

Governance and Policy Trends and Challenges in Regional Mediterranean Ecotourism



DestiMED PLUS Project

Ecotourism in Mediterranean Destinations: From
Monitoring and Planning to Promotion and Policy Support

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Executive Summary

Ecotourism respects the resources of a Protected Area (PA) destination and the well-being of the people living in and around it whilst also providing incentives for conservation and operating in tourism's off-season. In order for this sustainable development model to be effectively adopted in the Mediterranean, enabling conditions around governance and policy making must be improved and strengthened to establish balance between the historically-conflicting interests of tourism and conservation sectors in the region.

The Interreg-Med DestiMED PLUS project aims to strengthen the cooperation between regional and tourism administration through the creation of Regional Ecotourism Coordination tables (RECs), as well as identify common gaps and policy development needs for ecotourism development in their territories. This report provides a comprehensive baseline of information on the current policy and governance situation in each of the project's nine pilot action regions, as an essential starting point for the identification of good practices and areas of improvement within and beyond the project partnership.

Detailed information was collected via regional project partners using a self-administered questionnaire developed for the purpose of this assessment. A working group composed of representatives from IUCN Centre for Mediterranean Cooperation, WWF, Lazio Region and Sardinia Region was established to design the survey, which was then circulated to all regional partners for completion. The surveys were completed and collected over the course of 2020.

The collected data has shown that the integration of tourism in a protected area context is widely acknowledged, but unclear in practice. The institutional and legal separation of protected areas and tourism is present in most cases, and the cooperation is rarely institutionalised and often takes place on an ad-hoc basis. Numerous, often unlinked strategies and plans are elaborated by different institutions. In general, there is lower awareness in the tourism sector regarding conservation than in the conservation sector regarding tourism. As a result, only aesthetic values of protected areas are used as a core element of promotion.

Based on the results, a series of recommendations for DestiMED PLUS pilot actions were developed:

- RECs should be established across and are beneficial to all nine project pilot actions. As such, REC should focus on clarifying mandates and competencies in regards to tourism development, in and around the PAs. In response to the diverse character of each pilot action, it should be decided on a case-by-case basis whether the REC is an institutional or informal governance body. The REC should coordinate initiatives for the establishment of synergies and to ensure resource bundling for the implementation of joint actions.
- The REC should work to raise awareness and increase mutual understanding of priorities and needs of both the tourism and conservation sectors that are represented. Field trips and excursions are recommended to achieve this. To establish a better understanding of local challenges, the REC should invite local ecotourism representatives to some meetings.
- There is a clear need to increase awareness of conservation issues in the tourism sector. This includes going beyond promoting the aesthetic value of a protected area towards promoting the conservation values.
- As funding is a major constraint, it could be worth the effort to gain the interest and

commitment of tourism actors as they have more resources available than PA administrations. Common initiatives, such joint package development, could increase the commitment if it shows economic benefits in the end. The feasibility of implementing fee and benefit sharing mechanisms, which currently exist in some pilot actions, should be explored for other project pilot actions.

Introduction

Ecotourism respects the resources of a Protected Area (PA) destination and the well-being of the people living in and around it whilst also providing incentives for conservation and operating in tourism's off-season. In order for this sustainable development model to be a feasible alternative in Mediterranean PAs, enabling conditions around governance and policy making must be strengthened to foster a balance between the sometimes-conflicting interests of the conservation and tourism sectors.

The Interreg-Med project DestiMED PLUS is the next step on a journey to promote integrated planning in coastal tourism, where regional policy makers apply holistic policies that link tourism with conservation. They are doing this by jointly developing ecotourism itineraries in Mediterranean Protected Areas (PAs). The project builds on the results of the ENI CBC Programme MEET project and Interreg-Med project DestiMED. It supports 9 Mediterranean regions, and a respective Protected Area in each, by enhancing cross-sectoral local and regional policies, improving integrated planning strategies, and providing stakeholders with effective training and tools to manage, measure, and promote ecotourism in their destination.

One of the goals of DestiMED PLUS project is **to strengthen the cooperation between regional conservation and tourism administrations to better support the integration of policies, as well as identify common gaps and policy development needs for ecotourism development in their territories.**

The project is attempting to achieve this goal through the creation of Regional Ecotourism Coordination tables (RECs) - groups of regional tourism and conservation stakeholders responsible for the joint implementation of the Pilot actions of the project.

1. Objective of the Survey

1_1 Objective of Ecology

In addition to the establishment of the RECs, the project seeks to assess the existing governance and policy situation in each participating region, to provide an overview of the situation at the beginning of the project and pin-point potential good practices and areas of improvement that can be taken during the project and beyond. This specifically includes: existing decision-making systems; available documents; plans and strategies; legal frameworks; the level of cooperation between tourism and conservation sectors; and the situation in each of the individual Protected Areas.

The report at hand should provide the project with a comprehensive baseline of information about the current situation in the pilot areas and enable it to carry out further work on the identification of good practices within and beyond the project partnership, which will be reflected in a policy roadmap to share with relevant policy makers at a later stage.

1_2 Methodology

IUCN Centre for Mediterranean Cooperation (IUCN Med), the partner responsible for the implementation of the assessment, decided to collect detailed information via regional project partners using a self-administered questionnaire developed for the purpose of this assessment.

To design the survey and agree on the scope and goals a working group was established, composed of representatives from IUCN Med, WWF, Lazio Region and Sardinia Region. The working group agreed that the survey would be exploratory, with the objective of understanding the following, within the context of each participating region:

- The governmental bodies responsible for tourism and conservation policy and planning.
- The existence and type of ecotourism and/or tourism policies in protected areas.
- The level of integration of tourism and conservation policies and planning, especially ones related to protected areas.
- The existing coordination mechanisms and collaboration arrangements between conservation and tourism policymakers.
- The type of support and role of the RECs in strengthening the project.

