The Project is co-funded by the European Union and by National Funds of Greece & Albania under the IPA Cross-Border Programme “Greece - Albania 2007-2013”


All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be translated, reproduced stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the publisher.
Preface

The partners of the project on BIOTOURISM – Innovative Practices in Biotourism, implemented within the framework of the European Commission’s IPA Greece–Albania 2007-2013 cross-border program, held an international conference to disseminate the results of the project and to promote a common biotourism product of added value incorporating and promoting the natural and cultural assets of Prespa and Korçë. The event convened on 5-7 October 2013 at the Conference Center of Pyli in Prespa, and brought together local and regional stakeholders to discuss the development of the cross-border area through initiatives in biotourism. The conference also featured an informative exhibition of distinctive maps, postcards, photographs and historical materials from Dr. Panayotis Koliomichalis’ personal collection.

The importance of the Prespa–Korçë cross-border area stems from its high ecological and biological diversity, as well as its wealth of natural resources. Surrounded by tall mountains, Lakes Small and Great Prespa create a landscape of incomparable beauty formed by retreating glaciers and a series of seismic phenomena. The region harbors some of the richest biodiversity in Europe, such as many endemic species of birds, fish and mammals.

The old age of the lakes, the geomorphology of the region, the climate, and to a large extent culture and tradition, combined with long-established fishing, agricultural and stock-breeding practices, contribute to the unique character of the region. However, economic development in the wider cross-border area, including agricultural and industrial production, as well as climate change, are placing serious pressure on the balance of local ecosystems and the lake environment. Biotourism can inspire cross-border cooperation for the preservation of natural and cultural resources and ensure development that respects and protects the local environment and livelihoods.

The project was brought to fruition by the following partners: Biopolitics International Organisation – B.I.O. (overall lead partner), Biologists of Albania (lead partner in Albania), Erymanthos (partner, Greece), Cultural Triangle of Prespa – C.T.P. (partner, Greece), Regional Council of Korçë (partner, Albania).

For their contribution to the realization of the goals and deliverables of the project, I wish to thank Entela Pinguli and Ardian Maci from the Biologists of Albania, Gabriela Scheiner, Director of the Cultural Triangle of Prespa, and Vasilios Taktikos, President of Erymanthos.

Above all, I wish to thank Helen Efraimiadou, the B.I.O. colleague who undertook the task of coordinating, researching, and implementing the entire project.
and ensuring good cooperation among all the partners. The project has been successful thanks to her brilliance and diligence.

In addition, I am grateful to the other B.I.O. colleagues who contributed to the project’s completion, especially Katerina Zafeiri and Helen Papadimitriou who helped with the organization of the conferences in Prespa and with the publication of this volume of proceedings.

The project was funded by the European Commission’s “Greece–Albania IPA Cross-Border Programme 2007-2013” and by national funds from both countries. I thank the Commission for supporting our effort and hope that this model of cross-border cooperation will last well into the future.

Prof. Agni Vlavianos Arvanitis
B.I.O. President and Founder
Overall Lead Partner and Project Coordinator
Contents

Preface 3

Introduction 9

Definition and scope of the Biotourism project 12

The value of biotourism 15
Agni Vlavianos Arvanitis
President, Biopolitics International Organisation
Overall Lead Partner and Project Coordinator, Greece

Joint actions, biotourism and diplomacy 17
Ioannis Pediots
Consul General of Greece in Korçe

Biotourism and cross-border cooperation as a valuable investment for future generations 18
Dashnor Dervishi
Ambassador of Albania to Greece

Biotourism as a means to promote dynamic tourism in Prespa 20
Yannis Kazoglou
Representative of the Mayor of Prespa, Greece

Tourism, local values and goal setting 22
Gabriela Scheiner
Director, Cultural Triangle of Prespa, Project Partner
Greece

Environment, tourism and development 23
Yiannis Boutaris
Mayor of Thessaloniki, Greece

Comparative advantages, initiatives and cooperation 24
Efthimios Bakas
Economist, f. General Secretary of Lifelong Learning
Greece
The value of a joint cross-border heritage
Panagiotis Koliomichalis
ENT Director, Hippokration General Hospital, Greece

Tourism and cross-border cooperation – Prespa

Biotourism and innovation in the Prespa and Korçë cross-border area
Helen Efraimiadou
Biopolitics International Organisation, Greece

Biotourism – new prospects for development in Prespa
Thodoris Sdroulias
Journalist, European Biological Cities Network, Greece

Local products and new dimensions for development
Nikos Stergiou
“Pelekanos” Prespa Agricultural Cooperative, Greece

Standards of living and tourism in Prespa
Sotiris Vosdou
Civil Engineer, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece

Promotion and markets for biotourism in Prespa
Tasos Gousios
Founder, Alpha Marketing S.A., Greece

Travel agencies and quality tourism
Stefanos Chatzimanolis
Vice President, Travel Agencies Association of Northern Greece

Life, biotourism and balance
Dimitris Michailidis
Agricultural Journalist, Greece

New models for tourism and economic development
The case of the Molyvos Tourism Association
Nikos Molvalis
President, Molyvos Tourism Association, Greece

Nature and human emotions – Prespa as an exemplary biotope
Panagiotis Valatidis
Local Resident, Prespa, Greece
Tourism and cross-border cooperation – Korçë

Protecting the natural, cultural and traditional values of Korçë – the status of tourism in the Korçë region
Entela Pinguli
Director, Biologists of Albania, Project Partner

Cultural heritage and Biotourism development in the Korçë region
Kliti Kallamata
Architect, Director of the Past for Future Foundation, Albania

Building pathways for tourism cooperation through handicrafts
Arian Gjura
Albania

Examples from Lake Ohrid as a biosphere reserve
Arjan Meroli
Joint Secretariat for Lakes Ohrid and Prespa, Albania

Tourism and local community collaboration in the Korçë region – DMO perspectives
Orjeta Gliozheni
Destination Management Organization, Albania

Best practices in biotourism

ICT and cooperative knowledge for sustainable economy and tourism governance
Helen Efrainiadiou and Katerina Zafeiri
Biopolitics International Organisation, Greece

The role of the media in the enhancement of environmental awareness
Sypsas A., Nikoletta Tsitsanoudis Mallidis, Leta Dromantiene, Jenny Pange
School of Education, University of Ioannina, Greece
Social Policy Faculty, Mykolas Romeris University, Vilnius, Lithuania

Global institutions and applications of the social economy
Vasilios Taktikos
President of NGO Erymanthos, Project Partner, Greece
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tourism and regional development</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nicholas Vagionis</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior Researcher, Center of Planning and Economic Research</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greece</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biotourism market analysis and strategic marketing plan for Molyvos</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aleks Buda, Irini Cerepi, Georgios Kartaltzis, Margaux Pauwels,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elizabeth Tsavdarides Veenendaal and Hercules Mousiades</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American College of Thessaloniki, Greece</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forests and ecotourism as biotourism components</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Athanasios Karameris</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School of Forestry and Natural Environment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Prespa Lakes case study – uniting societies</td>
<td>129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anastasios I. Valvis</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PhD Candidate, Political Science, University of the Peloponnese</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ELIAMEP Research Fellow, Greece</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biotourism – building a society of cooperation and hope</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agni Vlavianos Arvanitis</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>President, Biopolitics International Organisation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall Lead Partner and Project Coordinator, Greece</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Introduction

The **BIOTOURISM – Innovative Practices in Biotourism** project emerged as a natural consequence of the need for coordinated economic cooperation between Greece and Albania. Sharing cross border resources involves cooperation and common management practices to ensure social and economic benefits for local communities which minimize environmental damages. In an age of accelerating globalization, tourism is one of the fastest developing industries worldwide. Untapped destinations are of particular interest to the growing tourist demographics, and the providers and stakeholders of this business. Sustainable tourism development must be promoted with the intention of increasing cooperation in common business initiatives for the support of the local communities of Prespa in Greece and Korçë in Albania. Funded by the European Commission’s “Greece–Albania IPA Cross-Border Programme 2007-2013” and by national funds of Greece and Albania, the project ran for 21 months, from April 2012 to December 2013.

Project objectives

The primary goal of the project was to promote sustainable economic development in order to increase the standard of living and to facilitate cross-border cooperation between Prespa in Greece and Korçë in Albania, through the enhancement of sustainable tourism in the area. More specifically, the project had the following objectives:

- Creation of a transboundary network of cooperation and the development of common transboundary tourist packages of added value.
- Enhancement of the quality of local tourism development through innovative practices in the fields of culture and the environment with the interactive participation of all stakeholders.
- Participation of local authorities in high quality tourism initiatives.
- Effective management of local human and natural resources, historic and traditional values, and cultural diversity, reflecting the needs of the area.
**Biotourism development tools**

The implementation of the project was based on the following biotourism development tools:

- A bilateral tourism platform/portal highlighting the comparative advantages of Prespa and Korçë.
- E-services and electronic tools (digital services) involving Greek and Albanian businesses operating in the cross border region.
- Development of a specific common tourism product of added value to be promoted and contracted out to international tour operators.
- Educational seminars and workshops on tourism and the environment, as well as training programs for youth and other stakeholders to obtain working experience through the sharing of expertise and best practices.
- Local tourism exhibits, meetings and media events with the participation of local authorities, private companies, municipalities and NGOs.
- Networking and the creation of tourism packages to boost economic and social development on the transboundary and local level.

**Partners**

The BIOTOURISM – Innovative Practices in Biotourism cross-border project was coordinated by the Biopolitics International Organisation (B.I.O.), the overall lead partner of the project, and was implemented in cooperation with the following partners from Greece and Albania: the Biologists of Albania Organisation (ALB), Erymanthos (GR), the Cultural Triangle of Prespa–CTP (GR) and the Regional Council of Korçë (ALB).

The Biopolitics International Organisation (www.biopolitics.gr), an environmental NGO founded in Athens in 1985, promotes global action for international cooperation and education in environmental protection, as well as a series of initiatives in biodiplomacy. B.I.O. has extensive experience in developing, managing and implementing EU and nationally funded projects in sustainable development, environmental education, social economy, green entrepreneurship, and sustainable tourism. B.I.O.’s President and Founder, Prof. Agni Vlavianos Arvanitis, is an internationally acclaimed environmental expert, who has published over 70 books and has cooperated with leaders in 160 countries in the implementation of educational, cultural and awareness raising projects. B.I.O. focuses on a wider scope of environmental preservation – one which integrates the environment into all educational, social and economic schemes – by providing guidelines that will enrich environmental policy and leadership with a view to the future.
The Biologists of Albania Organisation was founded in 1991 and has a strong background in the field of environmental education and research. Its mission is community education through sustainable and functional knowledge on issues of biodiversity and environment, in order to increase capacity building and ensure European standards and respect of the regulations for protection of biological assets in Albania. Methods of work include, but are not limited to: awareness raising; environmental education (training, debates, demonstrations); public outreach and public participation; nature conservation and monitoring, research and consulting with stakeholders. Its Board of Directors is composed of environmental professionals, with a strong academic background and high expertise. They rely on a team of internationally acclaimed environmental experts and have extensive scientific experience in the environment of the cross-border project area.

Erymanthos (GR) is a collective body of NGOs in Greece. President Vasilios Taktikos and his staff have extensive experience in creating and mobilizing social networks, in designing and implementing volunteer initiatives, events, conferences, exhibitions and seminars, and in promoting the institutional role of civil society organizations in Greece. Erymanthos is involved the establishment of local development partnerships between local authorities and civil society organizations, and in the implementation of pilot programs of social, cultural and green entrepreneurship. Furthermore Erymanthos publishes books, magazines and brochures and organizes seminars for local authorities and investors on issues of social and economic development partnerships.

The Cultural Triangle of Prespa (CTP) is an independent, non-profit local NGO situated on the borders of Albania, the F.Y.R. of Macedonia and Greece. The organization is working towards an equal quality of development on each side of the border based on the protection of common environmental and cultural assets. Active on a local, cross-border and European level, CTP implements activities for youth, culture and tourism development.

The Regional Council of Korçë is a local public authority supporting better public services in tourism and environmental and cultural initiatives, including public awareness-raising. The Head of the Region of Korçë and its staff combine their efforts to promote rural development and to provide temporary employment and economic benefits for unemployed citizens. The Regional Council of Korçë reinforces actions for high quality standards in tourism.
Definition and scope of the BIOTOURISM project

Biotourism \([\text{bios}=\text{life, \\& tourism}]\) – tourism that respects bios and the environment – was introduced in 1985 by Professor Agni Vlavianos Arvanitis, President and Founder of the Biopolitics International Organisation. The concept promotes tourism services that support the environment and conserve cultural and natural resources and biodiversity. It focuses on a value system that promotes the appreciation of bios as well as a win-win situation – a win for the economy and a win for the environment, biodiversity, culture and, ultimately, local communities and livelihoods.

The tourism sector depends on the natural and cultural environment, and can also be a vehicle for the protection and promotion of natural and cultural resources. Biotourism can support social and cultural entrepreneurship and become a diverse source of inspiration and motivation for local communities, enabling them to implement effective measures that can contribute to their livelihoods and sustainable development. These benefits are critically supportive of the local effort to reduce economic, social and territorial disparities as well as to limit local immigration. Through international networking, Biotourism can also become a transnational platform for cultural exchange and mutual understanding among the peoples of Europe. Solutions for the problems of environmental protection and the sustainable development of both urban and rural areas can be shared more readily by involving all stakeholders (local authorities, small business, local communities, etc.) and encouraging active community engagement.

The BIOTOURISM project aims to influence environmental and regional development through community participation. It goes a step further than other projects that have taken place in the area, by focusing mostly on synergy and cooperation for the development of common tourist packages.

Active community engagement comprises both horizontal and vertical cooperation of national institutions, local authorities and NGOs, as well as community-based organizations (CBOs) and individuals. It is a dynamic and continuous process. Community engagement can include many forms of actions while involved groups can be composed of public, private, regional, local or non-governmental groups, agencies, institutions, academic entities or individuals. The implementation of the Biotourism project encourages active community engagement through three pillars:

1. \textit{Participation}: Actions involved in active community engagement should aim to include all local communities in continuous project evaluation. Therefore,
actions like open group meetings, public forums and/or web-based forums can contribute to the understanding of the community’s perception of the Biotourism Project and its implemented actions.

2. **Communication**: Access to information is vital at every community level. This involves equitable access to accurate information for men, women, youth and marginalized groups. The dissemination of information for community engagement will start from local stakeholders passively receiving information, and it will evolve into a dialogue between all groups in order to address potential difficulties.

3. **Engagement** is the third pillar which comes into play after the stimulation of social dialogue and the accumulation of information by the community. Engagement involves participation in decision making procedures and capacity building projects.

Biotourism promotes cross-sector elements such as: green salaries and bio-economics; climate change mitigation; environmental education; agrotourism and rural development; environmental tourism and geotourism; urban biotourism; culture and technology; clean energy; mutual understanding, peace and biodiplomacy. Biotourism also focuses on: inspiring stakeholders with positive values; resolving the information deficit; creating trust and cooperation; restoring cultural links; capitalizing on previous experiences and best practices.

The protection of the environment is inextricably linked to economic progress. The true wealth of the planet lies in biodiversity – in the range, the variety and the beauty of flora and fauna which is continuously threatened by human arrogance and greed. In an economic strategy that respects the environment, quality of life is a measurable factor of national prosperity. The concept of a healthy environment also embraces the protection of culture, history, tradition, and architecture, which make up an inseparable sum of natural and cultural wealth. Accordingly, biotourism protects the environment with the aim of conserving the natural and cultural features of each region. Visitors and the local population mingle and socialize in the spirit of cultural exchange. They can thus become familiar with the natural environment in a direct and productive manner.

The “bio-tourist” is not limited to conventional museum visits and archaeological sites. Music concerts, cultural trips, fairs, and guided nature walks connected with the history and culture of a region are an integral part of the biotourism experience. This experience may even include cooking classes, weaving, pottery or music. Visitors are introduced to local flora and fauna through carefully designed tours, while also taking part in events encouraging their active appreciation of the cultural heritage of the region.

Biotourism is gradually becoming a reality. Many environmentally conscious consumers demand holiday packages that respect the natural and cultural environment which the tourism industry does indeed offer. At the same time, many new areas are becoming accessible to tourism. High development rates of the
tourism industry translate into rapidly growing sectors such as adventure tourism, culinary tourism, wildlife tourism, or socially responsible tourism, which are some of the many forms of biotourism now available worldwide.

The natural and agricultural backdrops of Greece and Albania share many similarities and are characterized by rich biological diversity, while cultural and historical linkages are etched in every corner of the cross-border landscape. Unique social, cultural and agricultural systems have been created, shaped and maintained by generations of local populations applying locally adapted practices. These natural and cultural systems reflect the evolution and diversity of local knowledge, plus an insightful relationship with nature. These systems have the potential not only to provide stunning landscapes of rich biological and agricultural diversity, but also to preserve indigenous wisdom, healthy ecosystems and, above all, a steady supply of multiple goods and services securing sustainable livelihoods for the local communities.

References
I wish to express my gratitude to all who are present here today in order to participate in this important conference for the promotion of cross-border cooperation in biotourism. I thank Gabriella Scheiner for hosting the conference and for her contribution to the project. I also wish to congratulate the partners from Albania, and especially Entela Pinguli and Ardian Maci, for the great success of the conference organised yesterday in Korçë.

My deepest appreciation is extended to Ioannis Pediotis, General Consul of Greece in Albania, Dashnor Dervishi, Ambassador of Albania in Athens, and Yiannis Boutaris, Mayor of Salonica, for their distinguished presence and insight. Last, but certainly not least, I wish to convey my warmest thanks to Dr. Panayotis Koliomichalis for enriching this event with a unique exhibition of his private collection of historical and archival material from the Prespa–Korçë cross-border area.

The project, which has culminated in this timely gathering, enhances the value of biotourism and aims to strengthen transboundary cooperation for the protection of bios – life – the most precious gift on our planet. The concept of biotourism – as promoted by B.I.O. since its inception in 1985 – combines all the dimensions of environmental protection and economic development. If we consider building a society based on the joy of possessing bios, then we will immediately realize that we have a common responsibility to safeguard this gift for the future. Differentiation is the richness of our world. Differences in culture, language and tradition make up the wealth of humanity. Biotourism protects our natural and cultural resources and helps us to realize how interdependent we are with the environment and with each other.

Tourism, as a very important economic activity, needs to be based on the standards of bio-economics and to place the protection of the environment and natural and cultural diversity at the heart of economic policy. Entrepreneurs working in the field of tourism development increasingly appreciate the need for environmental standards, since the criteria for success of any economic activity now include environmental dimensions. It is heartening that many organizations have adopted codes of ethics for travelers, recognizing the importance of biocultural principles for the protection of the natural environment and our cultural
wealth. These ethical codes encourage visitors to behave responsibly towards wildlife, conserve natural resources, avoid polluting activities, and avoid buying or using products that threaten biodiversity.

Biotourism is not limited to fun and recreation but contributes decisively to the development of an environmental consciousness, by providing environmental awareness activities and environmental education programs. Preserving the richness and beauty of life, ensuring public health and equal opportunities in every country of the world can be a source of substantial profit, both financially, and socially. The dual nature of the current economic and environmental crisis can also be regarded as an opportunity for environmental economic and social development; current threats can translate into sustainability and biotourism.
Joint actions, biotourism and diplomacy

Ioannis Pediotis  
*Consul General of Greece in Korçë*

We are gathered here today to initiate a collaboration milestone for the region. I also speak on behalf of Mr. Leonidas Rokanas, Ambassador of Greece in Tirana, who is not present today.

Apart from the city of Korçë and its surroundings, the wider region comprises the provinces of Pogradec, Devoll and Erseka, including the Albanian Lake Prespa. These areas are characterized by great natural beauty and immense cultural and historical value, untapped for many years. What is more important, however, is the friendly and welcoming attitude of the local residents, who welcome all visitors. The project we are discussing today tackles the restoration of these values and the development of their full potential, as promoted by Biotourism.

Certainly, a lot of action is required in the long run, but this is only the beginning. This project entails another dimension in terms of European cooperation, perhaps even more important than its direct objective. Both countries will cooperate in order to generate a mutual effect, to bring to light all positive effects of synergy, understanding and the productive results of good neighborly relations. These actions should be expanded and multiplied in order to strengthen the relations between the two countries. The Greek Embassy in Tirana and the Consulate of Greece in Korçë will continuously assist in this effort.

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to make a general observation: an increasing high level of synergy between the two countries has already been noted, which indisputably promotes the European future of Albania. In this context, I wish the long-term implementation of the project every success.
Biotourism and cross-border cooperation
as a valuable investment for future generations

Dashnor Dervishi
Ambassador of Albania to Greece

Allow me to express my great pleasure for being here today in this conference of particular importance in terms of bilateral and trans-boundary collaboration between our two countries.

I would like to congratulate the organizers and the Biopolitics International Organisation that brought together several environmental and tourism experts including the local authorities of both sides. It is an excellent opportunity to evaluate the extensive progress in the area and to highlight that partnerships between governments, community groups and the private sector have proven very useful in shaping the urban and rural landscape of tomorrow in an environmentally responsible manner.

In this context, let me underline the significant personal contribution of Professor Agni Vlavianos Arvanitis, not only in this conference, but in environmental issues and the development of specific national and regional policies. Her academic background and countless publications have been addressing issues like bio-policy and bio-diplomacy.

The project on Innovative Practices in Biotourism, funded by the European Territorial Cooperation Programme “Greece–Albania IPA Cross-Border Programme,” in the framework of which we have all gathered here today, expresses the needs of the local communities of Korçë in Albania and Prespa in Greece. The aim is to promote sustainable economic development with a view to further expanding the cooperation and coordination on common business initiatives.

I would like to take this opportunity to highlight the importance given to environmental issues by our government. Especially, the Albanian government has been collaborating with neighbor countries for optimum environmental management in order to tackle pollution. Environmental protection is a vital investment for future generations. The sustainable management of natural resources requires an integrated approach towards the cycles of natural resources, energy and waste within urban and rural areas. The objectives of such an approach have led to the preparation of a national legal framework respecting all international acts, European legislation and signed bilateral agreements.

The Albanian–Greek agreements for the protection and good management of trans-boundary ecosystems have created a solid base for cooperation and understand-
ing on all levels. In this context, I am referring to the bilateral agreement for trans-boundary water issues in the framework of which a Joint Commission for the protection and the sustainable use of the Vjosa River and Prespa Lake was set up. The Joint Commission is composed by experts of both countries in charge of sustainability and management of the areas around the Vjosa River and Prespa.

Another important trilateral act is the Agreement for the protection of the Prespa Lake signed by the Ministers of Environment of Albania, Greece and FYROM. The agreement created the necessary political and environmental dimensions in terms of sustainability between all levels of regional and local governments in order to achieve greater coherence in policy and action.

These remote areas away from the loaded urban transport and population density, in possession of clean air and green spaces represent an attractive and calming oasis for everyone. It is our personal and collective responsibility, in both regional and local administrative levels, to preserve and enrich the area by turning it to a tourism attraction. Tourism development will deliver direct benefits for these zones and their residents. In this context, all connections and interactions will lead to the creation of new bridges of cooperation between both sides of the borders as a concrete investment in the development of economy and tourism.

I have the pleasure to express my greetings and congratulations to a very honored personality, Dr. Panayotis Koliomihalis, who has prepared a cart postals exhibition dating back to the last century, which will open today as an excellent evidence of shared heritage based on the common cultural, traditional and historical values.

In conclusion, I would like to express my personal conviction for the intensification of collaboration between both countries as well as the further consolidation in all levels and areas in terms of regional and bilateral initiatives that will help in this direction.
Biotourism as a means to promote dynamic tourism in Prespa

Yannis Kazoglou  
Representative of the Mayor of Prespa  
Greece

Tourism in the Prespa region is an important economic activity to which many local entrepreneurs have turned in order to secure additional or exclusive revenues. Featuring a unique richness in stunning landscapes, historical monuments, biodiversity and human activities that benefit the local natural environment, Prespa attracts thousands of visitors all year round. But there is still a lot to be done. The local government, for the time being, is directly or indirectly involved in three Interreg projects for tourism development:

1. The Innovative Practices in Biotourism project, as presented at this conference.
2. The TOUR ACT Project which sets an action plan for the promotion of the Greece–Albania cross-border region as a competitive tourism destination.
3. The GREEN BOAT project, which for the first time in Greece supplied two solar boats for lake tours.

All three of these projects are in accordance with the essence of biotourism, promoting mild tourist activities and highlight daily local activities. Furthermore, with limited means at our disposal, we have organized large and small events to promote Prespa both nationwide and internationally. These events include:

1. The Prespeia cultural events, which, this year, also reached the Odeon of Herod Atticus in Athens.
2. Yearly international sporting events, such as fencing.
5. Culture and nature tours of the area.
6. Meetings in cooperation with the Albanian neighboring municipalities of Resen and Pustec, and many other stakeholders involved in cross-border programs.

Indeed, in cooperation with mayors from both Albania and FYROM, we plan further collaborative steps, always carefully measured because of the great restriction in funding.
The Municipality of Prespa has proceeded with the formation of a Commission for Tourism Development and Promotion, of which Ms. Gabriela Scheiner, Director of the Cultural Triangle of Prespa, is a member. This Commission is involved in the organization of significant local events, despite having limited resources and economic opportunities. In the future, we will try to enhance the action of this body and tourism in general through the Public Benefit Corporation of the Municipality of Prespa.

In closing, I would like to thank those who support the Municipality of Prespa in matters of tourism development. I am personally engaged in further enhancing the area and attracting more visitors for longer periods of time. In this effort, we will need more help, cooperation and patience.
Tourism, local values and goal setting

Gabriela Scheiner  
*Director, Cultural Triangle of Prespa*  
*Project Partner, Greece*

For the past four years, the Cultural Triangle of Prespa has been implementing several actions which contribute to tourism development in the wider area of Prespa (local, transboundary, regional level), such as projects for the establishment and support of the Ecotourism Society of Prespa and actions for the promotion of the area and the stimulation of entrepreneurship.

In the context of the Biotourism project, which focuses on multifaceted cooperation, we need to focus on the long-term actions of the project, notably the website of the program and its many benefits. However, many projects face the risk of becoming inactive after their completion, which is partly due to the cessation of funds. This compromises the future progress and the long-term impact of the project. Therefore, it is essential to ask: “Who can continue the project? Who can benefit from the project? Is it many or few?” These questions need to be answered at this conference.

Based on the above and knowing that the Prespa area is a small paradise on earth, both for the local residents and for Greece as a whole, we must ask ourselves whether the economic crisis has resulted in the problems we are facing, or whether we have been setting false objectives, expecting prosperity solely from the support of tourism.

At the same time, at this conference, we will deal with the concepts of biotourism and sustainable development, the importance of local actors, including local products, farming, catering, and fishing, the importance of horizontal cooperation among all relevant stakeholders (local government, business, institutions, organizations and the local community), as well as good practices, groups, goals and recommendations, and presentations. Before proceeding to address all this, though, I have one more question: “What do we really need to do? Do we need to create a pleasant backdrop for tourists or should we try to change our behavior and apply local traditional values to our modern lives?”
Environment, tourism and development

Yiannis Boutaris
Mayor of Thessaloniki
Greece

I will begin by explaining the reasons why I am here. I have known Professor Agni Vlavianos Arvanitis for many years and her work has helped me to broaden my horizons, especially after my contact with the Biopolitics International Organisation. Moreover, my family comes from Prespa, and I have participated in actions sponsored by the Arcturos Environmental Center and the Cultural Triangle of Prespa. I also take part in the work of the Society for the Protection of Prespa, thereby acknowledging and cultivating much potential in different perspectives.

In the field of tourism, my collaboration with Arcturos in the region of Nymphereon is also known. In particular, we are implementing programs promoting sustainable development and biotourism, while offering environmental education through various projects. Furthermore, we have recently inaugurated the park of Durres in Thessaloniki following a series of twinning actions with the city of Durres, aiming at strengthening bilateral relations between the two cities where cooperation will lead to increased growth.

Regarding diplomacy, cities need to see how they can contribute to the improvement of cross-border relations. Tri-state cooperation in the Prespa region can act as a means of conveying vital messages. Channels will open for citizens in order to implement future collaborative actions along with help from the state, which should promote the needs of citizens.

Local tourism infrastructure does not always have a specific local character and does not function in an appropriate manner. As a result, stakeholders do not reap the desired benefits. Local governments must initiate actions to preserve the natural landscape and restore infrastructure. The implementation of a new package of “overnight fees” – collecting money from the revenues of citizens engaged in tourism – can help to create a local tourism organization with new foundations for the progress of the tourism industry and the general perception of tourism activities in the Prespa region.
Comparative advantages, initiatives and cooperation

Efthimios Bakas  
*Economist, f. General Secretary of Lifelong Learning  
Greece*

Prespa and Korçë are in need of immediate development, though the lack of appropriate infrastructure due, but not limited, to economic difficulties makes this path not entirely easy. However, the key is that society and markets tackle development efforts separately.

Setting political issues aside and being aware of the prevailing conditions, a question of fact is the functionality of diplomacy to be applied. In an era of cooperation, when states continuously become empowered but fail, teamwork is required for a common response to the challenges present, be they political, social or economic. This teamwork acts against individual and collective development, so, in my opinion, an all-Balkan effort must be undertaken in this context.

Regarding economic and development factors, there is a need for society to detach itself from industry and seek development through its available strengths and resources (i.e., the environment). Such efforts need to be effective in order to stand up in the competitive market sector.

Apart from the macroeconomic perspective of development, we need to address the specific development potential of Prespa. Why development through tourism or biotourism? Because development can exist only if based on small units dealing with sectors of international interest. So Prespa, Korçë, Kastoria and Albania, can make the most out of their resources and play a key role in this effort by espousing the principles of biotourism.

A specialized development framework is required which aims to capitalize on the diverse resources of a region. In the case of Prespa, this development framework incorporates the lakes, nature tourism and other elements that can prove beneficial for the local economy.

In closing, I would like to focus on the substantial development and progress of Prespa and the broader cross-border region, which depends on current methods involving increased publicity and smart marketing techniques.
The value of a joint cross-border heritage

Dr. Panagiotis Koliomichalis  
*Director, ENT University Clinic, Hippokration General Hospital, Greece*

Following multiple visits to Albania, I witnessed, first hand, the friendship between our two countries, combined with a deep-founded spirit of hospitality.  

My great love is medicine, but I have a secret weakness for collections. Being a collector of postcards from the Balkans and Albania for years, I noticed that a piece of paper can demonstrate all the wealth of a region or an entire state. Thus, the exhibition presented here today, reveals the natural beauties of Prespa and Florina, while their cultural heritage is imprinted in the eyes and spirit of all those present.  

