrying capacity of coastal areas especially during the summer months, while facing social desolation during the winter season.

From an environmental point of view, the most important problems faced by coastal areas are (Mitoula and Economou, 2003; Babilis, 2012; Papaioannou, 2012; Mastrodimou, 2010; Tzouma, 2012; Dimopoulou, Avagianou and Zentelis, 200?; TEE, 2009; Kalaitzidaki, 200?; b; Moschovoudi, 2009; Ntasiopoulou, 2008; Zisimopoulos, 2012a; Zisimopoulos, 2012b):

Biodiversity loss due to habitat destruction in order to address the increasing needs for housing, tourism and industrial development.

Loss of coastal forests with a rate of about 200.000 hectares per year due to urbanization and wildfires

Increased pollution rates of land and water resources since the sea is the ultimate recipient of pollutants derived from processes both within the marine area, such as ship discharges and urban waste water discharges, and from land-based processes such as excessive use of pesticides and uncontrolled dumping sites leachates carried by rivers to the sea

Depletion of water reserves and water quality degradation due to increased demand especially during the summer months and simultaneous groundwater pollution from pesticides and sewage

Increased urbanization with environmental impacts due to the rapid development of tourism

Coastal erosion due to human intervention in the natural process of sedimentation

Risks from global climate change and its effects, in particular the increase of sea levels which may flood several coastal areas

Soil loss and destruction of coastal infrastructure due to the elevation of water levels caused by heavy storms during the winter months

Last but not least, are the impacts on coastal areas mainly in the Mediterranean region due to the desertification process caused by natural phenomena and anthropogenic factors.

Concluding, it should be highlighted that although the problems of coastal areas are common to almost all regions, however, in each coastal zone they have different weight and importance, and of course different impacts, which depend on a variety of factors (Tsolakos, 2009). Although the ranking of the aforementioned problems is purely subjective, it is commonly accepted that their effects are particularly destructive and severe in both the natural environment and the lives of people residing in coastal areas around the world (Tsolakos, 2009).

THE TOURISM SECTOR IN THE MEDITERRANEAN SEA

Tourism and leisure are two of the most important economic and social activities at both the European and global levels, which favour job creation, increase income levels in tourist areas, assist intercultural understanding and motivate the conservation of the natural and cultural heritage of a region.

One of the most famous tourist destinations in the world is the Mediterranean basin, which, in the last few years, hosts annually around 200 million tourists and likely this number is set to increase dramatically over the next ten years and touch 355 million by 2025 (A Fleischer, 2012; Michalena, Hills and Amat, 2009; Lacitignola, 2007).

Mass summertime tourism thrived on the shorelines of the Mediterranean after the WWII when the coasts of southern Europe became the symbol of mass tourism by offering a product that long remained without particular contenders (Onorfi and Nunes, 2013).

Data indicate that the wider region of the Mediterranean basin receives 30% of global arrivals which provide about 25% to 28% of global tourism revenues, amounting to \$131.8 billion for 1999 for the economies of touristic countries (Arlem, 2013; Zorpas, 2007; Magoulas and Pappas, 2008; Michalena, Hills and Amat, 2009; Hadjidakou, Chenoweth and Miller, 2013). Of the total number of tourists visiting the Mediterranean, 80% come from European countries with Germany possessing the lion's share and 90% of the total number of tourists spend their holidays in the European part of the Mediterranean shoreline (Magoulas and Pappas, 2008; Arlem, 2013; Zorpas, 2007). Of the remaining 10% a 6.4% visited the African coast and only a small percentage of 1.3% spend their holidays in the Asian coastal areas (Magoulas and Pappas, 2008).

Of all the Mediterranean countries Greece holds a fairly good position compared to its competitors regarding tourism activity, possessing 2.9% of the European and 1.5% of the world market share, data 2012 (SETE, 2013a). The contribution of tourism to national GDP for both 2011 and 2012 was about the same, averaging 16.4% to 16.5% and contributing 10 billion euros to the Greek economy (SETE, 2013a; Karoulia and Tsiou, 2013). The number of arrivals in Greece during 2012 reached the highest level in the last decade, totalling 17 million and showing an increase of 3.16% compared to 2011 when 16.5 million arrivals were recorded (SETE, 2013a). The highest percentage of arrivals (69%) was observed during the summer months from June to September, while the region with the most arrivals for 2012 was Crete totalling 2,830,750 arrivals (SETE, 2013a).

THE PROBLEMS OF THE MEDITERRANEAN BEACHES

Although most beaches of the Mediterranean basin are considered of outstanding natural beauty with special cultural heritage elements and attract each year millions of tourists who seek relaxation and leisure, unfortunately their situation regarding both environmental conditions and services to visitors – bathers, in some cases is particularly daunting if not catastrophic for both the environment and the local economy.

The main problems faced by coastal areas today are (Zisimopoulos, 2015):

Pollution of coasts from garbage and waste discharged into the coastal zone.