The survey is not intended to produce comparative analysis of the regions, but a “snapshot” of the current situation, with the goal of guiding the project in developing RECs in the participating regions and building a culture of integration.

The questionnaire is organized in accordance with the 3 main themes that were considered most relevant from the perspective of both areas and where integration should be expected: tourism and conservation policy, destination management and promotion.

For each of the themes, specific questions are defined to understand:

- (i) How it is organized in each region (current situation),
- (ii) The effectiveness of the existing practices (functioning),
- (iii) In what way organisation or effectiveness could be addressed by the REC during DestiMED PLUS and beyond.

Therefore, the target audience for the questionnaire was primarily tourism and conservation departments (or equivalent). However, given the transversal nature of tourism, inputs from other sectors (such as transport) may have also been included at the discretion of each regional partner.

The scope of the survey and the definition of the questionnaire was informed by desk research that covered internal resources produced by IUCN, and external sources such as: academic papers (Journal of Sustainable Tourism, Journal of Integrated Coastal Zone Management, etc.); books; reports from European and international organisations (OECD, European Committee of the Regions, etc.); and “grey literature” (conference papers, project manuals, etc.).

The detailed sections of the questionnaire can be found in Annex 4_2.

The questionnaire was sent to all regional partners to evaluate their initial situation. All project partners completed the survey over the course of 2020.

Analysis of the questionnaire

Subsequently, the individual results were analysed and interpreted to establish a clear initial situation and potential recommendations to be considered by the project. The analysis of the questionnaire was carried out between November 2020 and January 2021 by E.C.O. Institute of Ecology (Austria).

The contents of this report are based on the information that was provided in the questionnaires and thus reflects each pilot areas own self-assessment. No additional sources of information were used for this analysis. Hence, this report provides a summary of the subjective information provided by project partners and is not an objective external assessment, which may result in some limitations.

Even though the pilot areas are all protected areas, the analysis mostly focuses on the region surrounding the protected areas. Therefore, unless otherwise indicated, the analysis refers to the protected area region in general.

1_3 The project pilot actions regions and protected areas

The 9 Regions and Protected Areas of DestiMED PLUS are:

- Corsica, France (Bouches de Bonifacio Nature Reserve)
- Croatia (Cres-Lošinj Marine Protected Area)
- Cataluña, Spain (Zona Volcànica de la Garrotxa Natural Park)
- Andalucía, Spain (Cabo de Gata-Níjar Natural Park)
- Albania (Divjake-Karavasta National Park)
- Lazio, Italy (Ponziane Islands Archipelago, including Ventotene and Santo Stefano Islands State Natural Reserve and Marine Protected Area, and Zannone Island within the Circeo National Park)
- Sardinia, Italy (Porto Conte Regional Nature Park)
- Crete, Greece (Western Asterousia Natura 2000 Site)
- South Aegean Region, Greece (Northern Karpathos - Saria Natura 2000 Site)

1_4 Structure and content of the report

This report includes three main chapters and four major annexes:

Chapter 1 (Introduction) describes the background of the project, the objective and design of the survey and the analysis steps.

Chapter 2 (Overview and general results) summarizes the information of each of the nine pilot areas including specific recommendations which could be addressed in the process.

Chapter 3 (Conclusions and Synthesis) provides a synthetic overview across all pilot areas indicating commonalities, differences as well as general recommendations for the Project.

The annexes outline potential best practices (Annex 4_1), a full list of all survey questions (Annex 4_3), the detailed analysis for each pilot area (Annex 5) and additional information that was provided by the Albanian project partner (Annex 6).

2. Overview and General Results of DestiMED PLUS Participating Regions and Protected Areas

The following section comprises a brief summary of the pilot actions. A more detailed analysis can be found in Annex 5.

2_1 Corsica, France (Bouches de Bonifacio Nature Reserve)

Current situation

In Corsica, the competences and mandates regarding ecotourism development are fragmented. Whilst there are clear mandates and a common strategic document, the Plan d'Aménagement et de Développement durable de la Corse (PADDUC), there is currently very limited cooperation between institutional conservation and tourism actors and a relatively low awareness in the tourism sector regarding conservation issues. Nonetheless, the nature reserve does offer some important local tourism activities (e.g. diving), a fact that has not been reflected in existing strategies or plans so far. The protected area itself is comparatively well equipped for receiving visitors, which is also reflected in the management plan and in the visitor monitoring system.

Among the main objectives will be to improve coordination and exchange between the two sectors at all levels (institutional coordination and cooperation with local service providers). So far, cooperation with the private sector has been limited and often informal.

The Bouches de Bonifacio Nature Reserve (Réserve Naturelle des Bouches de Bonifacio, RNBB) extends along the Southern tip of the island of Corsica around the city of Bonifacio. It extends over 79,460 hectares (ha), with 12,300 ha under stricter protection and 1,130 ha under very strict protection. It receives about 250,00 visitors per year. The protected area is managed by the local administration.

Strengths

- Clear mandates and a common development plan (PADDUC)
- PA well equipped for visitors.
- Visitor management and monitoring in place.

Shortcomings

- Fragmentation between different sectors and limited cooperation and exchange
- Low awareness of the tourism sector regarding conservation issues and limited cooperation with the private sector

Recommendations

- The establishment of a REC should focus on improving coordination between institutional actors and enabling multi-agency coordination.
- Clarifying and communicating the role of the protected area and its objectives in tourism development to increase awareness amongst regional stakeholders.
- Focus on the existing cooperation with scuba diving clubs to build relationships with the tourism sector.

