

## AN EXPLORATORY ANALYSIS OF PUBLIC CONSULTATION IN TOURISTIC ISLANDS:THE ROLE OF GREEN TRANSPORT

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*Tourism is a global high consumption industry with important sustainability implications. Given the strong link between tourism and transport, this research analyses the opinion of local authorities and stakeholders to help promote sustainable transport in the touristic islands of Chios and Lesvos, in the Aegean Sea, in Greece. The attitudes of stakeholders towards the current state of tourism, future targets of the tourism industry and ways that green transport may assist the local tourism industry achieve these targets, were analyzed. A total of 82 completed questionnaires were collected from public consultations in Chios and Lesvos. Tourism seasonality, an emphasis on sun and sea, the small size of tourist enterprises and pressure from tour operators were seen as problems of the existing situation of the tourist industry. Stakeholders considered the independent operation of local institutions, a reduction of the emphasis on sun and sea tourism as well as an increase in the size of enterprises, important future targets for the tourist industry. Finally, it was established that stakeholders thought that green transport may prove to be particularly helpful with an increase in the size of tourist enterprises, legalization of more unlicensed establishments and less emphasis on sun and sea tourism.*

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**Keywords:** *tourism, island communities, public consultation, stakeholders, green transport*

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## **INTRODUCTION**

In this age of sustainable development, a few important facts come to mind when one considers tourism within its social, economic and environmental setting (Patterson, Niccolucci & Bastianoni, 2007). Firstly, tourism is the world's largest industry so it has a large footprint globally. Secondly, it is oftentimes rich tourists travelling to poor (or poorer) countries (same source), so, on a per capita basis, tourists typically consume more than the host community. As a result, the local impact of tourists is disproportionately large. Thirdly, due to the large influx of tourists, many destinations operate at sustainability below the global average.

These considerations underscore the importance of tourism especially for touristic islands that oftentimes play an important role in economic development. Island communities are caught in a dilemma: they are often incapable of autonomously developing comprehensive plans for environmental protection and tourism development yet they are, at the same time, increasingly anxious to preserve their identity, environment as well as natural and cultural wealth. This is definitely the case with many touristic islands such as those in Greece.

On the other hand, tourism is closely intertwined with transport. Tourism transport contributes 94% of the energy used in tourism, with road transport and aviation being the most developing and most polluting transport sectors (Woodcock et al., 2007).

Given this strong link between tourism and transport, this research documents and analyses the opinion of local authorities and stakeholders to help promote sustainable (green) transport in the touristic islands of Chios and Lesvos, in the Aegean sea in Greece. The rest of the paper includes a literature review, a methodology with specific research questions, results and conclusions.

### **Literature review**

Given the aim of this research, five things are carried out in this literature review: (1) important characteristics of the tourism industry are

delineated (a necessary precursor to the rest of the items carried out); (2) important characteristics of small touristic islands are presented; (3) green transport is defined in relevance to the rest of the economy and tourism; (4) the importance of stakeholders in solving conflict and creating synergies is pointed out; and (5) policies in the field of tourism are discussed. The overall goal of literature review is to pinpoint knowledge gaps that may be synthesized into specific research questions that this work may address.

Tourism is a global high consumption industry with important sustainability implications for most popular destinations (Patterson, Niccolucci & Bastianoni, 2007). Tourism's ramifications are wide ranging, impacting socio-economic life, culture and the environment. Most importantly, tourism presents a unique opportunity for viable economic and social development in many destination areas (Mathieson & Wall, 1982; Murphy, 1985). Compared to other destinations, islands are geographically isolated and lack of capital is an issue for many islanders (Enoch & Waren, 2008). In the case of touristic islands, tourism constitutes an important component of insular transport as well as an important source of income for local societies. The problem is that island communities are keen both on (a) preserving their identity, natural and cultural wealth as well as (b) forging a unique identity into a competitive product that may be exported globally. This is where sustainable (or green) transport enters the picture.

Of the numerous definitions of sustainability, the authors of this work prefer to think of it as economic development that secures a satisfactory quality of life (QoL) for the current generation within the carrying capacity of the environment (by respecting the constraints imposed by the limited availability of natural resources, future generations are assured of equivalent development opportunities). Sustainable and green transport refers to transportation systems that are built and operate in a sustainable manner. Green transport is seen as an appropriate means of achieving the twin goals of making tourism overall more sustainable as well as helping the economy of destinations. Clearly, both of these goals are very pertinent to touristic islands that place a high value on their environment and natural resources and are located in countries hit by the economic crisis.

