

# Med Pearls

## Cross-border conclusions on: SWOT analysis, Mapping of assets and Action Plan

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# SUMMATIVE SWOT ANALYSIS

A detailed SWOT analysis was carried out for every Med Pearls project Pilot Area. Interesting and important items were identified within the selected destinations throughout the Mediterranean. The reader should have a clear perception of what a SWOT analysis is, and what it is not, and how it should be used, when development planning takes place.

## Analysis of Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT)

A SWOT analysis is a tool of strategic planning (Dess, 2018) used to analyze the internal and external environment of an entity. This entity is usually a business or company, yet the SWOT analysis concept has already been successfully applied on destinations, organizations (Caves, 2004), and even public figures. This analysis is mainly useful, when the aforementioned entity makes plans in relation to the goals set and how to achieve them.

The acronym SWOT derives from the words: Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats. During the SWOT analysis, the Strengths and Weaknesses of a business, organization or region are studied, as well as the existing Opportunities and Threats.

On one hand, the strengths and weaknesses have to do with the internal environment of the organization as they arise from its internal resources (e.g., qualities and characteristics of the entity, skills of the personnel, know-how, brands, and patents, financial health, and ability to respond to new investments, variety of the resources etc.).

Analyzing the strengths and weaknesses must be realized both from the internal point of view, and from the demand point of view. A crucial factor, imposing the effort data quantification, is the possibility of a realistic (objective) assessment of the current situation. The whole analysis must also be seen under the prospective of the competition.

Opportunities and threats, on the other hand, reflect variables in the external environment – namely the elements and changes (Birkenmaier, 2001) that affect the way the entity operates. The organization should identify those variables and adapt to them, or even modify them if possible. Such variables include the creation and / or emergence of new markets, the entry of new competitors, changes in legislation, changes in political environment etc.

A common approach to identify opportunities lies in reviewing the strengths and exploring their potential for opening new chances. Alternatively, it is the weaknesses that are reviewed and the possibility of eliminating them and seize the opportunity is explored (Mesly, 2017). The opposite process can be followed to approach the threats.

## SWOT Analysis Questions

When a SWOT Analysis is carried out, a series of questions about the organization must be answered in the most quantitative way possible. Analysis and answering the questions must be carried out relentlessly and repetitively. The questions fall in the following four fields:

**1. Strengths:**

- What are the most competitive products?
- What are the advantages?
- How local financial actors perform as endogenous force in the region?
- What are the uniquely available resources?

**2. Weaknesses:**

- What are the disadvantages?
- What could be improved or should be avoided?
- What local financial actors consider to be an inherent weakness?

**3. Opportunities:**

- What are the good chances arising?
- What are the interesting trends concerning the area?
- Useful opportunities can be considered:
  - Changes in technology and markets, on a small or large scale
  - Changes in government policy in the field of interest
  - Changes in social patterns, population profiles, lifestyle changes
  - Local events

**4. Threats:**

- What are the recurrent problems?
- What do competitors do?
- What changes happen to legislation, policies, or trends?
- Are there any financial or technological problems or deficiencies?



### Summative SWOT Analysis

Taking into consideration the local SWOT Analyses from the Med Pearls Pilot Areas, a summative one was created. The aim is to summarize the mutual attributes shared between the study areas one hand, and on the other hand to develop guidelines and a common action plan to make better use of them.

For every set of questions (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) the mutual characteristics are summarized, and later on furtherly discussed, as follows.

#### **Strengths**

- Well-established brand / destination name
- Tourism resources richness:
  - cultural heritage
  - museums
  - archeological sites
  - natural resources
  - landscape
  - unique flora and fauna
- Rich rural landscape in proximity
- Rich local / traditional production
- Diverse environment

- financial
- social
- natural (biodiversity)
- Variety of natural resources
- Local cuisine which can be further enhanced
- Strong and wide local market
- Location, proximity to major urban centers and markets
- Transportation alternatives
- Proximity to well-known sites / established destinations
- Access to organized health services

The study areas are characterized, more or less, by some common attributes such as richness in a wide variety of tourism resources, and the willingness of the local communities to invest in slow tourism development.

Analyzing the individual mapping and strengths analysis it is easy to identify the high potentials of all study areas, especially in the field of developing new products to incorporate the available resources. Such resources are local, traditional, and contemporary production (cuisine, handcrafting etc.), as well as the heritage and archaeological capital (sites, museums etc.). Other resources recognized and suitable for new slow-tourism products development are the natural ones, including the variable landscape, biodiversity and endemic flora and fauna.

One common strong point identified is the proximity of the areas to main city centers, suggesting that international accessibility is available, and that modern tourism infrastructure and overstructure can support the early years of slow tourism development.

