

TOURISM AND SPATIAL PLANNING OF PROTECTED AREAS: PROBLEMS AND PERSPECTIVES IN GREECE

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In Greece, the State's interest in preserving areas of biological importance began in the 1930s, resulting in an extended network of Protected Areas (with varying degrees of restriction), that so far covers more than 25% of the country. However, despite the exceptional natural and cultural heritage of these sites, management and planning of Protected Areas is suffering from obsolescence and under-funding. Management Plans are often outdated, whilst Management Agencies are struggling to survive due to the current fiscal crisis. Given this framework, nature-based tourism is inadequately organized, representing so far only a small proportion of the Greek tourism industry.

The paper argues that organization of tourism within Protected Areas can become extremely beneficial for Greece, serving a fourfold purpose: a) enhancement of the natural and cultural heritage of the country, b) self-financing of Protected Areas, c) dispersion of tourism activity to all parts of the country (instead of only the islands and coasts), and d) broadening the offered tourism product that is still characterized by seasonality.

Keywords: *Protected Areas; tourism; spatial planning; conservation planning; Greece*

INTRODUCTION: THE TOURISM FACTOR IN PROTECTED AREAS

Protected Areas constitute worldwide key spaces for conserving biodiversity and for providing a range of ecosystem and other services, such as watershed protection, wildlife protection, carbon storage, recreation, spiritual fulfilment, etc. (DeFries *et al.*, 2007; Manning and Anderson, 2012).

Although initially Protected Areas were considered as spaces including vital natural resources, lately more and more countries have complemented their content so as to include cultural values and resources as well (Eagles, McCool and Haynes, 2002).

Given these attributes and the fact that they constitute important natural and cultural heritage sites, Protected Areas are the most attractive settings for nature-based tourism and eco-tourism (Eagles, McCool and Haynes, 2002). And as tourism keeps rising world-wide so too will tourism in Protected Areas (Buckley, 2000; Shultis and Way, 2006). Indeed, as many academics claim (Eagles *et al.*, 2002; Newsome *et al.*, 2002), nature-based tourism accounts for a large segment of the world tourism industry (worth at least US\$250 billion a year [Buckley, 2003]), which is constantly increasing in proportion, since nature-based tourism continues to grow faster than the tourism sector in general (Newsome *et al.*, 2002; Watson and Borrie, 2003).

Given this growing demand for nature-based tourism and eco-tourism, many Protected Areas are most likely to face increasing pressures - both at local and global scales - as a result of the impacts of tourism. After all, as Eagles and McCool (2002) argue, tourism may potentially carry the seeds of its own demise. However, regardless of the threats of tourism in Protected Areas, recent arguments and studies (Eagles, McCool and Haynes, 2002) keep underlining that tourism may become a way of financing conservation activities, as well as a more favourable alternative to other forms of land use.

Given this context, it becomes evident that in the future Protected Areas management must face a two-fold challenge: a) how to maintain ecological function and sustainability without suppressing tourism and other vital land-uses and human activities (vital to the local economy and employment) (DeFries *et al.*, 2007), and b) how to financially support conservation and preservation of a Protected Area (Dharmaratne, Sang and Walling, 2000).

In this framework, the present paper deals with tourism planning and management in Protected Areas of Greece, a country rich in natural (and cultural) heritage sites and quite a long tradition of tourism. The paper begins by presenting the new trends and approaches regarding the management and planning of Protected Areas, and then makes special reference to tourism and the way the activity in question can be better integrated in conservation management of Protected Areas. Regarding the Greek case, the paper initially presents the evolution of the national Protected Areas system as well as the management objectives and regulations set by the Greek Authorities within them. The paper also presents tourism implementations in the Greek Protected Areas and ends with a discussion and conclusions on the problems, perspectives, and future

of tourism development in Protected Areas of Greece, as a way to broaden the Greek tourism product.

PROTECTED AREAS MANAGEMENT AND TOURISM

About Protected Areas: key information and definitions

According to the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), Protected Areas are defined as “areas of land and/or sea, especially dedicated to the protection and maintenance of biological diversity and of natural and associated cultural resources, and managed through legal or other effective means” (IUCN, 1994).