This special significance that tourism has gained in the economic reconstruction of many regions or even countries has attracted the interest of various institutions and organizations at a national, regional or local level (Marinakos & Papatheodorou, 2009). The large number of tourism enterprises (including accommodation, transport, dining and entertainment), particularly in countries with developed tourism, constitute important partners on issues of social dialogue on the topic of tourism development through the professional associations which represent them. In many countries, including Greece, private enterprises operate as official spokespersons with the state (through official and unofficial channels) and influence the formation and implementation of tourism policies.

The tourism industry is oftentimes turned into a field of conflict and opposition over the structural problems faced in tourism development, in particular among stakeholder groups such as public authorities and the private sector that oftentimes pursue their own agenda (Marinakos & Papatheodorou, 2009). At the same time, tourism is an important cross-sectorial economic activity in many destinations and may also become a field of synergies among the agencies involved in the tourism development process. This is how stakeholders enter the picture and assume an important role in outlining future directions for the tourist industry.

The literature indicates that stakeholder participation and public involvement generates many benefits and is a central component of integrated environmental management, bringing together diverse societal groups in generating support for the implementation of sustainable policies such as green transport (Margerum, 1999; Reed, 2008). Although very little has been published on stakeholder attitudes towards green transport in tourism, it is noted that the attitudes and beliefs of stakeholders may be assessed with consultation events. These also promote the support of local authorities for sustainable transport policies and help synthesize guidelines for the successful implementation of green transport measures in touristic island communities.

What is the state of the art in policies in the field of tourism? Although tourism may be a desirable option for touristic islands, it should be developed on the basis of a strategic action plan. The plan for tourism

development in destination areas will have to take into consideration and balance the unique structural problems which arise during the tourism development process on the one hand, and the conflicting opinions of the stakeholders on the other (Marinakos & Papatheodorou, 2009). Moreover, the complexity of the tourism phenomenon demands that tourism policy should be applied at a national, regional and local level and that it should be part of a broader industrial, social, environmental and cultural policy. Attard (2005) points out that transport policies in island states, have so far escaped the attention of the research community. Like many touristic islands, island states are unique in terms of geography, economic development and varying degrees of government. In such islands, society, culture, and local politics influence decisions. Coleman (2000) suggests that local authorities need to continue on the green transport path with awareness efforts, although he points out that this is likely to be a lengthy process with a slow return. On a pessimistic note, he argues that the widespread implementation of green commuter plans is unlikely unless national legislation requires it. Interestingly, he suggests that targeting (large) businesses in urban and suburban locations may be a sensible short term way forward.

## **METHODOLOGY**

Literature review findings may be synthesized into the following research questions that could be answered by analyzing the responses of stakeholders in the islands of Chios and Lesbos:

1. What are the attitudes of respondents towards (a) the current state of tourism in these islands, (b) future targets of the tourism industry and (c) ways that green transport may assist the local island tourism industry?
2. Are there any differences in the attitudes of stakeholders between the two islands and among professions (especially public versus private employees) for matters (a), (b) and (c) of the previous question?
3. Based on the responses to the previous questions, how should green transport measures target the most pressing issues raised by local tourism stakeholders more efficiently?

Three public meetings, the oldest and simplest form of public participation, were carried out in the Aegean Islands of Chios and Lesbos, in Greece, in order to explore: major issues faced by these islands with respect to the tourism industry. The following parties were invited to these public meetings: community groups; religious groups; business organizations; public authorities; utilities and sundry cross-sectoral groups such as trade unions. These parties were presented with a questionnaire on tourism and green transport right after the main consultation event.

The questionnaire was structured in three sections: The first section captured the perception of respondents on the current state of tourism. The second section reflected the thoughts and beliefs towards future targets of the islands in terms of tourism development. Finally, the third section focused on the impact and role that green transport may play in achieving the targets set at the previous set of questions. The questionnaire concluded with some biographical characteristics of each respondent.

The questionnaire contained 5-level Likert-scaled items addressing: (1) the seasonality of the tourism product; (2) emphasis on sea and sun tourism; (3) alternative and special interest forms of tourism; (4) the quality of tourism services; (5) the size of tourism enterprises; (6) the practices of tour operators (TO); (7) unlicensed tourism accommodation establishments; (8) and the cooperation between local and national stakeholders. Specific Likert items are shown in Tables 1, 2 and 3.