Pollution of seawater close to the shore from garbage and waste discharged from bathers.

Substandard and often poor services provided by the entrepreneurs-operators of beaches.

Use of unattractive equipment (sunbeds - umbrellas - waste bins) which are absolutely incompatible with the general scenery and nature of the beach.

Use of damaged or broken equipment.

Overpricing of goods, products and services provided within the coastal zone.

Substandard if not non-existent planning for the management of waste produced at the beach.

The number of visitors often exceeds the carrying capacity of the beach with disastrous consequences for the natural environment.

THE NEED OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF THE MEDITERRANEAN BEACHES

Taking into account the data presented it is easily understood that Mediterranean coastal areas - beaches, but also beaches throughout the world, daily receive enormous pressures from the expansion and proliferation of human activities like tourism, resulting in the continuous deterioration of natural resources and environmental pollution within these areas (Tzouma, 2012).

The need to adopt a sustainable development - management model of coastal areas - beaches is highly imperative and arising after the recognition of the key factors that are directly related to the coastal zone – beach, and these are (Economou, 2007; Tzouma, 2012; Moschovoudi, 2009; Vittis, 2004; McLachlan et al, 2013; Lamberti and Zanuttigh, 2005):

The impact on these areas from environmental changes on the climate and geomorphological level.

The recognition of the economic and environmental importance of these areas.

The impacts of human activities both inland and in coastal areas have a direct or indirect effect in these areas.

And finally, the lack of coordination between the authorities involved in coastal zone management in each state and their conflicting plans which are often inconsistent with the protection of the natural environment in coastal areas.

The main purpose of a sustainable management plan of the coastal zone - beach is to combine the protection of the environment and natural beauties of this area while developing it, although with full respect of the natural and cultural specificities of each coastal region, and at the same time aiming to achieve prosperity for the peripheral population, which unfortunately, until now, is facing particularly serious problems (Iliosporoi.net, 2008).

The main axes that should be followed when designing and implementing a system of sustainable management of coastal areas - beaches are (Iliosporoi.net, 2008):

Identifying the social, environmental and economic problems faced by local communities.

The clear defining of the objectives that will lead to an overall problem resolution.

Identifying concrete steps with partial measurable and defined results.

The implementation of measures and actions within the local community.

Securing the financial and human resources and infrastructure, and generally all the necessary tools needed to implement the defined actions.

Creation of an audit and evaluation mechanism.

Exchange of best practices and experiences through networks.

Active involvement of local authorities and residents

Finally, raising the awareness and knowledge of local residents in order to achieve the necessary community involvement.

WHAT IS “COSTA NOSTRUM” STANDARD CERTIFICATION?

The Standard Certification for the Sustainable Management and Development of Mediterranean Beaches - Costa Nostrum[®] is a standard and innovative "tool" that can objectively ensure the sustainable development of Mediterranean beaches, by primarily protecting the environment, contributing decisively to the economic development of the region around the Costa Nostrum[®] sustainable beaches and of course ensuring the social cohesion and prosperity of the region's citizens.

At the same time, the standard certification Costa Nostrum[®] will be an online tourist information portal for visitors - tourists of the Mediterranean, regarding infrastructure and the classification and characteristics of each Costa Nostrum[®] sustainable beach. In its full and extended development, each interested person visiting a coastal area in the Mediterranean, by accessing www.costanostrum.org or by downloading the special mobile application will be able to see which are the Costa Nostrum[®] sustainable beaches and what are their characteristics (natural – such as flora, fauna, weather, etc. and technical - such as provided services) and infrastructure. At the same time the visitor will be able to choose a Costa Nostrum[®] sustainable beach according to his preferences, such as infrastructure for disabled people, babies changing facilities etc., through a simple options form. In each Costa Nostrum[®] beach there will be both an electronic and printed short questionnaire and a complaints - proposals form which the visitor will be able to fill. In the information section for each Costa Nostrum[®] beach, in the website or the mobile application as well as at the beach itself (where possible in existing beach facilities such catering businesses) and at other catering businesses in the broader area, there will be advertisement – promotion space for local traditional products from the region as well as for the businesses that produce them.

Anyone having selected a sustainable Costa Nostrum[®] beach through the mobile application will also be able to get directions to the beach and information for businesses producing traditional local products that are in his path and can be visited.

At the same time another innovation of the standard certification is that it has a control evaluation mechanism for the compliance with the relevant legislation and rules regulating both the use of the beach and the operation of leisure enterprises, for example marine activities businesses.

WHICH BEACHES CAN BE CHARACTERIZED AS “COSTA NOSTRUM®” SUSTAINABLE BEACHES?

This management plan - standard certification is designed in such a way that all beaches, whether organized or not, even those considered of "ecological" character can potentially qualify as sustainable beaches, providing they meet the basic criteria of the management plan.