Although Protected Areas existed even in ancient times (serving spiritual and sacred needs, or even hunting objectives) (Berkes, 1999), the earliest registry in the existing World Database of Protected Areas (WDPA) is the Yellowstone National Park in the USA, which was established in 1872 and is considered to be the first National Park world-wide (Shultis and Way, 2006). Since then, Protected Areas have spread all over the world, accounting for some 44,000 sites (by 2002), covering almost 10% of the land surface of the planet (Eagles, McCool and Haynes, 2002). Marine Protected Areas on the other hand, having been established in more recent years (mid 1970s), in 2014 accounted for over 2,000 sites, covering an area of 3.41% of the oceans world-wide (UNEP-WCMC). Nowadays, however, establishing fewer but larger Protected Areas seems to be the trend.

Given their size and fragile nature, as well as their attractiveness for nature-based tourism, Protected Areas demand wise and systematic management and planning if sustainability is to be maintained. The following sections present management approaches and trends for Protected Areas, and especially for tourism and recreation, which as activities with special features and impacts, need special and proper planning.

Management approaches and trends in Protected Areas

From their establishment in the late 19th century, Protected Areas were destined not only to serve conservation objectives, but tourism and recreation as well (Boyd, 2000; Buckley, 2000; Eagles and McCool, 2002; Shultis and Way, 2006). Indeed, as Eagles, McCool and Haynes (2002) argue, one of the common features among the first National Parks was public access, imposing in this way, visitation and tourism as central pillars in the management of Protected Areas.

By the 1960s, (i.e. at a time when the science of ecology was born), the initial concept of Protected Areas being large areas that were “set aside” for protection and recreation reasons was broadly complemented so as to include more systematic approaches regarding management and planning (Eagles, McCool and Haynes, 2002). These approaches are widely reflected in the IUCN Protected Areas system that was launched in the 1960s, and after several amendments was finalized in the 1990s (IUCN, 1994). The IUCN system included the following Protected Area categories/types:

- I:** Strict Nature Reserve/Wilderness Area: Protected area managed mainly for science or wilderness protection
- Ia:** Strict Nature Reserve: Protected area managed mainly for science
- Ib:** Wilderness Area: Protected area managed mainly for wilderness protection
- II:** National Park: Protected area managed mainly for ecosystem protection and recreation
- III:** Natural Monument: Protected area managed mainly for conservation of specific natural features
- IV:** Habitat/Species Management Area: Protected area managed mainly for conservation through management intervention.
- V:** Protected Landscape/Seascape: Protected area managed mainly for landscape/seascape conservation and recreation
- VI:** Managed Resource Protected Area: Protected area managed mainly for the sustainable use of natural ecosystems

Table 1. Management objectives in IUCN Protected Areas categories

Management objective	Ia	Ib	II	III	IV	V	VI
Scientific research	1	3	2	2	2	2	3
Wilderness protection	2	1	2	3	3	-	2
Preservation of species and genetic diversity	1	2	1	1	1	2	1
Maintenance of environmental services	2	1	1	-	1	2	1
Protection of specific natural/cultural features	-	-	2	1	3	1	3
Tourism and recreation	-	2	1	1	3	1	3
Education	-	-	2	2	2	2	3
Sustainable use of resources from natural ecosystems	-	3	3	-	2	2	1
Maintenance of cultural/traditional attributes	-	-	-	-	-	1	2
1 = Primary objective 2 = Secondary objective 3 = Potentially applicable objective; - = not applicable							

Source: adapted from (Eagles, McCool and Haynes, 2002 and IUCN, 1994

Regarding the management objectives set by IUCN for each of the 6 categories of Protected Areas (see Table 1), it becomes evident that: a) tourism and recreation constitutes a management objective for all Protected Areas categories (with the exception of Category Ia, regarding strict nature reserves) and b) biodiversity conservation is only one out of nine total objectives set for the management of Protected Areas world-wide.

Given this context, the following sections present management and planning trends in view of combining and encountering this wide range of objectives in Protected Areas, giving special emphasis to tourism and recreation.