At the time when the borders between Florina and Korçë were open for commercial purposes, all residents took advantage of the free flow of goods and services in the context of pure cooperation. Influenced by the past, I dare to propose the idea of creating a Prespa ring-road, the creation and operation of customs offices and a ferry connection between various regions that will re-instate the smooth transportation of goods.  

I strongly believe that what was implemented many years ago may need to be reassessed today in order to increase development and tourism perspectives. Hoping for these wishes to become true, I congratulate the effective action of the Biopolitics International Organisation throughout this effort. Let us not forget that a good beginning is half the battle.
Biotourism and innovation in the Prespa and Korçë cross-border area

Helen Efraimiadou
Biopolitics International Organisation
Greece

The Biotourism project has become a model for the creation of a network of cross-border cooperation that aims to develop joint cross-border tourism packages of added value. Upgrading tourism quality in the intervention area through innovative practices in the sectors of culture and the environment is also one of the main objectives of the project which would not be implemented without the interactive participation of all cooperating parties.

The involvement of local authorities in high quality standards in tourism along with the effective management of local human and natural resources and values stemming from tradition, history and ethnic diversity are key factors developing and consolidating biotourism principles in this special and unique cross-border region.

The project resulted in innovative methods of development and promotion of the wider region of Korçë and the transboundary region of Prespa between Greece and Albania, bringing closer the two neighboring countries and establishing collaborative relationships that will bear fruit over time.

The main outcome of the project is the bilateral tourism platform/portal, which will highlight the comparative advantages of Korçë and Prespa. Moreover, online services and digital tools have been developed including the Greek and Albanian businesses around the border area. A common Biotourism product of added value has been set and it will be promoted and assigned to international tourism agencies Meanwhile, throughout the extent of the project, educational seminars and workshops took place featuring issues of tourism, the environment and ways in which young people can gain work experience through the exchange of expertise. Furthermore, local tourism exhibitions, conferences and other media events have been organized involving local authorities, private companies, municipalities and NGOs.

The Biotourism project can serve as a regional trademark in the future and pose value added features in prospect projects in the region creating more tourism packages, which will eventually increase competition, economic and social development both at cross-border and local levels.
Biotourism – new prospects for development in Prespa

Thodoris Sdroulias
Journalist, European Biological Cities Network
Greece

The local residents of Prespa, especially those involved in the agriculture, fishing, hotel and restaurant sectors, are the direct beneficiaries of biotourism, which can contribute significantly and substantially to improving local livelihoods in close cooperation with stakeholders in Albania and FYROM.

Biotourism promotes a bridge for communication and cooperation between human and natural habitats. In this context, farming and livestock production are key players. Organic and environmentally conscious agriculture is a way of life, a different proposal to meeting our everyday needs, and can simultaneously develop into a model separately defined for each consumer seeking a completely different approach. Organic production not only aims at revolutionizing the production sector, it also seeks to infuse a different dimension to what consuming and producing means, while, at the same time ensuring quality production.

A typical example of this aspiration is the European Network of Biological Cities, a network of local bodies striving to promote the concept of a “culture of biological cities.” In general, the purpose of this network is to:

- highlight any kind of local organic production
- integrate organic products in school and hospital meal plans
- inform citizens and consumers about the value of organic products. Every year, five exhibitions of local organic products are organized.

In the framework of its tourism promotion actions, the network also promotes an economic model based on good and reasonable utilization of resources by economic actions to support the rural population engaged in organic farming. Information on the promotion of organic products in all European markets and beyond is also part of this endeavor.

Regarding access to European Transnational Cooperation Programs, the goal is not only to create a European network, but also to develop a bridge of multi-level cooperation between all participating cities. Biological cities will assume a series of initiatives that will conform to the manifold development of cities and their residents. Agricultural production is viewed in the context of local food and local products, combined with the cultural aspects of each region, highlighting the region with an entirely different spirit.
A number of parameters are evaluated and utilized on a daily basis in close cooperation with many cities in Europe aiming to create a global network of cooperation within this field. Each municipality has the potential to be a member of the European Network, to take part in all its activities and enjoy all the advantages provided. The important element is that people become motivated to take action, because they are the only ones able to bring change. The Municipality of Prespa could become a leader in establishing a similar network within the framework of this Biotourism project.

The value of biotourism and bio-culture is immense. It has been expressed through this major conference in Prespa and by Prof. Agni Vlavianos Arvanitis who has put forward the concept of bio-culture as a best practice which encompasses multiple initiatives for the protection of our planet and represents what we can best refer to as “this land is our land.”
Local products and new dimensions for development

Nikos Stergiou
“Pelekanos” Prespa Agricultural Cooperative
Greece

The region of Prespa is blessed with many local agricultural products that can be successfully marketed thanks to modern production methods and to the cooperation of the local residents. This has resulted in better promotion as well as improvement of the products with the use of best farming practices and quality control mechanisms, such as the Integrated Quality Management System which is being implemented by the bean growers of Prespa since 2004.

Many local agricultural products are still under- or un-exploited, like mountain tea which has been grown for many years in the area of Sfika. New business models, vendors and market resources for the promotion of this tea are an immediate priority.

At the moment, efforts are underway for the development of other sectors like livestock rearing. While livestock quality is of immense value, the sector is suffering from years of lack of organization and infrastructure. The creation of mobile slaughterhouses and domestic cheese dairies has been proposed in order to serve the needs of local farmers and in order for quality products to reach consumers.

From our experience as an agricultural cooperative, we have reached the conclusion that teamwork can drive many actions to succeed. Undoubtedly, success is more difficult in cases of individual producers because of the high economic costs involved.

Prespa beans are a widely known local product which can also be viewed as a tourism asset. They are highly nutritious and stand out for their exceptional quality due to their place and method of production.

There is no precise information on exactly when the cultivation of the Prespa beans began. However, it is widely acknowledged that the “plaki” or “plake” beans were introduced in area in the 1920s and have been systematically cultivated in valleys and cool microclimates. Travel logs from the 1930s and 1940s attest that bean cropping in Prespa has been highly developed since then. Once an irrigation network was in place in 1967, cultivations were moved to Small Prespa lakeside areas.

The “Pelekanos” Prespa Agricultural Cooperative was created in order to promote Prespa beans, while, at the same time, operating in the fields of processing, standardization and marketing, for both domestic and foreign
markets. We have created a pilot program for the development and promotion of
traditional products like sweets, jams, trahana (rolled wheat), egg noodles and
other traditional products. Our goal, however, is not limited to the above; our
good is to try to merge agricultural farming with the trade of agricultural and
livestock products. For this purpose, we have participated many times in various
livestock events actively contributing to local development.

In 2009, the Prespa beans (megalosperma/plake and elephant beans) received
certification as a PGI (Protected Geographical Indication) traditional local
product. From 1994 to 2009, the Prespa beans had been labeled as products of
Protected Designation of Origin (PDO). Official labeling allows for greater
product protection from sellers of imported products of inferior quality, which
deceive both retailers and consumers. With the aid of relevant Ministerial
Decisions, the Prespa beans are formally acknowledged as products produced,
processed and packaged in the region of Prespa, Greece. Moreover, their
cultivation has joined the Integrated Management System following a system of
modern agricultural practices with respect to environmental standards, so as to
produce quality and safe products, both for the environment and for the
producers and consumers.

There is an urgent need for agricultural producers, in cooperation with partner
organizations, to exploit all available technological resources for the cultivation
of agricultural products in line with environmental standards and to improve their
economic status for their own benefit, as well as for the benefit of society as a
whole. This mentality change and the adoption of an environmental business
attitude is an essential and desired innovation. Therefore, we must fully apply
environmental standards to agricultural production and tourism, not only in order
to maximize profits, but, most important of all, in order to enhance product
identity.
Standards of living and tourism in Prespa

Sotiris Vosdou  
Civil Engineer  
Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece

The context of my speech includes two axes. The first relates to why someone may choose to live in a given place, while the second relates to why they may choose a certain place for recreation or tourism, respectively.

Today, there is a struggle to improve quality of life and not necessarily to merely survive. The continuous improvement of human life led to a revision in living standards and to the discovery of new benefits that improve quality of life. With time, demographic data began to gradually change. Water, food and safety had been replaced by medical care, civil protection and vocational rehabilitation.

Another issue of concern is the population decline in the region of Prespa. Notably, while in 1920 the population of Prespa numbered 9,032 inhabitants, in 2011 the population did not exceed 1,554. The time has come to think about the reason why.

In Prespa, agriculture and animal husbandry are the two main pillars of local employment, along with fishing. As for the sector that particularly concerns us today – tourism and mainly biotourism – relevant reports show that past efforts and actions were unsuccessful for various reasons. Affected by this and knowing that, in Prespa, only about 25 people are active in the tourism sector, we need to ask ourselves why visit the area, what the main attractions are, what the presupposed actions are, etc.

To improve tourism influx in Prespa, we need to improve the quality of life of the local residents, as they are the future of the region. It is also necessary to establish acceptable and easy to follow rules, along with team action and the involvement of other areas, such as Kastoria and Florina, in tourism development actions. Moreover, sound environmental data will create the necessary conditions to allow and promote tourism development, and more. Let us not forget that, for all of the above, a key priority is the correct assessment of organized conferences and the efficient implementation of goals set by them. We must see how we will move on to find the right path, and, above all, how to love Prespa.
Promotion and markets for biotourism in Prespa

Tasos Gousios

Founder, Alpha Marketing S.A.

Greece

Promoting Prespa as a tourism destination includes the following elements: consumer and market research; tourism destination promotion and destination directions; promotion to agents; promotion to the general public with the use of the media, the Internet and social networks; and promotion via opinion-formers.

Market research should systematically collect and evaluate information and trends in order to discover new opportunities for uncovering the full potential of biotourism. Relevant information should be collected by embassies and consulates, local authorities, professional tourism bodies, tourism businesses, the media, visits to exhibitions etc. Similarly, consumer research should focus on businesses, organized social groups, the participation in exhibitions and fairs, as well as presentations and events.

A key step for the promotion of a tourism destination is the identification of target markets and target groups, destination assets and relevant distribution channels. Regarding available promotional directions, key players include travel agents (including online services) and the public. Promotion to travel agents requires individual meetings and participation in B2B (Business to Business) events. Promotion to the public includes the best use of the media, online social networks and opinion-formers.

Evaluation plays a key role in the whole marketing process of a tourism product, and should be based on the promotion of new characteristics, different selection procedures and the targeting of new markets.
Travel agencies and quality tourism

Stefanos Chatzimanolis  
Vice President  
Travel Agencies Association of Northern Greece

Tour operators engage in the conversion of a tourism product into a commercial one. In addition, mass tourism should not be condemned as a term; instead we should all be its advocates as long as it is being implemented under quality tourism.

The tourism identity of each region is of particular importance to its development. The contribution of Silver Star Holidays to the strengthening and development of good relations between Greece and Albania lies in the value of the various tourism packages offered since 2004 (Byzantine Panorama, Albania). Immediate results depend on the approach and resources available to each country in support of such an endeavor.
Life, biotourism and balance

Dimitris Michailidis
Agricultural Journalist, Greece

Bios – life, the prefix of biotourism, implies balance, as opposed to imbalance which leads to the death of the host biosystem. Also, life and its regeneration presuppose long-term viability. Hybrid systems have limited viability and cannot support the propagation of life. A system can be successful only if all of its parts cooperate efficiently. Therefore, in order to ensure the preservation and continuation of life in Prespa, it is essential for all local stakeholders to cooperate in a balanced manner.
New models for tourism and economic development
The case of the Molyvos Tourism Association

Nikos Molvalis
President, Molyvos Tourism Association
Greece

Biotourism represents all the natural and cultural assets of a region, its biodiversity, geomythology, local architecture, rural and cultural heritage and local history. At the same time, biotourism promotes participation in the protection and enhancement of the environment, the productive assets and activities of a region (farming, production and packaging of local products, etc.), and the enjoyment of nature (lakes, mountains).

Thematic forms of tourism are complementary actions that compose the biotourism product, such as: complete experience of an area, contact with the local people and their activities, and active participation in such activities. In this context, promotional tools for biotourism differ from those of mass tourism marketing (i.e., the “monoculture” of the sun & sea model of the Mediterranean coast). These tools highlight the diversity of productive, cultural and social actions required to form a biotourism product.

Biotourism is an attitude towards life, synonymous with respect for the environment. It is offered as a holistic product and experience. The model developed by the Molyvos Tourism Association regarding tourism and economic development and successful cross-border cooperation in outbound and inbound tourism on the island of Lesvos, can be a powerful tool for development in the Prespa–Korçë cross-border area. The objectives and actions of the Molyvos Tourism Association offer a comprehensive social experience and make up the biotourism product of Molyvos and the island of Lesvos.

The Molyvos Tourism Association is a non-profit corporation comprised of professionals in the tourism sector, but also of residents from Molyvos and the greater area. At a time when tourism is changing internationally, when all tour-
ism stakeholders seek new alternatives and tourists become discoverers, the Molyvos Tourism Association aims to highlight unique opportunities in tourism and environmental and cultural resources, in order to give a boost to the local economy and to provide a variety of quality services in a friendly atmosphere.

The Culture Group undertakes and establishes new cultural institutions, such as the Arion Summer Guitar Academy, organizes events (Aegean Regatta 2013), inaugurates festivals (“Rhythm & Movement” Festival), exhibitions (Gallery Art of Mithymna, TRYFON Cultural Center, etc.) and workshops (Workshop on τηε Lesvos Geopark by UNESCO), and promotes local folklore and tradition in cooperation with local associations and many more.

The Environment Group organizes and holds several events and initiatives in environmental action. These include the clearing, improvement and labeling of hiking and cycling routes, clean-up actions and campaigns (Let’s do it Greece, Cleaning our Neighborhood), tree planting, and meetings with various environmental organizations.

The Implementation Group undertakes and implements European programs aiming to support the work of the Association.

The Intervention Group monitors and intervenes in major infrastructure projects directly related to tourism and to the economic and cultural development of the region (museums, road infrastructure, etc.).

Finally, the Promotion Group organizes the advertising campaigns used by the Association (website creation, application forms, promotional material, social media, etc).

An important development in the course of the Association has been to study the strategic positioning of the region. The study included a comprehensive
Case of the Molyvos Tourism Association

marketing plan, a strategic branding for Molyvos and the island of Lesvos, and a detailed analysis of alternative markets (rural tourism, agrotourism, wellness tourism, nature tourism, gastronomy, etc.). At present, we are implementing this new strategy across the whole application spectrum. The new identity “The Other Aegean,” the new logo and vertical branding appear in all the products used by the Association for promotional reasons (new website www.theotheraegean.com, participation forms for international tourism fairs, social media development).

One of the characteristics of the local community of Molyvos is its timeless collective consciousness. This collective consciousness always emerges in times of crisis and generates new growth conditions, new social structures and new economic dynamics for the future of Molyvos and its people. The launch of the Molyvos Tourism Association has been one such moment, especially under the current national circumstances. Tourism professionals and the citizens of Molyvos, who participate in this creative effort, hope to do what is required for the future of our island; what makes Molyvos and Lesvos a unique destination.

So far, the success of the Molyvos Tourism Association is due to civil society involvement. A serious approach to the development of a tourism destination like Prespa requires, above all, active stakeholder involvement in all spectra (professionals, citizens, cooperatives, associations, etc.) with the local community being the main project partner. Furthermore, a comprehensive study for the positioning of the area in the tourism market will serve as a foundation and critical direction for the wider economic development of the region.
Nature and human emotions
Prespa as an exemplary biotope

Panayiotis Valatidis
Local Resident, Prespa, Greece

Prespa captivates and triggers human sensations turning them into feelings and emotions. Then, like a magic potion, it provides many opportunities for collective and individual action of selflessness and altruism. At the point where actions meet emotion, the joy of bios emerges in Prespa. This is the Prespa I will describe to you, my Prespa, an exemplary biotope.

A simulation of life in the Garden of Eden, where time, place and man create a triune entity. The three pillars of bios – space, time and living beings including man – contribute to shaping, adapting, and enhancing the conditions of bios, which man constantly tries to reshape to his needs. This is the triptych that one must analyze and study, but also feel when choosing where to reside and where to turn one’s dream for a happy bios into a reality. Of course, one is also obligated to watch over one’s place of abode. Nevertheless, man being in a hurry and seeking immediate gratification, has adopted a short-sighted approach; he attacks his own home, trying to change it, reshape it, usurp it, and above all, exploit it. Then, nature takes revenge in order to restore harmony. The grandiose biblical landscape, the unique natural heritage and the love of the people for their land keep the Prespa valley alive, flooding the senses and creating feelings of individual and collective acts of selflessness.

Prespa, an exemplary biotope
a simulation of the Garden of Eden where
time, place, living beings and man
harmoniously cooperate
in a timeless model
enjoying a safe and happy life
the grand biblical landscape
proportions of natural elements
the love of the people for their land
keep the valley alive
flood the senses
generate feelings and acts of selflessness,
individual and collective solidarity
Protecting the natural, cultural and traditional values of Korçë – the status of tourism in the Korçë region

Entela Pinguli
Director, Biologists of Albania
Project Partner

The purpose of the current Biotourism conference is to promote the comparative advantages of the area by focusing on the promotion of Biotourism as an alternative for economic development in the Korçë region. It is also to further support the cooperation between Greece and Albania on common marketing initiatives in the cross-border region of Korçë and Prespa.

The Korçë region represents an area of extreme interests regarding cultural and biological values. The variety of habitats and their natural beauty ensure the necessary environment for a large number of species, known as biodiversity. The main tourism directions in the Korçë region are: natural, cultural and traditional and they are based on the combination of economic activities, infrastructure, services and elements of the natural environment.

The selected project area in the Korçë region includes the town of Korçë and the following four communes: Voskopoja, Vithkuqi, Liqenasi and Drenova. Such selection was based in the situation of the above areas regarding: natural tourism, cultural wealth and gastronomic traditions.

Local interest groups identified from the project include: the local authorities, small businesses involved in tourism, farmers, NGOs and local tour operators. The results of a research study carried out in the project area show that:

- The working directions of the Biotourism network of the Korçë region are: natural tourism; cultural/religious tourism; social/traditional/culinary tourism and a combination of the above.
- In the Korçë region, different forms of tourism have been spontaneously developed, based on the use of: the natural resources of the area, natural wealth such as mountains, forests and lakes, and local food products. Tourists are supplied with products prepared by local farmers where the tourist business is located. These products are being used fresh by the application of the ‘kilometer 0’ concept. It must be mentioned that the above services are not provided in the framework of Biotourism packages.
- Cultural tourism has not been properly developed in the Korçë region despite the fact that it offers several opportunities for such development capitalizing on the large cultural and religious heritage stemming from the 13th century.
Despite the opportunities provided both in natural and natural products and biodiversity terms, there are hindrances in properly exploiting them. These obstacles include policies, promotion, road infrastructure, tourist infrastructure, and lack of social networking.

The project has concluded that the Korçë region has the necessary potential to develop a Biotourism model providing an alternative form of tourism much more modern and contemporary. This attempt of Biotourism development could be supported through:

- Enrichment of tourist products through the development of supporting structures, specialized tourist infrastructures, “soft” forms of tourism alternatives, as well as through the modernization of tourism business units.
- The use of innovative facilities which would influence the enhancement of energy and environmental performance.

To combine local tradition and the beauty of natural and cultural wealth, the project proposed a 3-day tourism package throughout the Korçë district and the surrounding communes. The characteristics of this package include:

- Management from a professional operator to increase chances of success.
- Services guaranteed according to European standards.
- Regional standards must be included in this package after having been redesigned to meet some basic requirements (e.g. improvement of conditions for waste management).
- The package must be coordinated with the promotion of activities from local businesses, which provide and trade natural/traditional products.
- Visits to local businesses according to season. In order to achieve this, the interested businesses must ensure the necessary supporting infrastructure for promotion and trade of their products close to their businesses.
- The package must be also combined with the promotion of natural, cultural and social elements and with the organization of social and cultural activities which promote the values and heritage of the area.

Other suggestions for Biotourism potential in the Korçë region include the improvement of road networks and labeling, the improvement of hotel services according to European standards, the implementation of tourist info-points, the organization of studies and training visits at local businesses, and closer cooperation of local governments with civil society and the relevant bodies of the central government.

The project presented posters and one brochure promoting the natural, cultural and traditional values of Korçë. It has also paid great attention to assistance mechanisms for the creation of a Biotourism Network in the Korçë region and
Status of tourism in Korçë – natural, cultural traditional values

The project announced the vision of such a network and also presented some mechanisms which contributed to its creation. The Biotourism network is presented at the present Conference as a voluntary network, based on a memorandum of cooperation, sharing a common objective and vision.

Notably, the Biotourism network aims to best use all natural, cultural and religious wealth of the region based on the experiences and traditions of this area, aiming at the development of tourism that respects the environment, protects its values and enables tourists to have incomparable experiences.

The vision of the Biotourism network, as stated in the memorandum of cooperation upon which the network is based, is: “Towards nature tourism through quality and culture which combine the cultural heritage and social values of the area.” In this context, it is important to note that the Biotourism network functions on a voluntary basis, will be managed by a local tour operator and will embody coordination between the local government, businesses, farmers, local NGOs and tour operators in the Korçë region. The network shall participate actively in the implementation of a 3-day tourism package. In support of the above network, the project presented some of its results at the Korçë conference in the form of a technical manual on a “Strategy for the Development of Biotourism in the Korçë Region,” and a Memorandum of Cooperation between local actors interested in Biotourism in the Korçë region.

Status of tourism in the Korçë Region

Millennia of history and culture have created an attractive and interesting region to be visited and discovered. Since 1280 Korçë was referred to as a castle, while there are documents from 1431 that in fact refer to an inhabited castle. After 1484 Korçë started to expand and develop as an urban and regional center. The town has been part of cultural and commercial exchanges with the Byzantine Empire and of the Greek civilization. The area has been populated since ancient times; the Neolithic remnants indicate local populations from 6000 years ago. Besides its archaeological findings, Korçë is also known in the Balkans for the prospects offered by nature, especially within neighbouring areas, thus, making it a great attraction for hikers, nature lovers, botanists and zoologists.

In the western side of Korçë lies Voskopoja, an extremely attractive spot for tourists, as it gives shelter to many churches and byzantine monasteries. Within Mborja village (some 3 km away from Korçë), there is one of the most ancient churches of the country, which dates back to 1390 and was built on the ruins of an older church (IV century). Two other neighbouring areas, Kamenica and Barçi, have several archaeological findings including “tumulus” - hill tombs - from the Bronze Era. Other villages, such as Boboshtica, offer local food recipes different varieties of grapes and other fruits used for raki and wine distillation - raki produced by mulberry fruits, is a fine example. Recently, Korçë has been developed as a weekend tourist destination. Interesting cultural-artistic events
along with various local celebrations aiming to revive Korçë’s old traditions, fairs, taverns with live traditional music, etc, have strengthened the general conviction for a pleasant weekend in Korçë.

Furthermore, both quantity and quality of accommodation capacities in Korçë have drastically improved over the recent years. Travel and tourist agencies are already active and currently cover a variety of offers and packages for visitors and tourists. Natural, cultural and traditional tourism is a form of tourism based on the combination of economic activities, infrastructure, services and elements of natural environment. This type of tourism represents the initial stage of Biotourism as a sustainable ecological form based on the exploration of natural areas by experiencing, evaluating and help protecting natural wild life, biodiversity as well as the cultural wealth of the region.

Up to now, there are no registered data about biotourism development rates either in Albania or in the region of Korçë. On the other hand, it is certain that there are high development potentials regarding natural, cultural and traditional tourism. Interviews conducted involved representatives of different local authorities, small tourism businesses, farmers, non-profit organizations and local tourist operators. The results indicate that, in the Korçë region, a new kind of tourism has been developing which incorporates all local natural resources; not only natural spots (mountains, forests and lakes), but also local food products. As a result, tourists are served with locally produced and cooked on the spot dishes (“0 Kilometer” concept). This kind of ‘service’ though not offered as a part of a Biotourism package yet, it will be integrated in the development of the common Biotourism product. Another form of tourism not adequately developed in Albania is cultural tourism including religious tourism, even though Korçë has great religious monuments dating back to the 13th century.

Needs analysis of Biotourism stakeholders in the Korçë Region

The need analysis carried out in the frame of the implementation of this project has highlighted and identified all tools and assets needed for the development of Biotourism in Korçë. The Biotourism project ranked all these strengths and opportunities in order to enable all interested parties not only to benefit from their optimum use, but also to promote and self-develop either in networks or independently. These assets represent a powerful instrument for the development of Biotourism strategies. The training event which took place in Korçë on September 20, 2013, concluded in a primary SWOT analysis involving the opinions, attitudes, thoughts and practices of participating stakeholders. Some strong points identified by the participants included:

- Natural wealth
- Cultural heritage
- Gastronomic traditions
Working patterns of region’s inhabitants
Tradition of celebrations
Geographical location

The group diligently discussed each one of the points and analyzed them for the benefit of the Biotourism network.

The initial means serving Biotourism development in the Korçë Region is the rich and colorful natural wealth of the area. The climate of the area is another valuable asset which must be recognized and used by all involved in development and economic activities. On the other hand Biotourism requires environmental-friendly principles when it comes to the exploitation of natural wealth. The most prominent natural assets of Korçë are:

- The snow which is present during 5 months of the year
- The fresh summer
- The variety of microclimates as a direct consequence of the co-existence of fields, forests and mountains. Microclimates are important not in tourism development terms, but also in terms of it of differentiated agricultural and livestock production. Extended agricultural production throughout the year with many natural products constitutes another asset and tool for Biotourism development.
- Korçë Region has high quality potable water available throughout the year. The more the quality of water is respected along with the distribution system, the bigger and long-term shall be the opportunities of biotourism development in the region.

A great asset of the region is its cultural heritage involving the organization of cultural events, picnics, theaters, concerts, cinemas, balls, serenades, etc. Yet the area’s religious heritage is also dominant involving a variety of churches spread all over the region bearing artistic and historical values. Archeological sites (Maliq lowlands) and historical sites (six museums including the first Albanian School) are also a unique cultural advantage. Yet, the well preserved architectural features make Korçë an exceptional town compared to other cities in Albania. All the above represent important assets regarding the development of tourism in general and of Biotourism in particular within the area. The Biotourism network in Korçë must best utilize all the above by including them in tourist packages, daily or weekly travel itineraries, while they should also take initiatives for the voluntary collection of funds destined to renovate and maintain such values.

Other important cultural and traditional assets are characteristic food products of local inhabitants. Korçë and its population have preserved their gastronomic traditions, tastes, customs and preparation of local recipes. Local recipes include a special pie, smoked meats, pickles, dried fish, trahana (rolled whet) plus other
local sweets and cakes mostly prepared with local ingredients, cultivated and prepared in natural manner. Such culinary traditions must be part of activities developed within the biotourism network and in the tourist packages provided by it. Also, culinary traditions can be promoted and supported in order to enhance local farming activities and local businessmen. In this context, a targeted promotion of local products like potatoes, onions, apples, plums, pepper, cabbage and leek, etc is essential. All the above products are typical of the area, with a peculiar taste still well preserved despite the introduction of imported seeds.

Another important asset to be considered as a tool for Biotourism development in the Korçë region, is the very temperament of local inhabitants as hard workers and committed people. They are also distinguished as good hosts and hygiene caring people which could serve as support to the development of Biotourism strategy in the region. In the town of Korçë there is a civil tradition which could be promoted and extended further: every morning the residents clean up the alleys around their gates; such tradition influences greatly the hygiene and beauty of the town. This tradition must be cultivated as a specific touristic feature of the city and promoted as an important value and tourist attraction for those who wish to explore the peculiarities of a given country. Sanitation and nature together constitute another successful tool for Biotourism development.

The Korçë region also features sport activities like skiing, hiking, football, volleyball, basketball, etc. Beside this practice the Korçë Region has quite an experience in managing several celebrations which are officially a part of the website of Korçë Municipality. The most renowned are the carnival (June), Pie Fest (July), Beer Fest (August), Apple Fest (October). Apart from town celebrations, Korçë also organizes several religious ones like the Feast of Saint Mary (Drenovë, Boboshticë), Feast of Saint Prodhomi and Saint Nicola (Voskopojë). These celebrations are part of consolidated traditions often promoted also outside the region, and, therefore, they must be used by the Biotourism network for the development of the sector fully respecting the natural environment.

Another factor worthy of mentioning is the large turnout of local citizens in many kinds of celebrations organized by local authorities. Usually these events are also accompanied by fairs of local products and act as a juncture to promote local traditions and costumes (the main events are the fair of typical products by the end of the year and the fair of pottery products organized in spring). These elements must become part of tourist packages itineraries; on the other hand the Biotourism network should promote them in order to increase tourists’ curiosity, their will to feel closer to nature and its wealth and get involved in relevant activities echoing the sound of the local culture and the social formation of the area.

Korçë is situated in a border area close to border crossing points with Greece and FYROM. Geographical location represents another tool to develop biotourism strategies, but also activities in the frame of the biotourism network.
The favorable geographical location if accompanied by better promotion techniques of natural, cultural and social wealth, will constitute the basis for the future development of Biotourism. The SWOT analysis mentioned has identified several weaknesses, including:

- Local infrastructure
- Lack of financing
- Forest mismanagement
- Poor management of national parks
- Lack of coordination among stakeholders
- Lack of promotion of local products
- “Bio” certification

Admittedly, Biotourism in Albania is not being applied according to International and European standards. Despite the wealth of values mentioned above, there are other aspects which would enable stakeholders to be cautious on addressing them during their future activities. From the responses of the project’s stakeholders and communities interested in Biotourism development in the region, it seems that important challenges will rise in the near future. These challenges can be met through the commitment of all parties involved and their participation in problem-solving. Communities can cope with the problems by using internal resources and financial support of the interested private sector and not always by expecting state funding. In this framework, an effective Biotourism network must influence investments, which are not always well targeted, find the right direction by respecting the development priorities of the region including nature and the environment. Local infrastructure needs improvements while measures must be taken to utilize local funds for their refurbishment; yet the network must raise awareness within the community regarding its continuous safeguarding. Furthermore, people’s mentality does not always facilitate the required changes; in such context face-to-face meetings with the community where best practices are promoted, could be an effective tool to accelerate development rather than await solutions from outside.

One of the most fundamental problems that Biotourism tackles is also the reckless management of forestry regarding cuttings and fires. This phenomenon must be stopped through raising community awareness about nature protection and biotourism development. Community must recognize that despite the temporary benefits of few individuals losing natural values is just the start of an irreversible economic devastation.

The national parks of the region constitute another valuable asset and a tool for biotourism development, but their mis-management remains a problem opposed to the biotourism development vision in Albania; therefore the biotourism network must try to influence local authorities and relevant departments responsible for the management of these parks through lobbying.
As mentioned earlier, cultural monuments represent another important vehicle for the development of an integrated natural and cultural tourism; now the preparation of a strategy for the protection of these monuments often abandoned or not functioning has become absolutely imperative for the Korçë Region. It is the responsibility of the Biotourism network to plan and coordinate the necessary steps both with local and central government, in order to best define the technique of concrete protection activities and the transformation of the monuments into functional centres of culture, tradition and history of national pride.