2_2 Croatia (Cres -Lošinj Marine Protected Area¹)

Current situation

In terms of key actors in tourism and conservation, both authorities (Destination Management Organization (DMO) of Primorsko-goranska County for tourism and Primorsko-goranska County Public Institution for protected area management Priroda) have clear – but separate - mandates.

Even though the Green Tourism Plan (2015) explicitly refers to visitor carrying capacities, its implementation only addresses the tourism sector and its actors. The rather strict level of separation underpins the need to go beyond the level of solely consultation. The survey also indicates that particularly in conservation, tourism aspects need to be integrated, given the fact that major attractions such as the Bottlenose Dolphin and the coastal areas are linked to protected areas. This is also reflected in the fact that aesthetic nature values are used extensively in the promotion of the destination.

Between the Green Tourism Plan, the management plan of the protected areas and further plans and strategies, there is a well-established set of basic documents. However, due to limited funds, human capacities, and unclear mandates these fall short when it comes to implementation. The mandate to

¹ The official name of this Natura 2000 site is Cres-Lošinj, but it is expanded here to reflect that the site is entirely marine.

develop tourism products seems to be unclear to the regional actors.

In terms of forms of cooperation, cooperation and exchange only happens at a formal level (e.g., interministerial body). There is an apparent need to foster the vertical and intersectoral information exchange.

In terms of area management, an NGO, the Blue World Institute of Marine Research and Conservation (BWI) plays a significant role. Formally, the area is managed by the public authorities in a rather traditional way, with no cooperation formats and limited participation. There is no visitor monitoring in place.

On the other hand, BWI with its strong focus on dolphin conservation is quite committed: It operates an educational center, raises awareness, information and training to tour operators. Of these, some donate a certain amount of their generated revenue to BWI. Apart from this, there is limited cooperation with the private sector.

The Natura 2000 Site Cres-Lošinj was originally designed as a special zoological reserve for bottlenose dolphins (*Tursiops truncatus*). In 2014 it was transformed into a (marine) Natura 2000 site covering 52,574 ha. It is located in the Kvarneric area around the sheltered coast and waters of the Eastern part of the Lošinj and Cres archipelago. The protected area is managed by the regional administration and is under the jurisdiction of the Primorje – Gorski Kotar County.

Strengths

- Existence of well-developed strategic documents such as the Green Tourism Plan considering conservation aspects.
- Committed Institute (BWI) at the interface of conservation and tourism.
- Benefit sharing model in place donating a certain amount of tourism revenues for conservation.

Shortcomings

- Rather strict separation between the conservation and tourism sector including limited cooperation and exchange.
- No cooperation formats (beyond formally required consultations) in place.
- Rather low awareness of conservation issues amongst local service providers
- Limited implementation of well-made plans and strategies due to unclear mandates and limited human and financial resources.

Recommendations

- Make use of the REC establishment to improve the communication between the sectors and use it as a platform to clarify the definition of roles and mandates in tourism development.
- Increase the awareness regarding ecotourism amongst local actors and service providers by creating products that are attractive for local service providers.
- Develop an additional format involving local stakeholders around the protected area.
- Clarify the mandate to develop ecotourism in the protected area.

2_3 Cataluña, Spain (Zona Volcànica de la Garrotxa Natural Park)

The Garrotxa Volcanic Zone Natural Park is found in Catalonia, north-eastern Spain, comprising approximately forty inactive volcanoes. The park covers 15,309 ha and includes territory from eleven

municipalities. The population inside the natural park is around 2.100 people and the population in the whole Garrotxa area is 58.620 people. Some 1175 ha of the park are fully protected as nature reserves. The protected area is managed by the regional administration based on an existing management plan.

Current situation

La Garrotxa Volcanic Zone Natural Park is amongst the furthest developed pilot actions so far. It has several functional arrangements at strategic, programmatic, and local level and is in constant exchange with conservation and tourism sectors.

The Catalan Ecotourism Board already has a REC model in place which could serve as an example for other pilot actions. The region confirms a high level of integration of tourism and conservation bodies at all levels and good mutual understanding of both the tourism and conservation sectors. This is supported by a focus group of the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism being active in the natural park. These two groups work to promote the destination as an area with a distinctive and coherent traditional culture and identity.

The main challenges and gaps are related to funding as there is limited funding for the programs developed and limited interest by the tourism sector to invest into ecotourism.

According to the survey, DestiMED PLUS is a project to further consolidate the regional tourism strategy and to reach out to more actors and to create new tourism products.

Strengths

- Well established cooperation bodies and intersectoral working groups as well as corresponding strategies and plans in place at all levels.
- High level of integration of tourism and conservation sectors.
- Well established ecotourism destination including various ecotourism packages and robust cooperation with service providers.

Shortcomings

- Limited access to funding and limited interest on behalf of the tourism sector to invest into ecotourism.

Recommendations

- Use the Destimed PLUS Partnership to rethink the regional strategy and to involve new actors, particularly from the tourism sector to increase awareness amongst tourism investors.
- Create strong links with the European Charter on Sustainable Tourism (ECST).

2_4 Andalucía, Spain (Cabo de Gata-Níjar Natural Park)

Current situation

Cabo de Gata-Níjar Natural Park's legal and organisational structures are well-developed. This is because ecotourism is high on the agenda in the "Plan General de Turismo Sostenible", there are several relevant strategies and plans in place and conservation and tourism bodies have the mandate to develop ecotourism in protected areas, as the context is favourable.

Even though the legal competencies for tourism and conservation are found in different regional departments, there are different legal coordination mechanisms (for exchange, consultation) and formats in place (e.g., The Andalusian Tourism Council, the Andalusian Environmental Council). With

the so-called social participation body, there is also a well-established formalized local body in place, which facilitates the participation of different stakeholders in the Natural Park.

However, the awareness in the tourism sector is limited and there is a need to further integrate tourism and conservation sectors. The fragmentation of competencies is also mentioned as one of the key barriers for implementation.