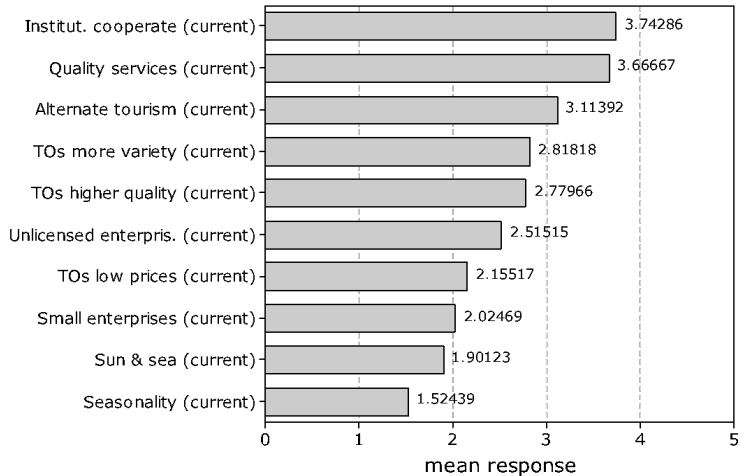
## **RESULTS**

A total of 82 completed questionnaires were collected: 65 from two public consultations in Chios (considered to be the more significant island of the two, touristically) and 17 from one public consultation in Lesbos. Data from the two public consultations in Chios were pooled on the reasonable assumption that audiences in these two events shared local attitudes. A little under two thirds of the participating stakeholders were male, with public servants being twice as many as freelancing professionals. Unfortunately, socioeconomic data contained many missing observations

and were thus disregarded for the rest of the analysis, shifting the focus on Likert scale responses.

To address research question 1a, the average value of responses on the current situation of the tourism industry is graphed in Figure 1. Respondents agreed, in decreasing order of preference, that: regional and national authorities cooperate harmoniously (average score of 3.74 out of 5); tourism services are of high quality (3.67); alternative and special interest forms of tourism are supported (3.11); tour operators pressure tourist enterprises for more choice (2.82) and services of higher quality (2.78); unlicensed establishments are a problem (2.52); tour operators pressure tourist enterprises for cheaper prices (2.16); most tourist enterprises are small (2.02); there is emphasis on sun & sea tourism (1.90); there is seasonality in tourism (1.52).

To address research question 2a, independent sample t-tests were used to test the hypothesis of equality of average responses between the two islands and the corresponding p-values are shown in the rightmost column of Table 1a (where the proper type of t-test was determined with Levene's test for homogeneity of variances). It is noted that average responses were identical between the two islands with the exception of a statistically significant difference (at a 99% confidence level) in the sun and sea item: apparently Lesvos stakeholders felt more strongly that tourism presently puts an emphasis on such sun and sea activities. Average responses between the two sexes were tested with similar t-tests and were found to be statistically different ( $p=0.0412$ ) only in the case of current state of tourism offering high quality services, with male scoring higher than female stakeholders (detailed results not shown).



**Figure 1.** Average value of “current state” responses for both islands

Average responses broken down by profession are shown in Table 1b and indicate that most responses were more or less the same among the different profession groups with a few exception: public servants and freelance professionals seemed to believe more strongly that support for alternative tourism is offered by the current state of the industry at a 90% confidence level, indicated by one way ANOVA (shown at the rightmost column of the table) and accompanying Bonferoni multiple comparison tests (not shown); students and public servants believed more strongly that touristic enterprises are too small (at a 95% confidence level); and, as expected perhaps, private employees did not really believe that unlicensed enterprises present a problem, in stark contradiction to what was thought by public servants (at an 80% confidence level approximately).



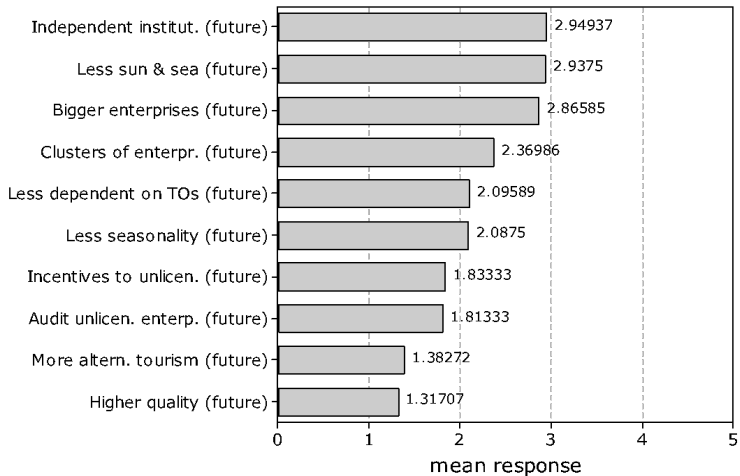
**Table 1a.** Average responses to items describing the current state of the tourism sector broken down by island (t-tests are appropriate independent sample after testing for homogeneity of variances)