### Further discussion

#### *Well-established brand name*

In almost all the beneficiary regions a well-established brand name or destination name has been developed, either on purpose or unintentionally. It is strongly recommended to identify the core characteristic of that brand (history, culture etc.) and further invest in its development and dissemination.

#### *Tourism resources richness: cultural heritage, museums, archeological sites, natural resources, landscape, unique flora and fauna*

A common characteristic of the study regions is their abundance in a wide spectrum of resources. These regions, being mainly in rural areas effectively combine rich cultural /

historical creation with natural resources. Especially those resources can be easily and cost-effectively upgraded to unique selling propositions. They can also be further exploited into creating new compatible tourism products, combining human-made and natural elements.

#### *Rich in rural landscape in proximity*

Although the regions participating in the project are either in the countryside or urban, they are very close to interesting and picturesque landscapes. Those landscapes can be used in developing new products in the countryside, combining different parts, namely historical sites, specialized boutique accommodation agrotourism activities and, bird watching and other soft adventure activities, like walking, cycling, nature gazing, horseback riding, wilderness gazing etc.

#### *Rich local / traditional production*

Another strength shared among the study areas is their rich local / traditional production of both consumable and handcraft products. Small and very small (usually family) enterprises offer a wide variety of raw material and processed products, in numbers enough to cover locals and tourists' consumption. This is very important since locals will have the opportunity to further develop local production, and minimize imports, and transportation.

#### *Diverse environment: financial, social, natural (biodiversity) - Variety of natural resources*

The environmental diversity (financial, social, natural) offers the study regions the possibility not only to supply the demand with a complex sum of different products, but also to develop new ones, according to the demand's requirements. Resources abundance combined with the local production capabilities can support tourism demand in slow and special interest tourism forms.

#### *Local cuisine which can be further enhanced*

Local cuisine and gastronomy have always been a strong attraction for tourists interested in authenticity. Especially in slow and alternative forms of tourism, local gastronomy plays significant role since it offers a sum of cultural production in a very easy to understand way. Locals can further develop local restaurants, cafeterias etc. to match high standards demand.

#### *Strong and wide local market*

Keeping in mind that local gastronomy can and has to be based on the local traditional production, the regional market will also play major role. Organized market networks developed locally can support the development of slow tourism products, especially when

authenticity is their key attribute.

*Location, proximity to major urban centers and markets*

Nevertheless, local production may not be capable of covering special requirements of alternative tourism development. Nearby urban centers and markets can provide the specialized equipment, consumables etc. when needed.

*Proximity to well-known sites / established destinations - Transportation alternatives*

Although authenticity, local focusing and mild tourism activities are the scope of slow tourism development, there is an irrefutable need: organized transportation. Tourist will need easy, well-organized, and trouble-free ways of transportation in order to reach the study areas. The project regions are close to urban areas, with developed networks of transportation (airports, ports, highways etc.) already offering services to mass tourism.

*Access to organized health services*

Last, but not least, especially today, health is very high in the public agenda. Indeed, alternative tourist enjoy some sort of adventure, yet they require high safety and health standards to be met. Again, the study areas proximity to urban centers offers a fair level of organized health services.

## **Weaknesses**

- Limited number of visitors due to insufficient tourism campaigns and / or low popularity
- Shortage of specialized products providers (niche tourism)
- Shortage of certified tourism service providers
- Limited (or no) access to tourism information offices
- Insufficiencies in urban infrastructure
- Insufficient language and ICT skills
- Insufficiencies in technological and digital tools and infrastructure
- Limitations in disabled people accessibility
- Ill-organized and inadequately funded local transportation
- Limited variety of accommodation options (mainly up to 3-star hotels)

Just like strengths, some weaknesses seem to be shared amongst the study areas. One of the major weaknesses identified has to do with low appreciation or misuse of the available tourism resources. This could be attributed to the fact those resources are



rather suitable for slow tourism development, that comes alongside with small tourism numbers and moderate financial revenues, opposed to the general idea of mass tourism.

Another common weakness refers to the shortage of specialized tourism service providers, limited -or no- variety of slow tourism compatible activities, and shortage of respective infrastructure.

On the same page, almost all the areas, have limited variety of accommodation options to offer. In most of the cases, accommodation enterprises are of 3 stars or lower level.

Focusing more on the local communities, limitations are also pinpointed in the field of tourism education, language and communication skills, and specialized training and certifications (coaching, hiking, kayaking etc).

### Further discussion

#### *Limited number of visitors due to insufficient tourism campaigns and / or low popularity*

Although most of the study areas hold a strong brand / name, it is not adequately utilized in attracting tourists. The number of tourist arrivals is small, smaller than a carrying capacity assessment would predict. Low popularity of a tourism destination is the first obstacle to overcome. Therefore, an organized marketing campaign must be planned and carried out, to reach potential tourists, of the targeted market share, namely alternative tourists.