According to the survey, the REC could further promote the much-needed coordination of tourism and conservation policies in the region. The pilot Park expresses concrete needs related to strengthening intersectoral coordination, setting-up a tourism working forum for public and private actors and to increasing the general awareness for ecotourism in the sun and beach-dominated destination. This is also considered essential as visitor numbers are constantly increasing.

Because the service providers and the tourism sector in general are already quite involved, it seems to be a promising ground for DestiMED Plus to link these actors in a joint product development process.

Cabo de Gata - Níjar Natural Park was established in 1987 and is located in the south-eastern corner of Spain. It is Andalusia's largest coastal protected area covering a total area of 49,512 ha and receiving some 400,000 visitors per year. The Regional Ministry for Agriculture, Livestock, Fishing and Sustainable Development of Andalusia has legal competences for the management of this area. In that work they are supported by a public enterprise (TRAGSATEC).

Strengths

- Different cooperation and exchange formats for intersectoral coordination in place.
- Social participation body in place at local level to include different stakeholders.
- Ecotourism as a priority in regional tourism development strategies.
- Appropriate strategic and planning documents in place.
- Existing involvement of service providers and the tourism sector in general.
- Relatively clear mandates to develop ecotourism in the protected area.
- Outstanding natural and cultural values in the area recognised by international, national and regional designations (Biosphere Reserve, Geopark, SPAMI, Ramsar Site, Natura 2000).

Shortcomings

- Low understanding of conservation and ecotourism amongst traditional tourism service providers (Competition with sun and beach tourism)
- Lack of a forum linking public and private actors.
- Fragmentation of competencies at the level of authorities impeding the implementation of intersectoral strategies.

Recommendations

- Establish a committee for sustainable tourism in protected areas (such as the Intersectoral Committee on Geotourism or the Intersectoral Committee of Astronomical Tourism). There is the need to set up a tourism working forum where public and private tourism representatives could come together, capable of energizing and implementing a sustainable tourism model in the park, that would fulfil the actual needs of the protected area.
- Discuss in the REC options to coordinate tourism and conservation policies going beyond the planning instruments for public use in protected areas.

- Increase the understanding of conservation issues amongst tourism actors and authorities. Carry out a campaign of participation and environmental awareness on an ongoing basis, mainly aimed at the sea & sun tourism sector.
 - Strengthen the existing coordination and create new lines of work to develop and promote ecotourism in Andalusia.
 - Ecotourism is considered a key issue in the next Sustainable Tourism Plan (at present time under revision). The REC could provide a tool for widespread dissemination in order to approach common Sustainable Development Goals in its territories.
- **2_5 Albania (Divjake – Karavasta National Park)**

Current situation

The main actors are the corresponding government authorities, the Ministry of Tourism and Environment and National Agency of Protected Areas (NAPA) for conservation and management together with its regional administrations (e.g., Regional Administration of Protected Areas (RAPA)). Both the ministry and NAPA have the mandate to develop tourism and have also explicitly included tourism-related objectives in their scope of work. Due to changes in the structures of existing institutions and the establishment of new ones, there is often an unclear division of competencies between them.

The cooperation processes are mostly formally required, or process driven. They mainly include sharing information and consulting with one another on a specific purpose. Once it comes to implementation of plans and strategies there are two core challenges: lack of funding, and the fragmentation of competencies and responsibilities at different levels (e.g., Management Committees in the protected areas).

Apart from the formally defined processes, no intersectoral forum or format exists for regular exchange. They are created on an ad hoc basis depending on the issue or topic. Consequently, the REC is seen as a major opportunity for improving the coordination and the discussion of overlapping responsibilities.

At site level, the management is based on a management plan which explicitly includes ecotourism objectives. The budget is based on the annual allocation by the Ministry depending on the specific needs. NAPA was also part of DestiMED. So, there is some experience regarding ecotourism development even if knowledge on this topic at local level remains low. To further specify the contributions to ecotourism, a master plan for tourism in the national park and ecotourism model is in preparation. So far, at local level no product development has taken place, there are no certificates and there is only very limited experience in cooperating with local service providers.

The National Park Divjake-Karavasta is a coastal park in western Albania in direct proximity to the Adriatic Sea, covering a total area of 22,230 ha. It was established in 1966 and is comprised of wetlands, salt marshes, coastal meadows, floodplains, woodlands, and estuaries. It is estimated to receive approximately 600,000-700,000 visitors per year. The protected area is managed by regional (RAPA) and national (NAPA) administration.

Strengths

- Relatively clear mandate for RAPA (and NAPA) for developing ecotourism inside the protected area.
- Existence of a management plan explicitly including ecotourism objectives.
- Existence of intersectoral formal exchange (for public authorities) within administrative

processes

- Previous experiences with DestiMED and ecotourism development

Shortcomings

- High number of involved bodies resulting in overlapping responsibilities, fragmented competencies and unclear mandates.
- Lack of exchange and cooperation formats outside specific purpose-driven meetings
- Limited exchange and cooperation with the private sector actors

Recommendations

- Improvement of the communication and understanding between the institutions.
- Develop a specific ecotourism strategy for protected areas (NAPA).
- Use the REC to coordinate activities and clarify and discuss the overlapping responsibilities.
- Increase the awareness and knowledge for ecotourism amongst local actors.
- Establish a local platform including the protected area management and local tourism actors and service providers.

2_6 Lazio, Italy (Protected areas of the Ponziene Archipelago)

Current situation

The institutional and legal framework is relatively clear with the main (public) actors having the corresponding mandates. The conservation sector has no clear mandate regarding tourism development but basically coordinates with the region. The main document, the Regional Tourism Plan, makes clear reference to protected areas as a “product” and clearly links to protected areas. However, this is the only section in the plan without concrete actions, which is also considered one of the key gaps.