<b>Itemdescription</b>	<b>Chios average</b>	<b>Lesvos average</b>	<b>t-test p-value</b>
current state of tourism characterized by seasonality	1.523	1.529	0.9710
current state of tourism places emphasis on sun & sea	1.781	2.353	0.0046*
current state of tourism supports alternative tourism	3.097	3.177	0.7574
current state of tourism offers high quality services	3.629	3.813	0.3866
most current enterprises are small	2.078	1.824	0.1533
currently, tour operators (TOs) pressure enterprises for reduced prices	2.196	2.000	0.4950
currently, TOs pressure enterprises for higher quality	2.813	2.636	0.5411
currently, TOs pressure enterprises for more variety of offered services	2.864	2.636	0.4278
unlicensed enterprises are currently a problem	2.482	2.700	0.5003
currently, local & national institutions cooperate harmoniously	3.714	3.857	0.5972

**Table 1b.** Average responses to items describing the current state of the tourism sector broken down by profession

<b>Variabledescription</b>	<b>public servant</b>	<b>private employee</b>	<b>freelance</b>	<b>student</b>	<b>ANOVA F-test p-value</b>
current state of tourism characterized by seasonality	1.333	1.667	1.545	1.667	0.157
current state of tourism places emphasis on sun & sea	1.952	2.000	2.000	1.783	0.811
current state of tourism supports alternative tourism	3.429	2.000	3.182	3.087	0.100
current state of tourism offers high quality services	3.762	4.000	4.000	3.476	0.160
most current enterprises are small	2.095	1.667	1.545	2.261	0.013*
currently, tour operators (TOs) pressure enterprises for reduced prices	2.067	2.333	2.333	2.364	0.816
currently, TOs pressure enterprises for higher quality	2.571	2.333	2.889	2.923	0.453
currently, TOs pressure enterprises for more variety of offered services	2.667	3.000	3.000	2.769	0.767
unlicensed enterprises are currently a problem	2.625	1.500	2.125	2.579	0.208
currently, local & national institutions cooperate harmoniously	3.737	4.667	4.200	3.444	0.063

To address research question 1b on the future targets of the tourism industry, depicted in Figure 2, respondents on the average agreed, in decreasing order of preference, that: regional and national authorities should operate independently (average score of 2.95 out of 5); there should be less emphasis on sun & sea tourism (2.94); tourist enterprises should become bigger (2.87); tourism enterprises should form clusters (2.37); tourism enterprises should become less dependent on tour operators (2.10); more licensing incentives should be given to unlicensed establishments (1.83); unlicensed establishments should be subjected to more control (1.81); more emphasis should be afforded to alternative and special interest tourism (1.38); and tourism services should be of higher quality (1.32).



**Figure 2.** Average value of “future target” responses for both islands

As for research question 2b, as tabulated in Table 2a, there was statistically significant difference between the two islands in three items: Chios stakeholders were keener on less sun & sea; Lesvos stakeholders were more intent on quality; and Chios stakeholders desired less

dependence on tour operators more strongly. As before, average responses between the two sexes were tested with similar t-tests and were found to be statistically very different ( $p=0.0006$ ) only in the case of improved quality of services, with female scoring higher than male stakeholders (detailed results not shown).