Spatial planning in Protected Areas

As Protected Areas are not geographically isolated spaces, nor are they areas set up in unusable and infertile lands (as was mostly the case in the past) (Eagles and McCool, 2002; Brockington, Rosaleen and Igoe, 2008), the issue of planning and management has considerably grown in complexity over the years. As a result: a) production of a Management Plan (which is a tool to indicate how a Protected Area is effectively protected and managed, developed and used), and b) establishment of a Management Agency, became a compulsory procedure in many countries (required by laws, policy directives, etc.) (Eagles, McCool and Haynes, 2002). In these Management Plans (often referred to as Master Plans), land-use planning regulations, as well as regulation of the tourism activity, is an important segment.

Regarding the land-use planning and management of a Protected Area, zoning is widely considered to be the most effective way to achieve sustainability in the use of biological and natural resources (DeFries *et al.*, 2012). Indeed, organizing land-uses in zones and keeping certain activities (such as tourism) away from environmentally sensitive areas, apart from preventing conflicts, ensures optimal protection of the ecosystem and resources in question (Manning and Anderson, 2012). Beyond its spatial dimension, zoning can also have a temporal sense (if certain regulations or restrictions are seasonal).

However, since Protected Areas are not immune to outside influences, arguments keep growing that ecosystem management should become cross boundary and embed within larger ecosystems and management units (Shultis and Way, 2006; DeFries *et al.*, 2012). In this case a buffer zone,

which is a special type of zoning, becomes imperative for organizing human activities, as well as for imposing appropriate building regulations in surrounding spaces affecting the Protected Areas in question (Manning and Anderson, 2012).

If management of Protected Areas takes place within greater ecosystems, balance between human activities and ecosystem function will become more sustainable (DeFries et al., 2012). After all, as environmental concerns keep growing, management in Protected Areas tends to adapt to the Ecosystem Integrity (E.I.) approach, which is a concept in favor of a more process-based conservation (protecting ecological processes themselves), instead of a species-based conservation (Shultis and Way, 2006).

Tourism planning in Protected Areas

Tourism and Protected Areas can be mainly characterized by a “love - hate” relationship. Indeed, tourism is often accused of “loving a park to death” or of “carrying the seeds of its own demise” (Eagles and McCool, 2002).

According to Eagles, McCool and Haynes (2002), tourism development in Protected Areas may have serious impacts on ecosystem services, wildlife habitats and species, soils, vegetation, and water and air quality, due to touristic activities, or the development of lodgings or other facilities within the parks. However, as Pickering and Weaver (2003) argue, environmental impacts are not the only ones to consider. Financial and economic costs, or even socio-cultural alterations, are often among the hazards related to tourism development in many Protected Areas.

Yet, even if tourism is the cause for many threats posed to Protected Areas, it is also a key factor for providing solutions to many of the problems and deficiencies related to management and financing. Indeed, as Karmakar (2011) argues, *ecotourism has been recognized as the backbone of economies of many countries*. At the same time, as Dharmaratne, Sang and Walling (2000) pinpoint, *“nature-based tourism and ecotourism in all parts of the world is a major, if not the only, means of self-financing of protected areas”*. In this case however, attention must be drawn to the pricing of the entrance fee, so as to be optimally and wisely defined, following cost-benefit - and other types of - analysis (Alpizar, 2006; Brida, et.al., 2013).

Considering the above, overall principles regarding spatial and tourism planning in Protected Areas are the following (Buckley, 2002):

- *Parks are for conservation first.*
- *Parks are for recreation second.*
- *Only low-impact recreation should be in parks.*
- *Tourism has no special right to parks.*
- *Planning for parks and tourism needs a regional ecosystem approach.*
- *Partnerships need consent not coercion.*
- *Any user fees should reflect management costs, including conservation impacts.*
- *Tourism facilities in parks should provide a net benefit for conservation.*
- *Commercial tour operators should meet all the costs they impose on parks.*
- *Commercial tour operators should pay a resource rent.*
- *Marketing should match park plans.*
- *Parks agencies need a range of staff skills.*

To conclude, it becomes evident that tourism in Protected Areas must be wisely planned and managed, having always in mind as a key parameter the carrying capacity of the fragile ecosystems and how not to exceed the limits of acceptable change in the Protected Area in question (Eagles and McCool, 2002).