This plan sets a clear strategic framework with a clear role for protected areas despite missing actions and limited involvement of the protected area bodies. There is also a link to the Law of the establishment of protected areas which deliberately foresees tourism development in protected areas.

The survey respondents see the role of the REC as an important element to improve the integration and coordination as well as policy planning between the two departments and see opportunities to clearly define roles and responsibilities and to define common strategic approaches and actions. This could be exploited to develop actions linked to the missing parts in the regional tourism plan. In addition, REC will be particularly important to facilitate knowledge sharing and coordination between the tourism and conservation departments and to mainstream results in regional tourism policies. So far, cooperation was mostly ad hoc due to institutional fragmentation.

At the level of the Ventotene-Santo Stefano protected site, only the marine protected area has a specific management plan. Overall, the objectives are strongly focused on conservation. There are sufficient visitor regulations in place, this is partly because it is an island and thus, allows for easy monitoring and management of visitor flows. The park also collects fees (e.g. boat unloading fees or processing fees for activities) to provide additional income during the peak summer season. Basically, it is a destination that is well known on national markets but would like to grow further.

As the island is managed by the municipality of Ventotene, the question of expertise, experience and access to funding is essential. There are no concrete exchanges and cooperation formats in place, but

there is ongoing exchange at the municipal level (e.g., normal board meetings).

The protected areas are often used in promotion and in regional campaigns or transregional itineraries indicating a systematic approach to include protected areas in tourism. There is some interaction with the tourism sector and some product development happening. Being a small island that is managed by the local council, makes the destination a good base to further collaborate with service providers.

The pilot area in Lazio Region, Italy, includes two protected areas (Marine Protected Natural Area and State Nature Reserve) encompassing Ventotene and Santo Stefano Islands. The Archipelago includes three further islands (Ponza, Palmarola, Zannone), that together with Ventotene and Santo Stefano are all encompassed by a Special Protection Area (EU Birds Directive), that has however no management body on site. Zannone island is also part of Circeo National Park.

Strengths

- Management by local authority. This usually makes intersectoral cooperation easier and issues can be discussed in municipality meetings.
- The Regional Tourism Plan includes protected areas as “product” and sets a clear strategic frame for ecotourism development.
- Tourism development in protected areas is defined as a task of protected areas by law.
- The Protected Area is already included in transregional itineraries.
- Good basis for collaboration with local service providers.
- Park is already collecting user fees providing a source of income.

Shortcomings

- Whilst The Regional Tourism Plan sets a clear framework, it does not define the specific role of protected area management and does not have corresponding actions.
- Even though there are no formal cooperation formats at local level, it might not be as important as elsewhere as there are already periodic municipal board meetings. However, there is a lack of intersectoral cooperation formats at regional level to coordinate tourism and conservation policies.
- There is limited expertise, experience and funding available on the islands for ecotourism development limiting the implementation capacities at local level.
- The protected areas are managed by different authorities requiring clear coordination, this also applies within the conservation sector.

Recommendations

- Identify specific actions for fostering development of ecotourism in and around protected areas, either as specific items when updating the regional plan, or with a more specific sectoral plan. This is linked to the lack of specific actions related to ecotourism or green tourism in the regional strategic plan.
- Further highlight in the policies and plans the role of protected areas as ideal and preferred places for various types of tourism (e.g., outdoor, wildlife and sky watching, etc.), and further promote this.
- Use REC to facilitate and mainstream adoption of processes, such as ECST, methodologies and guidelines (e.g., those coming from initiatives or projects like MEET/DestiMED) regarding

tourism in PAs or implement coordinated initiatives/approach for this at regional level.

- Increase the local capacities and expertise through targeted trainings of tourism and conservation stakeholders at local level.
- The REC should facilitate knowledge-sharing and awareness on initiatives, processes, and proposals between the two departments.
- Improved communication and understanding between the two departments, facilitate coordination of initiatives on promotion, ensure in each department there is staff that is aware and responsive to requests and proposals from the other departments.

2_7 Sardinia, Italy (Porto Conte Regional Park)

Current situation

Tourism development is strongly driven by the tourism department, which has a clear mandate. The development is based on the Regional Tourism and Marketing Strategy, which also refers to protected areas. On the other hand, the mandate of the conservation department to develop tourism is less clear even though DestiMED PLUS is implemented by the conservation department.

Currently, there is mainly ad hoc cooperation and exchange between the two departments even though a regional coordination body was foreseen in the Strategy. The pilot action hopes to close this gap with the establishment of REC which should become a main regional format for coordination and exchange.

There are existing coordination formats (e.g., NECSTouR) and there were previous – no longer operating – formats. A particular chance is the twinning with the Sustainable Development Regional Forum.

The context is rather challenging as sun and beach tourism is dominant and there is a limited understanding of tourism for conservation issues. To date, the destination is not known for ecotourism.

The park itself is managed by the Municipality of Alghero through a management plan. For certain areas there are carrying capacities in place and there are several offers for visitors. Whilst cooperation with the local tourism sector is loose, there is a specific park brand available and some product development happening.

Porto Conte Regional Park, founded in 1999, covers 5600 ha of coast and hinterland of the municipality of Alghero, a well-known destination in Sardinia. It's territory includes the landscapes of Punta Giglio and Punta Cristallo, Porticciolo and Cala Viola, grottos and forests. Since 2002 it has included the Capo Caccia marine area, fundamental for the preservation of Mediterranean biodiversity. The area is managed by the Porto Conte Park Special Company, a body of the Municipality of Alghero.

Strengths

- Protected Area well-equipped for visitors.
- Existing coordination and communication formats.
- Experience with park brand development and product development.
- Experience with private sector cooperation.