#### *Shortage of specialized products providers (niche tourism) - Shortage of certified tourism service providers*

Alternative forms of tourism suggest the tourists themselves participation in the production of the experience. Alternative (slow) tourists seek for the authentic, unbiased, and realistic feeling; thus, tourism products need to meet their high standards. Those standards cannot be met unless service providers are effectively trained and educated. Locals need to enroll themselves into training and education programs, to better their skills, enhance their abilities and get certified onto providing specialized services, such as guided tours, outdoor activities etc.

#### *Limited (or no) access to tourism information offices*

Tourism information offices have been part of almost every single development plan in every destination around the world. Yet, their fate is usually the same, they end-up either closed or ill-working due to insufficient funding and staffing. Nevertheless, these office's importance is very high. They can act both as information centers for the tourists, and as education and training centers for the locals. Offices must be supported by information and communication technologies to meet high tech demand. The ideal plan would be to establish only as many information offices as the local communities can support continuously for a long period of time.

*Insufficiencies in urban infrastructure*

Urban infrastructure, such as facilities, utilities, and systems used by both visitors and locals is of very high importance. Its importance gets even higher when this infrastructure supports communication and transportation. Alternative tourists, travelling mostly alone, or in small groups, use communication and transportation networks to organize their trip, activities and conclude financial transactions. WiFi, high speed and stable mobile internet networks etc. must be diploid before attracting nice market tourists.

*Insufficient language and ICT skills - Insufficiencies in technological and digital tools and infrastructure*

Alongside with specialized tourism training and education, locals must enroll into language and ICT skills enhancement programs. Although alternative tourists seek for a realistic experience -including some interaction in foreign languages- it is of high value for them to be able to communicate in their mother tongue. The same applies with ICT. Experienced tourists expect to organize most of their trip / activities on their owns. Locals and local businesses need to adapt to this reality and be able to support updated websites and applications to satisfy the demand.

*Limitations in disabled people accessibility*

A major drawback in tourism development of the study areas has to do with accessibility limitations. Niche tourism markets include elders, people with disabilities and their families, usually travelling alone or in small groups. For these tourists, easy access to overstructure and infrastructure is vital. It is also vital to adapt / built urban infrastructure having in mind it must be accessible by all. Alongside with providing accessibility, it is important to include the respective information in sources such us the info centers, smartphone applications, websites etc.

*Ill-organized and inadequately funded local transportation*

Most of the study areas are in proximity with urban centers, suggesting that there is connection with international transportation networks, and highways. Yet, local transportation and road networks are either ill-organized or inadequately funded, or both. Keeping in mind that alternative tourists mainly organize their vacations themselves, information about, and actual organization of local transportation is of high importance. Local communities and governments must invest to upgrade and built new networks. The same networks will also allow furthers local interregional economy.

*Limited variety of accommodation options (mainly up to 3-star hotels)*

Alternative tourism generally uses products offered by small, local, family-run businesses. These businesses include small accommodation establishments, traditional

restaurants, and local guides. Nevertheless, those businesses are hard to provide the high-quality product the experienced tourists want. The key is to upgrade their standards through education, training, and specialization. Subsequently, a small rural 3-star hotel could be upgraded to a boutique hotel, small but specialized, themed and attractive for niche markets.

### **Opportunities**

- Raise public awareness on slow tourism and sustainability of tourism sector in general
- International initiatives to promote and fund alternative / mild forms of tourism
- Create new eco-tourism and slow tourism products
- Strong mindset from population to accept further investments on tourism
- New website for promotion
- Potential development of new integrated itineraries and programs for activities and actions on slow tourism area
- Potential traditional local festivals in an organized integrated schedule
- New integrated market for local products
- Structural capacity for further investments on hotel and resort infrastructure
- Creation of new gastronomical contexts
- COVID-19 – mass tourism restrictions

Common opportunities identified throughout the study areas mainly focus on the rising interest of tourism demand for alternative and especially slow tourism forms. Taking into consideration that alternative / mild / green / slow tourism has been intensifying since early '70s, without diminishing rates, it is safe to predict rising demand for such forms of tourism.

Furthermore, slow tourism is known for its high per capita consumption, minor susceptibility to seasonality and deeper locals' involvement in the tourism industry, wherever it takes place.

Another great opportunity to make good use of lies within the areas resources themselves. Areas have the possibility to bring their local production, tradition, and heritage forth, and upgraded to interesting tourism attracting poles. Some of these resources have already been mapped, yet exploitation potentiality has a lot of room for improvement.

Finally, organizing both the local transportation systems and the local internal market, communities would profit on shared local economy and enhancement of home-grown production.