THE ADVANTAGES AND INNOVATION OF “COSTA NOSTRUM®” STANDARD CERTIFICATION

The proposed management plan - standard certification Costa Nostrum dominates in the following areas (Zisimopoulos, 2015):

The Sustainable Development of beaches and the surrounding areas is the main objective and purpose.

It emphasizes all three pillars of Sustainability (Economic, Environmental and Social).

Holistic and comprehensive approach to the criteria and requirements for the development of the beach aiming towards its sustainability.

Classification of beaches depending on the services provided and their characteristics.

Calculation of the carrying capacity of each beach.

International promotion and advertising of Sustainable Beaches via Internet, Facebook, Twitter etc.

Application to all kinds of beaches with the same positive results.

Evaluation of the standard and each beach by the visitors through a questionnaire.

Promotion and advertising of local traditional products.

Engages directly and indirectly the local institutions (Schools, Municipalities, Regions, etc.) and the wider society (Beach visitors and residents of the region).

Ability to design the standard accordingly in order to adapt to the local conditions and particularities of each beach.

It is easily applicable - measurable and controllable.

Adopts and is based on principles of various certification systems such as ISO 14001, EMAS, ISO 9001 and ISO 13009.

Raises awareness on environmental protection and sustainability through the education of visitors and local residents.

Has a sound process of balancing – rating and classification.

Is as strict as it needs to be and specific.

Covers the absence of state control on the compliance with all the rules and laws regarding the use of the coastline and beaches - control mechanism.

Corresponds to the real needs of the beaches of the Mediterranean Basin.

Has a system of promotion and advertisement of Sustainable Beaches.

CONCLUSIONS

The Costa Nostrum® standard certification for the sustainable development and management of Mediterranean beaches is an innovative and pioneering tool aiming to protect the environment of the coastal areas - the coastal zone, and assist the economic development of the wider region around the Costa Nostrum® sustainable beach and the cohesion and prosperity of the region`s society.

This model can be adopted and implemented by all the municipalities or regions in the Mediterranean countries as well as by private entities - businesses like hotels for example, which administer some beaches without contrasting and conflicting with the respective state laws. It is designed in such a way that all beaches can potentially qualify as Costa Nostrum® sustainable beaches, providing they meet the basic criteria - indicators of the standard certification.

The benefits that can arise by enacting one or more beaches as Costa Nostrum sustainable beaches are diverse, very important and cover all three aspects of sustainable development by helping significantly the development and evolution of the coastal area (Zisimopoulos, 2015).

On the economic level:

Increased number of visitors to the Costa Nostrum Sustainable Beaches.

Increased income for the managing entity of the Costa Nostrum Sustainable Beach.

Creation of new jobs.

Increase in other types of tourism such as Ecotourism.

Increased added value for the Costa Nostrum® Sustainable Beach.

Global advertising of the Costa Nostrum® Sustainable Beach and the region through the website www.costanostrum.org and the Mobile Application.

Surplus value on land adjacent to less popular beaches which, upon certified as Costa Nostrum® Sustainable Beaches will bring benefits for both the landowners and municipalities.

Linking Costa Nostrum® Sustainable Beaches with local businesses – craft industries and cooperatives producing traditional products.

Advertising and promotion of local - traditional products worldwide.

Connecting the visitor of a Costa Nostrum® Sustainable Beach with the mainland and its cultural identity with direct effect in the number of visitors to businesses and other tourist attractions of the region.

Direct economic effect in the region by the promotion of the quality - cultural characteristics of each area:

Increased turnover for the nearby Tourism Businesses.

Unemployment reduction.

Increase of state revenues, through the collection of indirect and direct taxes.

In the environmental level:

Informing and raising the awareness of the visitors of the beach and the residents of the region.

Protection of the Environment and the Ecosystems in the coastal zone.

Protection of Natural Resources - Flora and Fauna.

Cleaner Beaches.

Increase of recycled and composted material - better waste management.

More appropriate and better management of hazardous Biological Waste such as nappies.

More appropriate and better management of cigarette butts.

Protection and Conservation of protected species such as the Caretta - Caretta turtle.

CO₂ emissions reduction due to the use of Public Transport and Bikes to access the Costa Nostrum® Sustainable Beaches.

At the social level:

Increased satisfaction of bathers – visitors of the Costa Nostrum® Sustainable Beaches.

Conservation and promotion of local culture.

Better service quality.

Increase and consolidate the egalitarian sentiment since specific social groups like disabled people, pregnant women and elderly people will have equal access to the Costa Nostrum Sustainable Beach.

Better control of the businesses operating within the coastal area and the employees who work in them.

Compliance with all the essential rules and law requirements verified by the annual audits which will be carried out as part of the standard.

Increased social cohesion.

Increased security in the Costa Nostrum® Sustainable Beach resulting from the information provided to the visitors - bathers on potential dangers and by hiring qualified personnel for the Costa Nostrum Sustainable Beaches.

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