Shortcomings

- Unclear role of the conservation department and the protected area in tourism development.

- Exchange and coordination between tourism and conservation departments mostly on an ad hoc basis
- The regional coordination body did not materialize. Previous cooperation formats are no longer operating.
- Limited understanding regarding ecotourism due to strong competition with sun and beach tourism.

Recommendations

- Clarify the mandate to develop tourism inside the protected area.
- Establish a regional DMO and steering group as foreseen in the Strategic Plan.
- Develop a format for local coordination and communication (e.g., LEC)
- Increase awareness amongst tourism actors for ecotourism and its benefits (e.g., through the local regional park brand)
- Use the synergies with the Sustainable Regional Development Forum to further integrate and promote ecotourism.
- Use the lessons learned from the no longer existing Sistemi Turistici Locali for future formats.

2_8 South Aegean Region, Greece (Northern Karpathos - Saria Natura 2000 Site)

Current situation

In Greece, tourism development is strongly driven by the corresponding national authorities from the tourism sector who have the mandate for it. The conservation department is not involved in tourism development and has no mandate for it.

This is also reflected in the fact that there are only formal relationships between the two sectors and no cooperation formats in place. Even though tourism uses the landscape and scenery in promoting the destination, there is a low general awareness regarding ecotourism development.

For ecotourism development, the context is determined by the fragmentation of competencies, lack of clear mandates and lack of human and financial resources. MADPA has no resources for tourism development.

There is the expectation that with the establishment of REC, the coordination and cooperation between the tourism and conservation sector can be improved.

The Natura 2000 site is managed by MADPA, but there is no management plan in place and there are limited resources for visitor management. MADPA operates a visitor centre and carries out visitor monitoring.

MADPA has some experience in working with the tourism sector as a result of its involvement in the MEET project but there is no package in place and the local awareness regarding ecotourism is still low.

The South Aegean Region comprises a range of different protected areas on the Cyclades and Dodecanese island groups. The Natura 2000 site “Voreia Karpathos kai Saria kai Paraktia Thalassia Zoni (North Karpathos and Saria)” is located on the island of Karpathos, has a size of 11,298 ha and offers a number of hiking trails. The area is managed by the Management Agency of Dodecanese Protected Areas (MADPA), a management agency for the protected areas of the Dodecanese regional unit.

Strengths

- MADPA has already initial experiences with ecotourism development (Experience with the MEET project)
- There is a visitor centre and visitor monitoring in place for managing tourism.
- Landscape and nature are key element of promotion of Greece as a destination

Shortcomings

- Tourism development is strongly driven by the tourism sector. There is low awareness regarding ecotourism at institutional and the private sector level.
- No mandate, resources and legal basis for the conservation department or MADPA for ecotourism development.

Recommendations

- Establish a campaign and information events for local service providers and tourism actors to create basic awareness for ecotourism.
- Use the package developed to demonstrate the benefits of ecotourism.
- Increase the awareness of conservation issues in the tourism sector (at all levels).
- Clarify with REC how to coordinate tourism development in protected areas and clarify the specific mandates and roles of the corresponding departments.
- Consider a “Super”-REC together with Crete which operates in the same legal-institutional setting.

2_9 Crete, Greece (Western Asterousia Natura 2000 Site)

Current situation

In Greece, there is a rather formally defined governance and administration structure making a clear separation between conservation and tourism. Tourism development is driven exclusively by the corresponding national tourism authorities whereas the conservation department is not involved in tourism development at all. Thus, there are only formal relationships between the two sectors and no cooperation formats in place. Even though tourism uses the landscape and scenery in promoting the destination, there is a low general awareness regarding ecotourism development. Being an emerging destination with a strong nature-related focus embedded in the well-established destination of Greece there is considerable potential for ecotourism development.

For ecotourism development, the context is determined by the fragmentation of competencies, lack of clear mandates and lack of human and financial resources.

There is the expectation that through the establishment of REC, the coordination and cooperation between the tourism and conservation sector could be improved and collaboration with local service providers could be initiated.

Western Asterousia comprises several Natura 2000 sites at the South-Western edge of the island of Crete. The pilot protected area, the Natura 2000 Site “Western Asterousia” was recently established (2018) and is a relatively “young” protected area. It includes a wide range of different habitats along the coast and in the mountain range. The Natura 2000 site is privately managed but coordinated by the Management Agency of Protected Areas of Central and Eastern Crete, but there are not yet any plans or strategies in place.

Strengths

- A new Natura 2000 Site which starts to develop allows for integrating ecotourism and visitor management aspects right from the beginning.
- There is high ecotourism potential. The simultaneous development of a new protected area and ecotourism at the same time is an asset.
- Given the location, there is no immediate competition with sun and beach tourism but rather the potential to develop complimentary offers.

Shortcomings

- There are hardly any protected area management structures, plans or processes in place.
- There are no cooperation or exchange formats beyond the policy-driven formally required exchange between tourism and conservation.
- There are limited human and financial resources available.

Recommendations

- Establish a campaign and information events for local service providers and tourism actors to create basic awareness for ecotourism. Use the package developed to demonstrate the benefits of ecotourism.
- Consider using the LEC to increase local awareness for ecotourism amongst local actors and service providers.
- Consider an exchange with other protected areas in Crete which have already moved beyond the “emerging destination” stage to identify upcoming challenges.
- Increase the awareness of conservation issues in the tourism sector (at all levels).
- Clarify in REC how to coordinate tourism development in protected areas and clarify the specific mandates and roles.
- Consider a “Super”-REC together with the South Aegean Region which operates in the same legal and institutional setting.

3. Overview and general results of the analysis

3_1 Level of integration of tourism and conservation

Amongst the different pilot actions, the level of integration of tourism and conservation sectors is heterogeneous.