MANAGEMENT AND PLANNING OF PROTECTED AREAS IN GREECE

The Protected Areas System

Greece is a country with a relatively long tradition in conservation planning and designation of Protected Areas, compared to other European countries and the rest of the world. Indeed, the first time a Protected Area was introduced was back in 1929, when “Protective Forests” were launched, whilst a few years later, Law 856 launched another category also related to the protection of forests. “Forest Parks” were introduced in 1937, resulting in - within a year later - the designation of Mount Olympus (known as home of the twelve Gods of Greek mythology) as the first Forest Park of Greece.

As Table 2 shows, since the endorsement of “Protective Forests” in 1929, Protected Areas in Greece kept growing in number and types, including a wide range of natural ecosystems that according to the Greek

State needed protection and special treatment. Among them, the “Landscapes of Outstanding Natural Beauty” (a type of Protected Area designated so as to protect mixed sites of natural and cultural heritage), the Wetlands and Deltas (where fragile fauna and flora are hosted), wilderness areas (for wildlife breeding) and so on. However, despite the variation of Protected Areas, most categories introduced before the 1980s mainly regarded forests, as well as other arboreal vegetation lands such as the Aesthetic Forests, etc.

Table 2. The spectrum of Protected Areas in Greece (in chronological order)

Year	Category of Protected Area	Legislation
1929	Protective Forests	L.4173
1937	(Oak) Forest Parks	L.856
1950	Landscapes of Outstanding Natural Beauty	L.1465
1971	Aesthetic Forests	L.996
1971	Protected Natural Monuments	L.996
1975	Hunting Areas	L.177
1975	Wildlife Refuges	L.177, L.2637/98
1975	Wildlife Breeding Areas	L. 177
1983	Zones for Building Control (ZOE) Areas of Special Protection (IIEII)	L.1337/83 L.2508/97
1985	Special Protection Areas (SPA) (79/409 E.E.U. Directive)	Joint Min. Decision 414985
1986	Strict Nature Reserves	L.1650
1986	Nature Reserves	L.1650
1986	National Parks (including Forest Parks)	L.1650
1986	Protected Geological Formations, Protected Landscapes/ Seascapes, Protected Elements of Landscapes	L.1650
1986	Eco-development Areas	L.1650

1998	Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) (92/43 E.U. Directive)	Joint Min. Decision 33318/3028
2011	Regional Parks	L.3937

Source: adapted from Beriatis, 2003

Growing concerns on the state of the environment and sustainable development expressed after the World Summit of 1972, in Stockholm, signaled a new era in environmental management and planning. In Greece, these concerns resulted in the establishment of a competent Ministry for the Environment in 1980 (Min. of Spatial Planning, Housing and the Environment), and a few years later (1986), in the adoption of the first Institutional Law for the Environment (L.1650). It was with this law that Greece managed to acquire an integrated system of Protected Areas that, after the amendments of 2011 (L.3937), includes the types and categories presented in Table 3.

Table 3. The national System of Protected Areas in Greece

<p>Category 1: Strict Nature Reserves</p> <p>Category 2: Nature Reserves</p> <p>Category 3: Natural Parks</p> <p>3.1 National Parks (Special types: National Marine Park, National Geological Park, National Oak Forests, etc.)</p> <p>3.2 Regional Parks (Regional Marine Parks, Regional Oak Forests, Regional Geological Parks, etc.)</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">3.2.1 Quiet areas in open country (according to the 2002/49 Directive)</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">3.2.2 Eco-development regions (in rural and country space)</p> <p>Category 4: Habitat / species management areas</p> <p>4.1 Special Areas of Conservation (SAC)</p> <p>4.2 Special Protection Areas (SPA)</p> <p>4.3 Wildlife Refuges</p> <p>Category 5: Protected Landscapes/Seascapes and Protected Natural Formations</p> <p>5.1. Protected Landscapes/ Seascapes (Special types: Aesthetic Forest, Wild nature Landscapes, Geological Parks, Urban Landscapes, Rural Landscapes)</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">5.1.1. Protected elements of Landscapes</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">5.1.2 Landscapes of Outstanding Natural Beauty</p> <p>5.2 Protected Natural Formations</p>
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5.2.1 Protected Natural Monuments

Source: adapted from Law 3937 of 2011

Current categories of the Greek Protected Areas system are very much in line with the international system proposed by IUCN, including a wide range of categories with varying management objectives and protection needs. Within these objectives and needs, tourism is definitely the most challenging one, demanding special planning and management efforts. Given this fact, the following sections, in addition to the Greek Protected Area spectrum, present aspects of spatial and tourism management and planning, as well as the national experience and practice.