### Further discussion

#### *Raise public awareness on slow tourism and sustainability of tourism sector in general*

Alternative forms of tourism gain on popularity as the human societies evolve, especially in the developed countries and the countries in transition. This is the result of the changes happening in people's way of life and changes in the way people produce, buy, and consume. It is evident that mass tourism will continue to move the gears of international tourism industry, yet a valid minority, alternative tourists, also become a profitable substantial market especially for the new destinations. Thus, study areas should focus their efforts onto reaching these markets, identify their needs and develop products suitable for the experienced alternative tourists.

#### *International initiatives to promote and fund alternative / mild forms of tourism*

The United Nations World Tourism Organisation, central and local governments not only institutionally support sustainable tourism, but also legislate and subsidy its development. European Union and international organisations actively and financially support sustainability in tourism as well. The study regions can furtherly apply for funding and assistance for their development.

#### *Create new eco-tourism and slow tourism products*

The ongoing increased popularity of slow / alternative tourism goes alongside with increasing demand for the respective products. Locals and local businesses, based on their skills development, will be able to develop new products and adapt the existing ones in order to meet contemporary trends. For that, local communities must embrace new methods and approaches, beginning with investing in tourism training and education.

#### *Strong mindset from population to accept further investments on tourism*

Sustainable tourism development requires close cooperation and mutual understanding. Local communities, and especially key stakeholders must embrace the idea that further investment, especially in tourism will have multiplication effects. On the hand, those in favor of tourism investments must respect the concept of the triple bottom line, suggesting that these investments must happen in small scale, be pin-pointed and addressed towards specialized initiatives.

#### *New website for promotion*

The MED-PEARLS website, providing information for the slow tourism demand will have a significant effect both on promoting the local offer, and on supporting the existing demand. This website, together with an updated application will act as a distribution channel and will support local small-scale entrepreneurship. Furthermore, informational

material will help other lookalike areas and local entrepreneurs to adopt slow tourism concept and develop respective tourism products.

*Potential development of new integrated itineraries and programs for activities and actions on slow tourism area - Potential traditional local festivals in an organized integrated schedule - Creation of new gastronomical contexts*

Alternative forms of tourism, especially the “slow” ones, require a wide spectrum of yearlong products, chiefly connected to the local history, tradition, culture, agriculture etc. Those products must be developed (or enhanced) by the local entrepreneurs and get interconnected. We cannot let aside the fact that, although a tourism package consists of different, partial products, the visitor consumes them as a whole. This experience cannot (and must not) be separated into small pieces, on the contrary all tourism resources must be tuned to satisfy the same needs. Some products may indicatively include local cuisine menus, guided tours, site seeing, escape activities etc.

*New integrated market for local products*

For the study areas, proximity to urban centers and markets has been identified as a strength. Yet, this proximity may also be a reason for the low competitiveness of the local markets. Slow tourism can invest into this fact and allow local markets to focus on regional production and specialized services. Local markets need to revert their interests into promoting and merchandizing agricultural and manufactural products coming from the area. This is even more important when discussing about food, beverage and handcrafting.

*Structural capacity for further investments on hotel and resort infrastructure*

Although the “built it and they will come” approach has no application in alternative / slow tourism, it is very safe to suggest that any new investment will be highly welcomed. Keeping in mind that even though slow tourists seek for small, family-run accommodation establishments, this does not mean they are ready to compromise for lower quality services. Infrastructure of accommodation and food & beverage can be upgraded and enhanced, to meet the high expectations “slow” tourists have.

*COVID-19 – mass tourism restrictions*

In the midst of every crisis, lies great opportunity. The same applies in the global pandemic COVID-9 crisis and its effects on tourism. Travel restrictions keep tourists away from popular destinations. At the same time, tourism businesses have enormous losses and local communities suffer from unemployment and income losses. Restrictions are also applied on the numbers of people traveling together, means of transportation availability and accommodation. All these imply that alternative / slow tourism can be a relief for tourism destinations, just because it happens in smaller numbers, and on wider

areas. Furthermore, it is proven that per capita consumption of alternative tourists is much higher compared to the consumption of mass tourism. This even furtherly supports the idea of having higher profitability with smaller tourist numbers.

### **Threats**

- Unorganized, excessive competition among local entrepreneurs
- Incomplete tourism market which leads to potential price imbalances and unfair wealth dissemination
- Bureaucracy in various tourism actions and tourism initiatives
- Constant economic crisis' phenomena in various sectors and activities (lack of resources and professionals in some instances)

Threats, most study areas will face are either endogenous or based on endogenous factors. One major threat has to do with excessive and unorganized competition among local businesspeople. Such competition not only minimalizes profitability per business, but on level of destination as well. Having in mind the already narrow variety of specialized tourism services, unregulated competition may be one key reason no new entrepreneurs move into the market.