**Table 2a.** Average responses to items describing alternative future targets of the tourism industry broken down by island (t-tests are appropriate independent sample after testing for homogeneity of variances)

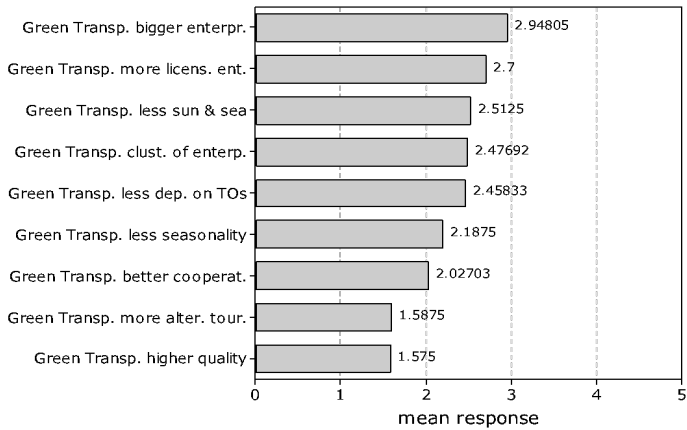
<b>Itemdescription</b>	<b>Chios average</b>	<b>Lesvos average</b>	<b>t-test p-value</b>
reduce seasonality	2.125	1.938	0.5385
reduce emphasis on sun & sea	3.063	2.438	0.0299*
offer more alternative tourism	1.391	1.353	0.7796
improve quality of services	1.246	1.588	0.0065*
increase size of enterprises	2.877	2.824	0.8649
create clusters of enterprises	2.414	2.200	0.4904
reduce dependence on tour operators (TO)	2.207	1.667	0.0407*
provide unlicensed enterprises with incentives	1.793	2.000	0.2716
intensify auditing of unlicensed enterprises	1.754	2.071	0.2009
operate local and national institutions independently	2.953	2.933	0.9581

**Table 2b.** Average responses to items describing alternative future targets of the tourism industry broken down by profession

Itemdescription	public servant	private employee	freelance	student	ANOVA F-test p-value
reduce seasonality	2.095	2.670	1.636	2.455	0.240
reduce emphasis on sun & sea	2.952	3.667	2.364	3.409	0.026*
offer more alternative tourism	1.238	1.000	1.455	1.478	0.190
improve quality of services	1.238	1.000	1.364	1.500	0.170
increase size of enterprises	2.810	3.000	3.091	2.667	0.770
create clusters of enterprises	2.600	3.667	2.400	2.421	0.229
reduce dependence on tour operators (TO)	2.100	1.667	1.778	2.400	0.317
provide unlicensed enterprises with incentives	1.944	1.333	1.889	1.952	0.370
intensify auditing of unlicensed enterprises	2.105	1.333	1.889	1.636	0.195
operate local and national institutions independently	2.952	3.333	2.900	2.783	0.881

Average responses to future target items broken down by profession are shown in Table 2b. Sun and sea scores differently among the different profession groups (at a 95% confidence level), with both private employees and public servants in strong agreement with this target. Of the other items, it is noted that private employees were very keen on creating clusters of enterprises (although not statistically different from the other groups) and private employees, as expected, not at all enthusiastic on intensifying auditing of unlicensed enterprises (at an approximate 80% confidence level).

Finally, to address research question 1c on how green transport may assist the tourism industry, as shown in Figure 3, respondents on the average agreed, in decreasing order of preference, that: tourist enterprises should become bigger (2.95); more unlicensed establishments should become legal (2.70); there should be less emphasis on sun & sea tourism (2.51); tourism enterprises should form clusters (2.48); tourism enterprises should become less dependent on tour operators (2.46); tourism should become less seasonal (2.19); cooperation of regional and national authorities should improve (2.03); more emphasis should be afforded to alternative and special interest tourism (1.59); and tourism services should be of higher quality (1.58). The only gender difference was related to green transport reducing emphasis on sun & sea, with female being more enthusiastic than male employees on green transport helping the industry shift focus away from the sun and sea paradigm.



**Figure 3.** Average value of “green transport” responses for both islands



**Table 3a.** Average responses on how green transport may assist the tourism broken down by island (t-tests are appropriate independent sample after testing for homogeneity of variances)

<b>Itemdescription</b>	<b>Chios average</b>	<b>Lesvos average</b>	<b>t-test p-value</b>
green transport may reduce seasonality	2.172	2.250	0.7622
green transport may reduce emphasis on sun & sea	2.540	2.412	0.6448
green transport may offer more alternative tourism	1.540	1.765	0.3385
green transport may improve quality of services	1.540	1.706	0.4162
green transport may increase size of enterprises	2.902	3.125	0.4295
green transport may create clusters of enterprises	2.510	2.357	0.5640
green transport may reduce dependence on tourist operators (TO)	2.421	2.600	0.5437
green transport may integrate unlicensed enterprises in the industry	2.719	2.615	0.7374
green transport may improve cooperation between local and national institutions	1.949	2.333	0.1438