The Network of Protected Areas

Since the 1930s and the first designations of Forest Parks, Protected Areas in Greece have considerably increased both in size and in number, ranging among all the categories included in the national Protected Areas system (see Table 3). To date, according to a study elaborated in 2010 (Papageorgiou, Giannoula, Telianidou), Protected Areas of Greece cover more than 2,000,000 Ha, which correspond to more than 25% of the total surface area of the continental country. Among these areas, the most important and fragile ones are also part of the world's natural heritage network, having international designations. Key information on the Protected Areas of Greece (of both national and international importance) is presented in Tables 4 and 5.

Table 4. Protected Areas of national importance in Greece

Protected Area Categories	Total No	Surface Area (Ha)
National Parks	17	667,644.82
Aesthetic Forests	19	32,021.6
Protected Natural Monuments	52	15,970.5
Wildlife Refuges	607	1,067,756.7
Hunting Areas	7	111,513.8
Wildlife Breeding Areas	21	30,352.59
Nature Reserves	5	13,368.4
Strict Nature Reserves	3	3,391.7
Protective Forests	3	41,742.2

Protected Geological Formations and Landscapes/Seascapes	4	4,581.2
Eco-development Areas	3	172,155.0

Source: Papageorgiou et.al, 2010 (data retrieved from Greek Biotope/Wetland Centre, 2010)

Table 5. Protected Areas of international importance in Greece

Protected Area Categories	Total No	Surface Area (Ha)
Wetlands of international importance according to the Ramsar Convention	10	167,301
World Natural Heritage Monuments	2	34,087
Biosphere Reserves (UNESCO, Man and Biosphere)	2	8,838
Specially Protected Areas (according to the Barcelona Convention)	9	214,790
Biogenetic Reserves	16	22,261
Eurodiploma Sites	1	4,850

Source: Papageorgiou et.al, 2010 (data retrieved from Greek Biotope/Wetland Centre, 2010)

Among the spectrum of Protected Areas in Greece, “National Natural Parks” is the most complex category, often including other types of Protected Areas (e.g. Strict Nature Reserves, etc.) and the most dispersed one, found both in the continental as well as in the marine and insular parts of the country. Including important natural and cultural heritage sites, National Natural Parks constitute an enormously attractive type of Protected Area, and the most favorable for eco-tourism development and recreational tourism.

Management and planning of the Greek Protected Areas

In Greece, integrated environmental and conservation planning of Protected Areas (terrestrial and marine) requires the elaboration of a special study: the Special Environmental Study. According to the existing legislation, Special Environmental Studies are meant to provide a full record of the condition and the threats in a Protected Area and suggest the optimal measures and spatial organization according to the objectives set. Special Environmental Studies are compulsory for all Protected Areas, since they

are a prerequisite step for the formation of Management Plans (to be implemented by the competent Management Agencies). However, despite being compulsory, such studies rarely accompany Greek Protected Areas, either due to financial deficiencies or even due to incomplete efforts (some Studies that were elaborated never reached full consensus among stakeholders and Authorities, therefore they were never officially adopted) (Beriatis, 2003; Beriatis, 2012).

As regards spatial organization and planning, existing Management Plans of Protected Areas in Greece are mainly based on a zoning system, within which regulations serve multiple management objectives, according to the vulnerability of each ecosystem (Papageorgiou, 2012). At the same time, apart from taking into consideration the special needs in management and protection of each ecosystem, restrictions and spatial regulations within each Protected Area (and/or zone) have also to comply with a minimum set of standards that are defined by the Greek environmental legislation (recently amended by Law 3937, etc.).

According to the existing legislation, among the various types of Protected Areas, the ones with the highest restrictions are the “Strict Nature Reserves” and the “Nature Reserves” (Categories 1 and 2 respectively). Within these Zones, no activity is allowed, except for research studies and special actions taken for the protection and restoration of the ecosystems. “Strict Nature Reserves” as well as “Nature Reserves” are also used as sub-zones within large-scale Protected Areas. All the remaining types of Protected Areas have fewer and less strict regulations, leaving room for the development of certain types of facilities, human activities, or even other installations, according to the management objectives and the vulnerability of the ecosystems in question.