Instability, either financial or political, is another major threat for slow tourism development. It is well-known that tourism flows avoid troubles areas, and slow tourism could not be an exception. Most of the study areas suffer from some form of instability.

Imbalanced and unfair wealth dissemination is another common threat. On one hand, locals who do not profit from tourism directly oppose tourism development plans, and on the other hand, discrepancy between financial status of tourists and locals may push low criminality rates higher.

### **Further discussion**

#### *Unorganized, excessive competition among local entrepreneurs*

The phenomenon of sinking market is very common, especially in tourism destinations. Local businesses compete each other not by enhancing, developing, and introducing their products, but by lowering their prices. This leads into a vicious circle of a relentless price lowering. At the end, no business is profitable, and many cease to exist. Unorganized and excessive price competition can sabotage any tourism development effort. Local entrepreneurs must organize their activities towards specialization, cooperation and mutual interest perception.

#### *Incomplete tourism market which leads to potential price imbalances and unfair wealth dissemination*

Unorganized competition and development can have side effects such as price imbalances and unfair wealth dissemination. These can have a great toll on the

development plan itself. Keeping in mind sustainable development requires a perfect balance among the social, natural, and economic pillars, it is of high value not to underestimate local communities' importance. Locals need to be -and feel- that they are part of the planned development, of the development happening, and of the financial prosperity achieved.

*Bureaucracy in various tourism actions and tourism initiatives*

Bureaucracy has been identified as a key factor restricting development on global level. It has also been identified as a threat afflicting most of the study areas. New, updated legislation (national, regional, and local) is needed, to support development. Tourism necessitates new perception, innovation, and quick responsiveness. Authorities must support private sector's initiatives and subsidy them, whenever possible. Fast-track investments is a good practice to apply when the common interest is evident.

*Constant economic crisis' phenomena in various sectors and activities (lack of resources and professionals in some instances)*

The ongoing economic crisis, together with the pandemic, are obstacles almost impossible to overcome. Although tourism was, and will always be around, the global crises also affect other sectors. On one hand, there is no available income to spent on tourism, and on the other, there is no capital to invest in new tourism facilities, products, or infrastructure. Resources are scarce, and apart from capital, human resources are also in shortage. The study areas need to invest their available capital (and capital coming from funding programs) into specialized in sustainable tourism initiatives. Furthermore, they also must invest in tourism training and education, and develop the required specialized personnel locally.

# MAPPING

Mapping, namely identifying and locating, the already available tourism resources in a region is of key importance when planning for further development. It is vital to research what is produced, who and how produces it.

Yet, mapping of tourism resources needs to take place following guidelines. These guidelines include:

- Periodicity
- Inclusivity
- Broad perspective
- Evolvement
- Specialization / education / training

## Tourism resources mapping guidelines

### *Periodicity*

Mapping of resources needs to happen several times a year, at least 3, for every year to come. This way useful and up-to-date information is collected and can further be used to help (potential) tourists, and to create an informative source, such as a smartphone application.

### *Inclusivity*

No tourism product exists per se. Most tourism products are described as such not by their production, but by their consumption. That said, almost everything consumed by the tourists is regarded as tourism product. On the same path, it is crucial to identify every resource available in the area, that could offer tourists any kind of product. Especially in alternative tourism forms, local food enterprises have to be identified, since they provide local restaurants with their products.

### *Broad perspective*

Tourists are not just consumers. They do not cease to have common human needs such as security, health security, trouble-free transportation etc. This requirement suggests to also map police / fire-fighting departments, health centers / clinics / hospitals, and accessible to all establishments.

### *Evolvement*



The demand evolves alongside with human needs. Offer is required to respond. When discussing about special / alternative / slow forms of tourism development we need to map all the innovative enterprises and entrepreneurs entering the market, to offer specialized products.

### *Specialization / education / training*

Tourist typology suggests that alternative (slows) tourists not only have higher per capita consumption when travelling, but they also are experienced and demand specialized, high-quality services. It is therefore vital to identify, either within the regions themselves or in the nearby urban areas, the educational institutes offering tourism training and education. As already discussed, lack of specialized and high-end products will drive demanding tourists away.