One of the problems to be solved is the labeling and establishment of those products placed in the market as “bio”. The Biotourism network must be very active in promoting the certification of local products (a good example to be followed is the Voskopoja potato). Product certification would help to increase the trust on local products and would clarify the real meaning of “bio” products which is often misused.

The strategy of the bio-network must consist also in undertaking initiatives which motivate both the authorities and the stakeholders to develop the full potential of the Korçë region. The findings of the project’s research indicate that bio-products are diminishing, there is a trend of not using local seeds, there is no state control of market products, there is no coordination between farmers and manufacturers and markets, farmers tend to focus on immediate profit and forget about tradition (research interviews demonstrate that there is a trend towards intensive agriculture and globalization and state is not subsidizing or supporting agriculture of traditional handcrafts). All the above problematic identified by this project urges for immediate measures and actions. In order to eliminate the negative aspects of region’s development, it is recommended that the strategy of Biotourism development should include: awareness raising activities, strengthening of control/pressure concerning state effective policies and law enforcement, cooperation among stakeholders (businessmen, local authorities, tourist operators, farmers, retailers, civil society, NGOs), exchange of best practices and information, promotional campaigns on Biotourism and its benefits, increase of product credibility through the certification of “bio” products of the area. The combination of geographical location and tradition, culture, nature and hard work, must be seen as the pillars of biotourism development as envisaged by the Biotourism network created by this project.

**Directions of biotourism development in the Korçë region**

The Biotourism Project analyzed both values and challenges within the Korçë Region, and concluded that the area has a specific interest regarding its traditional, natural and cultural aspects. Biotourism development will include the natural environment, cultural heritage (religion and history), social values (local traditions, culinary wealth), and a combination of all of the above. For the purpose of this project the area included: Korçë District and four other communes,
namely Voskopoja, Vithkuq, Liqenas and Drenova. Such selection was made based on the characteristics and advantages of the above areas in terms of natural tourism, cultural heritage and gastronomic traditions, where the kitchen products are local and the concept of kilometer “0”. The intact natural beauty of Korçë region territory indicates the proper environment for the existence of a rich variety of biodiversity.

The project concluded in local natural beauties and rich culture assets of Korçë Region, assumes particular values also because of the fact that the local population not only respects local traditions and customs starting from the welcoming of guests, but they would also do their best to comply with specific requests of tourists both national or international. Local traditions are connected with the existence and protection of local products (such as milk, cheese, butter, fruits and vegetables depending on the season). These are products originating from the local farmers of the area where business are located.

However, the project also acknowledged that opportunities to enjoy the benefits of the wild life and natural products are low since as road and tourism infrastructure remains poor when compared to international standards.
Cultural heritage and Biotourism development in the Korçë region

Kliti Kallamata
Architect, Director of the Past for Future Foundation
Albania

One of the distinctive features of modern man is the desire to explore the values of nature and the environment, where the values of the past are elements of great consideration. This desire for exploration and the attempt to preserve the purity of nature and its values has created a product called Biotourism. Cultural assets that man has created with his activities throughout history (construction, spiritual, artistic and recreational) which naturally has added to his environment are unified with it and are an integral part of Biotourism. Korçë is a region with significant potentials in terms of cultural heritage. These values generate advantages for the development of nature and cultural tourism according to international standards. However, achieving these standards is a challenge which consists in shifting to a higher level of quality when it comes to the presentation of historical and cultural values within the region. Consequently, the mere possession of values is not enough values; they should be preserved, conserved and presented according to European standards. The means to achieve it is presented in this paper through a specific case. First, it is important to highlight some of the most prominent values of cultural heritage in the region of Korçë.

Church of the Birth of the Virgin in Maligrad Island, Lake Prespa

The church dedicated to the Birth of the Virgin is one of the most valuable monuments of the region. It is built in a large cavity rock in the island of Maligrad. The earliest paintings date back to 1345. Around 1369, the nobleman Cesar Novak made several reconstructions during the time of the Archbishopric Justiniana Prima. The church is famous due to a large painting located in the main facade depicting Cesar Novak, his wife, Kalia, and his two children, Mary and Amiral. The latter is considered to be the donor of the reconstruction activities conducted in the church of Christ Zoodotes (life giver) in Mborie.

Church of St. Demetrios, Boboshtica

St. Demetrios Church is located in Boboshtica, a village 6 km south of Korçë. This monument of the Byzantine period was built in 14th century and has some
repairs carried out during the 15th and 16th centuries. It has several hands of paintings dating from 14th to 16th century attributed to the same local school closely related to the churches of Mboria, Maligrad and several churches in Kastoria, Greece.

Church of Christ the Life-Giver (Christ Zoodotes), Mboria

The Church of Christ that Gives Life (Zoodotes), or Ristozi as locally called is a key monument of the Byzantine era. It was reconstructed in 1389. The church features high quality frescos of the 14th and 16th centuries linked to an active local artistic school of this period.

Church of St. John, Boboshtica

The Church of St John in Boboshtica dates back to the 14th century and it has been during the 15th century. It possesses high quality paintings of the Byzantine and Post-Byzantine period.

Basilica of the Dormition of the Virgin Mary, Voskopoja

It was built in the late 17th century and it was decorated in 1712 with frescoes made by the painters Theodore, Anagnost and Sterian from Agra. The Basilica, Dormition of the Virgin Mary has been the Cathedral church of Voskopoja.

Basilica of St. Nicholas, Voskopoja

Voskopoja and Vithkuq are the two main areas with the largest concentration of monuments of the post-Byzantine period due to their astonishing development during the 18th century. The Basilica of St. Nicholas in Voskopoja is one of the most valuable ecclesiastic monuments not only for its architecture but also for the mural painting. It was built in 1722 and was decorated with frescoes in 1726 by one of the best painters of the 18th century, David from Selenica, considered to be the successor of one of the most eminent Byzantine art painters of the 13th century, Emmanuel
Panselinos. He is regarded as one of the most prominent figures of Albanian post-Byzantine icon painting. David from Selenica was accompanied by two other painters, Constantine and Kristo. Portico paintings of the legendary Apocalypse scenes were created in 1750 by two painters, the brothers Constantine and Athanas from Korçë. The complex is well preserved and includes the central nave, the narthex, the portico with an arcade, and the bell-tower.

Basilica of the Archangels St. Michael and St. Gabriel, Voskopoja

The Basilica of the Archangels St. Michael and St. Gabriel in Voskopoja (known just as St. Michael for short) was built in the late 17th century and painted in 1726 by a painter who has remained anonymous.

Basilica of St. Athanasius, Voskopoja

The Basilica of St. Athanasius in Voskopoja was built in 1724 and was decorated with paintings in 1744–1745 by the brothers Constantine and Athanas from Korçë.

Monastery of St. John the Forerunner (Prodhromos), Voskopoja

The Monastery of St. John the Forerunner (Prodhromos) is located about 1.5 kilometers north of Voskopoja and dates back to the 14th century. The main monastery church, the katholikon, was built in 1634 in the prototype of the monasteries of Mt. Athos (three-conch and a dome) and painted in 1659. The structure of the monastery and its interior paintings were seriously damaged by the Nazi bombing during World War II.

Monastery of the Apostles Peter and Paul, Vithkuq

The church dedicated to the Apostles Peter and Paul began to be built in 1710, but ended in 1759. It was painted in 1764 by Constantine and Athanas from Korçë. A cemetery chapel dedicated to the Saints Kosma and Damian was built
nearby the church in 1736 and was decorated with frescoes in 1750 from the same brothers. The iconostasis was decorated in 1748 by the painter Constantine from Shpat. Unfortunately the cells of the monks collapsed during the Nazi bombing in World War II. However, the main church and the cemetery chapel still existing today constitute a unique example of monastic architecture in the Balkans.

The Church of St. George in Shipcka is a three-aisled basilica, roofed by a complex of arches, vaults and domes. It dates back to the end of 17th or the beginning of 18th century. It is situated in a flawless natural environment being part of an impressive landscape. The village of Shipcka, hosting about eight thousand inhabitants in the 17th century, was gradually abandoned and left with around 5-6 families and lots of ruins. The condition of the church was becoming worse from year to year, when during the winter of 2002, the main narthex vault collapsed, threatening the entire monument.

Fortunately, a Greek from Metsovo, named Ioannis Averoff, admired this church and decided to safeguard it. Restoration works began in June 2004 and were completed in September 2008. After an intensive and highly scientific conservation work the monument regained its values and became a strong attractive
point for locals and tourists. The project went further on involving the restoration of a ruined barn at the entrance of the monument – turned afterwards into a cafeteria for visitors – the construction of a parking place in front of the cafeteria, the construction of a photographic exhibition inside the church with records of all restoration works and the printing of leaflets regarding the monument.

The whole restoration project and the new visitor facilities had immediate positive results, first for local residents in emigration terms, which began to feel proud of their village church. They started to come back, recuperating their houses and thinking of a permanent return to their homeland.

European cultural heritage bodies had the opportunity to assess all the steps of this project appropriately praising the conservation project and acknowledging it as one of the best in Europe for 2011. Up to now, the Church of St. George in Shipcak is the only monument in Albania which has won three of the highest awards in the field of cultural heritage protection provided by the European Union and Europa Nostra:

- EU / Europa Nostra Award 2011
- EU / Europa Nostra – Members Award 2011
- The Best in Heritage 2012

The Church of St. George in Shipcak is now featured not only in the agendas and itineraries of all travel agencies in Albania, but also in the European Map of Cultural Heritage. Dozens of foreigners from all over Europe visit the monument every day. At the same time, they are show great interest towards the nature of the village while demands for local products are increasing. Many of the residents have returned to the production of traditional food goods, beverages, textiles, etc. already preferred by tourists. What is more, this is an example of how a historical monument after genuine professional care can gain attractive attributes and directly contribute in the development of bio-tourism within the wider area.
Building pathways for tourism cooperation through handicrafts

Arian Gjura
Albania

The philosophy of collaboration promotes tourism development through the creation of a network system that clearly distinguishes cooperation from competition. Progress in tourism activities presupposes communication with a broader market and a richer tourism supply. Indicatively, Guri i Zi and Podgorica are the nodes in this kind of network characterized by souvenirs production and significant market sales.

The economies in both Albania and Montenegro are tourism oriented, and aim to enhance tourism development through a network system and through communication with a broader market and richer tourism supply.

The IPA Cross-border Programme Albania–Montenegro has been running for 15 months aiming to develop and revitalize the handicraft fabric production, improve the life of communities and accumulate knowledge by implementing European procedures.

The first result of the project has been the establishment of an ethnographic museum for tourists (commune of Guri i Zi). The second result was the organization of a big fair in Shkoder and the exhibition of local products at the open sky event in Podgorice. The project established a brand name for handmade fabrics and clothes.

The participation of local communities has been vital for the implementation of the project. The production process included the selection of raw materials, weaving and knitting, while developing products ranging from curtains, table clothes, bed covers and sheets, scarves, hand bags, dresses and shirts to kitchen clothes, bathroom accessories and carpets. All in all, the project can act as an example of implemented cross-border synergy and effectiveness.
Lake Ohrid and its watershed were formed 2-3 million years ago during the Tertiary period. Because of the age of the lake and the fact that it is isolated by the surrounding hills and mountains, the evolution of a unique collection of plants and animals can scientifically be demonstrated. Notably, 10 out of the 17 identified fish species of Lake Ohrid are endemic. The lakeshore reed beds and wetlands provide critical habitat for hundreds of thousands of wintering water birds. Lake Ohrid has 87.5km of shoreline, 7km of which are sandy shores (on the Albanian side), mostly preferred for recreation. However, all human activities, including settlements, tourism, agriculture, forests and fisheries increase environmental pressure on Lake Ohrid.

Transboundary cooperation in the Lake Ohrid Basin was first institutionalized in 1956 with the establishment of the Joint Water Management Committee (WMC). The Committee aimed at developing the basis for the joint management and protection of the Lake, promoting cost-effective solutions to transboundary natural resources management and pollution problems and providing the basis for the sustainable economic development of the watershed, especially through alternative tourism.

Among the main elements of Ohrid transboundary cooperation is the institutional strengthening focused on increasing the capacity of public officials, at all levels, within the Lake Ohrid watershed. Equally vital is the monitoring component focused on establishing a comprehensive bi-national monitoring program (Albania – FYROM) to inform the public and local officials about the condition of the Lake. Furthermore, the participatory watershed management component, aimed to mobilize groups within the watershed in order to create a strategic action plan, while the public awareness and participation component aimed to create public awareness and increase community participation.

The WMC conducted eight pilot projects and two special public awareness activities. The total expenditures were approximately US$187,000. One of them is a joint project for Tourism and rural development in the Lake Ohrid watershed aiming to diversify the economic development based on tourism opportunities as well as to increase cross-border cooperation (Pogradec, Ohrid Struga, Resen and Pustec). The goal of the project was to introduce new forms of activities promot-
Examples from Lake Ohrid as a biosphere reserve

...ing tourism in a socio-cultural and environmental context and taking into consideration the protection of regional values. The project featured the creation of public/private partnerships as mechanisms of self-employment which would stop emigration and stimulate public awareness concerning regional values. Furthermore, the project:

- identified and developed local tourism products
- developed capacities for tourism
- promoted the tourism potential of the region
- improved tourism infrastructure
- exchanged best practices
- presented five separate tourism products
- offered training and tourism capacity building to relevant stakeholders
- promoted the exchange of visits encouraging local tourism

Two joint fairs with local products were organized, while two video-clips were issued on the local media of both countries aiming to promote the region as a tourist destination and new tourism forms as an economic alternative. The protection of the Ohrid watershed was institutionalized in 2004 under the New Bilateral Agreement on the Protection and Sustainable Development of Lake Ohrid and its Watershed. Its objectives were

- the protection as well as the sustainable development of Lake Ohrid and its watershed, according to the European Union standards
- to attribute the status of World Cultural and Natural Heritage and the status of “Biosphere Reserve” of UNESCO to Lake Ohrid and its watershed; and
- to prepare the conditions for the approval of the Council of Europe’s proposal to designate the Prespa–Ohrid lake areas as one of the Euro-regions in Southeastern Europe

The question remains in identifying the advantages of a transboundary biosphere reserve in terms of local tourism development. Biosphere Reserves are areas established to promote and demonstrate a balanced relationship between humans and the biosphere. From their institutionalization local population can benefit in economic terms, while protected biospheres lay the platform for cooperation and provide stimulation for commitment between stakeholders.
Tourism and local community collaboration in the Korçë region – DMO perspectives

Orjeta Gliozheni
Destination Management Organization (DMO)
Albania

As far as the nature of community tourism destinations is concerned, we should keep in mind that destination assets and resources can be shared by its inhabitants, visitors, public, and private sector interests. Its benefits may be shared by the numerous local stakeholders, while local authorities have the delicate task of juggling private sector interests with local resident needs in order to maintain the economic health of the community and ensure that development is sustainable.

A destination community has to ensure the presence of a requisite mass of attractions, suitable accommodation, and adequate transportation to be able to satisfy tourists. The stakeholders within the tourism planning sector should be aware of the high degree of interdependence with each other and with the natural environment. Notably, collaboration for tourism destination planning will depend on involving the key stakeholder groups: local government plus other public organizations having a direct bearing on resource allocation between the tourism industry, associations and different sectors.

Community collaboration plays a major role in tourism. Undoubtedly, partnership building and collaboration are essential for sustainable development. In a community-based tourism destination adopting an ecosystem approach visitors interact with local living (hosts, services) and non-living elements (landscape, sunshine) in order to experience a tourism product (Murphy 1985). A collaborative body is necessary to include key actors from the regional planning and marketing levels in order to ensure coordinated planning and to minimize the gap between the marketing and planning of tourism destinations.

For the implementation of community-based tourism in the Korçë Region community participation, collaboration, power redistribution and sustainable tourism are key-issues. Community-based tourism in Korçë is a different way to look for alternatives to traditional mass tourism, which permits the creation of jobs for the local community. This type of tourism is assessed by the local community in a very positive way, because it is perceived as a way of generating economic benefits; for example the programmed tours of Go Albania. Residents have a possibility to benefit from tourism and not become its victims.
Local issues have a direct influence on the tourist experience, especially in developing countries. The image of tourism is based on local community assets, including not only local people but also the natural environment, infrastructure, facilities and special events or festivals; therefore, the cooperation of the host community is essential to access and develop these assets appropriately.

Collaboration can act as a dynamic tourism development process. The Destination Management Organization (DMO) promotes the collaboration theory in community-based tourism planning, where collaboration is defined as ‘a process of joint decision making among autonomous key stakeholders to resolve problems of the domain and/or to manage issues related to the domain’. The tours of Go Albania are a representative example of successful collaboration processes in the context of tourism development regarding the created product.

In order to implement successful tourism action plans in terms of community development, the following factors must be taken into consideration:

- Participatory processes
- Awareness
- Collaboration
- Building interactive systems
- Sustainability
- Unification & Coordination of Promotion & Products
- Exchange perspectives
- Improved control of scarce environmental resources
- Satisfaction and representation of various social interests and needs
- Problem-solving networks
- Shared decision-making

Collaboration can be an effective tool of advancing shared visions, where stakeholders recognize the potential advantages of working together. Notably, collaborative forms in tourism destination planning and management are a relatively new situation. Collaboration needs to be stimulated involving multiple stakeholders, promoting shared decision-making processes, bridging cultural distinctions and resolving tensions among the various stakeholders. The main challenge is to motivate collaboration at a regional level plus at the level of public–private partnerships, community–private sector partnerships including cross-sectoral planning initiatives.

The branding of Korçë greatly depends on community functions. The city has so far been branded as:

- Korçë, City of Events
- Korçë, Small Paris
- Korçë, Where I want to live
- Korçë, the Cradle of Albanian culture
- Korçë of Serenades
- Korçë of the Beer Fest
- Korçë of Churches & Monasteries
- Korçë of Lyra
In conclusion, local community collaboration directly depends on participation which is not only about achieving the more efficient and more equitable distribution of material resources, but it is also about knowledge sharing and transformation of the learning process itself in the service of people’s self-development. Collaboration is crucial in securing benefits and solving problems among stakeholders. Cooperation means working together to some end, but it does not contain the complex interpretations and the necessary conditions covered by the term collaboration. Community based tourism planning is a must in destination planning and management strategies in the transboundary area of Prespa and Korçë.
ICT and cooperative knowledge for sustainable economy and tourism governance

Helen Efraimiadou and Katerina Zafeiri
Biopolitics International Organisation
Greece

Introduction

New possibilities arise from the bio-assessment of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) enhancing at the same time innovative services and products. Modern society is characterized by reduced access to the knowledge society and the need for the development of an effective communication network between society, science and decision makers in order to bring balance for the preservation of environment. The present paper elaborates on the case study of the e-services developed in the framework of the project “Innovative Practices in Biotourism,” Greece–Albania 2007-2013 proposing new dimensions for further improvement of tourism governance.

The project “Innovative Practices in Biotourism” funded by the European Territorial Cooperation Programme “Greece–Albania IPA Cross-Border Programme 2007-2013” and by National Funds of Greece and Albania emerged as a natural consequence of the need for a coordinated economic cooperation between Greece and Albania. The main tool supporting this effort was the development of a bilateral tourism platform involving e-services for the self-organization of tourism operators and web-based applications. Notably, the platform constitutes a dynamic structure of communication for the exchange of knowledge between society, science and businesses. In order to achieve a sustainable economy, the horizontal development of partnerships with the presentation of pluralistic views on the common challenges may lead to balanced and sustainable systems.

Project

Three main e-services were developed for the self-organization of tourism operators and stakeholders in Prespa and Korçë which are divided in 6 linked units: 1. Business catalogue; 2. Business map; 3. Files; 4. Meeting room; 5. Events calendar; and 6. Book now!

The first application involves a virtual meeting/discussion room where with the use of multimedia or plain text, participants may organize their meetings, to discuss and exchange files for better networking and development of the Biotour-
ism product. The functionalities of this application are related with Unit 4 and Unit 3. For the better organization of this application, an event calendar was developed – Unit 5 where the announcements of the next meetings are posted.


The second application is a simple template where businesses can, step by step, register in order to access the e-tools and take part in the cross-border common Biotourism product. This application involves business-to-business and business-to-consumer possibilities. Through this procedure, a business can be included in the Business Catalogue – Unit 1 and input its address and relevant
data as to be also visible in the Business Map – Unit 2. Filters and classification tools serve the targeted search, per category or alphabetically. Notably, the catalogue can facilitate the search of anyone interested in finding a farmer providing traditional products from a specific region. All registered users related to the tourism sector can regularly update their profile developing a micro–site within the main site. They can thus gain multiple benefits arising from synergies, knowledge exchange and promotion actions of the total partnership platform.

The third application concerns the development of an interactive booking system connected with key tourism operators in Prespa and Korçë (Unit 6). Based on the positive values of partnership, tour operators are in close collaboration with local stakeholders and they get informed for all offers or changes. Through the above, both visitors and the market have access to the most updated data regarding local enterprises, while through a simple application form future travelers may request an organized Biotourism package of high quality criteria.

Finally, an e-library has been developed through which online visitors can be educated and informed about the best practices in Biotourism development through a series of scientific studies. In order for the digital environment to be as
friendly as possible the content will be dynamically updated depending on what
the user will select without the need of a net page to be uploaded each time. The
e-library was developed with the use of the AJAX technology as well as the
library Jquery of the Javascript. The programming language PHP and MySql
were used for the synthesis of the site and the database plus the data mining,


**Horizontal coordination for successful tourism governance**

Tourism governance, ICT tools and cooperative knowledge can act as a vessel of transnational cooperation generating new management tools and working plans in all levels of governance (local, national, regional). Tourism governance comes as part of tourism quality services and promotes strategies of national tourism awareness programs involving all societal structures. The case of Greece and Albania implementing the project “Innovative Practices in Biotourism” is a best practice of transnational tourism governance both in terms of new technological tools implemented in a cross-border region and in terms of raising cooperative knowledge in isolated areas with high potentials, but also with high development needs.

Tourism governance discourses need to demonstrate a more refined framework of the way tourism needs to be constructed and perceived as a governance issue both in national and international levels. Keeping in mind that the bottom-up approach will be the most suitable in terms of-theoretical and later on practical-applicability, if the tourism governance concept get deeper roots in national policies, then stronger and more solid international commitments will be put forth. Ideally, when all states incorporate tourism governance in their agendas both for national and human welfare reasons, tourism governance will start to produce viable solutions for greenhouse gas emissions reduction and all relevant problems. This is what this paper actually suggests; a radical rethinking of the tourism governance concept involving new technologies and cooperative forms that can eventually produce effective results on tourism and environmentally-related issues. At the end it is not the conceptualization that matters but the action and policy effects. What needs to be understood is that tourism is a complex system impossible to change when solutions are either provided by single –international, national or non-state- actors or targeting to specific issues (environmental protection) ignoring others (technological adaptation and change, cultural preservation).

Therefore, a more systematic and multilevel decision making approach that will provide solid theoretical and empirical grounding on the connection between tourism and governance is greatly needed. This includes what has been done so far and what more needs to be done in state policies towards tourism. The shift towards the adoption of integrated tourism policies will be beneficial both for nation states, as they will be able to deal with the emergence of new trends and apply sustainable policies, and for individuals whose livelihoods often depend on tourism impacts and the incapability of states to cope with it.

Tourism development and effective governance is a challenge to states when speaking in terms of cross-border considerations. The shift towards a new approach of dealing with tourism and environment in fact exists. However, there is a quite clear range of variables that needs to be taken into consideration in order to uncover the actual utility in terms of human governance and quality of life.
Results and conclusions

Tourism industry such as all the other economic sectors is becoming more and more competitive, while the natural and cultural heritage of each place constitute its comparative advantages and the prerequisite for a sustainable and qualitative tourism development. New ICT may provide the tools for the self-organization of the tourism sector based on the establishment of horizontal cross-sector partnerships and bringing new horizons of innovative entrepreneurship and improving sector intelligence. The increase of the wide use of cloud technologies and the crowd sourcing clever systems as well as the spread of smart-phones and the availability of mobile information can provide strong organizing and marketing tools to the tourism sector. Location-based services combined with Augmented Reality techniques and linked content to many different contexts increase today the need and the opportunities for a competitive differentiation to the global tourism industry.

Through an effective network of communication between society, science and policy makers, the horizontal exchange of knowledge, the increase of the quality of the tourism services with lower cost and the establishment of effective tourism governance structures is possible. Cooperative knowledge in a local and a regional level and the increase of access of the citizens to the society of knowledge and their participation to the development of decision support tools may improve local governance through the design of better action plans. Cross-sector partnerships may lead to innovative solutions and holistic management plans creating new models to meet the challenges of the environmental and economic crisis.

Nature has created self-organized but interdependent living systems in a balanced network, where all different members are mobilized and participate in ongoing natural procedures. Likewise, ICT knowledge systems may provide the ideal tool to achieve win-win scenarios - win for the economy and win for the society and bios on our planet - with the active engagement of all citizens.

References

4. Bramwell, B., and B Lane. (2000) Collaboration and partnerships in tourism planning In: B. Bramwell & Lane B. (Eds.) "Tourism collaboration and
partnerships: politics, Practice and Sustainability’ (1-19), Clevedon: Channel View Publications


The role of the media in the enhancement of environmental awareness

Sypsas A., Nikoletta Tsitsanoudis Mallidis
Leta Dromantiene and Jenny Pange
Laboratory of New Technologies and Distance Learning
School of Education, University of Ioannina, Greece
Social Policy Faculty, Mykolas Romeris University, Vilnius, Lithuania

Introduction

During the last decades, global warming, climate change, hurricanes, tornados, melting of icebergs, aridity, floods, greenhouse effect, acid rain, extinction of flora varieties and fauna species, constitute recurrent terms in our vocabulary. Air, water, soil and food quality is deteriorating day by day, especially in the developing countries i.e. China, Malaysia and India, (Aminrad, Zakariya, Hadi & Sakari, 2013; Sharma, 2012).

Scientists from all over the world point out that such environmental issues have also serious consequences on human health (Brunekreef & Holgate, 2002; Hill, 2012; Jarup & Åkesson, 2009; Kunzli et al., 2000; Moeller, 1997; Pope et al., 1995; Satarug, Garrett, Sens & Sens, 2010). It is widely recognized that chemical, physical and biological hazards in the environment may lead to serious health problems. Environmental pollution has primary confluence in the rise of many types of cancer and respiratory, cardiovascular and reproductive problems, leading to morbidity or even mortality.

Notwithstanding the aforementioned, research (Barr, 2003; Chun, Hwang & Byun, 2012; Erdogan & Tosun, 2009; Gadenne, Kennedy & McKeiver, 2009; Membiela, Nogueiras & Suarez, 1993; Shivakumar, 2012) has shown that still a great number of either businesses and citizens are unaware of the seriousness of the environmental problem and do little or nothing to save the planet. As Louv (2008) highlights, people, and especially children, are alienating more and more from the nature, mainly due to the lack of safeness in the modern society and the extended use of technology. According to the author, this alienation leads to a “problematic stewardship” towards nature.

Scientists maintain that, current situation can be changed if people’s environmental awareness is raised (Aminrad et al., 2013; Ayush, 2008; Barr, 2003; Lahiri, 2011; La Trobe & Acott, 2000; Miller et al., 2010; Uzunboylu, Cavus & Ercag, 2009; Yarkandi & Yarkandi, 2012). Matthies and Schahn (2004) defined
environmental awareness as “a purely cognitive construct, indicating whether someone is aware of the endangered environment” (as cited in Arlt, Hoppe & Wolling, 2011), thus how one perceives, estimates and comports in regard to the environmental problems. Enhancing the environmental awareness, though, is not a new trend, as since the early ‘90s the European Committee was already emphasizing the need of intense activity towards this sector (UNESCO-UNEP, 1991).

Attempts have been made since then to inform and sensitize people and governments about the environmental pollution. The core idea of these attempts was, and still is, that the more people are aware of the environmental problems and the correlated health risks, the more their motivation to overturn the situation and act with caution towards the environment, reduce their ecological footprint and adopt green technologies (Barr, 2003; Fahlquist, 2008; Miller et al., 2010). Moreover, people should understand that even the so called “green technology” is not totally “green,” but as Lorenzen (2012) states, “greenness emerges in the linkage between people and things”.

The media, and especially the digital ones, can and should contribute towards this direction, as, according to Hansen (2011), via the media people have most of their knowledge regarding the environment. The power of media lays on the fact that they are widespread and shape, or even wield, public opinion. As Sharma (2012) soundly states, “there is no doubt that the media plays an instrumental role in modern societies.” The aim of this paper is to contribute to the understanding of the media dynamics with reference to the environmental issues and present some interesting practices that exploit such means.

**Media and environmental awareness**

The environmental emergency that we are facing needs to be addressed and analyzed “within a social frame of reference” (Arlt et al., 2011). Media seem to be an interesting approach towards such direction. The great potential of the media in regards to the provision of information, the construction of knowledge and the cultivation of skills and attitudes, has been proved scientifically over the years (Prathap & Ponnusamy, 2006; Sharma, 2012; Suoranta, 2003; Tisdell & Thompson, 2007; Wartella & Knell, 2004).

As far as the environmental issues are concerned, media either as a risk communicator, or as a promoter of data, information and good practices of any kind, should smooth the progress of people to become more environmentally responsible and cultivate an environmental awareness (Sharma, 2012; Arlt et al., 2011). Additionally, media (electronic or printed) could help people associate reasons and effects, thus to get informed and to reflect upon the given information, in order to understand the origins and the causes of the major environmental problems (Arlt et al., 2011; Forno, 1999; Hansen, 2011).

Generating public awareness and environmentally friendly behaviors is a complex and multidimensional task (Arlt et al., 2011; Hansen, 2011). To achieve
The role of the media in environmental awareness

this, different kind of information and ways of presentation should be exploited (Miranda & Blanco, 2010). Moreover, as Kapoor (2011) highlights, there is a need to use low cost and environmentally friendly technologies in order to cultivate ecological attitudes. All the aforementioned could be accomplished by the use of digital media, and especially the Internet. Firstly, the blending of text and multimedia contributes to the presentation and decoding of complicated situations and events, and secondly, the proper choice of internet-based approach could be low cost and “green”.

Some Internet usages to raise the environmental awareness are the following:

- **Documentaries and amateur videos**: as mentioned before, exposing an environmental situation or hazard could be a difficult endeavor. The power of pictures and videos to illustrate, captivate or shock, is undoubtedly, as according to Ottino (2003), “seeing and representing are inextricably linked to understanding”. Via the Internet, people have an instant, cost free and unlimited access to a great number of environmental documentaries (Bouse´, 2000; Ingram, 2000; as cited in Hansen, 2011) or professional and amateur videos regarding nature and its protection via apposite websites, like www.youtube.com or similar.