Among the facilities and human uses allowed within the less strict types of Protected Areas, and especially within Natural (National and Regional) Parks, are included: tourism activities or even Resorts, Renewable Energy Resources installations (such as wind farms, etc.), mining installations, agriculture, etc. However, as defined by Law 3937 of 2011 (that amended the Institutional Environmental Law of 1986), these types of uses mainly take place in buffer zones and never in zones that include fragile ecosystems and species (e.g. Sites of Community Importance [S.C.I. of the E.U.], etc.). Indeed, buffer zones are rather critical in Greek conservation planning, since most of the Protected Areas are surrounded by (or even located in) living/inhabited and fertile lands; therefore, management has to correspond to the needs of populations as well as to the conservation objectives¹. After all, as many Greek scholars argue (Trakolis,

2001; Christopoulou and Tsachalidis, 2004; Dimtrakopoulos *et.al*, 2010), participation procedures are of high importance when defining the management objectives in the Protected Areas of the country.

To conclude, despite the fact that the Greek Protected Areas system is rather complete and integrated, serving multiple protection and management objectives (including tourism as well), Management Plans are often outdated or unable to tackle current management and conservation needs (related to the climate change effects too), whilst Management Agencies (that are the competent bodies to implement Management Plans) are struggling to survive due to the current economic conditions.

The tourism factor in the Greek Protected Areas

Among the spectrum of Protected Areas in Greece, National Natural Parks constitute the largest (in scale) and the most complex ones, both in biological as well as in cultural and natural diversity. Therefore, they also constitute the most attractive and favorable areas, with great potentials in developing nature-based tourism and eco-tourism.

Having this in mind, most of the existing Management Plans of National Natural Parks (especially the newer ones), include special zones within which tourism activities and facilities are permitted. Also, in 2009, the competent Ministry for spatial planning launched a Sectoral Spatial Plan for tourism development at a national scale². Among the wide range of special, new and alternative forms of tourism, the Sectoral Plan in question suggested eco-tourism as one of the niche tourism markets that Greece had to turn to, in order to further develop its tourism industry. Other forms of tourism suggested by the Sectoral Spatial Plan were: congress tourism, urban tourism, marine tourism (yachting, cruise tourism, etc.), cultural tourism, pilgrimage tourism, sports tourism (e.g. golf clubs, ski centers, scuba diving, mountainous sports, etc.) and geological tourism.

According to the National Spatial Plan, eco-tourism and nature-based tourism are ideally developed and organized in mountainous areas as well as in Protected Areas. In fact, among the spectrum of Protected Areas, the National Spatial Plan for tourism indicated National and Regional Natural Parks (marine and terrestrial) as the most suitable and attractive for the development of eco-tourism. Other types of Protected Areas that were also indicated as suitable for nature-based tourism were the Wetlands and Deltas, the “Landscapes of Outstanding Natural Beauty”, as well as those Protected Areas that benefit from the existence of a Management Agency.

Indeed, the Sectoral Spatial Plan for tourism puts special emphasis on the role of Management Agencies. Acknowledging their importance in the wise management and protection of Protected Areas, the Spatial Plan considers as a sine-qua-non their financial support, as well as the imposition of fees to visitors, in order to ensure revenues for the optimal protection and management of the Greek Protected Areas.

Regarding the spatial regulations, according to the Sectoral Spatial Plan, development of tourism in Protected Areas should only regard soft interventions for the enhancement of the natural and cultural heritage, the enhancement of the built heritage and the place identity, and the sustainability of the local resources. At the same time, tourism facilities and infrastructure should be of small-scale and mainly regard: walking paths, mountain bike trails, nature observatories, mountain refuges, educational centers, etc. In general, according to the Sectoral Spatial Plan, development of tourism should respect the tradition of the local (and mostly agricultural) economy and take advantage of the existing rural settlements for developing hosting facilities (instead of creating new tourism resorts in the rural space)³.

