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Challenges and gaps towards sustainable coastal and maritime tourism in the Mediterranean

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Résumé / Summary

This paper is based on the synthesis of challenges and gaps identified by a community of projects under the INTERREG MED Programme aiming at the enhancement of coastal and maritime sustainable tourism in the Mediterranean region. The need for a focus on coastal and maritime issues stems from the increasing littoralisation of the Mediterranean coast as well as the socio-economic and environmental importance of natural and cultural resources located on land and sea (Chaline, 2001; UNEP/MAP, 2012). In this context, a series of strategic policies are promoted with a view to an integrated approach.

At a European level, the introduction of the concept of Integrated Management of Coastal Zone Management (ICZM) (2002/413/EC) and the recent Directive on Maritime Spatial Planning (MSP) and Integrated Coastal Zone Management (2014/89/EU) constitute the clear identification of human activities on coastal and marine environment imperative towards sustainable development. Additionally, there is an increasing need for an integration between land and sea (relationship and interactions) along with the legal and policy framework related to both tools (ICZM and MSP). Recently, there is also a specific focus of the European Commission for coastal and maritime tourism through the Communication for "a European strategy for more growth

and jobs in coastal and maritime tourism” (2014). The document highlights the need for exploiting coastal and maritime tourism potential in order to generate sustainable benefits.

At a Mediterranean level, the Mediterranean Action Plan, through the Barcelona Convention, promotes the Protocol on ICZM (Papatheochari et al, 2015) while in the context of the European Union Strategy for the Adriatic-Ionian Region (EUSAIR, 2014), sustainable tourism is one of the four key pillars identified for the development of coastal and maritime areas (blue growth, connecting regions, environmental quality, sustainable tourism).

The objective of the community of fourteen (14) projects is to foster the harmonization of their outputs, in terms of thematic focus, methods and results, towards sustainable development in order to support Blue Growth Strategy.

The community’s focus includes a variety of issues one of which is the identification and promotion of alternative and diversified sustainable tourism products based on the Mediterranean rich cultural and natural heritage. In this context, the community aims to avoid the traditional ‘sun and sea’ patterns which have long been part of Mediterranean’s tourism policies and have often led to mass tourism development. Therefore, the community’s target is to increase the region’s attractiveness and prosperity by re-balancing tourism development in terms of spatial and temporal scale and thus, promote the sustainable use of natural and cultural resources and extend the tourist season (UNEP/MAP, 2012; 2016).

However, the increase of tourist flows in the Mediterranean region, providing new economic opportunities, is expected to continue generating a series of social and environmental pressures. These pressures are mostly related to issues such as water management and efficiency, waste management, energy etc and reflect the exceeding of carrying capacity thresholds for natural and built coastal and maritime environments. Therefore, there is an emerging need for re-establishing the tourist flows between coastal and maritime ecosystems and the hinterland, ensuring the improvement of the distribution of human activities and taking into account external factors such as climate change impacts (UNEP/MAP, 2012; 2016).

The issues described above call for integrated planning and management actions in order to fully exploit tourism opportunities in the Mediterranean region as well as protecting its valuable natural and cultural assets. However, there is a lack of such coordinated actions and mechanisms for their implementation, especially in the Mediterranean region. The initiatives described above, introducing ICZM and MSP as important tools towards sustainability in coastal and maritime regions, set the first integrated steps towards this direction. However, there are many steps ahead in order to achieve the common goals set by the Mediterranean countries and a series of barriers to overcome which mainly concern the variation of characteristics and policy frameworks identified the region. The current practices promoted by the policy framework in an international, European, Mediterranean level suggest the adoption of decision-making processes that follow an ecosystem-based approach of natural and cultural environments, taking into account the particularities of the socio-economic activities along with the natural processes while being adaptive to future changes.

The series of challenges described above are the priority of the community of projects under INTERREG MED Programme which will enable them to enhance the region’s capacity to build a sustainable tourism future. The community of projects, through a 3-year duration, are expected to identify common methods and tools in order to address those issues and collectively contribute to the improvement of knowledge towards a more sustainable tourism development in the Mediterranean region.

Keywords

coastal and maritime tourism, pressures, tourism offer, integrated coastal zone management, maritime spatial planning

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