- **Blogs, Wikis, Forums and educational portals**: such websites, on the one hand give access to an vast amount of information regarding the planets and its protection, without any consumption of paper and ink, and on the other hand, provide a virtual space of communication and exchanging of information and ideas, without the burden of traveling. Examples of such websites are: a) portals of environmental education (www.kpe.gr, www.envedu.gr/Documents.aspx?subID=20), b) the information provided from the Pedagogical Institute of Greece regarding the environmental education (www.pi-schools.gr/perivalontiki), c) blogs regarding the environment (http://perivalontika.blogspot.gr), and d) the WWF portal (www.wwf.gr).

- **Virtual environments and e-museums**: which represent an attractive alternative for the enhancement of the environmental awareness, as the user has the opportunity to navigate and sometimes interact with the presented environment. Examples of virtual environments regarding the environmental education are those presented by Chalkidis, et al (1997) and Mikropoulos, Chalkidis, et al (1997). Examples of e-museums concerning nature are: a) the forest museum (www.kambos-museum.org/gr_index.shtml), b) the environmental park of Torino (www.envipark.com), and c) the Center of Art + Environment in Nevada (www.nevadaart.org/ae/index).

- **e-Learning**: such educational practice has a double impact on the enhancement of environmental awareness. Firstly, it is an effective way for organizations and academic institutes to reduce their carbon footprint, with the elimination of face-to-face presence, and the paper and ink usage. Secondly, over the Internet there are many available courses regarding the nature, the envi-
The role of the media in environmental awareness

Environmental problems, the use of green technologies, the ecological friendly agriculture, the ecotourism, etc. Examples of such courses are: a) Online courses regarding the ecology and the tourism (http://elearning.cbc-biotourism.eu), b) UNESCO’s teaching and learning platform (www.unesco.org/education/tlsf), c) commercial e-courses (www.digimagix.gr/e-courses), and d) many e-courses delivered from the Institutes of Higher Education in Greece.

Certainly the role of media in the effort of awareness for environmental issues should be addressed not only to businessmen or state-owned ownerships. Such dependencies cumber ideologically the role of media and their democratic functioning, (Tsitsanoudis – Mallidis, 2010, 2011). For this reason it is useful to enhance the educational movement of media. Civil society, teachers, and families must use new information technologies and modern forms of communication and education for environmental studies without commercialization of environmental problems. Furthermore, the emergence of communication in education is interesting. This is a new approach that bridges the gap between the traditional and the new school. The traditional school learns to incorporate tools and techniques necessary for critical analysis of the media and by this way achieves the modernization. The ability of citizens to address critical reasoning alongside media should start from schools. So, in a future study we could examine the impact of new technologies, on commercialization of other social goods in schools.

Conclusions

The modern way of living is aggravating the planet. The vast use of carbon and chemicals, extended deforestation and the large-scale of agriculture, farming and fishing are deteriorating the soil, air and water quality. Notwithstanding climate change and environmental pollution remains for decades a prime subject of European and International agendas, research indicates that little is done regarding the communication of such scientific results and their impact on ecology and health and the enhancement of the public environmental awareness.

On the one hand, governments and related institutes need to invest on environmental education and promote the use of green technologies. Additionally, people need to focus not only on the industrial but also in domestic use of hazardous materials, reduce carbon emissions, paper and ink usage, follow eco-tourism ideas and adopt green technologies. More precisely, people, more than ever, need to take individual and social responsibility regarding the environmental problems, to develop new ethics and personal attitudes in their relationship with nature and determine new terms, like quality of living, quality of traveling and healthy living. In other words, they need to enhance their environmental awareness. The literature findings indicate that media, and especially digital ones, play an important role in the enhancement of environmental aware-
The role of the media in environmental awareness

ness and the establishment of a more ecological friendly way of living. In fact, they have a double influence. Firstly, they constitute a flexible environment in order to decompose and explain a complex issue, as an ecological disaster, via different types of information, text, pictures, multimedia presentation, virtual simulations, smart technologies that assist individuals in monitoring their resource use. Secondly, they promote and facilitate the adoption of the ecological philosophy, as they contribute to eco-tourism, to reduction of fuel, and minimize paper and ink consumption.

Since digital media are used widely by young people, new educational material should be created by universities and governmental organizations in order to meet the updated needs for information concerning environmental issues.

References

Awareness in Kids (PEAK): the development and implementation of a new scale. Proceedings of the 2010 Northeastern Recreation Research Symposium
Global institutions and applications of the social economy

Vasilios Taktikos  
*President of NGO Erymanthos*  
*Project Partner, Greece*

**Biotourism strategic marketing planning**

Biotourism strategic marketing planning in areas like the Municipality of Prespa and the Region of Korçë characterized by small businesses, guest rooms, restaurants, shops etc. can rely on tour operators and tourism offices only as an alternative; instead they should rely on social and horizontal network marketing for three reasons.

First, because the tourist market is small and cannot be industrialized as to receive thousands of tourists en masse; this is what primarily interests tour operators. Second, these small businesses find it difficult to contribute in the cost of advertising with high procurement costs. Third, because many of the small tourism businesses are represented by farmers, fishermen or breeders applying tourism practices for income.

For all these reasons, common marketing tools have only limited use, since nobody from the above professionals is prepared to pay the high mediation costs required in traditional marketing. Taking into consideration that the typical mediation cost accounts for 15% on average (profit of tour operators in the final reservation price), it is understood that innovative practices of social and online marketing are required for these costs to be reduced or eliminated.

Then, high specialization required by the large tourist market cannot be applicable in this case study. This is not necessarily at the expense of the quality of services provided, since, within Biotourism, quality depends on a holistic approach. Nevertheless, the experiential knowledge – the aim in every sector of Biotourism – could not be obtained differently. For example, the product of agritourism is better offered by those engaged in agricultural crops, fisheries, livestock and general primary production who may simultaneously offer accommodation and food services. The proposed methodology is based on the logic of social marketing, namely the use of the principles and techniques of traditional / business marketing in order to influence all target groups of the current program. The ultimate goal is for the area to voluntarily accept the adoption of good practices in the development of a common Biotourism product for the benefit of the local community. The differentiation of social marketing lays in networking, self-organization and cooperation between all stakeholders in an area, the creation of
information and digital content viewing from everyone involved in the process of Biotourism, and networking with social groups in other parts of the country and abroad. As a result, the main technological tool is the internet and social media. Through their organized use these tools minimize costs and continuously multiply the area’s level of promotion, its comparative advantages, its local businesses and occupations.

Social marketing can be used in any situation in which a critical social behavior is desired to change. In many cases the goal is achieved while decisive role in this success pattern plays active public hearing and understanding of public needs. Marketing is the process of planning and executing the conception, pricing, promotion and distribution of ideas, goods and services in order to create transactions that meet objectives of individuals and organizations. It is an integrated process that begins at the birth of a product, service or concept and it includes a set of operations carried out throughout the life cycle.

Business and social marketing while different, they still have in common some basic techniques, as social marketing takes lessons from the business marketing applying them under social variables. The idea of social marketing emerged in 1971 by Philip Kotler and Gerald Zaltman as an attempt to promote some desired social behavior using a model built upon the traditional logic of marketing. However, Wiebe in 1952 had already talked about the idea posing the question why “can’t you sell brotherhood like you can sell soap?” In practice, in the most distant past, relevant actions have taken place in the cases of child labor abolishment, granting voting rights to women and acceptance of African Americans as equal members of society. Nowadays, social marketing through theoretical approaches, research and testing, has reached its maturity stage offering the right tools to promote desired ideas or behaviors, such as the development of Biotourism. Note that it efficiently meets the basic principle of Social Economy which is to reduce the cost of goods.

The proposed marketing plan will feature low costs, high diffusion and ease of use, in accordance with the techniques and principles of social marketing. The scope of social marketing in developing Biotourism in the cross-border area of Korçë is briefly as follows:

- establishment and action of Social Cooperative Businesses for promotional reasons in synergy with other Social Cooperative Businesses in both countries and the wider cross-border area between Albania and Greece
- diplomacy of cities and municipalities twinning
- virtual reality, virtual exhibition of businesses/products
- e-shop
- self-organization – e-booking

The analysis of these data will be made in the light of the cross-border region of Greece–Albania and, then, the results can be generalized and modified in order
Global institutions and applications of the social economy

75

to be adapted to other mountainous rural areas applicable for Biotourism development. The most important in this whole process is the involvement of local community in the development of Biotourism to manage the communication and promotion of comparative advantages and the special character of Biotourism in both areas.

The anticipated Memorandum along with the establishment of Social Cooperatives can in principle be designed to promote the activity of the common Biotourism product, mainly through the use of the internet and the social media, as analyzed in relevant manuals.

Evolutionary process of the social economy

Social Economy as a form of solidarity economy is a different area of economic activity for all citizens that surpasses competitive economy and exceeds the paradoxes of state and market including the social and economic exclusion of the socially weak citizens. It creates an alternative way of income in place of hardship, unemployment and poverty. The comparative advantage lays to the reduced transaction costs, the recovery of inactive material and human resources and the dissemination of knowledge and organizational technology.

Social economy is, indeed, solidarity economy characterized by non-monetary exchanges, charitable social enterprises in all sectors like non-profit institutions, socially supported agriculture, cottage industries and crafts processing, cooperative services health and education services via non-profit entities. These public benefit business social enterprises differ from regular businesses since their main goal is to generate social benefits and healthy employment relations.

Having described the concept of social economy a separation between traditional forms of social economy and types of modern, formal and systematic social economy should also be mentioned in order to better comprehend the historical evolutionary process of Social Economy.

The informal traditional social economy is based on solidarity, charity and non-monetary exchanges. Its systematic organization is implemented through social businesses and institutions. In traditional rural economies there was always an informal form of trade via products, labor and means of production that facilitated the villagers since they did have little money. Thus, exchanges did not only include products, but also working time (Kselasi was the Greek term used in rural communities). This procedure, in effect, excluded all intermediaries and operated in favor of producers.

Even today, in modern postindustrial societies, one can meet these non-monetary exchanges, in the form of clubs among those who struggle to find sufficient employment in order to meet their needs and exchange their working time to ensure some basic living standards. Similar initiatives are developed by civil society organizations the so-called time banks. But today, the institutional organization of the social solidarity economy has been implemented through non-profit
social enterprises creating sustainable employment and generating income for employees or groups ensuring benefits also to small producers and those who provide social services.

Under this concept, social economy acts as a multiplier of social responsibility, assuming the role of a “reservoir” of solidarity and human resources against social and economic exclusion, generating income where there is no sufficient capital, but increased willingness to cooperate. The aim is to eventually attract socially necessary investments in relevant sectors, which do not offer strong profit motivation.

In contrast, investing in social enterprises is based on a collective cultural agreement on social associations or a Partnership with social capital as its main component. It is also based on relations of trust between members of cooperatives and within consumers. Local Government takes part in these partnerships as a guarantor, but also as a contributing partner.

These trust relationships can secure jobs in advance including agreements that can make a business viable. This way, social partnerships and social enterprises are today the most advantageous solution for Local Authorities to address the functioning gaps in social services in close collaboration with social cooperatives. In other words, we are referring to the third sector of economy – in broad sense – with the boundaries between the three of them not to be easily distinguished. The first sector relates to the private/commercial sector, i.e. businesses operating for profit reasons. The second sector concerns the public or state economy within which the State or other units provide goods and services with redistributive characteristics.

The third sector relates to the broad field of solidarity economy. It is a bottom-up economic activity which starts as a citizens’ initiative (civil economy = citizens and their needs) and does not include profit. It is in other words, it is an economy of “real” needs. The aim of social economy is not consumption per se rather that the satisfaction of basic needs through the assessment of an equitable distribution of resources and relations of solidarity.

This definition covers a wide range of economic activities of cooperatives up to exchange networks. Today, institutional social solidarity economy is exercised through non-profit social enterprises which create sustainable employment and income to individuals.

**Social economy institutions**

The institutions of the social economy, to the extent that they have developed so far, were not created by some great theory, nor imposed by political powers at a particular time. Born under the pressure of the need for economic synergism from the bottom, they are an alternative option, particularly in times of crisis. Thus, we have a constant evolution driven by the needs of society partly incorporated into the system through a pragmatic process that offers solutions to
Global institutions and applications of the social economy

unemployment, while still covering the gaps left by the welfare state. Consequently, political power in relation to the Social Economy is de facto not ahead, but it is following the institution of society.

It is rather a spontaneous social process horizontally developed less based on large-scale policy initiatives. According to this approach, consciousness in the totality of a corpus of Social Economy comes empirically through the participation of activists in a variety of best practices from around the world. However, the social activism of social movements, which mobilizes to a large extent and harnesses social economy, is not an integral political program. It does not constitute a single political institution, but it could be termed as a pre-transmitter of economic developments.

Any governmental legislative initiatives undertaken so far are fragmented. Even transnational entities, like the European Union, which acknowledge the high importance of social economy, are still reluctant to limit the economic power of states begrudging when it comes to self-limiting due to Civil Society claims. The reason apparently lies in the institutions of social economy which contest the lack of rationality in waste of materials and human resources by states and financial markets. While social institutions are not at odds with political powers and do not support another power as parties do, however, they scare the irrationalism of the system and its pseudoscientific hypostasis which is absolutely market-oriented, inclined to monetarization of human relationships and rigid gains from goods and services.

It is obvious that the prevailing policy usually employed through this pseudo-science of economy serves the illusion of self-regulating markets while avoiding to adopt “science against poverty” based on the organizational technology of social economy presumed to serve the whole of society.
The intention is not to underestimate the immense importance of the moneta-
risation of economic development during the last three thousand years including
one of humanity’s greatest inventions, the currency.

The aim is rather to point out, just as many others, the extravagance, the arro-
gance and the hubris against humanity which hides behind the transformation of
exchange values – money – in a product with absolute value and power. A distor-
tion in values creates rampant speculation and condemns in absolute poverty a
large population number, while in times of crises labors of a lifetime are being
lost. It is also known that money alone creates cash for banks through the capital
markets and stock markets often to the detriment of real economy.

So the antidote to money autocracy is the institutions of social economy,
which can both curb unemployment and poverty as well as ensure quality of life
with less money by reducing transaction costs.

But how can this whole process be implemented when most people have ex-
perienced only the superficial institutions of power?

The answer is just by being aware of the underlying institutions of society, not
necessarily quoted in laws, such as social capital, volunteering, social networks,
civil society organizations, social activism, lifelong learning, Participatory
Democracy. These concepts are ultimately contributing to the institutionalization
of the Social Economy.

**Social capital – the basis of the social economy**

Social Capital can be defined as the accumulation of collective knowledge,
organizational culture, solidarity, common trust and creative institutional while
developing social skills. Social networks and voluntarism are the key players for
its constitution.

Social capital complements and substitutes, to a large extent, the economic
capital for investments, leading to trust in transactions, cost reduction and cred-
itworthiness. According to relevant studies, social capital is a concept inherent in
the social structure; it facilitates individual action and gives meaning to partner-
ships and Social Development Partnerships.

The gradual awareness that neither the state nor the market can exclusively
solve all economic and social problems has brought forth the concept of social
capital, bridging the public and private sphere.

The term “social capital” is increasingly being interrelated with the concept of
civil society, but not limited to it, since it includes both formal and informal so-
cial networks and common values. The definition given by Woolcock (1998) that
social capital includes all values and networks that facilitate collective action is
based on this very interaction with civil society. In the international debate link-
ing non-governmental organizations with the concept of civil society mainly
relies on the example of Posle Tokvila according to which civil society is an area
where organized citizens exercise their association right as institutional counter-
weight to the state authoritarianism as a democratization force from below, as a school of democracy, as a production method of social capital and even as a vehicle for social activities contributing in the common good.

**Solidarity – a prerequisite for the development of a social economy**

Simply, the constant upgrading in line with the offer of services on behalf of Civil Society Organizations configures, collects and develops social capital. The latter refers to synergism, voluntarism and solidarity institutions not aiming at profit, and contributes in the social and income-generating employment and social benefit including corporate social responsibility. In light of this, social capital can be defined as the accumulation of collective knowledge, organizational culture, solidarity, common trust and creative institutional functioning that develops social skills.

Social capital complements and substitutes, at a great extent, the financial capital within the investment sector creating trust and creditworthiness. It is a fundamental value formed collaboratively by civil society organizations, social networks and solidarity institutions. It contributes decisively in green and cultural entrepreneurship as well as in social solidarity. It is the basic condition for the development of social economy disposing features common with other forms of capital; someone can invest in it in order to reap benefits in the future.

Social Capital does not belong to any organization or company neither is a state or market property, though everyone can contribute in its creation. It is a bottom-up approach initiated by socially linked citizens of the same or different origin and culture. These citizens create networks and associations. According to the definition of the World Bank social capital is the “glue” that holds societies tied. It is a matter of socialization, trustiness and cooperation at a local level, but also a matter of capacity towards innovative investment policies that help society progress, including a whole network of relations, institutions and norms that shape the quality of other social interrelations and benefits. In a world of rational economic consideration social capital has the same importance as financial, physical or human capital.

Also, while social capital belongs to microeconomics it also affects macro-economic factors. Therefore, social capital can be measured and its benefits can be calculated. It can be considered as a concept inherent in the social structure that facilitates individual action and gives meaning to it within the social context. At the same time, social capital consists of overlapping social networks that have shared values, trust and common decision criteria.

**Social trust – the public benefit business**

In search for the particular characteristics of social capital and civil society, it could be said that the criterion of trust is the comparative advantage over com-
munities with no cohesion. In networks with a high level of social capital the principle of reciprocity and solidarity prevails contributing in the individual well-being, since participants have effortless access to information or other resources, which increase the chances of self-accomplishment.

In this sense, there are three key parameters that maximize social capital:

- **Trust**, built through social networks securing that the obligations and duties of the members will be smoothly processed.
- **Information**, channeled through social networks, regulations and penalties imposed on the members of the networks.
- **Collaboration**, provided and developed in human communities.

Although social capital has many common features with other forms of capital, it is radically different vis-à-vis its creation which presupposes interaction between a large group of people. The relevant literature has demonstrated that it is a complicated process influenced by historical, social, political and cultural factors, as well as by the dominant model of economic development. Social Capital increases when people cooperate in voluntary organizations and when they communicate. This is achieved through:

- **Voluntary participation** in networks of individuals or groups on the basis of equality of members. Social capital refers to horizontal relationships between community and family members, but also to vertical associations between communities, various institutions and bodies and governmental entities. A relevant theory has been developed known as Network Theory.
- **Reciprocity**: Individuals provide services to others or act for the benefit of others at personal cost generally expecting to get a return at some unspecified time in the future when they will need it. Indeed, there is a combination of short-term altruism and long-term interest.
- **Trust**: Trust allows risk-taking when it is estimated that others will react positively and support or at least do not undermine the initiative. Confidence and trust are extremely important even at the state level, where the higher the social consensus (greater trust between social partners), the greater the progress of the country.
- **Rules (norms)**: They usually are non-written but understood social rules and principles that provide the framework for informal social control, without institutional sanctioning procedures. Many argue that in presence of strong social capital crime rates and the police need are low.
- **Community**: The combined effect of trust, networks, regulations and reciprocity creates a strong community capable of combating against any opportunist, who would try to exploit the community’s social capital without any offers in return. The community is not owned by anyone, but it is used by everyone. A community may be preserved in perpetuity for the benefit of all
only when there is a strong ethos of trust, reciprocity and effective social sanctions against offenders and invaders.

- Human and Social Capital: As we have already analyzed, human capital represents valuable resources, like knowledge and skills derived from education, training and experience. Some types of human capital, like teamwork and communication skills are supportive to social capital. Thus, investments in human capital contribute to the development of both types of capital.

In examining the role of social capital it is useful to consider the three basic types of social capital, as identified by experts:

- Bonding: Ties between family members, members of the same group, or friends.
- Bridging: Bridging differences and interaction between different ethnic groups, ages, partners or states (Intercultural Cooperation).
- Linking: Links and vertical communication between different and diverse social and / or political levels (Customer relationships).

The great challenge for the research and theory of social capital is the identification and promotion of the terms and conditions under which several positive aspects may be taken in advantage, while containing or eliminating the negative aspects, which in this case are significantly less.

Volunteerism as a parameter of social capital

Volunteering in our times, as a key factor in creating social capital, is the main vessel for the alternative development of social economy and employment, creating added value in the economy. From the patriotic, charitable and local volunteering with non-monetary transactions which prevailed in earlier generations, nowadays we have in fact passed to an era of multidimensional, ecumenical, humanitarian and ecological volunteerism both autonomous in terms of market and the state and complementary operating and covering the gaps of economy. Volunteerism today does not only refer to the feeling of solidarity, but to the logic reciprocal process within social economy. It no longer solely recognized as an act of charity and solidarity in cases of need, like in the past, but it has also assumed the role of an institutional activity that produces and disseminates durable goods to human culture, the environment and social care, as a sector that develops human resources and enriches the social capital.

Social networks – how do they relate the social economy?

The term social capital is related to the concept of social networks. Social networks are the multidimensional communication and modulation systems re-
Global institutions and applications of the social economy

garding human practice and social identity. They are also defined as the sum of personal contacts through which an individual maintains his social identity, receives emotional and material support and participation, participates in services, has access to information, creates new social contacts and self-develops.

Empirical researches confirm that the larger a network and the greater the contact between members, the more effective the help offered, for example in ensuring job opportunities and employment for their members when they need it.

On the other hand, social networks carry important information both for employees and businesses, increasing productivity. Therefore, social capital has major impact on job search in a region where it interacts with social networks.

Strengthening social capital is directly related to civic engagement. Social networks are new forms of organization, ensuring effective participation of citizens in public affairs, but also in production and economic operations of society. Networks with a social mission have the following attributes:

- reduce transaction costs
- serve as reservoirs of social capital
- act as a precursor to social and green entrepreneurship
- horizontal networks operate in favor of the socialization of knowledge and expertise
- contribute in the democratization of information and action
- steer investments towards regional levels and for socially necessary purposes
- establish a Social Capital at local and national levels

Forms of social networks

As Internet use is growing, online social networks also become more and more popular since they are a wide communication platform. Already, social networks like Facebook, Twitter, etc.

grow rapidly, not only by people looking to socialize, but by everyone, with a constantly elevating user average age. But socialization, in local levels, comes in conjunction with more traditional means, such as neighborhood shops. However, social and communication networks existed before technological networks – even though, historically, they were not called as such – and in any case, unified and coordinated operations for common demands and visions.

Social networks as perceived today are an online discussion which nourishes relationships, participation and networking of individuals. They connect groups of people not only socially but geographically as well. Thanks to those networks it is easy to share ideas, likes and dislikes with everyone in general or with a group of concerned individuals in specific. One can find friends or develop business contacts and become part of a community. Therefore, social networks give people something that traditional media could never give; the opportunity of creating partnerships and networking. Today, social networks have become an im-
Important means of communication and, in no way, can they be ignored, since they are an integral part of almost all organizations. Large and small organizations are experimenting everyday with social networks aiming to raise or disseminate information, attract members, etc. Social networks can play an important role in the agendas of an organization proving to be an important work tool.

But we should not forget that networks generally as a concept is not novel. Even family is no different from a network of more or less strong bonds, holding members bonded to a common purpose and a common ideology. There always have been power networks, or power assertion networks, national networks, tribal, trade even liberation or religious networks.

Here, however, we do not refer to traditional networks, which also had a different form of structure: hierarchical, authoritarian and assertive or state structured. We do not refer to networks that own or claim direct power and pursue class or national interests, but networks of social sensitivity motivated by volunteerism, the environment and social solidarity, whose diffusion is a fairly recent phenomenon. A phenomenon co-shaped by the liberation of human energy, brought by new interactive communication technologies such as the internet and renewable energy sources. We, therefore, approach networks and horizontal collaboration in terms of volunteering and social capital.

The crisis of trust in the wake of the global economic crisis raises in a dynamic way the importance of social networks in the treatment of social imbalances, particularly through social economy which creates new job opportunities. As a consequence, social networks, since they contribute to social solidarity and welfare, have a number of positive results. The main result is the reduction of transaction costs either in consumer networks terms, in communication networks terms or even in terms of networks for knowledge diffusion. They play a decisive role in the development of the social economy between state and market, combining volunteering with the non-profit business.

In no case should we be surprised for the crucial role of social networks in almost every area of human life, as recent studies have demonstrated. Just consider that what was formerly called “acquaintances” is today considered as a social network. So in case someone finds the term social network as foreign or exotic, let him ponder that those with the better acquaintances had always been getting better jobs, careers, salaries, marriages and social advancements. The difference lies in the fact that while once acquaintances were a privilege of closed social and economic castes, today the participation in social networks is open to everyone and is dependent upon individual possibilities rather than birthrights.

The establishment and coordination of regional and thematic networks is the only realistic proposal for strengthening civil society against a political system that is unable to guarantee and promote life values and the ecological future of the country. The great importance of horizontal communication, collaboration and networking of thousands of voluntary organizations in Greece is an issue that has only recently begun to emerge in public debates.
Social activism – an offshoot of voluntarism

Always in history, volunteering and activism – the practice of being involved in the improvement of a situation – have been the driving forces of radical changes. That is because social activism means, first of all, awareness of the struggle and offer in order to change an undesirable situation. It means that someone is willing to bear the cost of this process, offering either free time or money and expertise.

It also means expertise and willingness on how to change things. And it is the only way for a society to deal with incumbent mentalities and the corrupted bureaucracy. It also means, human rights, citizen rights, but also struggles to express themselves. In this sense, it may be that human resources can be mobilized for good practices and optimally used under strict social control. Because only control can be more effective. And this is neither the police control nor the legalistic control of public officials. The most effective control is the moral and social control by citizens leaving no escape room to distorted functions.

The voluntary and social activism, in this case, can reverse the decline of public affairs. It can awaken and mobilize society in a creative manner, which, in fact, has been shown historically. After long periods of decline and crisis, the mobilization of society and volunteering, in the form of patriotism or other forms, generated new creative periods. In today’s context, there are no resources – natural, material or human – missing. What is missing is their creative use.

It is obvious that social activism implemented by citizens’ initiatives requires an open society, and not closed oligarchic political systems prohibiting citizens’ initiatives. An open society is conquered, broadened and becomes more tolerant and inclusive through the liberate action of social activists through the possibility of horizontal organization and communication, not only at national but also at transnational levels. And we must admit, either we have realized it or not, that we operate within the institutions of a transnational entity, the European Union.

Movements and solidarity campaigns cannot have national borders. They can be focused where it is need, but solidarity between citizens of different countries is moving forward. And here we must keep in mind that the greatest solidarity movements were once international in character.

Social activism is also a basic parameter of participatory democracy in problem solving and management.

The interaction of social activism with social economy and the maximum use of citizens’ creativity lead to new opportunities for social businesses, self-employment, solidarity trade and, thus, contributes in tackling unemployment.

Ideologies can either push things forward in order to improve several conditions or they can lead to regression. Ideologies and technologies influence in a catalytic manner the development of a society. The ideological approach is related to the organizational culture of a State and the organizational culture is related to the optimal, or non-optimal, utilization of human resources. A decadent
consuming culture inevitably leads to the degradation of human resources and this is from that we are suffering today. An organizational culture with productive and creative values is what is desired in order to restart not only the economic, but also the social development. Social activism tackles these issues.

Social activism emerging from citizens’ initiatives presupposes an open society and not a closed, oligarchic political system that prohibits citizens’ initiatives. This way the open society is conquered and broadened becoming more tolerant and caring through the open action of social activists; through the possibility of horizontal organization and communication not only at national but also at transnational level.

Lifelong learning and knowledge management – a definition

Lifelong learning is connected to Social Economy in view of the fact that its complicated character requires ongoing training and awareness of institutional rules within which it operates.

Firstly, we need to define that lifelong learning is a long process that starts from the birth of man and continues throughout his life. In this sense, lifelong learning is neither associated with private expert training schools (the so called IEK in Greece) nor with the second chance schools. It does not equal school learning, but it is a separate process, combined with learning through work or volunteering. What is happening in Greece is actually a perversion of the term and the practice of the process of lifelong learning.

The formal definition given by the European Union refers to lifelong learning as all learning activity undertaken throughout life, with the aim of improving knowledge, skills and competence, within a personal, civic, social and/or employment-related perspective (European Commission, Com (2001) 678). From a philosophical point of view, the term lifelong learning refers to a philosophical perception, according to which education is considered as the most suitable and endless means for continuous personal improvement and professional development. This term mostly covers the experiential learning at work and learning via culture plus the participation in the collective social creation, the application of new technologies and the pursuit of art and volunteering.

In modern practice, while lifelong learning is extolled, it is in fact canceled by a bureaucratic system of hollow degrees. Furthermore, while present over the last 20 years in Greece, it does not have the desired results because of its being digressed from its real goal of lifelong learning in work and not through an educational entity isolated from production. Perversion lies in the fact that lifelong learning takes place in public schools while it should actually be prohibited. The diversion is provocative and it serves specific interests from the allocation of resources. This generation got a prepayment of the money that belongs to the next generation, which is a phenomenal historical fraud. The resources for lifelong learning, then, are thrown into the black hole of an insatiable public education
system, at least regarding the finance and administration sectors creating degrees with no correspondence to real economy.

Instead, lifelong learning can be applied in many sectors like in entrepreneurship, in collaborative organizations, new products and services where there is real need in productivity, networking, healthy diet, urban issues and the environment, gardening, cooking, e-learning, citizen journalism, and in many other fields.

Lifelong learning can provide experiential learning in the field of action and work in relation to the production of goods. That is, learning something tangible rather than acquiring only theoretical and academic knowledge, which certainly are valuable, but they cannot be embedded without practical application. Many universities abroad recognize this need and ask for interns. But this should not substitute the need for lifelong learning, which as we said, is a long lifetime process with practical experience. Ancient Greeks used to say that cities are a school. Even the walls of the city can teach; lifelong learning is performed within the city, its functions, its consultations and participatory processes. Technical training is done in laboratories and production sites while business is exercised in product companies.

**How is lifelong learning placed in the labor market?**

In the modern world, there are neither endless job opportunities, nor they arise spontaneously or they are unlimitedly created by the state. For this reason, the swelling phenomenon of unemployment occurs from restricting the supply of labor and the simultaneous increase in demand. Thus, it is obvious that job openings are created by investments and entrepreneurship, which neither the state can expand, nor the private sector, beyond the limits that allow sustainability in a business. In any case, the viability of an enterprise requires a profit rate, while for the state the immediate requirement of sustainability is the absence of damage. But, how can jobs be created beyond these defined limits?