Yet, despite the provision of special zones for tourism development within Protected Areas and the provision of eco-tourism and nature-based tourism as pivotal forms of tourism to be developed in Greece, very little has been done in practice. So far, eco-tourism is hardly developed, therefore it represents a rather small proportion of the Greek tourism industry. In fact, missed chances and deficiencies related to the Management Plans and the Management Agencies have not only deprived many Protected Areas from soft tourism facilities so far, but have also resulted in a significant and durable reluctance on behalf of the tourism investors as regards their preference to the Protected Areas of the country. For the time being, nature-based tourism within Protected Areas is mainly the concern of the Management Agencies; therefore it is limited to very few facilities and services offered, mainly regarding sports activities and the sales of souvenir products.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS: THE FIGURE OF TOURISM IN PROTECTED AREAS OF GREECE

Protected Areas constitute key spaces for the conservation of natural and cultural diversity. At the same time they constitute the most attractive spaces for nature-based tourism, which is an activity constantly gaining ground world-wide. Having to fulfil this dual – though often contradictory –

mission, it is only natural that Protected Areas must be subjected to wise management and planning, if flow of the ecosystem – and other services - is to be maintained for future generations. In fact, among the objectives to be met in the management and planning of Protected Areas, tourism development is the most challenging one. Indeed, as it is often accused of being self-destructive, and of putting pressure on the fragile ecosystems of Protected Areas, it is imperative that tourism development is carefully organized, so as not to exceed the limits of acceptable change (carrying capacity), whilst at the same time contributing to the financing of the necessary conservation activities.

In Greece, being a high priority of the State at a very early stage, Protected Areas enjoy and benefit from an adequate legislative framework, having now resulted in the designation of an extensive network of conservation sites, covering more the 25% of the country. However, despite this extensive network, which includes exceptional natural and cultural heritage sites (two of which are also part of UNESCO's world heritage), management and planning of Protected Areas are suffering from obsolescence and under-funding. Management Plans are often outdated or unable to tackle current management and conservation needs, whilst Management Agencies are struggling to financially survive, due to the current economic conditions.

As a result, Protected Areas of Greece, despite being attractive, are deprived of facilities and services related to nature-based tourism. In fact, eco-tourism and nature-based tourism represent only a small proportion of the Greek tourism industry. Nevertheless, it goes without saying that development of tourism in Protected Areas of Greece can become extremely beneficial, serving a fourfold purpose:

- a) disperse tourism activity from the coastal zone to inland areas too
- b) ensure important revenue for the financing of both conservation activities as well as other management needs within Protected Areas
- c) enhance the natural heritage of the country
- d) broaden the offered tourism product that is largely - if not uniquely - related to the "3 S" model and characterized by great seasonality

There is no doubt that nature-based tourism can become a rather promising activity and form of tourism, providing solutions to a series of deficiencies and threats faced in Protected Areas of Greece. At the same time, development of tourism in Protected Areas of Greece can contribute to the upgrade of the Greek tourism product too. Having this perspective in mind, it is of prime importance that Greece takes advantage of the existing

network of Protected Areas as well as its integrated environmental and spatial legislative framework. At the same time Greece has to get rid of its deficiencies and advance its efforts, especially in relation to: a) the Management Agencies, and how they can be functional and financially autonomous, and b) the Management Plans, and how they can provide reliable regulations and rules for tourism, therefore making Protected Areas attractive to tourism investors. It is only in this way that Greece will manage to take full advantage of its natural and cultural heritage, both to the benefit of the ecosystem and the national economy.

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ENDNOTES

1. Expansion of buffer zones in such fertile and usable lands, in many cases resulted in the delay - or even the non- adoption - of Management Plans, due to the reaction of private property owners.
2. The National Spatial Plan for tourism, amended in 2013, introduced few changes in the spatial organization and zoning of tourism activities. However, this new version was rejected in 2015 by the Council of the State. This means that until a new decision is reached, tourism activity and development is defined by the initial Sectoral Spatial Plan of 2009.
3. Two years after the adoption of the Sectoral Spatial Plan for tourism development, Law 3937 of 2011 (that amended the Institutional Law 1650 for the Environment) amended spatial regulations so as to permit the creation of large-scale tourism resorts (the so called Areas of Organized Tourism Development – Π.Ο.Τ.Α.), within Protected Areas (with the exception of “National Natural Parks”, “Strict Nature Reserves” and “Nature Reserves”).

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