This is particularly evident in Spain where the pilot actions have developed formats which deliberately include private actors as well. Generally, most pilot actions have at a minimum, ad-hoc partnerships or consultation processes within formalized processes (e.g., involvement in or information about regional strategy developments). Many of these mechanisms or boards are project-driven or have specific purposes but provide a sound basis for a more intense exchange in the future.

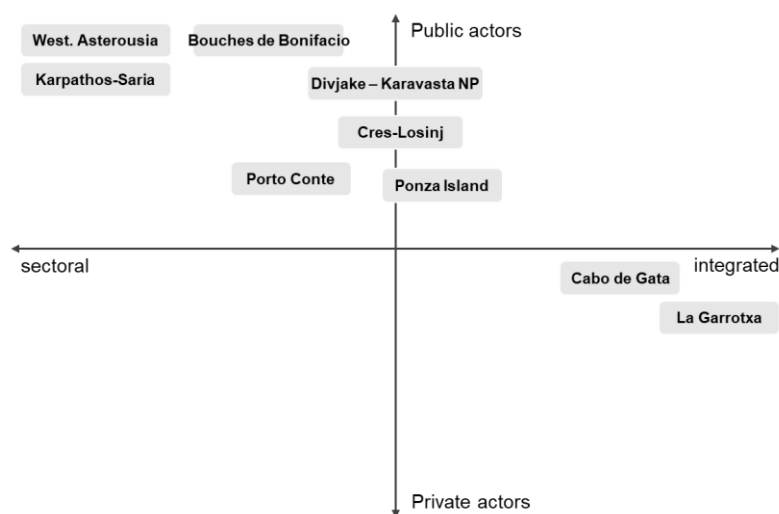


Figure 1: Level of integration of tourism and conservation

Sectoral: Sectors working along their mandates without coordination or exchange; Integrated: Tourism and Conservation Sectors align their planning and have developed common strategies and plans; public actors: cooperation and integration driven by public actors (i.e., government; public bodies); private actors: involvement of private or civil society actors in boards, committees or in strategic planning)

Whereas, in Greece, the different departments operate on a sectoral basis (also based on the legal framework) dominated by public actors, the Spanish pilot areas have set up a broad range of coordination and cooperation mechanisms, and boards at a regional and local level. This illustrates how the legal and institutional framework determines the shape, focus, extent and composition of cooperation mechanisms.

3_2 Exchange and cooperation formats

The different pilot actions have already established a wide range of formats, committees or bodies for intersectoral exchange and cooperation at regional and local level. However, across the pilot actions the situation is heterogeneous:

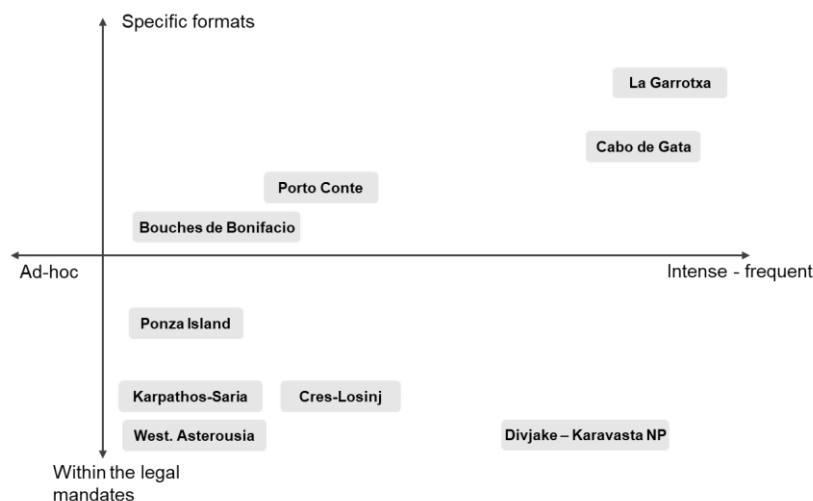


Figure 2: Type of cooperation formats of pilot actions

La Garrotxa and Cabo de Gata Pilot Actions have a range of functional and specific formats for exchange and cooperation both at a regional and local level (e.g., through ECST), which have partly been designed for cooperation and coordination purposes. These formalized bodies allow for a frequent exchange and thus also lead to a broader understanding between tourism and conservation sectors.

If there are no specific bodies or committees in place, coordination and exchange still happens but is dominated by the legal mandates (e.g., consultation meetings within the frame of planning processes) and happens more on an ad hoc basis. It also became evident, that in these cases, the lack of such a specific format may be a cause for limited mutual understanding between the sectors and also ended in the adoption of sectoral strategies.

The results of the survey indicate that with a REC, which has the specific purpose of intersectoral coordination, mutual understanding can be particularly supported.

3_3 Role of protected areas in tourism development

It is important to capture the general role of protected areas in tourism, which is closely linked to the type of protected area. For example, Natura 2000 sites often have specific conservation objectives, whereas national parks have predefined “recreational” functions to fulfil. In the case of nature or regional parks, these categories often have an explicit tourism component within their scope of work. Another important factor determining the role of tourism in a protected area is whether it is a clearly determined area that can be visited from outside (e.g., a national park) or if it includes cultural landscapes or settlements within (e.g., a nature park).

Role of PA in tourism



Figure 3: The observed role of protected areas (management) in tourism development

On this basis, the protected areas in the pilot actions deal with tourism differently. Protected areas such as La Garrotxa explicitly work on active tourism development of the region, whereas

conservation-focused protected areas are solely focused on managing the tourism and visitation rates inside their boundaries (e.g., through visitor management; guided tours, marking of trails). Protected areas, which do not have staff or a mandated management body directly on site (e.g., if the PA is supervised by a Ministry), or without a clear mandate related to tourism and visitation within their scope of work, take no active role in tourism development (e.g., in Crete). This naturally limits the potential to develop tourism through the Protected Area management.