If we compare ancient Athens with what we have today – from operational and cultural perspectives – in terms of modern technologies, we come through the following paradox: we admire the quality of projects and the quality of life of that time, a time without the sophisticated technological and mechanical means available today. We should think hard about the relationship between science, philosophy and lifestyle. Quite simply, we would say that in our time we are in possession of advanced science while ancient Athenians had a unique philosophy coordinating the institutions of the city. So if we combine sophisticated technological means with smart management of human resources and a more philosophical attitude in consumption, life values as well as in the wealth/poverty dipole, we can gain a better quality of life in terms of sufficiency via the reasonable distribution of wealth, focusing on the spiritual wealth of the city, equally determining the quality of life at all levels. Here we should emphasize on the essential relationship of human resource and knowledge management, not only in science
and technology, but also in the philosophical attitude of life in priorities and values including their involvement in the city commons.

Effectiveness requires organized expression through civil society organizations, neighborhood councils, and social structures in municipalities. If we want to go a little further, we can talk about a modern “ecclesia.” That is, local consultation meetings in the context of participatory democracy that can identify problems and take responsibility for solving them. Also, another form of smart knowledge management is the creation and development of institutional solidarity and its use in promoting economic and social entrepreneurship; that is, business creation for addressing social problems.

The responsible and organized citizen is invited in its own city to become a co-creator of local development initiatives along with the Local Government, claiming quality of life and poverty reduction and not exclusively profit. And at this level there are much better technological and material conditions than the ones existed in Ancient Athens, where citizens were, indeed, co-creators of their own city.

**Implementing the social economy internationally – the social economy as a global phenomenon**

Since the mid 70s, in all developed countries around the world, there has been a significant growth of social activism, of self-organization and mobilization of citizens with development actions as a common denominator forming new institutions of solidarity, which, in turn, led to the development of social economy.

This area, called with different names – third sector or social economy sector or non-profit sector – has the same social effect. Millions of people around the world practice solidarity economy. They work and consume for their own welfare or the welfare of their co-citizens but not for profit. They implement what is important for the solidarity economy, namely the creation of adequate economic conditions for all people. Governments and states observe this procedure, sometimes institutionally blocking it and sometimes incorporating it in social welfare policies. Local Exchange Trading Systems (LETS) are a form of transaction, in which goods are exchanged without generating profit, helping communities to breathe, to live and grow in difficult economic eras. It is a way to live and work without money.

Non-monetary exchange systems are spread all over the world. The exchange of services is equal. The currency can presumably be time. The one-hour legal advice equals one hour of gardening. All services are paid back. There is a central unit that charges and credits the account of each member similar in operation to bank withdrawals and deposits. The exchange is not always done during the week, but within six months. Some people save time for the future. Products traded through LETS vary depending on the region of operation and the members
Global institutions and applications of the social economy

Organic products from domestic backyards, language courses or music lessons, repairs, machine processing, medical or dental care, housework, children care but also astrological interpretations or yoga classes are some of the deals that one can encounter in the supply catalogs of these systems.

In any case, this trend leaves various governments no longer indifferent since the humanitarian crisis is at the doorstep of many countries. On the other hand, the activities of social enterprises are expanding, covering a wide range of social, cultural, cultural and humanistic needs and defending human and civil rights. This role must be identified by governments and supra-governmental organizations including the role of cooperatives. Within this framework, the European Union has recognized the role of Civil Society organizations and the importance of social economy by incorporating it to its policies. Notably, an important part of the European Social Fund has been invested under this purpose (community service programs and poverty reduction programs).

The recent economic crisis has further highlighted the importance of social economy and all poverty reduction plans are treated more in terms of organizing social enterprises.

However, institutions for rational and efficient allocation of these resources are not always reliable. So, at the edge of an unprecedented global threat of growing poverty, environmental degradation, social and economic exclusion of large parts of society, many programs while adopting social economy provisions end up being managed by administrative and financial elites, in a not always transparent way.

On the other hand, these same societies, having to face the looting of the future, the entire biosphere hangover effect of climate change emitting danger signals to everyone, gradually realize that the only antidote to overexploitation of natural resources and degradation of human resources is the development of forms of social entrepreneurship with respect to the environment promoting participatory ecology and limiting uncontrolled consumption.

This global awareness of the growing negative conditions brought together spontaneous movements from around the world and initiated efforts to create a
different economy. The direction leads towards a broader vision for society which promotes the expansion of solidarity dynamics. The existing development model is now under doubt, when 80% of people worldwide lives below poverty line gaining less than $10 per day. Thus, poverty management and economic growth are two concepts not always in line. Growth, or even overgrowth, can exist in some sectors but at the same time poverty rates remain high. This model should be differentiated from below and from within, since governments do not seem to be aware of the situation.

Nevertheless, the immense growth of the last 30 years brought expansion of global poverty. Despite the technological tools facilitating humanity by reducing human labor and multiplying production, the concentration of wealth in few hands has limited local development and solidarity economy that existed in traditional communities. It eliminated local resources dragging large population sections to poverty.

Traditional rural communities are struggling to survive. Today, there are areas where after violent industrialization and global competition end up with high unemployment rates. In turn, ancestral homes with agricultural holdings are being abandoned and, as a result, a huge concentration of population is noted in large urban centers. Thus, growth does not equal poverty reduction.

**The social economy in Europe**

Social economy in Europe already accounts for 10% of companies with about 11 million employees. There are extremely successful examples in many different sectors of economy, which demonstrate the great potential of social economy to be an effective counterweight between the classic choices of statism and private sector with the single aim of maximizing corporate profits. At the same time, it addresses the explosive problem of unemployment and the disintegration of social cohesion.

Cooperative enterprises of 800 million members provide over 100 million job positions which account for 20% more jobs than those offered by multinational firms. It is significant that in 2009, despite the recession, the 300 largest cooperatives in the world increased their growth by 14%, with a turnover of about 1.1 trillion dollars, while in 2011 these firms had a growth cycle increase of 1.6 trillion dollars, satisfying at the same time the social needs of their members.

Countries with strong cooperative action, like Finland (62% of the population takes part in cooperatives), Sweden, Canada (40% of the population takes part in cooperatives) and Spain with a long tradition in associations (21, 6% of national jobs comes from cooperatives) have established the institution of Support Centers for Cooperative Enterprises whose mission is to inform, educate and assist prospective social entrepreneurs in their first steps.

There is also no coincidence in the fact that the most successful and stable economies in the world happen to be also the most developed cooperative
Global institutions and applications of the social economy

economies. According to the European Economic and Social Committee, in countries like Germany, Italy, France and Spain, cooperative enterprises seem to have relatively higher performance rates and they are more durable and significantly more stable than other forms of enterprises in times of crisis.

In Germany, the cooperative sector is expanding, particularly within the health care sector. During the last three years, in fact, there has been a large increase in the number of new cooperatives. Moreover, in 2010, only 0.1% of businesses declared to have defaulted were cooperative firms. This is the lowest rate for all types of businesses. Also, apart from the four major companies, there are two million energy producers of renewable resources (small producers, houses, cooperatives, joint stock companies). In many cases, their creation relies on the enthusiasm of youth.

In the United Kingdom partnerships are flourishing in all areas. Notably, in 2009, the turnover increased by 10%, when the British economy shrank by 4.9%. In 2010, the cooperative sector continued to grow by 4.4%, compared to the growth rate of the total UK economy (around 1.9%). The UK also initiated the system of local non-monetary exchanges – Local Exchange Trading Systems (LETS) – which is a form of transaction, not remunerated. It does not generate profits, but it helps communities to breathe, to live and grow within difficult economic times. It is, in short, a way to live and work without money. This system started during the era of de-industrialization associated with the government of Margaret Thatcher.

According to mythology, these systems have gotten their name from parties organized by the unemployed of that time, in an effort to keep up their morale. The slogan “let’s party” used for encouragement in view of the social dead along with efforts to collect some money through these parties became the godfather of these systems.

In Italy, employment in cooperatives grew by 3% in 2010, while total employment in the private sector declined by 1%. The crisis in social welfare has resulted in the rapid proliferation of social cooperatives. Cooperatives have greater life expectancy. One out of three cooperatives established between 1970 and 1989 continue to operate, compared to one out of four cases of private enterprises. In Spain, particularly affected by the crisis, the decline in employment in 2008 and 2009 was around 4.5% in the cooperatives sector, compared to 8% noted in other businesses. However, in 2010, worker cooperatives increased the number of job placements by 0.2%, while employment in conventional enterprises decreased by 3.2%.

Implementing the social economy in Latin America

In Latin America, which has experienced many financial crises and bankruptcies during the last 30 years, solidarity economy managed to show its virtues and flourished thanks to the communication flow of via communication networks.
In Argentina, for example, after an initial explosion in the number of groups exchanging goods and services with their own local currencies – which at one point reached over two million participants while some statistics refer to three to five million – these networks have decreased in number. The severity of this dead end led to the emergence of a new national network of solidarity exchange, which had been improved in terms of organization and methodology.

In Brazil, the lessons from Argentina and elsewhere led to the creation of community banks that operated with social currencies issued locally. As opposed to the Argentinean case, currencies were guaranteed against reserves with solidarity micro-credit funds. The electronic system developed allowed transactions with unsecured currencies, which circulated only in a certain group of users/publishers and are guaranteed as a form of payment between any user of the system, without the need for “smart” cards.

In Venezuela, the Brazilian experience has inspired the ongoing organization of a network of community banks that issued local currencies recorded as credits in electronic smart cards allowing transactions over computer networks.

**Economic crisis and the social economy in Greece**

Europe is on the verge of social dissolution and Greece on the brink of a humanitarian crisis. The economic and social dimensions of poverty in Greece are dramatic, with about one third of Greeks living in poverty, according to Eurostat data for 2011. Particularly during this critical period, there is a need to mobilize all human resources in order to address the big problems of social exclusion and vulnerable social groups. Thus, the issues of solidarity institutions and social economy strongly appear in actuality.

Faced with all this, the numerous Municipal services and their structures seem helpless to respond to problems, insufficient to limit the general misery, while perpetuating bureaucratic and declined structures.

In many Greek cities, in order to address the reality of the humanitarian crisis, social clinics and polyclinics have been established along with social farmhouses, social vegetable gardens, social hostels, reception centers, solidarity institutions and agencies, day centers, community kitchens etc. However, the institutional cooperation deficit in addressing the expanded needs is obvious.

Obviously, it is not the country’s financial deficit per se that leads the society to regression, but many individual institutional shortcomings, such as the social consulting deficit, the organizational deficit and the empty think-tanks. Moreover, despite the huge amount of information, the paucity of synthetic thinking is apparent due to the fragmentation of spiritual life. If we add in all this, the organizational deficit in cooperation present in Greece, we can understand the underlying causes of lowering living standards.

Finally, the great accomplice to this situation is state bureaucracy and officialdom which must be eradicated. The only allies that Local Government can
have for the awakening of the respective area of responsibility are social activ-ists; and the only solution is the partnership with those willing and able to fight.

**The pragmatic phenomenon of the social economy**

The hindrances encountered when implementing the theory of the Social Economy worldwide are cultural. The consumer culture places quantity, extravagance, property and waste over people and community welfare. The replacement of the consumer model with sustainable forms of production, with the introduction of new ways of producing, consuming and living based on solidarity, is a system of our time.

Thus, the economic and cultural conditions of a molecular revolution are evolving, with solidarity networks to thrive and to transform political institutions from within, creating and reinforcing mechanisms of social participation. There is no linearity in this revolution.

The only solution is a partnership with all those who want and can fight for a new consumer model. For this reason, the mobilization of civil society organizations against state bureaucracy acquires increasingly vital interest.

These initiatives are pluralistic and accompanied by participatory democracy demands. What is obvious is that the logic of wealth concentration always ends up weakening the dynamism of local economy. On the other hand, the fact that solidarity economy promotes local development assumes a morale comparative advantage locally. Thus, to the extent that conditions of wealth distribution are established through fair values practices (both in the commercialization of goods and services and in the remuneration of self-employment) there is an increased local prosperity in general. These fair values are determined by the economic actors themselves – businesses, producers, consumers directly related to each other in any transaction – based on a process coordinated between networks.

These procedures are now a pragmatic phenomenon on the outskirts of world economy. This horizontal process came out of successful practices – examples of job creation and income, fair trade, ethical consumption, solidarity finance and dissemination of sustainable production technologies. These efforts, however, were isolated. It was necessary to evolve into collaborative networks that integrated these diverse practices in strategies that increased the potential of economic flows and linkages between them.

This meant that they had to solve issues that will allow the emergence of productive enterprises, such as solidarity credit and funding of development initiatives and partnerships. In this sense, solidarity economy is based on a set of values, moral and economic, implemented in specific practices, like self-management, democratic decision-making about economic activities and ecological reorganization of productive chains. If all main decisions are taken by and within assemblies, it is highly unlikely that this self-management would lead to the negation of the very democracy it is based on.
Returning to the Greek peculiarity, it is a common finding that the activities of the social economy sector are not highly developed; lots of words and fewer actions. Actions undertaken during the past few years for the coordination of efforts are hampered, *inter alia*, by the lack of an adequate and flexible institutional framework and most importantly, the negativity of the state bureaucracy and the general slander against civil society organizations.

It is typical that even the idea of various non-governmental initiatives (developed recently in Greece) constituting a distinct sector, is not often found in Greek thought. Generally, the Greek society as a whole continues to attribute to this type of initiatives a charitable character. This is also confirmed by official statistics which do not include the sector as a distinct category. A fact that is not done by chance, but it stumbles in the denial of the Greek political system – with few exceptions – to accept the message of our times.

References

1. Αδάμου Α. και Μεταξάς Θ. (2003) Άσμη αυρωπώντας την ελκυστική εικόνα ενός δήμου μέσα από τη διαδικασία του Μάρκετινγκ του δήμου: Η περίπτωση της Άλοννήσου
2. Αλεξόπουλος Κωνσταντίνος, CEO, Domotel Α.Ε., στην έντυπη έκδοση του www.ka-business.gr «ΚΑΙΝΟΤΟΜΙΑ & ΑΝΑΠΤΥΞΗ»
3. ΑΣ Κοινωνική Αμφικτιονία, Μεθοδολογία Παρατηρητηρίου Απασχόλησης και Επιχειρηματικότητας (equal)
4. Κοινωνική οικονομία και κοινωνική επιχειρηματικότητα – Οδηγός για την Κοινωνική Ευρώπη – Τεύχος 4 (2013)
5. Center for Regional Social and Cultural Entrepreneurship in Tourism (2006) Μελέτη για την καταγραφή της υφιστάμενης κατάστασης στο πλαίσιο της κοινωνικής οικονομίας και της κοινωνικής επιχειρηματικότητας στην περιφέρεια Πελοπονήσου
6. www.biodiversity.gr
7. Πολιτιστικό Τρίγωνο Πρεσπών, www.ctp.gr
8. Strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (ET 2020), ec.europa.eu
9. el.wikipedia.org/wiki
10. Ένας στους 3 Έλληνες στα άμεσα της φτώχειας, www.ethnos.gr
12. koinoniki-georgia.blogspot.gr
13. Νέα Πολιτική http://neapolitiki.blogspot.gr/2011/10/1.html
14. www.oikopress.gr
15. partetavouna.blogspot.gr
16. Πανελλήνια Ένωση Σχολικών Συμβουλών, www.pess.gr
17. Περιβαλλοντικό γλωσσάρι, www.sciencenews.gr
18. www.socialactivism.gr
19. Πανεπιστήμιο Θεσσαλίας www.uth.gr
20. www.visitcyprus.biz Κυπριακός Οργανισμός Τουρισμού
21. Τακτικός Β. (2011) Προτάσεις για την ΚΕΔΚΕ κατ η ζήτημα των κοινωνικών δικτύων
24. Τακτικός, Β., Κοινωνικό Κεφάλαιο. Μια διαδικασία «εκ των κάτω» ΑΜΚΕ Ερύμανθος
27. Achaean Solidarity Economy Network (Στακραέλ, Δίκτυο Αχαϊκής Αλληλέγγυας Οικονομίας) http://www.stakraeli.gr
Tourism and regional development

Nicholas Vagionis
Senior Researcher, Center of Planning and Economic Research (KEPE), Greece

Tourism, an ancient human need

Humans have exhibited an ancient need embedded in their character, to move from their living places, for shorter or longer periods. It may have started by going across a local or more distant river, across the sea to a near island or land and or over the mountains to other planes.

The obvious causes, to explain the natural drive to explore, were the search for a better place to stay, an alternative or more productive place to hunt, the eternal need to find a mate and later, a better land to cultivate. Besides, certain tribes developed a lifestyle within process of constant move, a nomad life, peaceful, or not.

Climate

Climate variations between the seasons have caused movement of human populations, a phenomenon also found in certain animals, fish and of course migratory birds (geese, doves, swallows, etc). Seasonal “to and fro” migration has also been a characteristic of the early human race in certain places that this was possible. Excessive ice, rain, drought, heat were to be avoided when possible.

Scientific research

Many scientists, like Geographers, Astronomers, Mechanics, but also serving philosophical and social facets of science have been moving to different places, at least from the ancient Greece era onwards. The need was twofold, first, to make physical and / or social observations and second to meet and exchange views and experience with other scientists serving common fields of research.

Social reasons – culture and health

With the advancement of ancient societies, reasons such as cultural, athletic, educational, theatrical, and health (baths, doctors) were causing people to move from their permanent living place for short or long periods. There, they lived in
alternative lodges, for money, or were hosted, which exactly constitutes “tourism” as we understand it today.

Tourism – a modern economic and development activity

World tourism data

World tourism has been constantly growing. It can be regarded both as a social phenomenon as well as a modern economic activity or “industry” for some. Today tourism as an economic activity is a very wide complex of services, practically any service, and also goods provided to visitors, that encompasses almost every facet of the economy. They are counted as ‘tourism related’ as long as they are consumed by visiting people, i.e. people that are non permanent residents and are not working in the area.

There may be more than a hundred indicators related to tourism, but one can get a good taste of the process with some basic figures regarding arrivals, expenditure and country receipts.

World tourism arrivals and expenditure

Tourist arrivals recorded are the first and basic index of the tourism phenomenon. During the last four decades world tourism arrivals have increased dramatically. From about 180 millions in 1970, to some 280 in 1980, to 420 in 1990, the trend kept strong to 680 millions in 2000, to exceed one billion in 2012. It is a strong trend that keeps for some 50 years on, and probably will not reverse in the foreseeable future. (see Figure 1).

Source: UNWTO, 2013

Tourist expenditure is also one basic index of the tourist phenomenon, especially describing its economic importance. Measured in billion USD, tourist ex-
Expenditure has also been constantly rising for the last forty years and more. From about 20 bil. in 1970, it rose to 110 in 1980, to some 270 billion in 1990, and kept rising dramatically, to about 480 in 2000, 850 billion to 2007, breaking through the one trillion marks in 2008, for the first time, and establishing above one trillion USD in 2011 and 2012. A big business in worldwide scale, distributed and affecting most countries in the world.

Average Expenditure per arrival is one index showing the money each tourist spends, on average, per visit to a tourist destination. It shows the increasing volume of purchased services that is offered and sold to visitors. For example in 1970 about 100 USD was the average spending in a given destination, per tourist arrival. This became almost 400 in 1980, more than 600 in 1990, about 700 in 2000 and kept on, to some 950 in 2007 and above 1000 USD per arrival for 2011 and 2012. From the above indices one can understand that the increase in tourism receipts is not only due to many more arrivals, but also to significantly more money spent per arrival. A thriving business, in other words, for those that have managed to enter, be and stay in the business.

So who have been those that have managed to receive a good stake from the ever growing pie of tourism business? Figure 2 helps in illustrating the analogies. As we can observe, for the years 2000 to 2012, the USA have been receiving double tourist receipts than the second country, which is Spain. Receipts in USA rose from 80 billion on 2000 to 130 billion in 2012. In Spain from 30 to almost 60 billion in the same period, while in France tourism receipts rose from about 33 to some 58 billion from 2000 to 2012. The country that comes after is China, increasing tourism receipts from 18 to 50 billion USD. Italy, follows, then Germany and after comes the UK. Greece comes at 23rd place with some 10-13 billion USD for the period, while the Russian Federation is at the 27th place, with receipts from tourism rising sharp to over 10 billion USD.
Tourism and regional development

Tourism – a multi faceted activity

Tourism, both as a human phenomenon, but also as an economic activity, can take place in very different parts of the world, as regards geographical, social, and economic development characteristics. For example there is tourism in central regions, like the world metropolises, but also in smaller metropolises and big cities. But in the same time there is tourism business in distant areas, by far non central. They can also be different regarding their state of development (i.e. small islands, areas with less developed economies in Africa, Asia or South America).

Need for infrastructure

Tourism development is in constant need for infrastructure. Transport infrastructure, and further on infrastructure and superstructures facilitating tourist accommodation, communications, health, safety, cultural, pleasure, sports, and other sorts of facilities, services and activities related to receiving and maintaining the tourist flows.

Types of hard/physical transportation infrastructure include road, railway, port, airport, integration of stations and terminals etc. Also urban infrastructure includes open spaces like parks, squares, bridges and channels, subways, lighting of public spaces, and all technical infrastructure needed in a city. Tourist accommodation superstructures and facilities include:

- various types of accommodation, like hotels, pensions, hostels and organized camping, and also villas, apartments, suites, bungalows, rented to tourists – for periods shorter than one year, according to the definition of UNWTO
- cultural superstructures like museums, theaters, concert halls, markets, baths, exhibition centres, conference centres, sports centres, ski-centers, etc.

Soft Infrastructure includes mainly information and communication networks, internet sites, wi-fi coverage, publications such as tourist guides, maps, etc., tour operators, offices and personnel, education structures for tourism science and business, providing specialized staff for tourism business and their supporting services like translators, animators, psychologists and cooks.

Need for utilizing technological change

Transportation infrastructure provides the access to the region to be developed touristically information/communication infrastructure is the necessary tool for the region to make the bookings and keep the customers feeling safe and connected. This makes their stay more comfortable and very possibly, longer.
Marketing through soft-infrastructure is the only way to put the local natural resources and cultural ‘gems’ into the tourist market. Internet booking of theaters, operas, museums, city tours, taxis and restaurants, and the electronic carrying out of the relevant transaction accelerates the money and services flow, thus producing increased tourism revenue, hits tax evasion, saves time in waiting and/or queuing and improves the experience. Customer services as a whole should accommodate latest technology and the related field of skills, which is the key to maintain an increased and sustainable visitability, which will provide both resources to maintain the infrastructure and local wealth.

Need for utilizing local civilization

Local civilization is – or at least should be - a very important parameter in the locally offered tourist product. Visitors should be given the chance to come to contact with local food, wines and alcohols. Local products, production units and outlets should be branded and accredited. Local music and dances should be made part of the tourist product, as well as local handicraft in wood, clay, textiles, painting, metal / stone carving and other.

Local fine arts like painting, sculpture, architecture, photography, should have proper venues of exhibition to the public and visitors.

Local sports that may include skate, ski, horse-riding, sailing, hunting, fishing, climbing should be made available to visitors. Local clubs should find ways to have their doors open to visitors.

Local traditions and history are of the highest importance, may it be festivals, religious or cultural (e.g. Octoberfest, Carnival, etc), castles, palaces, monasteries, battlefields, mythology etc.

Finally modern performance art like ballet, opera, theater, concert halls etc enrich the tourist product and strengthen the appeal of a tourist destination.

Need for managing the environment

The need for integrating the natural resources in the tourist product needs consistent procedures for the management of natural resources and environment. At first efforts should target in making natural resources known.

Second, measures should be taken so that natural resources are made visitable. Infrastructure should be provided in a way that will serve the resource – towards and within the resource. Of course any action taken should implement without disturbing or spoiling the resource. This means using natural resources in a sustainable mode, organize and respect the capacity and specificities of each resource (e.g., flash photography, noise, sanitation, tear and wear, etc). Third, measures should be taken in order to protect natural resources, maintain, study scientifically and preserve. Besides, it is useful to create facilities and structures in order to educate environmentally responsible visitors – clients.
Tourism and regional development

Tourism development – policies and political issues

Protecting the landscape

The European Landscape Convention, (Strasbourg, Florence 2000), concerns the protection, management and planning of all landscapes, aiming to raise awareness of the value of a living landscape. It covers natural, rural, urban and peri-urban landscapes that might be considered outstanding as well as everyday or degraded. It aims to promote landscape protection, management and planning, and to organize European co-operation on landscape issues, i.e. planning, awareness, training, socio-economic, etc.

It applies to the entire territory of the signing Parties, being: Andorra, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Georgia, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Moldova, Montenegro, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, San Marino, Serbia, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, the Republic of Macedonia, Turkey, Ukraine, United Kingdom, Iceland* and Malta*. (June 2013) (*not ratified)

Protecting natural resources

Since the early seventies international organisations have understood and have taken action for the preservation of cultural heritage and natural environment. On this context, the following international conventions can be mentioned.

The UNESCO Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage signed in Paris, in 1972. Noting that the cultural heritage and the natural heritage are increasingly threatened with destruction not only by the traditional causes of decay, but also by changing social and economic conditions which aggravate the situation with even more formidable phenomena of damage or destruction, and considering that it is essential for this purpose to adopt new provisions in the form of a convention establishing an effective system of collective protection of the cultural and natural heritage of outstanding universal value, organized on a permanent basis and in accordance with modern scientific methods, UNESCO adopted this convention. For the needs of the convention, “cultural heritage” contains monuments, i.e. architectural works, works of monumental sculpture and painting, elements or structures of an archaeological nature, inscriptions, cave dwellings and combinations of features, which are of outstanding universal value from the point of view of history, art or science; groups of buildings: groups of separate or connected buildings which, because of their architecture, their homogeneity or their place in the landscape, are of outstanding universal value from the point of view of history, art or science; sites: works of man or the combined works of nature and man, and areas including archaeological sites which are of outstanding universal value from the
Tourism and regional development

historical, aesthetic, ethnological or anthropological point of view. “Natural heritage” contains natural features consisting of physical and biological formations or groups of such formations, which are of outstanding universal value from the aesthetic or scientific point of view; geological and physiographical formations and precisely delineated areas which constitute the habitat of threatened species of animals and plants of outstanding universal value from the point of view of science or conservation; natural sites or precisely delineated natural areas of outstanding universal value from the point of view of science, conservation or natural beauty.

The Council of Europe Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats, signed in Bern, in 1979. The Convention aims to ensure conservation of wild flora and fauna species and their habitats. Special attention is given to endangered and vulnerable species, including endangered and vulnerable migratory species specified in appendices. The Parties undertake to take all appropriate measures to ensure the conservation of the habitats of the wild flora and fauna species. Such measures should be included in the Parties planning and development policies and pollution control, with particular attention to the conservation of wild flora and fauna. The Parties undertake to promote education and disseminate general information concerning the need to conserve species of wild flora and fauna and their habitats.

The Convention establishes a Standing Committee on which the Parties are represented by their delegates. The Committee's principal task is to monitor the provisions of this Convention in the light of development of the wild flora and the assessment of its needs. For this purpose, the Standing Committee is especially competent to make recommendations to the Parties and amendments to the appendices where these protected species are specified.

The Council of Europe Convention for the Protection of the Architectural Heritage of Europe, signed in Granada, 1985, having regard to the European Cultural Convention signed in Paris on 19 December 1954 and the Recommendation 880 (1979) of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and the Recommendation No. R (80) 16, Committee of Ministers adopted on 1 July 1981. The main purpose of the Convention is to reinforce and promote policies for the conservation and enhancement of Europe’s heritage. It also affirms the need for European solidarity with regard to heritage conservation and is designed to foster practical co-operation among the Parties. It establishes the principles of European co-ordination of conservation policies including consultations regarding the thrust of the policies to be implemented. The Council of Europe Convention for the Protection of the Archaeological Heritage, signed in Valletta in 1992, was based on the European Convention for the Protection of the Archaeological Heritage signed in London in 1969, the European Convention on Offences relating to Cultural Property signed in Delphi in 1985 and the Convention for the Protection of the Architectural Heritage of Europe signed in Granada on 3 October 1985. The new text makes the conservation and enhancement of the
Tourism and regional development

archaeological heritage one of the goals of urban and regional planning policies. It is concerned in particular with arrangements to be made for co-operation among archeologists and town and regional planners in order to ensure optimum conservation of archaeological heritage. The Convention sets guidelines for the funding of excavation and research work and publication of research findings. It also deals with public access, in particular to archaeological sites, and educational actions to be undertaken to develop public awareness of the value of the archaeological heritage. Finally, the Convention constitutes an institutional framework for pan-European co-operation on the archaeological heritage, entailing a systematic exchange of experience and experts among the various States. The Committee responsible for monitoring the application of the Convention assumes the role of strengthening and co-ordinating archaeological heritage policies in Europe.

Protecting the climate (USA, EU, China)

The USA created a combination of incentives, regulation, persuasion and innovation measures at the federal and state level. They have used a mixture of federal renewable energy tax incentives, state level renewable portfolio standards and a set of standards for passenger vehicles. In the EU, slower demand growth and a gradual move away from coal to nuclear, gas, and renewable sources kept emissions from growing and led to recent declines. For 2020, the EU27 has set an ambitious renewable energy target for 20% of total energy consumption, which translates to 34% of electricity generation from renewable sources.

In China policy encouraged increased renewable energy deployment through a mix of power generation targets, aiming to a fast deployment of environmentally friendly solutions. For example, in China the provisions for Hydroelectric plants was 100 GW (10th Five Year Plan), 190GW (11th FYP), 260 GW (12th FYP 2011-2015). For Wind generators production grew from 1.2 GW (10th FYP) to 10GW (11th) and to 100 GW (12th FYP). As regards solar power plants, from 0.05GW (10th FYP) to 0.3GW (11th) and to 21 GW (12th FYP). Finally, Bioenergy from 0 GW (10th FYP) grew to 5.5GW (11th) and to 13 GW (12th FYP).

Climate protection policies protect natural and living environment, while they need immediate funds for new technology installation and scientific research, with direct economic results that take time to show. Responsible Tourism should be very sensitive to reward such practices and also to penalize the lack of those.

Tourism development – effects on the economy and society

Local stakeholders

Local businesses are direct receivers of the tourist economic phenomenon, due to all kinds of business transfer to them. Tourism may increase demand for
local agricultural products, and of course demand for local services provision. Technology transfer to local firms is recorded as well as embedding of new information and communication technology. New transportation media can be justified. New know-how and organizational skills are used to meet the new demand. All of the above lead local firms to increased extroversion and new business opportunities and of course boost viability and profitability.

Development of the tourism business in one region will produce demand for skilled labor for the various services – and goods- that comprise the tourist product, together with some unskilled labor. It will produce dispersion of skills to newer members of the workforce due to “on the job” training practices. Besides it will induce accredited training programs for tourism related activities and also boost or justify formal education in tourism. In parallel, new small business opportunities appeal the wider local population, in a new, wider and more complex spectrum of demand.