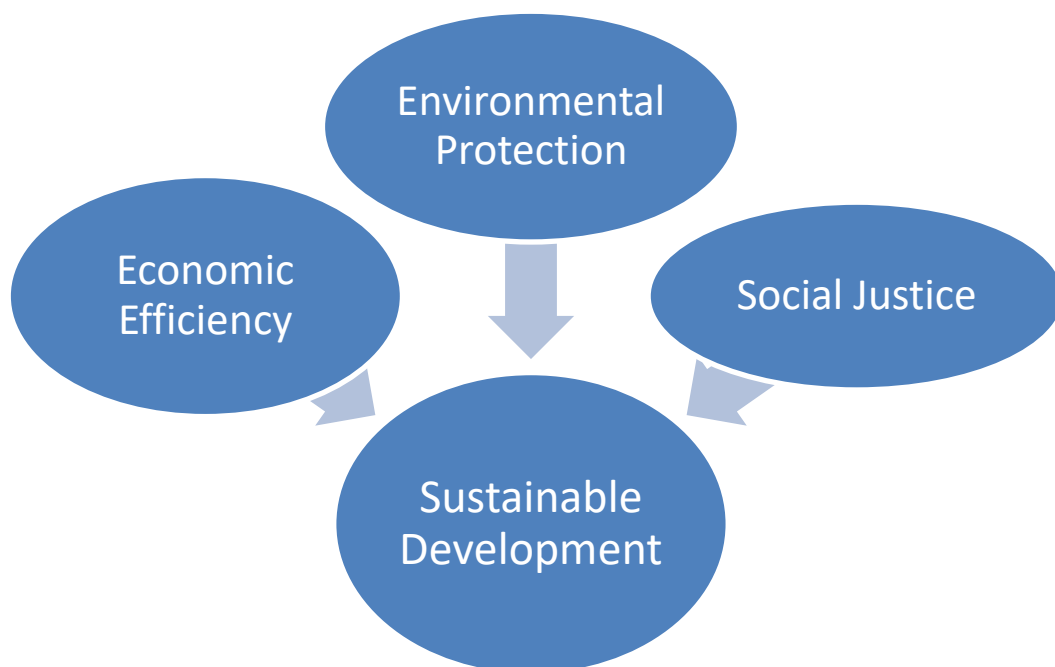
## ACTION PLAN

The development of tourism - like the development of any other activity - is not a purpose in itself, but we are interested in it since it contributes to the overall development of the host region. That is why its success is not determined by the number of tourists the destination receives (although this is an important indicator), but by the contribution of tourism development to the well-being of the local population

### Sustainable development and sustainable Tourism

For the assessment of human well-being, the concept of sustainable development has been introduced worldwide since the 1980s, which, although variously defined and interpreted, generally incorporates two central ideas (Creaco & Querini, 2003):

- Development has an economic, social, and environmental dimension and is achieved only when a balance is struck between the individual components that contribute to the operation of the life support system in an environment.
- The present generation has a moral obligation to future generations to leave sufficient social, environmental, and economic capital for them to enjoy levels of prosperity at least the same as ours.