In the end, this determines the budget lines of protected area management bodies to engage in tourism development (and management), the (legally defined) competencies and mandates, not to mention the public perception of the protected area as solely a conservation area or as an active actor in tourism development.

3_4 Destination characteristics

The survey distinguished between three different types of destinations:

- **Mature:** receives a lot of tourism, especially in high seasons and especially sun and sea tourism along the coast. Tourism is one of the main sources of income and tourism infrastructure is abundant although it might be obsolete.
- **Emerging:** currently experiencing an increase in travellers but not yet dealing with massification. Tourism infrastructures exist and access is feasible.
- **Undiscovered:** receives very limited tourism, there is little to no tourism infrastructure and the area is remotely located.

None of the pilot actions considered themselves to be undiscovered. Most destinations considered themselves as mature, which is also corresponding to the frequently mentioned challenges related to traditional “sun and beach” tourism. In some cases, the protected area involved in DestiMED PLUS considers itself as “emerging” whilst the overall destination would be relatively mature (e.g., a new, relatively undiscovered Natura 2000 site as it is the case in Crete).

Pilot Area	Country	Type of Destination
Bouches de Bonifacio Nature Reserve (Corsica)	France	Mature
Cres-Lošinj	Croatia	Mature
Zona Volcànica de la Garrotxa Natural Park – Catalunya	Spain	Emerging
Cabo de Gata-Nijar – Andalucía	Spain	Mature
Divjake – Karavasta National Park	Albania	Mature
Islands of the Pontine Archipelago – Lazio	Italy	Mature (partly Emerging)
Sardinia region	Italy	Mature
South Aegean Region	Greece	Emerging
Region of Crete	Greece	Emerging

Whilst emerging destinations have more opportunities to coordinate and proactively plan (eco)tourism development in cooperation with stakeholders, mature destinations need to focus more

on bringing the established tourism sector on board and manage (larger) visitor flows.

When it comes to specific ecotourism certifications, there are currently limited certifications in place, thus representing an opportunity for DestiMED Plus. Currently, only Croatia (CROSTO, GSTC, EITS, IQM), La Garrotxa (Q, ECST), Porto Conte Natural Park and Cabo de Gata-Níjar (Marca Parque Natural) have (mostly local) certifications in place.

3_5 Common trends and challenges

There are few trends and challenges which are common to most pilot areas:

- **Unclear mandates and roles of protected areas:** In most pilot actions, there is an institutional separation between tourism and conservation. Only a few pilot actions have established joint formats.
- **The institutional and legal separation** often prevents enduring cooperation requiring an additional format such as REC to overcome the gap.
- There is generally **lower awareness** amongst tourism stakeholders regarding conservation than vice versa, as protected areas are actually involved in dealing with visitors. This applies for the institutional level as well as for the local level. It also remains widely unclear which role protected areas can or should play in tourism.
- The **benefits of ecotourism are often unclear** to local service providers.
- All destinations are expected to **grow in visitor numbers** and will need appropriate means to deal with it.
- (Conservation) values of protected areas are seldom communicated in the promotion, but landscapes and aesthetic values are frequently used.
- The integration of tourism in protected area management and the role of protected areas in (eco)tourism is **widely acknowledged, but often remains unclear when it comes to specific actions**.
- Protected areas have limited budgets and resources, this includes the day-to-day management of the park, and therefore require incentives to include tourism stakeholders.
- Apart from the Spanish pilot actions, there are few intersectoral platforms or fora in place.

3_6 General recommendations

Across all pilot actions, there are some general recommendations based on the analysis:

- There are heterogeneous expectations regarding the role and function of REC. Across all pilot actions there is the apparent need for a body like this. However, depending on the corresponding legal/institutional setting, it should be decided case by case if it is an institutional arrangement or a more informal body (e.g., if the establishment would require a formal act).
- The REC should consider dealing with the key issues which are:
- The clarification of mandates and competencies regarding tourism development in and around the protected area.
- Awareness raising and increasing mutual understanding of priorities and needs. In many cases, tourism development and conservation are institutionally separated. To overcome this a good option could be to organize field trips and excursions to discuss mandates,

competencies, priorities on concrete case studies.

- The DestiMED PLUS project should consider proposing to the other pilot areas an experience exchange or/and exchange visit in Catalonia which has a corresponding working LEC and REC in place.
- For better understanding of local challenges, it is recommended for the REC to invite LEC representatives to some of REC's meetings.
- In many pilot actions, there are different strategies and plans being elaborated or in force and under implementation. Through the REC, the pilot actions should invite the corresponding bodies for discussing how to use synergies, implement joint actions (also to increase resources for the implementation of concrete actions).
- There is a general need to increase the awareness of conservation issues in the tourism sector. Based on the data provided, almost all tourism providers refer to protected areas and its landscapes in the promotion of the destination. However, it seems that it is rather the aesthetic value (e.g., landscapes) that is being communicated rather than the conservation values. This may be linked to the fact that in many pilot areas, the protected area is a complimentary offer to traditional "sun and beach" tourism. There is a need to highlight the potential for and benefits of tourism whilst raising awareness that it is not "just" an attraction and a place where tourism happens but also a site with specific conservation objectives. This will become more and more important across all regions, as there is an expected increase in visitor numbers.
- As funding is a major constraint, it could be worth the effort to gain the interest and commitment of tourism actors as they have more resources available. Common initiatives, such joint package development, could increase the commitment if it shows economic benefits in the end.

There are some sites which have fee or benefit-sharing mechanisms in place. The DestiMED Plus project should explore the applicability of this in other pilots as well, in order to ease the issue of funding constraints. An experience exchange could be useful for this.