Social dimensions

Incoming Tourism in one tourism-receiving society brings-in culture and promotes tolerance, openness, communication, new vision of life and development. Education provided to support the tourism business improves the knowledge and skills of the human capital, both directly and indirectly and in the course of time. Health infrastructure and improved sanitary conditions have to be – and eventually get- improved, to support tourism. They open a way to better living conditions for local society. Safety measures and necessary sanitary conditions, to attract and sustain tourism in-flows, also reflect positively to the local society.

Local society realizes some income generation for those employed or running business, depending on the type of tourist development. Besides, given a democratic and socially sensitive local government, income redistribution, especially through community actions – i.e. better provision of public goods, for children, for the elderly, has the opportunity to enhance.

Tourism development – technical issues

Seasonality

Seasonality in tourism is a phenomenon where tourism peaks for a certain, small period. It is undesirable for a region because it causes idling of regional resources, infrastructure capacity and labor, during the “low” season and overloading of regional resources and infrastructure during the peak “season”. (See Figure 3 showing the considerable seasonality of international tourism arrivals in Greece). The dispersal of the tourist demand is to be achieved with a wide tourist
product, (i.e. not only sea – sand) with plenty of different activities and services that may sustain the tourist in-flows all-around the year.

**Means of transport**

![Figure 3: Seasonality of international Tourist Arrivals (Greece)](image)

![Figure 4: International arrivals by means of transport (Greece)](image)

It is self-evident that the international and long distance tourism is more and more dependent on airlines and airports. Air transport is fast safe and economic. The better airport infrastructure in proximity to the proposed region to be touristically developed, the higher the possibility for a good inflow of tourism and relevant business. On the other hand, sea cruising is good as part of the locally offered tourist product, and relevant infrastructure and facilities always act in support of tourist development. Private car driving is better if based to locally hired cars. This, if advertised suitably, will solve various technical problems of
congestion (less parked unused cars), security (rented cars rarely get stolen) and maybe some extra local revenue.

Carrying capacity

Finally, there may be many different types of environment in a tourism receiving region, like urban, rural, forest or mountainous. Each has its own values and carrying capacity norms. The acceptable capacity of tourism reception can only be determined with a complex “carrying capacity” assessment. This is mainly based on the levels of disturbance or unsustainable exploitation of natural resources, which has to be avoided, on the disturbance of non-profit making parts of society, which also should be avoided, (or at least compensated) and other relevant Quality vs. Quantity arguments, together with business and social profitability arguments.

References

3. UNWTO (2013) http://www2.unwto.org/
4. UNESCO http://whc.unesco.org/en
5. Council of Europe http://conventions.coe.int
Biotourism market analysis and strategic marketing plan for Molyvos

Aleks Buda, Irini Cerepi, Georgios Kartaltzis, Margaux Pauwels, Elizabeth Tsavdarides Veenendaal and Hercules Mousiades
American College of Thessaloniki
Greece

Definition and characteristics

Rural tourism is generally considered a form of alternative tourism and as such an additional niche segment beyond the mainstream sun and sea mass tourism dominant in Greece and also in Lesvos. It should be noted however that many of the elements that make up the rural/agritourism offering add value to the traditional sun and sea seeker’s vacation, too.

Rural tourism consists of all “tourism activities carried out in a rural setting and involving interaction with the local population and culture as well as the enjoyment of nature” (www.Ecotourisminamerica.com) Nature in this respect refers specifically to agricultural and “tamed-nature” landscapes, while excluding outdoor activities which take place in national park and wilderness settings (Knowd, 2001, p. 7). Agritourism combines natural settings and agricultural products and/or operations within a broader tourism experience. It includes providing tourists with opportunities to experience a broad spectrum of agriculturally based products and services ranging from the simple fruit-stand shopping to winery, olive grove, and ouzo distillery tours, from farm-based “bed and breakfast” accommodations to tourist participation in goat herding, farm animal grooming, and olive harvesting.

Rural tourism offers visitors the experience of close personal contact with local populations and cultures. In fact, the EU LEADER program, which funds numerous rural development projects, stresses that rural tourism involves interaction between the visitor and the rural setting, where tourists are able to participate in local activities and traditions (EC-AEIDL 1997, in Knowd, 2001, p. 8). Activities may be centered around “working” farms and the tourist’s participation in the actual work of the farm (a mode which is also largely preferred by the core target prospects for this form of tourism) or may simply involve accommodation in an abandoned farm house or passive contact with the agrarian community and value chain (Phillip, Hunter and Blackstock, 2010, p. 756). Note also below the discussion relative to the culinary component of the agritourism initiative.
Culinary tourism

For some, the national or local cuisine can be a strong motivator in choosing a particular destination. Italy and France, and more recently Thailand and Vietnam, are all good examples of destinations that benefit from their exceptional reputation for their cuisine. The number of food-centered travel shows, travel-food blogs and ethnic food cooking shows which has grown significantly over the past few years are also indicative of the intrigue of food.

Culinary tourism is a growing and increasingly important niche opportunity that can “add value to rural economies” (Boyne and Hall, 2004, p. 81). It is a subset or integral component of rural/agritourism “that focuses specifically on the search for, and enjoyment of, authentic, local, prepared food and drink” (www.aglink.org). The parts of the agritourism offering that relate to culinary tourism include all types of food experiences such as: participating in cooking classes and demonstrations, attending food festivals and fairs, visiting farmer’s markets, learning about foods and their processes, visiting enterprises which produce foods, buying food souvenirs, and (of course) dining. It allows travelers to experience a locale and/or culture through its cuisine and unique foods while offering them a unique way of interacting with local communities.

Target prospect profile and segment potential

Travelers who participate in agriculturally related tourist experiences will likely be ‘independent’ travelers, although they may purchase a travel package on their own from a destination tour operator. Among them we usually can identify two segments: The “explorer” segment whose members’ interests include climbing, hiking, biking, camping and viewing wildlife and nature; and the “heritage” segment whose members’ interests include historic sites, museums and art galleries, and local festivals and crafts. Thus it is important to understand that although primarily motivated by the “agri” value proposition, these target prospects clearly also value benefits and elements of the value propositions addressing other vertical market segments as well as the mainstream sea and sun market. This is also consistent with the profile provided by the Guest Inns network of rural inns in Greece according to which travelers seek peace, quiet and relaxation and are interested in experiencing and learning about the area’s history, culture, gastronomy, local customs and arts and crafts, agriculture and farming, and nature.

The target prospects represent an estimated 20% of the adult population that normally travels for leisure at least once annually and has annual household income at least equal to the mean income (this is the target market size). This may vary depending on the particular source market but should serve as a reasonable starting point in estimating the market potential. Based on available research data, awareness is estimated at 11%. Similarly, an estimated 28% of
those who are aware are likely to trial an agritourism offering. Thus, approximately 0.6% is the estimated yield (i.e. the current size of the high value/target prospect market), from any larger population. However, distance always throttles demand and thus must be applied as an additional screen in estimating potential demand among high value/target prospects (as a rule of thumb, only 20% will travel 1000+ miles).

The characteristics of the high value/target prospect are:

- more likely to look for something new and different in a vacation
- more likely to want a vacation that is active, “authentic”, and educational
- more likely to value a variety of flexible (i.e. not scheduled) activities including cultural experiences (76% – visiting cultural landmarks, museums, historical and archaeological sites, etc) and activities that bring them closer to nature and the environment (wildlife viewing, birding, hiking, fishing, horseback riding, mountain biking, etc); however, most also value the essentials associated with sun and sea, traditional local foods (but not “gourmet dining”), etc. while notably, nightlife ranks low in the desired set of activities/entertainment. Since children are frequently in the traveling party, fun and easy family-centered activities are also highly valued.
- more likely to consider themselves “outdoorsy” (and some are attracted to “rugged” activities)
- have taken more trips in the past year
- spend more on vacations (nearly 40% more than non-prospects)
- have taken more types of trips (tour groups, cruises, educational and adventurous trips
- more likely to travel with their children (94% with spouse/significant other, 56% with their children; 66% consider agritourism most appropriate for families)
- do a lot of research in booking trips; influenced by word of mouth, Internet, TV, books, magazines
- have higher household incomes (substantially above the mean income), higher education levels, and are more likely to have kids (under 18, still in the household)

Top vacation influences for the target prospects are location (91%), season, cost and ease of getting to the destination (68%); no surprises here as these tend to be generally among the “hygiene” requirements of most travelers. In nearly 2/3rds of the cases the decision makers are women. Within the target population, 38% are between the ages 40-49 and 35% between the ages of 50-64; only 5% are 65+. Similarly, 65% reside either in a major urban center or in the suburbs of a major urban center. The primary influence among information sources is WOM (65%). And “newness” (of the experience, something different – 61%) is also a disproportionately important influence in these prospects’ choice process. Over
70% of the time spent researching a destination is via the internet and 66% book their travel online (either through a general travel website like Expedia or through individual supplier websites i.e. hotels, airlines, etc). The above data was obtained through Markitechture, a marketing consulting service and the Rural Landscape Institute in Bozeman, Montana.

Though little has been done in terms of systematic, large-scale collection of data regarding the incidence of rural tourism specifically in Greece, data from several small surveys and reports provide some limited insights on the demographics of travelers engaging in rural tourism activities in Greece and is generally in line with the more comprehensive data discussed above:

- Rural tourism generally appeals to urban populations, or those with urban lifestyles interested in experiencing rural environments and cultures, and authentic experiences (Papakonstantinidis 1993 and Marsden 1999, in Kizos and Iosifides, 2007). These travelers seek out new cultural and culinary experiences and desire to interact with local communities and cultures, seeking authentic experiences and relaxation (as well as sea and sun).
- According to information collected by Guest Inn (a network of Greek rural accommodations – www.guestinn.com) for ’05-’07, the greatest proportion of travelers are 35-55 years of age with above-average income and standard of living. There are slightly more families than singles or couples. Travelers are sourced from the UK, USA, Canada, France, Belgium, Switzerland, and even Australia and New Zealand.
- A small survey done on Lesvos in 2009 yielded similar information regarding age, income and nationalities, but also found significant numbers of tourists from the Netherlands, Germany and Greece (Chatzigeorgiou, Christou, Kassianidis and Sigala, 2009, p. 152-153).

As a result, for the island of Lesvos, the target geographic markets would be:

- current, developed markets in Northern Europe (France, Belgium, Switzerland, Netherlands, Germany, U.K. and Scandinavian countries) U.S. and Canada as well as Australia and New Zealand
- urban Greece, combined with the traditional summer holiday as well as for short getaways throughout the year (however, subject to the limitations associated with ease of access and travel cost)

Sales and promotion channels

The target market is accessible through a number of channels, including:

- *The Internet*: Given the clear preference articulated by the target prospect group to not only research destinations online but also to complete their
Travel booking, the island’s and Molyvos’ comprehensive presence on the internet is possibly the most essential promotional vehicle. Not only the research discussed earlier but also the information collected by the Guest Inn network, which operates a website with accommodations and booking options, offers additional insights. Tourists who book through Guest Inn are independent travelers who make their travel purchases online with organized booking sites (Expedia, Travelocity, Booking.com, etc) and directly with the various individual suppliers (for various transportation modes as well as for accommodations) or through a network or platform like Guest Inn (for accommodations) (Guest Inn, 2008, and Markitecture 2007 and 2009). Travelers also use the internet to solicit feedback from and research reviews written by others who have travelled to the destination they’re considering. It is vital, then, to maintain a comprehensive, cohesive and user-friendly internet presence (not only on the island’s and Molyvos’ portal but also through CRM initiatives, lead nurturing, encouraging net promoters to speak their voice on the web and by facilitating and actively placing related stories in appropriate online media.

− **Tour operators and travel agents**: Smaller, niche tour operators who focus on specialty travel alternative forms of tourism (wellness, new age, sports/activity, cultural, educational, etc.) are more appropriate channels for promoting rural/agro/culinary tourism than the traditional mass market tour operators. However, big tour operators have begun to promote alternative forms of tourism (including eco, rural, and wellness tourism) on their websites. Travel agents are also involved both in the outgoing as well as the incoming part of the channel. Nevertheless, given the characteristics of the “core” target traveler for this segment, the tour operator and travel agent channel is not a significant one. For these channels the “agri” offerings of the island should be supplemental to the mainstream value proposition and to those targeted toward other vertical market segments.

− **Fairs and expositions**: Traditional tools, such as tourism fairs and expositions can also serve a complementary role in communicating the comprehensive island offering to the travel industry (nevertheless with the caveat discussed earlier vis-à-vis the critical importance of the internet).

**Compatibility with existing infrastructure, current tourism base and other vertical and geographic markets**

Rural/agritourism is highly compatible with the existing mainstream tourism base on Lesvos and Molyvos in particular, as well as with all other vertical markets under consideration. Many tourists who choose Lesvos already consume various agritourism offerings (without necessarily referring to these as such. The overall rural character of the island and the numerous traditional, local food products which are not only consumed on site but also taken home to consume or
give away (sardines preserved in salt, olives and olive oil, ouzo, ladotyri and “glyka tou koutaliou” (fruit preserves) by the local women’s associations among the many examples), coupled with the related production sites and means (touring an ouzo distillery or olive oil processing plant, or joining a fisherman on a traditional kaiki to troll for sardines, or herding goats or harvesting olive trees, or watching a master fishing boat builder plying his trade, etc), and also with an attractive traditional local cuisine, rich history, local artists and artisan professionals, provide a strong basis on which to build a powerful value proposition and comprehensive offering for this vertical market segment.

Both the Molyvos area and Lesvos as a whole are very well suited as an agritourism and culinary tourism destination and, in fact, already have a range of offerings in place (albeit in an ad hoc rather than planned manner), including:

- history of agritourism and available agri-lodging alternatives
- eleven million olive trees, which provide the basis for local products (olive oil, olives), culture (olive museums), events (olive harvest festival), and even accommodations (Olive Press Hotel in Molyvos). The olive groves can serve as a setting for agri-lodging facilities (think Tuscany), agri-retail, agri-dining, and agri-tainment
- diverse natural landscape provides an exciting natural backdrop and attracts visitors with a variety of interests; enables many different activities (trekking, horseback riding, etc.) in different settings; allows for a variety of agri activities (olives, other crops, sardines/fishing, goats/sheep, cattle, etc.); and produces many distinctive and high quality local products.
- uniquely recognized as a top migrating birdwatching destination
- established and active women’s agricultural associations and cooperatives that make and sell local agri products (agri-retail) and operate restaurants and cafes (agri-dining and agri-tainment) and lodging facilities.
- abundant traditional local food products and raw materials. Many of the food products have a “story” which appeals to travelers and which gives insight into local culture. Many of the foods are easy to bring home to consume or give away and may be ordered online to ship to one’s home country.
- know-how and ability to convey knowledge of food and culinary traditions to visitors (locals “know the stories and how to tell them”)
- visitmolivos.gr and molivoswinendine.com represent a significant platform on which to build a comprehensive web presence

**Analysis and strategy recommendations**

Rural tourism offers visitors the experience of close personal contact and interaction with local populations and cultures allowing tourists to participate in local agrarian activities and traditions. It actually exposes tourists to substantial elements of the destination’s culture, including its history, societal make-up and
mores, arts and crafts, foods, and more. Agritourism activities may be centered around “working” farms and the tourist’s participation in the actual work of the farm (a mode which is also largely preferred by the core target prospects for this form of tourism) or may simply involve accommodation in a converted agri facility (an old farm house turned bed and breakfast, a flour mill or olive press turned into a boutique hotel, etc) or passive contact with the agrarian community and value chain.

The “culinary” component of the agritourism offering deserves particular attention. Properly developed and implemented, culinary tourism can strengthen the economy of a community at many levels—as the food is grown, processed, prepared, served and sold and the income is retained locally; which makes it an important element of sustainable tourism. Importantly, aside from the immediate positive economic effect, culinary tourism initiatives can also strengthen the brand of a region or locality, which in turn can strengthen its appeal as a tourism destination (Boyne and Hall, 2004) in a kind of virtuous cycle (think about Tuscany, Provence, Thailand; every time a German or Britt or Canadian experiences in his/her home country, in a restaurant or in the supermarket aisle “Tuscan” cuisine, or “Thai” food, or savors a wine from Provence or olive oil from Tuscany all in their own , the experience feeds the pervasive image of those destinations as culinary hotbeds).

It is critical to understand that agritourism adds value to farm operations as a diversification option that extends business viability in the agricultural sector and concurrently to the destination’s tourism infrastructure and market appeal. Farming advantages associated with agritourism include developing new consumer market niches, increasing awareness of local agricultural products and brands, creating greater appreciation of the importance of maintaining agricultural land uses, providing farm family members with on-site employment opportunities, and strengthening the long term sustainability for farm businesses. For rural communities and regions, agritourism can be a vehicle for diversifying and stabilizing rural economies by creating jobs and increasing community income; providing a broader market base for local businesses; and attracting other businesses and small industries. From a tourism viewpoint, agritourism can be a means of diversifying the mix of tourism products and services available to visitors and uniquely positioning rural regions and communities for tourism markets. It is important to acknowledge that although the core market that will explicitly be drawn by the agritourism offering may be small (at least initially and primarily hindered by distance and the related accessibility issues), multiple elements of the offering will enrich and add value to the main sun and sea market as well as to multiple other vertical market segments.

Key lessons learned from successful agritourism initiatives in Europe and the United States suggest that it is strategically important to: a) coordinate and link agricultural and tourism policies and programs; b) establish supportive organizational structures and processes; c) promote product quality and brand awareness;
As Kizos and Iosifides discuss in their 2007 report, rural and agritourism is a fairly recent concept in Greece coincided with the growth in mainstream mass tourism (2007, p. 62). Earlier forms of rural tourism (including returning to villages for saints’ festivals and weekends) were renamed under the umbrella name of agritourism in the mid 1980s, when a number of (EU-funded) rural development initiatives were launched and when gender equality programs became integrated into rural development programs (with as result the creation of a number women’s agricultural cooperatives (Ibid., p. 62). The overall initiative for the development of agritourism in Greece (including LEADER programs) did not involve establishing an advisory body to provide guidance to suppliers/producers and to coordinate efforts, nor was there sufficient or coherent monitoring by EU and national agencies, and so the programs resulted primarily in the building of rooms and guest homes in rural areas by individual business owners and not much more (Ibid., p. 63).

Agritourism in Greece, therefore, focuses mainly on lodging and the consumptions of food and drink products in rural settings. In their study, Kizos and Iosifides reviewed agritourism in three Greek locations, including Lesvos, and found that there were no units which operate on farms (ibid. p. 69). Agritourism facilities offer lodging and food (depending on type of enterprise) but very few other activities and services (including horseback riding) – though it should be noted that of the three locations, Lesvos had the greatest number of holdings with such activities (Ibid., p. 69). Given our knowledge of the characteristics of the target market – curious and adventurous travelers who are interested in interactive, fun and participatory agritourism activities which combine activity and nature with learning and a degree of cultural immersion – we can make the argument that the agritourism which is currently most common in Greece and also Lesvos may not offer the value which this target market expects and seeks.

Although some of the needed building blocks of agritourism exist in Lesvos, the full extent of the opportunity in this market has nowhere near been fully realized. To strategically guide Lesvos’ agritourism development efforts to capture the various opportunities in this market, we must combine current agritourism market and product information with an understanding of the challenges involved in the development and management of this form of agricultural and tourism diversification. And it is precisely at this point that efforts must begin: Acknowledging that this is neither a tourism industry initiative nor a farming industry initiative but rather a joint, collaborative effort to capitalize on significant demand potential and on the differentiated and intrinsic strengths of the island. For the initiative to succeed, three elements are necessary:
A qualified and adequate producer supply, meaning both a wide variety and depth of supply but also supply that is qualified to participate based on stringent quality standards. This may imply the need to develop and install a quality assurance or certification mechanism for farms/facilities/producers that participate in the initiative. Certification may also be achieved through agritourism networks like Guest Inn or other associations such as the European Federation of Farm and Village Tourism (Eurogites) or the Rural Tourism International Training Network which have developed both quality standards and online training programs which were developed with financial support from the EU Leonardo da Vinci program. Reputable agritourism websites with an outward orientation (such as Guest Inn) are a key source of information and bookings for tourists, but they only list certified accommodations.

A high level of consumer awareness/demand relating to the local offering - marketing agritourism in Greece is one thing, marketing the specific agritourism offering in Lesvos is another; regardless, it all implies proper marketing and communications schemes. This is critical as familiarity with the concept of agritourism is relatively low even amongst those that would be the likeliest target prospects.

A convenient linkage mechanism that can bring together the two groups (which may simply imply the integration of the initiative into existing marketing channels such as mass tour operators, or the development of relationships with focused/niche tour operators and agencies or user organizations, and/or the development of a themed portal on the internet, etc)

More specific recommendations and “things to keep in mind” are:

Product development should focus on delivering an “experience” that the target prospects value in a vacation: Authentic; New and Different; Unforgettable; Fun and Relaxing. The “product” should be highly experiential and participative in nature (but not extreme/rigorous/risky), should have a high “fun quotient” (not drudge, the tourist is not meant to replace farm labor..!), and should preferably be delivered not in a “showplace” setting but, rather, in a “working” environment (i.e. in a real farm, a working distillery, etc).

Since “familiarity” with agritourism is relatively low, communication efforts must seek to create awareness, educate potential travelers about what this experience could be like and assure them that this sort of vacation delivers the basics: private accommodations with a private bathroom, dining options with traditional local foods and ingredients, expected travel amenities, etc.

It is important not to lose sight of the essential benefits that are important to consumers on vacation, since it is still, first and foremost, a vacation. In other words, even for those most intimately involved with the agritourism segment,
the agritourism offering should be defined as selling “an authentic vacation (holiday) experience that brings you closer to nature and the environment and allows you to learn about farm/ranch life through a variety of fun (family) activities in a relaxing setting.”

- Since this is not a “luxury” segment, the island’s infrastructure is not likely to be problematic.
- Given the relatively remote nature of the island and the issues associated with accessibility (distance, time traveling, and cost), agritourism in Lesvos must be primarily viewed, packaged, promoted, and delivered as a complement to the main appeal of the island as a holiday destination (to the mainstream market) and to the targeted value propositions to other segments.
- In designing a comprehensive agritourism offering for the island it is useful to group services and products into an organizing framework: a) agri-retail, b) agri-dining, c) agri-entertainment, d) agri-education, and e) agri-lodging.
- It is critical to ensure that the actual experience lives up to the promise
  - accommodations are as they are described
  - activities are appropriate, interesting, relevant and suitable for the particular consumer targeted (degree of difficulty, physical requirements, engagement, etc)
  - visitors are able to have an authentic (or perceived as authentic) experience – which includes interaction with local population, participation in community events, etc.

Clearly, rural/agritourism is a suitable alternative market segment which could at least partially offset the decline in the mass sun and sea tourism market. More importantly, agritourism offerings can be easily bundled into the value proposition addressing the mainstream mass tourism market significantly enhancing its appeal and differentiation form the typical Aegean islands.

As mentioned earlier, there are already a significant number of building blocks in place on the island across all 5 of the axes of the organizing framework mentioned above (agri-retail, agri-dining, agri-entertainment, agri-education, and agri-lodging). However, development of these elements occurred in an unplanned, uncoordinated manner without a clear focus on the target consumer and has not been leveraged in its totality nor bundled into a comprehensive offering to the vertical market segment. The deeper understanding of the high value target prospect provided above, coupled with an organized planning approach as suggested, and the concurrent commitment by various key parties to put in place the three necessary ingredients also discussed above, should allow Molyvos and Lesvos to capitalize on an initiative relating to this vertical market.

Molyvos should position itself to guide the rural/agritourism initiative across the island with a collaborative approach with key participants from the public and private sector. This will yield better and more sustainable results for several reasons. First, one obstacle to successfully developing rural tourism in Greece has
been the absence of a cohesive national strategy and fragmentation on a local level (Kizos and Iosifides, 2007, p. 59). Thus, a well-organized, collaborative effort will result in a more unified approach and a more cohesive, consistent overall image; something that’s also critical in the overall branding effort for the area and the island. Second, collaboration will provide access to a larger pool of producers with the proper qualifications to participate in the initiative, a critical ingredient in the success of the initiative. Third, collaboration will also likely provide access to more financial and human resources which should enable larger-scale and more effective implementation of strategy and promotion. Lastly, travelers will want to “explore” the island, not limit themselves to the Molyvos area. Molyvos may position itself as the base and center for agritourists but must be able to sell and provide them with a rich and diverse experience, with access, activities, and opportunities that will enable them to explore the island, interact with local communities and learn about the island’s cultural heritage.

Agritourism visitors are motivated by Nature, Friendship and Hospitality instead of Sea, Sand, and Sun (Iakovidou, 1995 in Chatzigeorgiou, Christou, Kassianidis and Sigala, 2009). In order to ensure that nature, friendship and hospitality live up to expectations, it is important to get the key players involved. This most definitely includes the local community, as the stance and attitude of the community is an important factor in determining whether a visitor feels welcome and (emotionally) connected with the destination and satisfied with the experience (Sheldon and Abenoja, 2001, Swarbrooke, 1993, in Chatzigeorgiou, Christou, Kassianidis and Sigala, 2009). Educational activities may help to ensure community commitment to keeping the environment clean and engaging in sustainable practices (as much as possible), in order to help preserve the natural beauty of the island on which this type of tourism is heavily based.

It all starts in the beginning

The absence of a cohesive strategy is an obstacle to successful development of rural tourism on a national level. This certainly applies to the local level as well. It is therefore necessary to develop and agree the area’s/island’s agritourism strategy. This requires some preparatory work:

1. Assess current segment strategy (or what has been done)
   - Is there a strategy?
   - How is/was it developed and implemented?
   - Is it appropriate, practical, feasible?
   - Who are the main players?
2. Assess infrastructure with respect to the rural/agritourism segment
   - What accommodations are available? How/where are they situated (on the island, but also what natural setting?) What state are they in? What should be the standard and what’s required to bring them up to standard?
What other facilities are available (settings for cooking schools, class rooms, etc.)? What shape are they in? What is needed to bring them up to standard?

- How easy is it to build/create missing facilities?

3. Inventory current agritourism activities

- What type of agritourism currently takes place (e.g., working vs. non-working farm, participation in farm work, educational activities)
- Are visitors currently able to participate in farm work (e.g., harvesting of olives or other crops, care of animals) or processing of products after harvest/collection
- Are visitors currently able to participate in cooking classes or similar programs (e.g., honey making, cheese making)?

- Are educational programs related to food and agricultural and rural issues (e.g., culture, gender) available and appropriate for those who want to combine leisure with learning?

- Use the agri-organizing framework.

4. Assess success/satisfaction with activities (level of participation, demographics of participants, level of satisfaction, cost to participant, income to the producer)

5. Assess potential for interaction with local population and culture

- Is local population open to this type of interaction, engaged and interested in exchange of knowledge?

6. Inventory complementary activities (walking/trekking, biking, etc.)

**Centrally coordinated product development**

Although many agro- and culinary tourism activities will be developed and implemented by individual producers/providers, there is a need not only to ensure that the total “offering” is comprehensively designed and implemented (i.e. that the appropriate products, accommodations, events, etc. are available and at proper quality levels) but to also coordinate and implement activities that focus the island’s position in the agri-tourism market. These activities require central coordination and promotion and will likely involve public-private partnerships to share costs and resources. They may include:

- Agricultural and/or culinary tours of the island, similar to the Isle of Arran Taste Trail20 as well as to the “Wine Roads” concept. These could include activities, visits to farms/production facilities, museums, etc.—and of course, regular eating-and-drinking stops at specified locations with suggestions about specialties and other interesting information.

- Festivals that will engage visitors and provide traction promotionally. The “olive harvest” as an example could be turned into a 2 week festival involving visitors in the harvest; educating them about the tree, its history
and its history on the island, the fruit and the varieties and qualities that make an exceptional olive, the harvesting process, and the various processing alternatives; including tours of working processing plants; and sampling and selling product (olives and olive oil, etc)

- Print (and online) resources for tourists: maps with agri tourist sites marked and accompanied by information, lists of activities/facilities, lists of agricultural associations and cooperatives, list of interesting shops, working farms and/or production sites open to the public, etc. Here again, the agri-organizing framework is a reasonable guide. These resources can be made available to tourists as they check into their accommodations, or provided at the airport/port, or even provided to travel agencies and tour operators for their clients.

Coordinated selling and promotion

Lack of funding is of course a serious obstacle. Certainly, if the Greek government develops a strategy of diversification and repositioning, then Molyvos/Lesvos may be able to find support for promoting rural/agritourism under that umbrella. There is also potential for promoting culinary tourism as a result of publicity and attention surrounding the selection of Athens to host the 37th World Association of Chefs Societies Congress (WACS) in 2016. This will be the first time in 30 years that a Greek or Mediterranean city has hosted the WACS Congress, and it is considered to be an enormous opportunity to showcase Greek cuisine and the country as a whole—and to put the country firmly on the map as a culinary destination (these efforts are supported by Ministry of Tourism). However, selling and promotion should primarily focus on a) the internet, b) specialty tour operators and travel agencies, and c) mainstream tour operators and travel agencies as discussed earlier.

Internet – portal

As discussed earlier, the internet is a critical promotional vehicle for this market segment. Travelers interested in rural/agritourism do more research than other segments and use the internet extensively to do so as well as to complete their bookings. Molyvos/Lesvos must therefore ensure a comprehensive and visible internet presence to promote awareness, assure prospective visitors, and simplify the traveler’s trip planning and organizing. As discussed elsewhere, a single umbrella portal should preferably be used to guide prospective visitors to the island—coherently organized to provide both generally applicable information about transportation and accommodations (with booking options) as well as tailored sections aimed at the vertical market segments we choose to pursue (such as agritourism). Whether under a main umbrella or not, a dedicated rural/agritourism portal should be created and minimally include the following:
- Discussion of the island’s commitment to nature (certifications and testimonials), its agricultural history, its natural diversity, its range of unique (or not) products (sardines, olives, olive oil, salt, ladotyri, birds, goats, petrified forest, etc)
- Presentation of the mainstream vacation “context”
- Information about agritourism and complementary activities
- List of accommodations (all but with an agri-designation for those particular to the segment – and the ability to book (centrally or minimally through a link to the accommodation’s online booking system)
- List and detailed specifications/discussion of classes / camps / activities and ability to register where appropriate
- List of qualified producers participating in the initiative with detailed descriptions list of agricultural and women’s cooperatives and what they do or produce

The www.molivoswinendine.com website should obviously be integrated into the main and into the agritourism portal.

Internet – travel websites

There are other dimensions to achieving internet presence in order to promote Lesvos/Molyvos as a rural tourism destination:

- Articles and reviews on blogs and websites: Travelers seek information about possible destinations and activities online, and they are interested in feedback and opinions of others. Molyvos/Lesvos should actively seed travel websites and blogs (write a blog, write and publish articles, invite and pamper writers, etc) and also leverage its repeat customer base (particularly net promoters) through CRM efforts and nurturing initiatives to speak their voice on the web (on travel sites, in social media, etc) and find ways of engaging tourists through social media, both before and after their visit.
- Advertising on topical websites: Yes, there is a cost involved but approaches could be highly economical, using Google AdWords as an example on websites that relate to the particular topic/segment. In addition, sharing and spreading the cost across the qualified producers and others who are “on board” with the initiative should minimize the pain.