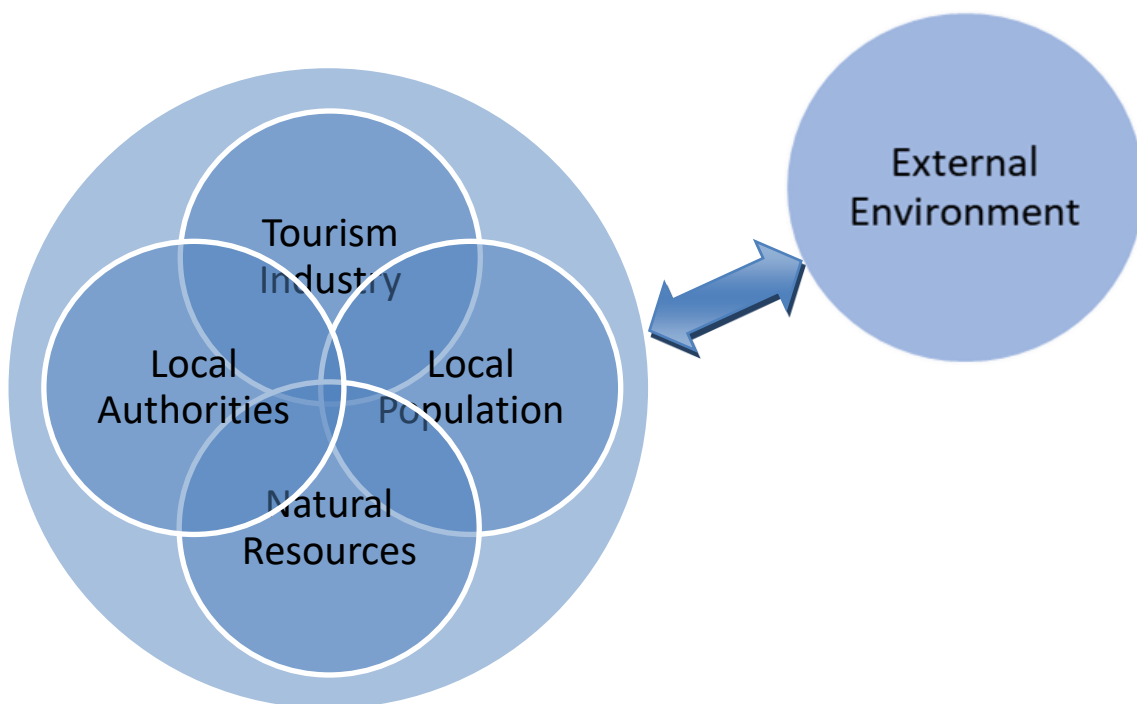


*Figure 1 Sustainable Development Goals*

Sustainable development should therefore be seen as a process, and not as a situation with specific limits to be achieved (Wall, 1997). Schematically, it can be considered to correspond to the center of gravity of an equilateral triangle, the vertices of which are the three individual dominant pursuits of sustainable development, both in the short and long term: economic efficiency (i.e. the economic performance of the system that makes it competitive) , social justice - intragenerational and intergenerational - (ie the diffusion of the effects of development on different social strata and environmental protection (as an element of quality of life). Precisely because it is a dynamic balance, any point other than the center of gravity, indicates an unequal composition of the three aspirations (Κοκκώσης & Τσάπρας, 2001).

What should be made clear is that the model of sustainable development depends on the particular characteristics of each region and that there is no "one-size-fits-all" model.

The term "sustainable tourism" has been in use since the late 1980s, when academics and tourism professionals began to consider the implications of the Brundtland report on the tourism sector (WCED, 1987). The fact, however, that there is no commonly accepted definition of sustainable tourism often leads to confusion about what the term means in practice. The World Tourism Organization defines sustainable tourism development as: development that meets the needs of tourists and host areas in the present, while protecting and increasing opportunities for the future. It is considered to lead to the management of all resources in such a way that economic, social and aesthetic needs can be met, while maintaining cultural integrity, important ecological processes, biodiversity and the life support system.



*Figure 2 Sustainable Tourism – Systemic Approach*

Tourism development planning - which is a process aiming to identify and solve problems and produce a master plan in order to implement the final "desired" image - moves within

the general framework of the systemic approach. In the context of systemic thinking, a “system” is a whole, which maintains its existence through the mutual interaction of its parts (Gortazar & Marin, 1999).

Real systems are open to their environment and interact with it, while they can acquire qualitatively new properties as a result of their continuous evolution. The characteristics of a system are the interdependence and interconnection within it of individual subsystems, as well as its tendency to ensure balance (UNEP, 1996).

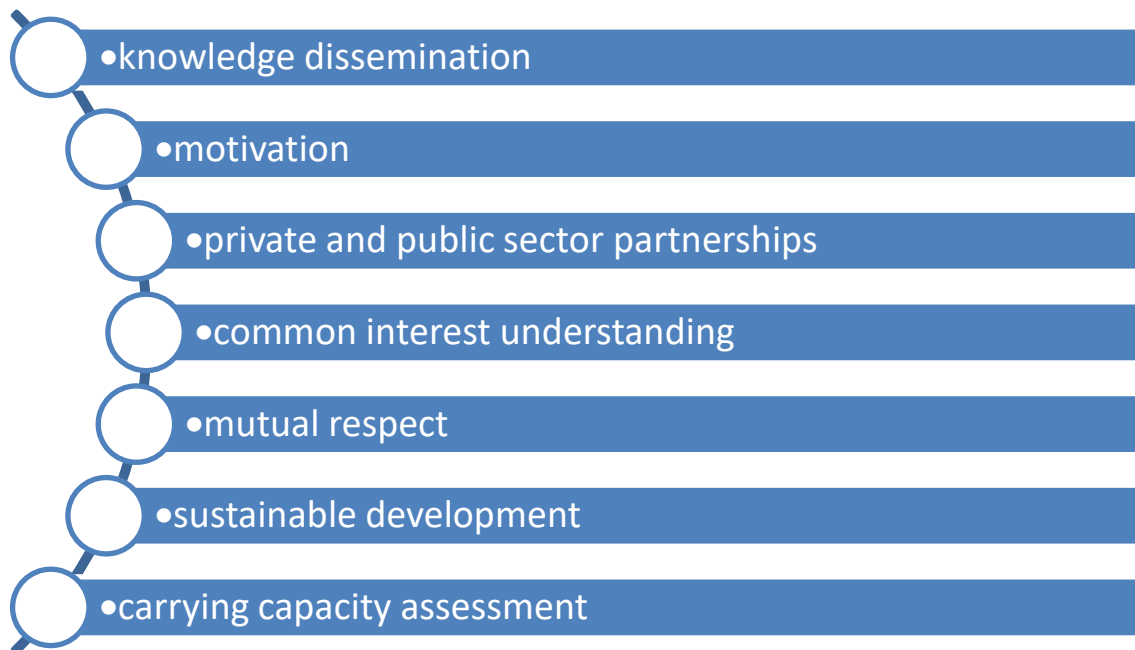
Through this spectrum, the regions can be seen as a system that includes four subsystems: a) the economic subsystem, which includes the employment and productive potential of the region, b) the socio-political subsystem, which includes elements culture, local institutions, public administration, as well as the demographic characteristics of the region, c) the environmental subsystem, formed by the elements of the natural and structured environment and d) the infrastructure subsystem, which includes the infrastructure and services that support the operation of the region. The individual components of each subsystem are characterized by relationships and interdependencies both with each other and between them and the components of the other subsystems. Every system is not an isolated part of the world, but part of a larger system, in which it evolves and from which it is influenced, but at the same time it influences. In this case, the broader system is the external environment of the region, which includes external factors such as the institutional framework, national and Community policies.