**Table 3b.** Average responses on how green transport may assist the tourism broken down by profession

Itemdescription	public servant	private employee	student	freelance	ANOVA
					F-test p-value
green transport may reduce seasonality	2.333	2.000	2.522	2.000	0.467
green transport may reduce emphasis on sun & sea	2.476	2.000	2.909	2.455	0.294
green transport may offer more alternative tourism	1.762	1.000	1.636	1.636	0.335
green transport may improve quality of services	1.762	1.000	1.609	1.455	0.379
green transport may increase size of enterprises	2.950	3.000	2.773	3.300	0.592
green transport may create clusters of enterprises	2.556	3.333	2.500	2.000	0.117
green transport may reduce dependence on tourist operators (TO)	2.600	2.000	2.450	2.444	0.789
green transport may integrate unlicensed enterprises in the industry	2.737	2.667	2.947	2.500	0.704
green transport may improve cooperation between local and national institutions	2.500	2.333	1.900	1.778	0.132

On research questions 2c, this time there was no statistically significant difference between the two islands (Table 3a).

On how responses differ among professions, shown in Table 3b, although none of the differences was statistically significant, it is noted that private employees were keener than other professions on creating clusters of enterprises (just short of a 90% confidence level).

To recap the most significant findings in answering research questions 1 and 2, responses to the item group describing current conditions in the field of tourism in Chios and Lesvos indicated that local stakeholders feel that the field is characterized (in order of decreasing strength of conviction) by undesirable seasonality, excessive emphasis on sun and sea, enterprises of too small a size, and unwelcome pressure by tour operators for prices to be cheaper. In addition, responses to items in the group on future targets of the tourism industry indicated that local stakeholders believe (in about equal strength of conviction) that it would be desirable for regional and national authorities to operate independently, less emphasis should be placed on sun and sea tourism, and an increase in the size of tourist enterprises should be sought after. Finally, responses to the item group on how green transport may assist the tourism industry, indicated that local stakeholders agreed (in decreasing strength of conviction) that green transport will help achieve tourist enterprises of bigger size and will aid in more unlicensed establishments becoming legalized; on the other hand, local stakeholders do not expect green transport to be of help in achieving tourism services of higher quality nor that it will be of help in placing more emphasis on alternative and special interest tourism. Some profession groups are keener than others in certain measures and these differences may be exploited when developing and deploying specific green transport measures. All in all, these findings suggest directions for corrective measures and policies.

Analysis is rounded up with some thoughts regarding research question 3. The literature reports that the effort to engage green transport in the development of alternative forms of tourism such as ecotourism or agro-tourism, may be enhanced through investments in infrastructure projects such as those exploiting renewable energy sources (RES,

Gossling et al., 2005). In fact, the presence of new technologies in the tourist industry, such as RES projects, might attract more visitors and thereby revitalize the economy and improve profitability (Solino et al., 2009). Furthermore, such projects may also reduce the level of internal migration and help decentralization, by providing motives to young people to remain in their hometown and take advantage of its natural resources. In other words, there will be more local development, stimulation of local entrepreneurship, creation of new jobs and attraction of investment funds exploiting local resources (Lehr et al., 2008; Sastresa et al., 2010).

## **CONCLUSION**

The consultation events reviewed herein succeeded in measuring the relative strength of the convictions of stakeholders; showing that they are clear on some issues and skeptical on others and uncovering some differences among profession classes. All in all, it is noted that there are great expectations of green transport in tourism. Findings of this exploratory research will be useful in synthesizing practices that guide local actors in identifying, signifying, valorizing and managing their resources.

Implementing sustainable transport policies is not easy. It is an unfortunate fact that, as Woodcock et al. (2007) and Chapman (2007) point out, good sustainable solutions, such as walking and cycling, are at the same time the least preferred. In way of confirmation, the European Conference of Ministers of Transport's (ECMT) "Sustainable Urban Travel" (SUT) program (1997–2001) sponsored a series of workshops aimed at addressing "why implementation of integrated sustainable policies has proven to be so difficult" (Goldman & Gorham, 2006). It is hoped that the findings of this research will facilitate the implementation of green transport policies in the field of tourism by taking into consideration the attitudes of stakeholders and their role in resolving conflict and creating synergies.

Future research could focus on an attempt to distinguish clusters among the stakeholders in order to be able to target green transport policies more efficiently.

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