Tour operators

Approach specialty and mainstream tour operators: Once the product development and strategy work is complete and a comprehensive offering in place, specialty tour operators may be an important resource. Possibly start with ATOI (Agricultural tour Operators International) members that source in the main tar-
get countries. Culinary tours are handled by particular operators (and some chefs) and it would be important to build relationships with them, too (for example, gourmetontour.com, classicjourneys.com, europeancookingtrip.com). The mainstream tour operators already on the island (TUI, Thomas Cook) also have begun to offer more specialized packages for their niche markets and would be interested in promoting Molyvos/Lesvos as a niche destination and certainly in enhancing the value of their sun and sea packages with the available agri-offering.

Certification and inclusion in databases

Hotels and guest houses could pursue certification to be included in agritourism networks/ and websites, such as Guest Inn and ECEAT (European Centre for Ecological and Agricultural Tourism). Hotels and guest houses may also want to consider obtaining the European ecolabel, which has relatively high recognition across Europe.

References


Forests and ecotourism as biotourism components

Prof. Athanasios Karameris
School of Forestry and Natural Environment
Aristotle University of Thessaloniki
Greece

According to Prof. Agni Vlavianos Arvanitis, Biotourism is tourism that respects the gift of life, preserves natural and cultural resources and biodiversity, and focuses on a value system that promotes the appreciation of life.

In this sense, the tourism model applied in Greece after the Second World War has been bio-destructive. Its consequences were multiple; environmental, economic, social and cultural.

The focus of tourism development in insular and coastal areas resulted in tourist crowding which created both environmental and social pressure. For example, Rhodes Island with 10.9 million of overnight stays in 1999 receives 1.6 million visitors (18 times more than its population). The region scores high in terms of tourism intensity (1,150 visitors per km²).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Regions of intense tourism influx (1995)</th>
<th>Arrivals/km²</th>
<th>Arrivals/km²</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Saint Maarten (Antilles)</td>
<td>13,878</td>
<td>Netherlands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bermuda</td>
<td>7,076</td>
<td>France</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malta</td>
<td>3,171</td>
<td>Portugal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aruba (Antilles)</td>
<td>2,808</td>
<td>Italy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guam (Micronesia)</td>
<td>1,621</td>
<td>Spain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhodes, Greece</td>
<td>1,150</td>
<td>Greece</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gayman Islands (Caribbean)</td>
<td>931</td>
<td>Ireland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corfu, Greece</td>
<td>858</td>
<td>Germany</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Tourist crowding in, almost exclusively, coastal and insular areas distorted and destroyed many sensitive areas between terrestrial and marine ecosystems. A European Union survey uncovered that tourism is responsible for the loss of 40-50% of sand dune areas in Greece from 1900 to 1990.

Tourism acted in strong competition with the biodiversity of the country, which ranked high in competitive potential. The carrying capacity of tourist destinations has been surpassed threatening, therefore, not only biodiversity but
ultimately tourism itself. Habitats have been disintegrated, fauna has decreased, species have been included in the red list, vegetation has declined or replaced by other more resistant species, forests have been burned out or cleared for building land attainment, water resources have become polluted and unsuitable for aquatic populations and tourist use.

### Loss of sand dunes in Europe (1900 – 1990)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Estimated surface in 1900 (ha)</th>
<th>Loss by 1990 (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>5,000</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Britain</td>
<td>80,000</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>250,000</td>
<td>40-50 (Atl.) 75 (Med.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>10,000 – 20,000</td>
<td>15-20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>80,000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greece</td>
<td>15,000 – 20,000</td>
<td>40-50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>20,000</td>
<td>40-60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>70,000</td>
<td>30 (Atl.) 75 (Med.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>35,000 – 45,000</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>45,000</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portugal</td>
<td>100,000</td>
<td>45-50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: European Union for Coastal Conservation, 1995*

### Tourism and biodiversity in European coastal areas

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Biodiversity</th>
<th>Tourism Pressure</th>
<th>Competitive Potential</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>medium</td>
<td>medium</td>
<td>medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>medium</td>
<td>medium</td>
<td>low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>medium</td>
<td>medium</td>
<td>medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>low</td>
<td>low</td>
<td>low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>high</td>
<td>high</td>
<td>high</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greece</td>
<td>high</td>
<td>high</td>
<td>high</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>low</td>
<td>low</td>
<td>low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>high</td>
<td>high</td>
<td>high</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malta</td>
<td>high</td>
<td>much high</td>
<td>high</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>medium</td>
<td>medium</td>
<td>medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portugal</td>
<td>medium</td>
<td>high</td>
<td>medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>high</td>
<td>high</td>
<td>high</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>medium</td>
<td>high</td>
<td>medium</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: World Conservation Monitoring Centre, 1994*

New hotel complexes, restaurants, tennis and golf courts, plus other tourist facilities, have been a huge intervention in the natural space leading to the loss of
naturalness. Furthermore, cooping-up tourists in large hotels for a week or two, offering only sun and sea, deprived tourists of direct contact with local people, their customs and traditions and the overall natural and cultural heritage of the country. Contemporary demographic data uncover large and uneven demographic changes. Population movement towards touristically developed areas is intense and accompanied by the anticipated depopulation of regions of origin. For example, it has been estimated that from 1951 to 1991 the population of Skiathos Island would have increase by 54%, of Rhodes Island by 67 %, Mykonos Island by 82 % and Alonissos Island by 122 %, while all islands are estimated to shrink by 11%.

Intra-sectoral labour mobility is greatly present; farmers become waiters and hotel employees, while domestic productive forces tend to ‘specialize’ in tourism services and to abandon their traditional occupations. Souvenirs within the local tourist market are not of Greek origin, but they are imported from Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore.

Pastures in tourist zones are converted into plots rather than farming fields. Values, customs and traditions, the sense of honor, selfless kindness, pride, culture and education are either eliminated or corrupted, while successful entrepreneurs are exalted over intellectuals, doctors and teachers, while farmers and breeders are even more humiliated.

The intense urbanization causing acute pollution problems and the deterioration of living conditions in urban centers leads to escape trends, enhances traveling towards wild and pristine nature destinations while generating aspirations for residency in forest lands where living conditions are better. However, such non-anticipated creation of residential areas not only discredits the landscape causing forest and coastal ecosystem fragmentation, but it also involves appalling methods like arson.

Demand in highland leisure increases and, in special cases, it becomes extensive with gradually more adverse effects. The example of the Alps is typical. In the context of mountain tourism development, Greece has been witnessing the senseless construction of ski centers, without sustainability planning. Forest areas are being eliminated in order for ski slopes, lifts, parking places, roads, catering facilities to be created. Nearby areas are being urbanized, the soil is eroded and pollution increases.

The above cases gradually led to the qualitative deterioration of tourism resources. The devaluation of the tourism product, the abuse and pollution of the environment and the general environmental awareness of tourists resulted in the gradual detachment from traditional tourist destinations and led to the quest of “new,” destinations less degraded and more unaffected, a physical environment that meets visitor expectations.

Under the prism of questioning the model applied so far, there is the need of discovering another model, another form of tourism that takes seriously and into
account both environment and society. This is the point where ecotourism appears as an alternative solution. But what is ecotourism?

According to the definition given by the IUCN (International Union for the Conservation of Nature) ecotourism is ‘environmentally responsible travel and visits to relatively undisturbed natural areas, in order to enjoy and appreciate nature along with complementary cultural features that promotes conservation, has low visitor impact, and provides for beneficially active socio-economic involvement of local populations’. It is a form of tourism that refers to more or less eco-conscious tourists that visit areas with enhanced natural environment, away from the throng of other forms of tourism, respecting both cultural elements and the local population.

It is the type of tourism that seeks to sustain over time the quality, quantity and productivity of systems of human and natural resources, while respecting and facilitating the dynamics of such systems. It is friendly with natural habitats and compatible with local communities. It is an experience of fruitful osmosis of both domestic and foreign elements, an experience that discovers new values and verifies the old ones. Ecotourism underlines and reinforces the symbiotic relationship between human and its surrounding nature during the spatial movement, going beyond the dominant forms of leisure travel, a shift of tourism development from its exploitative character to a Biotourism approach.

It embraces all natural and cultural resources and it is not limited to classical monuments, upon which the whole national tourism development has been based since its infancy. It expands to modern monuments, traditional villages, picturesque, mainly, mountain villages and areas, traditions and customs, traditional occupations along with the hospitality, peculiarity and purity of rural populations. It refers to all the above, as progressed in the course of the Greek civilization through time portraying the Greek population. All these were both denied and underestimated for a long time in the past under a general tendency to ‘deify’ and adopt foreign standards in an effort to follow modernization patterns. However, in recent years, we have timidly unearthed and displayed them seeking to identify, preserve and promote our culture and its uniqueness, without any feelings of inferiority. Besides, this is what modern tourists seek for, especially ecotourists; the acquaintance and contact with tradition and purity, the unique experience of fruitful congregation of foreign to domestic elements in their natural state, without embellishment and feints.

This way, the forgotten hinterland has been discovered and began to form a tourism attraction and destination. Forests and woodlands occupying most of the country’s interior have certainly become the subject of ecotourism.

But what is a forest, which are the possibilities of ecotourism and which is its contribution to life (bios)? A forest is a large area with a high density of trees which form close neighbors and social relationships and interact creating a separate environment, the inter-forest environment. Along with other plants and animals, they make up a distinct biotic community, the forest bio-community or
Forests and ecotourism as biotourism components

Forests serve a number of functions, unknown to the general public, but playing a crucial role in matters of life and environment, to the point that their preservation and protection is considered a sine qua non. These functions are, briefly, the following:

- **Production**
  - Raw materials
  - Production of forage and game material
- **Protection**
  - Soil
  - Flooding reduction
  - Settlements, crops etc.
- **Environmental**
  - Effect on the balance of atmosphere
  - Impact on climate
  - Clean air
  - Noise reduction
  - Biodiversity conservation
- **Social**
  - Recreation-tourism
  - Environmental education
  - Regulation of water balance
  - Employment opportunities for mountain populations
  - Availability of surfaces

Forests and woodlands are invited to respond to the new challenges arisen within the tourism sector. They occupy about two thirds of the total area of the country highlighting its mountainous character. The rugged terrain, the abundance of geomorphological formations, numerous watercourses combined with the geographical location and climatic environment, create favorable conditions for the development of unique flora and provide a habitat or passing point for remarkable fauna, while offering numerous opportunities for observation, admiration and enjoyment of landscape and wildlife, instilling visitors with great experiences. The beautiful forests of conifers and hardwoods occupy large areas in most mountainous regions of the country; Taygetos, Olympus, Pindus, Vermio, Falakro and Rhodope maintain their natural features at a great level. Forest vegetation unfolding from coastal areas to the alpine zone with numerous species and diverse forms, structures and alternations is an object of study, observation, admiration and unique experience. National flora diversity is huge, counting more than 6000 species, 1/10 of which are endemic. Greece at the European level, ranks second in biodiversity wealth, only to the much larger Iberian peninsula. It is a valuable natural capital, a priceless natural heritage, not only for Greece but for the whole Europe.
Forests and ecotourism as biotourism components

The diverse landscape creates a great variety of habitats of rare beauty, which not only accommodate remarkable flora, but also rich and rare fauna species of amphibians, reptiles, birds, small and large mammals, many of which are threatened with extinction, such as bears, wolves, deers, eagles, buzzards, vultures, grouses etc.

Wetlands are among special habitats. Over 400 lakes, lagoons, swamps, wet meadows, estuaries and all kinds of wetland areas, temporary or permanent, natural or manmade, form a network of unique ecological and aesthetic value. The countless species of flora and fauna, particularly bird fauna, local traditional activities (fishing, farming, etc.) combined with the beautiful scenery can be a force for ecotourism development for several locations.

We must not neglect the protected natural areas characterized by unique flora, fauna, geomorphology and water resources. Our country has a significant number of areas with exceptional natural features providing excellent opportunities for observation, admiration and study of the evolution of ecosystem life.

Elements of particular scientific, historical and folkloric beauty and value and inexhaustible sources of inspiration and reflection are all picturesque villages in mountainous regions, traditional settlements, remarkable caves and canyons, but mainly woodland populations with their purity and guileless character, their customs, traditional occupations and hospitality.

All these combined with the excellent climatic conditions constitute an important wealth resource of Greece constituting one of the major comparative advantages.

From all the above it is clear that forests contribute in the preservation, protection and quality of life improvement of human, plant and animal species. They protect all forms of lives and improve the environment through their environmental functions offering goods for people to meet their material needs and improve their quality of life. Consequently, both forests and ecotourism are vital components of Biotourism as already defined.

A key parameter but for the success of Biotourism and, thereby, the protection of life and the environment, is Man himself who has a direct or indirect relationship with nature through his tourist participation and action. Local Government, Institutions, government agencies, politicians, tour operators, tour guides, travel agencies, hotel and restaurant owners, citizens and tourists are, in the context of tourism, direct or indirect users of the environment; their attitudes determine the level of damage or benefit to the environment and the life it entails. Diverse educational levels, experiences and attitudes plus limited to nonexistent environmental awareness are issues that can inhibit or even harm forest protection and should be dealt with a serious Biotourism development plan. Respect for life, the protection of natural and cultural heritage and the environment in general in many cases require changing attitudes and behaviors, and re-prioritizing goals and values of those involved in the tourism sector. This presupposes a long process of lifelong education. The educational programs to be
drawn up should be tailored and adapted to each learner category so that they can correlate with their individual responsibilities and abilities aiming to include the concept of respect for life and protection of the environment in their duties. These ideas can also be cultured in children, students and adults through appropriate Environmental Education programs.
The Prespa Lakes case study – uniting societies

Anastasios I. Valvis
PhD Candidate, Political Science, University of the Peloponnese
ELIAMEP Research Fellow, Greece

Geographical setting

The Prespa Lake is a region of particular interest in many ways. At a first level, the basin has a unique characteristic. The lake complex is separated into two different lakes (Macro Prespa and Micro Prespa) connected with a small land surface. Secondly, the littoral states have a long history of relations and thirdly, the complex has a significant environmental importance. More specifically, the Prespa region is situated in the Balkan Peninsula and encompasses parts of Albania, FYR of Macedonia and Greece. It is a mountainous basin encircled by high mountains (over 2000m above the sea level) covering an area of 1519km² (Perennou et al, 2009). Regarding its environmental status, it is considered to be an ecosystem of global importance and has been identified as one of Europe’s 24 major trans-boundary “ecological bricks” (Langer, 1990). The entire Prespa region is widely known for its natural beauty. It hosts unique biotopes that are important from both a European and global conservation perspective (Med-Wet/Ramsar, 2010: 1-2). In addition, the lake region is considered to be of great cultural and historical importance (Bogdanovic, 2008: 11).

Protecting the basin at the national level

The three littoral countries have acknowledged the ecological importance of the region a long time ago. Hence, all three littoral countries have granted protection status to parts of the basin. In particular, the whole Prespa basin in Albania and Greece is declared a National Park, while in FYROM exist three separate national protected areas. Additionally, international and European conventions and legislations like the Ramsar convention and the Natura 2000 ecological network have provided Prespa with a protection status (Mantziou & Gletsos, 2011: 248). Yet, initial attempts to preserve the region did not have a collective reach. On the contrary, each littoral state has tried to set a framework for the protection of the basin.

Characteristically, Greece already since 1974 has declared almost all of Greek Prespa to be a National Park. The Greek parts of Lakes Micro and Macro Prespa and the slopes of the mountains Triklario and Varnoundas overlooking them de-
fined the extent of the Park. It occupies an area of 256.9 km² while the core of the park, a zone of absolute protection including all of Lake Micro Prespa, has an area of 49 km². In 1975 the area was also declared a ‘Landscape of Outstanding Natural Beauty’. Moreover, a large part of the Prespa National Park and a large section of Varnoudas Mountain were included in the NATURA 2000 network of protected areas. The Natura 2000 Network is a European Ecological Network of areas which are home to natural habitats of types which are important at a European level.

In July 2003, the Greek state established the Prespa National Park Management Body (PNPMB), based in the village of Agios Germanos, as a Legal Entity of Private Law aiming to contribute to the management of the protected area and to safeguard the valuable natural features of the National Park. On 23rd of July 2009, with a common ministerial decision the old Prespa National Park has been redefined covering an area of 327 km² [KYA 28651/National Gazette 302 (4)]. In addition, already since 1974, lake Micto Prespa was included in the group of 10 Greek wetlands which were described as being of International Importance, coming thus under the aegis of the international Ramsar Convention (the convention for Wetlands of International Importance was signed on 2 February 1971, in the Iranian city of Ramsar, and came into force in Greece and the other signatory countries on 21st December 1975).

FYROM (part of the Former United Yugoslav at that time) from its side has established the Galicica National Park back in 1958. The objective was the restoration and protection of the area’s unique ecosystem. The Park covers an area of around 250 km² and is situated on the mountain of the same name which lies between Lake Macro Prespa and Lake Ohrid. In 1948, Yugoslavia has also established the Pelister National Park situated to the east of Lake Macro Prespa at the Greek borders. The Park covers an area of 125 km². Later on, in 1966, the Ezerani Protected Reserve was established, sited on the northern shore of Macro Prespa and covering an area of 20.8 km². Moreover, the Ezerani Reserve and the 189.2 km² of Lake Macro Prespa which belongs to FYROM has been a Wetland of
International Importance under the Ramsar Convention since 1995. Lake Macro Prespa has been declared a ‘Natural Monument’ already since 1977. Lastly, Albania has established the Prespa National Park including an area of 277.5 km² in 1999 aiming to the restoration and protection of the important land and water ecosystems in the region.

**Kick-off attempts for trilateral cooperation**

In interstate level the first attempts towards cooperation has began in 2000 during a meeting of the Prime-Ministers of the three littoral countries. It was in the World’s Wetlands Day, in February, when realizing the international ecological importance of the area and in particular the need for sustainable water management for the mutual benefit of the nature and the inhabitants, the three leaders declared Prespa as the first transboundary protected area in Southeast Europe. The establishment of the Prespa Park was a fact.

The Prespa Park initiative was supported by the creation of an interim multi-stakeholder institutional structure/body, the Prespa Park Coordination Committee (PPCC). The newly formed Committee was empowered with the coordination of planning and implementation of joint activities. It was a non-legal entity composed by representatives of the Ministries of Environment, the local municipalities and members of NGOs from each state party. The MedWet/Ramsar Initiative was also present with a permanent observer. For the first 10 years of its function the Committee was quite active (Mantziou & Gletsos, 2011: 248). Although the PPCC has no substantial budget from the three countries and the three governments have not obligated themselves to support the PPCC, financially or otherwise, thirteen meetings were held to promote the implementation of joint projects and activities with the technical support of a Secretariat consisting of three officers from the collaborating NGOs. Indeed, it was only for the first year that the PPCC Secretariat’s operation cost was covered through funding by the Greek government. Since then it has been dependent receiving support from WWF-Greece, with some funding directed to ‘external’ communication activities (website creation, newsletter publication, promotion in media and meeting organization) from the German GTZ (Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit). The support from the Greek government continued in an ad hoc basis while in the same context was the contribution from the German development aid institution KfW (Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau).

A cornerstone for the promotion of a successful collaboration was the Strategic Action Plan (SAP) for the Sustainable Development of the Prespa Park. The chief priority of the SAP was the recording of the ecological and socio-economic situation in the transboundary protected area in order at a second stage to evaluate and identify the main management issues. The SAP set objectives, quantity and quality measures for the region fostering cooperation between the littoral states and it was adopted in May 2004 by the PPCC (SAP, 2005: 3-7).
During the following years a noteworthy number of initiatives were carried out in the region including meetings of the national protected area authorities, the competent veterinary services and the fire-fighting authorities of both the three sides of the basin. In 2006 and 2007 a Memorandum of Understanding and a Cooperation Protocol were signed respectively by the mayors of the three sides of the basin setting the framework for regular cross-border meetings.

The role of third parties

As mentioned earlier, decades ago initiatives at national level have already taken place separately in each littoral state. Yet the joint efforts that started in 2000 came as a result of the Society for the Protection of Prespa (SPP), a Greek local NGO and WWF-Greece under the auspices of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands. These two NGO’s mobilized the Greek government in the summer of 1999 with the idea of a Prespa Park. It was in a period of great challenges in Southeast Europe since the crisis in Kosovo was still unfolding and the prospect of a spill-over in other parts of SEE was threatening the neighboring states. According to what Christopoulou and Roumeliotou argued, the Simitis administration in Greece perceived this proposal as an opportunity for Greece to take the lead as a peace facilitator in the region by promoting an agenda of cooperation and sustainable development (Christopoulou and Roumeliotou, 2006: 337).

The idea of the SPP and WWF-Greece found positive response also from NGOs in Albania and FYROM. In particular, the Albanian NGO PPNEA (Protection and Preservation of Natural Environment in Albania), the oldest national environmental NGO in the country with notable presence in the region has provided vital support for the establishment of the equivalent Prespa National Park in the country. On the FYROM side there was an alliance of 25 small NGOs participating in the initiative. Yet, their insufficient capacity and internal coordination problems hindered any substantial input to the transboundary cooperation.

Consequently, the SPP was the strongest part in this network. Indeed, its contribution was catalytic backing up, along with the MedWet/Ramsar, transboundary cooperation in the region, by supporting the scope of the PPCC. The role of SPP apart from being a successful lobbyist at national and international level was also to provide continuous technical support to the Secretariat of the PPCC. Characteristically, since 2001, the seat of the Secretariat was hosted by the SPP.

Moreover, NGOs have been instrumental playing the role of intermediates regarding the implementation of the Prespa Park objectives (Najam et al. 2004:32). It was the NGOs and particularly the SPP and the WWF–Greece the ones that managed to mobilize the donor community even further. Indeed, as mentioned earlier, international donors were present since the preparatory stages of the trilateral cooperation. Even before that, German bilateral assistance in both Albania and FYROM was a fact since the mid-90s contributing substantially to local conservation efforts in Prespa.
The role of international donors

The international donor community has been mobilized from the beginning in order to engage in the protection of Prespa Park. For example, the MedWet initiative has contributed significantly from the first steps. Indeed, the first working meeting of the three sides in Tirana in October 2000 was held at the initiative and under the chairmanship of the Ramsar Convention Secretary General demonstrating the catalytic role that international institutions and the secretariats of multilateral environmental agreements can have in regime building (Churchill & Ulfstein 2000).

The most prominent project in the basin was the ‘GEF project’. It was a large multi-donor international project prepared by the Global Environmental Facility approved in the winter 2005-2006. The efforts from the PPCC found fruitful ground and in 2004 GEF approved a PDF B grant for the development of a full-size proposal. The full proposed budget, submitted by the PPCC in July 2005 was US$ 13.5 million while the title of the project was ‘Integrated Ecosystem Management in the Transboundary Prespa Park region’. The whole attempt led to the approval of a five-year regional project on integrated ecosystem management in the Prespa Lakes basin which commenced in 2006 (UNDP, 2005). The project was co-funded by GEF, the governments of the three littoral states, local authorities and other international donors, such as the KfW and SDC, and it was implemented by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Activities in the Greek part of the basin were financed by the Greek government. The main area of focus included environmental conservation, protection of biodiversity, mitigating pollution, encouraging sustainable resource use, strengthening stakeholder participation, building institutional cooperation and promoting integrated water management. In addition, the project included the establishment of a trilateral Prespa Working Group on Water Management as a subsidiary organ of the PPCC. The NGOs involvement was instrumental assisting the PPCC to carry through the GEF project in various ways such as facilitating consultations or providing technical assistance to the various agencies and consultants involved.

In 2007 the GEF/UNDP project established a Monitoring and Conservation Working Group (MCWG), consisting of experts from ministries, academia/research, national parks and the NGO sector from all three countries. The MCWG aims to satisfy the need to provide scientific and political guidance, ensure ownership of the TMS project, as well as tap expert resources from the three countries. The MCWG regularly convenes two to three times a year, with funding and support from the GEF/UNDP Prespa project.

The next stage of the TMS process involved the development of an Expert Study. Trilateral thematic expert groups consisting of experts from the three littoral countries, and international lead experts from France, Austria and the USA met in the Prespa area in 2009 and worked on seven monitoring themes: water
resources; aquatic vegetation and habitats; forests and terrestrial habitats; fish and fisheries; birds and other biodiversity; socio-economics; land-use.

The Expert Study also recommended the national institutions responsible for the future monitoring system, whenever it will be deployed – in accordance with the national legislations, the conclusions of the trilateral thematic groups and the recommendations of and the supervision by the MCWG members. The final draft of the Expert Study was presented to the MCWG in November 2009 (McIntyre, 2008: 3). The development of the Expert Study is followed by the purchase and installation of equipment, supported by the GEF/UNDP Prespa Park Project, the SPP and the national monitoring institutions.

The importance of international donors in the functioning and implementation of different projects and initiatives in the basin can be deduced from the data published in the official site of the SPP. As the following chart shows during the previous year (01/07/2011 – 30/06/2012), the income from foundations amounted to 78% of the entire amount, with income coming from the EU reaching the 11%, from governmental aid agencies 3% and from private companies 4%.

**Making progress**

Since the kick off 2000 high level meeting almost 13 years have passed. During all this period a number of steps and actions have been undertaken in order to promote an integrated water management approach combining institutional capacity building and scientific research.

As already mentioned, these steps included the creation of the PPCC and scientific projects, such as the GEF project, aiming to improve cooperation and achieve environmental conservation. Within this context representatives from the water authorities of the three littoral states held, in autumn 2006, their first joint
meeting as a parallel session to the 9th PPCC meeting in Korçë, Albania. With the closure of the discussion the representatives decided to establish an ad hoc trilateral working group with an emphasis on water management issues in order to develop a transboundary monitoring system in the basin. The GEF/UNDP project contributed to the composition of a draft proposal by providing recommendations for the working group, which were discussed later in 2008 at the second meeting of the water management authorities in Pyli, Greece. Moreover, in 2007 another four-year project commenced with the involvement of experts from the littoral countries. It was a project focusing on the development of a joint environmental monitoring system (Transboundary Monitoring System). It was implemented by the SPP with the assistance of the Tour du Valat, a French research centre and in coordination with the ongoing GEF/UNDP project (Gletsos et al, 2012: 2). In 2011, the original TMS was revised by a group of national water experts. The revision was based on the WFD 2000/60.

Yet, the stalemate depicted to the progress was the result of the absence of an in depth and formalized cooperation between the three countries. According to Mantziou and Gletsos the adoption of joint management measures in sectoral areas, such as water management, faced difficulties due to the lack of a binding commitment amongst the states (Mantziou & Gletsos, 2011: 250).

Some movement has been observed in late 2009. In November, during the tenth anniversary of the Prespa Park, the Prime Ministers of the three countries met in Prespa expressing their willingness to advance transboundary cooperation through the adoption of an intergovernmental Agreement on the protection and sustainable development of the basin (Mantziou & Gletsos, 2011: 250). The three leaders made a commitment to establish those appropriate mechanisms suitable for the development of joint strategies, plans and measures for the effective conservation and management of the region. Particular reference was also made on integrated water management initiatives.

Later on, in February 2010, at a new ceremony in Pyli, Greek Prespa, the Ministers of Environment of the three littoral states with the presence of the European Commissioner for the Environment signed a legally binding Agreement for the Prespa Park restating their commitment for the fortification of this unique ecosystem (Ministers of the Environment of Albania, Greece and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and the European Commissioner for the Environment (2010) Joint Statement on the Agreement on the Protection and Sustainable Development of the Prespa Park Area, 2 February 2010, Pyli, Greece). This was undoubtedly a significant step forward as it sets up a solid legal frame for cooperation and integrated water management, fulfilling at the same time the efforts of various stakeholders which for the past ten years have been closely and intensively collaborating towards this direction.

Catalytic was the EU involvement in the aforementioned agreement. Indeed, EU participation as a party in the Prespa Park Agreement has underlined in a prominent way the importance of this particular basin for Europe expressing si-
multaneously the willingness of the EU Commission to support and promote cooperation in the region. As the 27th of June 2006 decision of the Council has initiated, the EC participates in negotiations aiming at the conclusion of international river basin agreements with the ultimate goal being the radical improvement of cooperation in European river basins shared between certain Member States and Third Countries.

As far as the agreement itself is concerned, it has brought new developments regarding the management of the basin. Initially, the PPCC was replaced by the Prespa Park Management Committee (PPMC). The new institution will consist of representatives of the Ministries of Environment, the local communities, the protected area management authorities, the environmental NGOs and the EU, as well as of two permanent observers, one from the MedWet/Ramsar initiative and the other from the Ohrid Management Committee. A high-level segment consisting of the Ministers of Environment and the EU representative will hold regular meetings for setting up the agenda, providing political guidance and reviewing respective progress.

One of the pillars of the agreement is the commitment of the parties to promote IWM within the EU legislative framework and in particular the WFD (Article 5). Additionally, in order to achieve the required quantity and quality standards, the Agreement provides for the establishment of a trilateral working group on water management (Article 14). The working group will consist of representatives of the competent authorities and stakeholders of each state and will serve as a technical expert body of the PPMC to facilitate coordination of efforts for integrated water management, as reflected in the EU WFD.

Nevertheless, it should be noted that the Agreement which has already been approved by the EU, has not been ratified from Greece, which paradoxically was its most prominent supporter among the three littoral states.

**Cross-border cooperation and development – tourism in the Prespa region**

One of the major instruments for achieving cross-border cooperation was the “Interreg” programme. In was back in 1991, when the European Commission recognized that border regions were disadvantaged. Thus, “Interreg” programmes became a tool for development and especially job creation. Throughout these years of implementation of cross-border programmes what was became clear was that closer cross-border contacts gave boost to the construction of trust particularly to the point where important joint conservation works took place (Turnock, 2008: 27).

A principal goal for all the European Territorial Cooperation programmes is sustainable development in the targeted regions. According to the famous Brundtland report (1987) “Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”. Within this context, the social and economic challenges
that people face are tied together with the carrying capacity of natural systems. In the examined cross-border region a way to achieve that is tourism but not uncontrollable one. As already mentioned, the Prespa Lakes is a very successful case study where local groups with the support from international NGOs like WWF, the GEF have contributed to the promotion of sustainable use of this unique environmental place.

According to Petrescu, traditionally tourism has the capacity to strengthen local economies. However, in its general form, the impacts that tourism may have on natural resources, consumption patterns, pollution and social systems might be crucial (Petrescu). Thus, there is a need for sustainable/responsible planning and management. The tool to achieve such an ambitious objective is through sustainable and responsible tourism practices.