The decision-making for tourism development is characterized by the numerous and the variety of endogenous and exogenous factors of the system of the region, which include the involved individual and collective bodies. More specifically, in terms of endogenous factors, the role of tourism enterprises, local authorities and the local population, including landowners, second homeowners, as well as local non-governmental organizations (e.g., environmental organizations, cultural associations) is crucial. On the other hand, tourism development depends by definition on external / supra-local factors, such as the preferences of tourists, the economic situation of their countries of origin, the policies of tour operators, the competition of other destinations, foreign investment, national and international institutional framework, as well as exchange rate differences (Brassoulis, 2002).

In conclusion, sustainable development means the combination of economic, social and environmental parameters, which allows an activity or an area to be sustainable, i.e., to evolve, to adapt to new conditions and to meet new challenges, in the long run. Consequently, in sustainable tourism, a continuous effort is made to improve the economic, social, and environmental performance of tourism development. Creating long-term economic prospects in an area with high value-added activities and growing demand, research and know-how, human resource training and the “prudent” use of renewable and non-natural resources are crucial elements of a sustainable development strategy.

## Local action plan guidelines

Mapping itself is not enough. Although it is fundamental to identify the available resources when planning tourism development, further steps must be taken. Planning also includes:



### *Knowledge dissemination*

As previously discussed, tourism both as a financial and social activity takes place at the site of production. This suggests that the locals, whether participating in the tourism industry or not, become parts of a bigger system. They also become parts of the tourism experience. Hence, disseminating knowledge and information about how and what is planned to take place is vital for every tourism development plan success.

### *Motivation*

Knowledge dissemination itself is not enough, local communities not only have to be informed, but they must also become parts of the development. Locals must be involved and actively participate in the upcoming action plan. A scheme of motivation measures (financial support, short / long term training, clusters etc.) must be set up, to allow them to enter the tourism industry.

### *Private and public sectors partnerships*

It is common among the study areas to face problems with bureaucracy or complex legislation. Furthermore, cultural and social perceptions well-founded in local

communities and authorities have set barriers in private and public sector cooperation. Yet, tourism is an industry that requires those sectors to work close together. On one hand, public sector needs to support new and innovative ideas of entrepreneurship, and on the other continue to invest in infrastructure (roads, hospitals, border / customs check points). Private sector must understand the targets of the action plan set and try to disseminate profits on local level and further investment.

### *Common interest understanding*

One key characteristic of tourism economy is that nobody can ever be sure how to measure the tourism consumption. Meaning that, especially on local level, it is almost impossible to understand how much money the tourism contributes to the regional economy. Rather than trying to identify this contribution, it is much more effective to share the idea that tourism financial contribution is shared all over the economy system of the area. It is important for people to understand that tourism financial and employment multipliers create income and jobs for many more people than one might think.

### *Mutual respect*

Both private and public sectors, locals and tourists, and tourism workers or not, need to understand that apart from the common interest it is valid for everyone to promote their interests. Tourism, as an industry, is based on private businesses. It must be understood that these businesses are established to make profit and to allow their owners further invest and develop.

### *Sustainable development*

Although there is a lot of discussion concerning sustainable development, the debate itself mainly focuses on the natural environment. This is not a holistic approach towards sustainable development. The holistic approach is based on the three-bottom line, namely sustainability for the financial, social, and natural environments all together. An action plan must take into consideration that a financially non-viable project is not a sustainable one.

### *Carrying capacity assessment*

Tourism carrying capacity, namely how many tourists can a destination accept before the tourism experience deteriorates and the financial, social, and natural environments lose balance. As it is clear, those four pillars importance must be equally recognized to have successful action plan. Assessing carrying capacity for tourism is a long and complex process and requires cooperation and determination.

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