Although there is not a precise definition on sustainable tourism, the most widespread way to understand it is by applying the basic principles of sustainable development to it. Thus, sustainable tourism has been broadly defined as “tourism which is economically viable but does not destroy the resources on which the future of tourism will depend, notably the physical environment and the social fabric of the host community” (Swarbrooke, 1999:13). Putting it in a different level, sustainable tourism is about the interaction between the needs of the visitor, industry, community and environment (Shkira, Zoto, Theodhori: 1). Should all these stakeholders perform in harmony, the outcome would be equally distributed driving into a win-win situation.

The role of the stakeholders also was described with the adoption of a new term, the term of responsible tourism. Although, the differences with sustainable tourism are not too palpable, the new term that was introduced at the Cape Town Declaration in 2002, attempted to stress in a more clear-cut way the role that stakeholders should play. This term put an emphasis on responsibility that all the involved should show. As Petrescu has put it, responsible tourism is about the legacy and the consequences of tourism (Petrescu:17).

Going back to the examined area, the Prespa Region is situated in the border of Albania, Greece and FYROM. Although it lies in a relatively peripheral location from the main tourism routes of the three countries, its unique and comparable advantage is its natural beauty. Yet, as Gottfried Hilz-Ward has correctly observed back in 2008, despite the valuable and plentiful tourism resources, the tourism industry is in an infant situation and has never truly reached its potential if one compares Prespa with Ohrid Lake for instance (Hilz-Ward, 2008: 5).

Moreover, during the previous years there was a slightly unequal development of tourism infrastructure with the Greek side of Prespa being benefited considerably from EU programmes, such as LEADER or Interreg, especially as small-scale public tourism infrastructures are concerned. On the contrary, tourism in Korca region which is also concentrated mostly in tourist villages in Prespa there is the problem of the absence of communities in process of building, developing and implementing plans and strategies. According to Shkira et al, communities in
these areas are good oriented in agriculture but not sufficiently informed in tourism impacts and benefits (Shkira, Zoto, Theodhori, xxx: 4).

Yet, the National Parks and the trilateral agreements mentioned earlier in this text have clearly shown that cooperation is not something unknown. In fact, it is on this legacy that more joint efforts focusing on development should take place, constructed on the value of environmental sustainability. Besides, within the SAP the objectives of the Prespa Park include both issues of environmental protection and sustainable economic and social development.

- **Objective I**: Conservation of ecological values and functions and of the biological diversity in the Prespa Park area.
- **Objective II**: Enhance opportunities for the sustainable economic and social development of the local societies and the wise use of the natural resources for the benefit of nature, local economies and future generations.
- **Objective III**: Preservation of cultural values such as monuments, traditional settlements and traditional human activities and cultural elements that promote the sustainable management of the natural resources.
- **Objective IV**: Seek participation, co-operation and involvement in decision-making and in benefit or loss sharing of stakeholders in the three countries.

Thus, building upon the progress made so far with the National Parks and the other joint initiatives mentioned earlier, more recreational and learning opportunities for incoming visitors should be provided, while at the same time local population in both parts should be better informed about the potentials of sustainable tourism.

**References**

Biotourism – building a society of cooperation and hope

Prof. Agni Vlavianos Arvanitis
President and Founder, Biopolitics International Organisation
Overall Lead Partner and Project Coordinator
Greece

Biopolicy – guidelines and paradigms for change

Bios – life – is the most precious possession on Earth. Despite decades of research and intense efforts to unravel the macrocosmos and the mysteries of the universe, we know of no other planet where life exists. But, also, the study of the microcosmos, the world of the cell, consolidates the marvel of this unique gift. The revelations are dazzling; 650,000,000,000,000 molecules of hemoglobin are produced every second in the human body. We cannot grasp this measurement in a single lifetime, yet, besides hemoglobin, thousands of other proteins are produced by the millions in every cell, providing just a small example of what is taking place every fraction of a second in every living organism. Albeit, our arrogance is not allowing us to appreciate this miracle and we continue to be caught up in a dangerous web of destruction.

Climate change mitigation presents as the most challenging task for the millennium. Our planet is only a speck of dust in the universe, yet we continue to divide it up in even smaller specks. What is the excuse for such a deep division of humanity? If our planet is to survive, if all life is to continue, values and inspired leadership are urgently needed.

World leaders need to create new opportunities and set the framework for reforms and strategies. They have to be sensitized by new thinking and new ideas for the participation of every citizen in the attainment of a better quality of life. Through constructive dialogue, with a thesis, antithesis and synthesis of new values, we can mobilize world leaders and humanity’s collective talent in order to lay the groundwork for change.

Technology is expanding exponentially in every field. Information and communication technology are enriching our everyday lives with incredible options, while biochemistry is making genetic sequencing possible at amazing turnaround times. Are we using this great potential to create confusion and destruction, or are we realizing that it can help us to build a society of cultural diversity and sharing, a society of hope?

Since its inception in 1985, the Biopolitics International Organisation (B.I.O.) promotes the life supporting aspects of progress. B.I.O. seeks to inspire leaders to
apply the full potential of technology and human capital to clean the oceans, create zero-emission cities, and endorse clean and renewable energy. Furthermore, through its Green Salary concept, B.I.O. regards employment in environmental protection as the vehicle to solve the dual environmental and economic crisis plaguing our planet today. We provide publications and educational material to inform people everywhere of the endless possibilities for employment and job creation that environmental efforts have in store. Every individual on our planet needs to be engaged in climate change mitigation, since a dying planet cannot become the global legacy we leave for future generations.

Tourism thrives in peace. In this era of growing awareness, tourism cannot dissociate itself from the debate on sustainable environment. The time to act is now and the know-how is in our hands. All we have to do is make global leaders listen. We need to change the next swing of the pendulum in “our” favor, not just as humans, but as the collective potential of bios we all possess. Leaders should not sustain the mistakes of the past, but should have the courage to build a society of joy and the needed vision for a harmonious future.

Bio-education and life-long learning – B.I.O.’s extensive e-learning program

Educational models with the environment at the heart of every academic discipline can inspire policy-makers to foster innovation. A truly integrated environmental education can help us to reach a developmental framework that places people and the planet before profits. By allowing for cultural differences to emerge as the beauty and wealth of our planet, we can seek knowledge and infuse new thinking, encouraging action and change.

Today, the way we learn and educate has also vastly changed. Education and training have become a lifelong learning process, as we increasingly find ourselves in highly competitive environments and seek ways to update knowledge and skills. Traditional forms of education are no longer sufficient to cover the needs of contemporary learning. B.I.O.’s extensive e-learning program (http://elearning.biopolitics.gr) offers dozens of courses in several languages and places a wealth of educational material online with the aim of providing interdisciplinary models with environmental considerations in every specialty. Our program is open to everyone; there are no enrollment criteria or educational prerequisites. Since the launch of this groundbreaking initiative in 2004, students from 121 countries have enrolled in the program to date.

B.I.O.’s e-learning program promotes:

- Environmental values and bioethics in every academic discipline
- A new concept of “profit,” where the environment, culture, education, and quality of life are considered a priority
- A truly civil society where people and organizations everywhere are inspired to respond to the urgency of protecting the environment and bios on our planet
The program is based on a comprehensive approach to environmental protection, comprising science, the humanities, economics and policy. The program offers opportunities for study through a series of courses delivered online. The breadth of topics offered provides participants with the freedom to cross departmental boundaries and to discover intellectual and creative thinking processes spanning several academic disciplines and featuring the environment as a common point of reference. The program places a wealth of educational material and resources online with the hope to impart new thinking to environmental education and to enrich the concepts of sustainable development.

Some of the courses offered include:

- **Bio-Architecture**: Environmental models in architecture, energy efficient buildings, environmentally responsible urban planning.
- **Sustainable Urban Management and Transport**: Sustainable management of cities, economy, education, society, sustainable urban transport.
- **Bio-Diplomacy**: International cooperation in environmental protection, the environment as a unifying factor for peace.
- **Bio-Economics**: Environmental management, natural resource economics, international policy, EU environmental policy, corporate policy.
- **Bio-Energy**: Renewable energy sources, clean energy, models for energy savings, wind, solar, biomass, energy efficient buildings.
- **Bio-Ethics**: Environmental protection as an ethical responsibility, codes of environmental ethics for every profession, the environment in bioethics.
- **Bio-Health**: Environmental quality and public health, pollution threats to health, risks and benefits of biotechnology, quality of life.
- **Bio-History**: Environmental factors in the development of human civilization, culture, historical sources, ancient texts.
- **Bio-Legislation**: International and European Union environmental policy and legislation, international treaties, environmental action.
- **Bio-Assessment of Technology**: Tools and methods for pollution abatement, waste management technologies, recycling.
- **Waste Management**: Tools and methods of waste management and technologies, including recycling, composting, landfilling, and wastewater treatment.
- **Bio-Tourism**: Environmentally friendly tourism industry, suggestions for cultural tourism, environmental hotel management, water conservation, recycling.
- **Common Agricultural Policy**: A simplified text for non-experts who wish to become acquainted with the EU’s Common Agricultural Policy (CAP).
- **Food and Agriculture**: Agriculture and the environment, pollution loads, GMOs, water and soils, chemicals and biotechnology, environmental policy.
- **People with a Disability in Modern Society**: Equity and quality of life, accessibility, information, assistive technology, sports, Paralympic Games.
– **Health, Agriculture and Equity – the case of Sri Lanka**: Environmental dimensions in health, food production, agriculture and forestry with an emphasis on equity and the Millennium Development Goals.


– **Water, Soil, Forests and Agriculture – the case of Montenegro**: Improving sustainable development education in Montenegro.

– **Green Salaries – Best Practices in Environmental Protection**: Environmental job creation and “green” employment as a vehicle to reverse unemployment through best practices transfer in environmental protection.

– **Mythos and the Environment**: Environmental dimensions in mythology, ancient cultures and civilizations.

– **Protection of Natural Resources – Soil, Water, Forests**: Analysis of natural resources protection with an emphasis on Montenegro. Sustainable management of soil, water and forests.

– **Climate Change**: Climate change mitigation and sustainable management of natural resources.

– **Forest Protection and Management**: Sustainable management and protection of forest areas.

It is the goal of B.I.O.’s life-long learning initiatives to ensure effective learning by building on previous knowledge experiences and by combining training information and know-how. In this context, we envisage education and learning beyond classrooms and closed spaces, while ensuring contact with nature, people and real-life situations. An essential component is the combination of all means and media available to make learning happen, through multimedia strategies. Our e-learning program also takes advantage of distance education learning opportunities, through all available means, and promotes the diversification of policies and strategies to accommodate the specific needs and desires of specific communities, groups and individuals. The ultimate goal is to build learning communities, in both urban and rural areas, so that all members, young people, adults, senior citizens, are engaged in learning activities, and all local resources are utilized, with local and global development in mind. As a result of lifelong learning, individuals acquire competences that are developed throughout their lifetime and this process contributes not only to individual wellbeing, but gives economic results and improves the life of all stakeholders.

*International University for the Bio-Environment – I.U.B.E.*

B.I.O.’s e-learning program is part of the work and activities of the International University for the Bio-Environment (I.U.B.E.), created by B.I.O. in 1990. The I.U.B.E. actions the B.I.O. belief that education is the key to
enlightening students and teachers in all academic areas to become environmentally conscious and responsible world citizens. It is a truly “universal” initiative, encompassing all educational levels, set up with an ambitious but happening agenda to act as a catalyst, seeking to infuse educational institutions and their graduates with biocentric values and to encourage a deeper, internalized environmental awareness.

The I.U.B.E. is seen as the means by which B.I.O. can vaccinate every human endeavor with a love of bios and impart this message to students, training professionals and decision-makers around the world.

The I.U.B.E. focuses on the dissemination of environmental education to universities and training centers internationally, and to all the disciplines taught within them, rather than offering traditional diplomas or awards. It is designed as an open and distance learning initiative, whereby leading experts, scholars and educators from 160 countries actively engage in the promotion of environmental thinking. Fighting the trend towards over-specialization, the I.U.B.E. seeks to open up all areas of study and training to an appreciation of life on our planet.

The aim is for the I.U.B.E. to become a think-tank for the development of multidisciplinary environmental concepts, beyond the confines of conventional environmental science, leading to a revised educational system with a view to the future. In the framework of the activities of the I.U.B.E., the purpose and responsibility of bio-education, is to uplift the spirit of humanity and to reverse the crisis in values that has resulted in serious environmental deterioration. By provid-
ing interdisciplinary models with the environment at the core of every specialty and academic sector, bio-education seeks to apply environmental protection to every human endeavor.

Education is a fundamental right and determines how much a person can engage with and contribute to society. Quality education positively affects health, lives and livelihoods, so investing in education brings individuals and societies enormous benefits, socially, environmentally and economically. Availability of workers with the right skills is one of the key determinants of success for any business, and of capable and professional public and private services. Environmental education is no exception.

The understanding of changing environmental circumstances and of the fluidity of the concept of environmental protection requires the development of a critical appreciation of the numerous influences affecting the interactions between humanity and the environment. Environmental pollution is an international problem and a matter of vital importance for all. Concern over environmental questions is an international task, particularly for highly developed, industrialized countries. We must acknowledge our individual and social responsibilities and the fact that environmental protection involves confronting conflicting interests. There is a need to balance environmental and economic priorities in order to achieve safe and just global management. Bio-education consolidates awareness of the importance of incorporating the environment in every human endeavor and enables the realization of the interdisciplinary nature of environmental protection.

Stressing the international character of environmental problems and the multidisciplinary nature of the environment is a priority in bio-education. The environment is an integrating concept referring to the sensitivity, experience and culture of each member of society. Environmental quality and quality of life are inextricably linked. Human rights violations, disease, hunger, lack of safe water resources and poverty are more common in areas of severe environmental abuse. Health problems linked to the environment, food subsistence and access to culture and general welfare, including security and peace, are some of the challenges to be faced.

Bio-education should be disseminated as widely as possible with the assistance of educational institutions, businesses, municipal authorities, governments, NGOs and other stakeholders. By promoting joint action in all sectors of society and the economy, a broad consensus about the development of an environmentally-responsible citizenry can be built. The need for good quality training for teachers involved in bio-education cannot be over-stressed. Current inefficiencies in teacher training could pose serious problems in the future. Teacher training projects helping the introduction of environmental curricula into classrooms should be encouraged, while networking should be promoted on a world-wide level. Teachers must also be encouraged and trained to use methods in which students become agents of their own learning by being truly involved in the learning process. The learning process has to be flexible and interactive so
that students become independent and develop their own sense of initiative, responsibility and commitment.

Bio-education is an interdisciplinary subject of relevance to many fields of teaching. Given the complexity and the various levels of relationships with society as a whole, a wide range of subjects can contribute to bio-education. Educational institutions should therefore be encouraged to devise their own bio-education profiles, based on their strengths and the overall focus of their activities. The non-exclusive approach of bio-education is an opportunity to lift the barriers separating different disciplines and to offer a well-rounded education which is not hampered by overspecialization. New programs and curricula should be designed with this in mind, with the necessary adjustments in timetables and agendas. The promotion of bio-education in business, public administration and government should also be emphasized. Programs for vocational training and seminars for decision-makers are absolutely necessary if environmental awareness is ever intended to produce action.

**Education in biotourism**

Bio-education is crucial. Students, executives, policy makers and the general public must be imbued with an appreciation of life and the urgency of reversing present destructive trends. As a result, bio-education and the possibility to sensitize individuals and communities on environmental, social and cultural issues have always been the driving force behind the promotion and development of biotourism. Education in biotourism emphasizes good citizenship and critical thinking in order to enable citizens to behave in environmentally responsible ways and actively participate in environmental decision-making processes.

Approaching tourism activity with an educational emphasis can facilitate respectful and minimally intrusive interactions between cultures. Indeed, education plays a central role in biotourism in its many manifestations. Cooperative education programs, for example, bring students to partake in a structured educational program with classroom and field work experience, exploring local nature and/or cultures. This may take the form of helping researchers collect field data, assisting in conservation projects, or learning intimate local knowledge alongside experts.

With the use of websites and brochures, travelers should receive some information about natural and cultural peculiarities which will help them smoothly adjust to the foreign environment without disturbing it. Having trained tour guides is essential for providing a quality experience for tourists and is an important area for investment. Demand for education in these forms of tourism is usually greater than supply, and it has beneficial effects for all involved.

International development agencies also have an important role to play in educational projects concerning environmental tourism, because they finance projects relating to tourism development. In this context, many NGOs are ac-
tively working nationally and internationally to ensure that tourism is developing in a manner that is consistent with national and international conservation and sustainable development priorities. Reducing the negative effects of tourists can increase a habitat’s carrying capacity which means greater income from tourism without added cost on resources. Education is also preferable to other options in that it is relatively cheap compared to taking stricter regulatory action against unwanted behavior.

Overall many tourism areas are lacking educational aspects that could greatly enhance environmental integrity and local employment. Circumstances in Kenya exemplify this, where a rapid expansion of the tourism sector aggravated the already poorly developed field of studies. Management courses are not properly preparing students for the sector and graduates struggle to hold jobs in tourism. The lack of qualified and experienced instructors is of great concern.

Education for the local community also increases sustainable resource use, employment opportunities, and can have an effect on policy makers. Beyond the use of codes of conduct, environmental education can be offered through lifelong learning and schooling, field trips, community groups and special training. Rather than using restrictive methods or allowing naive tourist activity run rampant in delicate ecosystems, a number of educational tools are available to give tourists the necessary knowledge. Guided tours, websites, brochures, guidebooks and visitors centers are all valuable aspects for tourist education. Perhaps one of the most effective means to regulate the behavior of both visiting and native people of an area are codes of conduct which are voluntary, action based guidelines providing standards of best practice for everyone. Indeed educating locals about sustainability and nature issues is among the surest ways to instill the awareness needed to protect the environment and improve living standards.

While tourism provides considerable economic benefits for many countries, regions and communities, its rapid expansion can also be responsible for adverse environmental, as well as socio-cultural, impact. The effective implementation of any conservation program depends on the full support of local actors, which depends on a certain level of education, awareness raising and training in the relevant areas. Once awareness is raised, the necessary values and attitudes, skills and behavior can be developed.

Environmental education needs to apply to people from all walks of life and deal with such matters as urbanization, the desertification of agricultural areas, environmental pollution, the preservation of our cultural and natural heritage, the management of natural resources, etc. Lifelong environmental education in rural areas is of vital importance in this context. Not only does it deal with issues of a social nature, but it encompasses financial and environmental matters too, as well as issues that deal with the application of the right technology and tools that can improve quality of life without altering local customs. Lifelong environmental education should be based on educational material that focuses on specific case studies and positive practices and suggestions from around the world.
It is important to note that education and awareness programs need to be addressed to both the professional sector and the general public, drawing attention to the direct and indirect impacts of tourism, causes and effects, global and local issues, immediate and long-term problems, and good practices. The private sector, and especially tour operators, could provide information on sustainable tourism issues, encouraging their clients to conserve energy and resources, avoid negative impacts on biodiversity and cultural heritage, and respect the national legislation of the area being visited, as well as the traditions of local communities.

Education and awareness-raising is also required at all levels of government. This should include processes for increasing cooperation and mutual understanding among authorities, including joint and innovative approaches for tourism and environmental issues. Last but not least, it is just as important to raise awareness among academics involved in training and research in sustainable tourism. Connections between culture, education and tourism widen access to both cultural, educational and tourism products and services. This process leads to increased participation, which brings culture and education nearer to everyday life. It also brings economic benefits to local tourism and cultural organizations. Programs connecting cultural participation with tourism and learning are proven to improve individual creativity and potential for innovation. If combined with relevant entrepreneurial training, such programs could be a powerful catalyst for improving entrepreneurial and tourism capacity and could contribute to further economic growth.

**Climate change and the tourism industry**

Being one of the fastest growing sectors worldwide, the tourism industry is a vital component of the global economy and an integral positive element in society. It is a leading category of international trade and an especially valuable source of foreign exchange, both for developed and developing countries. As such, it has a far-reaching environmental impact across the world and is also highly sensitive to the effects of climate change and global warming. If implemented with an environmental vision, tourism can play a crucial role in climate change mitigation.

A recent UNEP Green Economy Report has identified tourism as a significant contributor to environmental degradation and pollution through greenhouse gas emissions, water consumption, diminishing water resources, and waste management which pressures local infrastructure. Damage to biodiversity is often caused by tourists, and can lead to conflict with local communities. Furthermore, poorly planned and managed tourism can threaten cultural integrity. These negative impacts can be reduced in many ways with the implementation of green tourism principles and practices, which reflect a “quadruple bottom line” of environmental, social, economic and climate responsiveness.
The tourism industry, which has a major impact on natural and cultural assets alike, relies on an unspoiled and clean environment. The construction and maintenance of tourism infrastructure and the influx of tourists to formerly pristine areas invariably have major adverse effects on environmental quality. Local communities may benefit economically from tourism or they may be harmed by insensitive contact with outsiders. The concept of biotourism, which is one of the mainstays of the B.I.O. philosophy, calls for tourism that is responsible and has a beneficial impact on both the natural and cultural environments.

Biotourism can lead to environmental sustainability and reduce poverty. It is an approach to travel and recreation in which the traveler comes into intimate contact with the environment and culture of the area being visited in a manner that is not destructive, but constructive. By encouraging a close interaction among peoples and cultures, biotourism fosters international understanding and can also serve as a pathway for peace. For its efforts to promote biotourism as a vehicle for peace, B.I.O. received the “Peace Through Tourism Award” by the World Association of Travel Agents in 1998.

The development of biotourism promotes conservation by facilitating environmentally responsible and minimally intrusive travel, allowing the visitor to learn about and appreciate local habitats and cultures. In addition to the environmental benefits it confers on society, it has become an important economic sector as well, offering many employment opportunities for a resource efficient, climate resilient, low carbon future. Moreover, the jobs created by biotourism can act as a very important motivation to reduce emigration from rural areas. By engaging in the sustainable tourism industry, local people can increase their influence on tourism development, as well as improve their jobs and earnings prospects through tourism-related professional training and development of business and organizational skills.

The tourism industry and the products constructed and promoted bring changes to the natural and cultural environment that are most often irreversible. It is therefore crucial to develop effective guidelines in tourism to prevent harmful activities to the environment and to ensure the future viability of the industry. With tourism stakeholders increasingly coming to grips with the fact that climate change left unmitigated threatens their business, many initiatives have been undertaken worldwide in recent decades that provide hope for a better way of doing things. They are sensitive to the protection of local traditions, respectful of the environment, and provide opportunities to learn about and engage in sustainable livelihoods. These praiseworthy efforts merit attention so we can direct our energy toward good practices that celebrate our rich cultural heritage.

Adapting to climate change will affect the ways people travel, and thus will greatly impact employment in the sector. Labor peaks in hotels, restaurant, transport and other tourism jobs will also shift. Moreover, there is vast potential for the creation of new green jobs in all areas of the tourism industry.
As higher living standards enable people to opt for different natural and cultural experiences in their pursuit of escape from the familiar, the opportunities for the tourism industry are boundless. Moreover, the ease of air travel and modernized transport infrastructures mean virtually no place is off limits. Without careful nurturance, this confluence of cultures often compromises the cultural heritage of a given area and becomes part of a self-defeating package of economic and environmental deterioration. In order to avoid the consequences of uncontrolled development of mass tourism and its negative impacts on sites preservation, local communities have to be directly involved in cultural and sustainable tourism approaches. Participation of government agencies in facilitating and managing the process of growth in tourism and the economy is a must. To do so, they have to ensure a multi-stakeholder process with socio-cultural as well as environmental criteria.

When linked to tourism, culture can also become a direct source of income. Well managed cultural and historic sites can become a tool to share experiences, exchange know-how and engage local communities in international tourism networks. As a result, support and protection of local traditions can help build a bridge not only between today’s cultures, but to a more sustainable economy and environment for future generations.

**Green jobs and green salaries in biotourism**

Increased environmental awareness is a driving force for innovation in the tourism industry. New green products and services are emerging, and being combined with measures such as recycling, energy savings and other environmental initiatives. The rationale for the tourism industry is to stay in business and to gain competitive advantages through innovative behavior. Green salaries in tourism span a wide array of occupational and professional profiles. Some constitute entirely new types of jobs, but most build on traditional skills, albeit with more or less modified job contents and competencies. Moreover, tourism has a strong educational element and can provide cultural exchange between hosts and guests, thereby fostering understanding among peoples and cultures. A lot of green careers in biotourism are about education. Travelers who visit pristine places can be informed about the importance of walking softly, or not leaving any kind of debris behind. Education can also be about explaining conservation techniques that are practiced, and how even the native tribes are doing their part to help improve their environment. There is an abundance of different kinds of jobs in this field as well.

Biotourism offers fertile ground for the development of initiatives combining environmental policy and job creation. In 2011, tourism visits grew from about 900 to 940 million visitors, and the figure is projected to rise to 1.6 billion by 2020. Currently, over 200 million people work in the industry, which is growing at a rate of approximately 25%. It comprises an estimated 11.5% of the global
economic landscape, with Europe leading both inbound and outbound tourist travel. In the process, it has become a significant source of employment, accounting for an estimated 12.5% of the world total when both direct and indirect economies are considered, in the developed and developing world alike. This employment effect is evident in local communities throughout the world, helping to alleviate poverty by providing new sources of income, especially in rural areas where the majority of the world’s poor reside.

The growing trend toward urbanized lifestyles has been matched by a comparable need for recreation activities associated with nature. While local parks and gardens offer temporary respite from increasingly fast-paced lifestyles, many travelers flock to seaside resorts and mountain hamlets during weekends and vacations in search of rest, rejuvenation, and contact with nature. This need for activities associated with nature has also found expression in new types of biotourism which provide local income-generating opportunities and countless new jobs. For example, sustainable tourism is the fastest developing tourism subsector, increasing at a rate of 10-15% per year globally. It can create trade opportunities in remote locations and is a vital source of green growth for many countries; for instance it is a major export for 82% of developing countries. A key element for sustainable tourism to succeed is the provision of benefits, especially economic opportunities, to local residents. These benefits can be achieved through resident participation in tourism or related industries, such as farmers selling food to restaurants. The challenge, then, is to facilitate the integration of residents and local firms into the tourism economy, to increase the local economic linkages within tourism.

Cultural tourism is also growing and can financially contribute to resource management. Local residents may see cultural tourism-related jobs as concrete benefits of cultural heritage management, which can enhance public support for that heritage. In the framework of sustainable tourism, community led activities and nature preserving operations create jobs for unskilled workers. Generally, large capital investments are not required making sustainable tourism a good model for developing countries. “Environmental tourists” from emerging economies are beginning to join those from developed countries, suggestion that the sector will grow significantly. Sustainable tourism and ecotourism are an especially effective way of transferring income to poor communities, as ecotourists often venture into remote and economically-disadvantaged areas. It is also a relatively barrier free trade commodity, avoiding income repatriation mechanisms, such as export processing zones.

Mythology in biotourism – meeting the climate change challenge

As extensively emphasized by B.I.O., mythology holds the key for the tourism development in many countries around the world. Mythology can inspire creativity and can help us to optimize the cultural wealth of humanity. It is the
bridge that links the past to the present and can lead to a better understanding of the history, tradition and knowledge of all the cultures of the world. People have always related phenomena in the sky, the earth, and every aspect of the natural world with the deities and mythical creatures of their customs. Mythology comprises humanity’s imagination and inspiration and reflects ways of interpreting the secrets of the universe. It is also among the earliest manifestations of human creativity and therefore found in virtually all cultures: Eastern and Western European, North and South American, Indian, Chinese, Polynesian, African.

For centuries, poetry, literature, art, music, architecture and even science all over the world have drawn inspiration from the themes and premises of mythology. In the spirit of globalization, mythology can become the needed link uniting all cultures and leading to mutual enrichment. Moreover, the Olympic Games, a global institution with major tourism effects, are deeply rooted in Greek mythology, as they were purportedly founded by the great Heracles to honor his father, Zeus. In this context, the settings and pathways of mythological lore all over world can serve as tourist attractions in themselves, demonstrating the strong ties between the past and the present, and helping us to realize that a viable tourism industry cannot be restricted to the beach, the ski slope, the dance floor, or the local cuisine, but should be deeply rooted in history and culture.

Furthermore, learning through cultural engagement at all levels and for diverse target groups seems to be a powerful way for solving social and economic issues in society. Stakeholders, cultural, organizations, educational institutions, citizens and policy-makers can all reap the benefits of an increased cultural awareness brought on by combining mythology and tourism.

In view of growing concerns over climate change, the environmental threats posed by a poorly managed tourist industry, and the industry’s susceptibility to environmental quality, initiatives linking mythology and tourism can help to infuse sustainability into the tourism sector, so that economic development and the protection of our global environmental and cultural heritage are mutually reinforcing elements. This is particularly relevant at a time when environmental conditions in most parts of the planet are worsening, and when the lives and livelihoods of millions of people are at risk.

Efforts linking mythology to sustainable tourism practices can be very fruitful in the context of:

- promoting an appreciation of the history, biogeography, natural diversity, and related social and cultural contexts of any tourism destination
- encouraging an increased understanding of local peoples and cultures, and their relationship to the land
- ascertaining the impacts of human actions on the natural environment, as well as human responses to those changes as they are rooted in time
- identifying the relationships between human societies and their natural environments from multiple perspectives
developing a multi-faceted and integrated view of the human/environment nexus that crosses interdisciplinary boundaries

- contributing to the preservation of rare landscapes and associated cultural elements in the framework of global efforts for climate change mitigation

It is clear that biotourism, enriched with the dimensions of culture and mythology, offers fertile ground for the creation of green jobs, which alleviate poverty and help to preserve the environment. However, this requires carefully designed and well-integrated policy that creates the right conditions and support for long-term sustainability on both the environmental and economic fronts. Cooperation between local communities, national and international NGOs, and tour agencies, in order to heighten the role of the local community and involve them fully in the employment opportunities and income-generating activities that tourism brings, is an essential element for this initiative to succeed.

Conclusion

Economic growth is vital for development. But global warming and desertification, the melting of polar ice caps, flooding and severe weather events are resulting in incalculable damage to society. Are we acting wisely enough? Are we acting quickly enough? The clock is ticking and valuable time is being lost. Can we use every tick of the clock to implement biopolicy measures that protect bios, our most precious possession and the only true profit for humanity?

Education and life-long learning are vital in bringing about change. Every human endeavor needs to be involved in the race to save the environment. Tourism as a most important economic and cultural enterprise is no different. More and more people begin to define recreation as a learning and educational opportunity, a way to explore new ideas and cultures, art, science and history.

A growing interest in lifelong learning is enriching the tourism industry, with important implications for intellectual and cultural growth in many communities around the world. Life-long learning through biotourism can tap into personal interests to help boost intellectual growth beyond what is learned in schools and through the channels of formal education. The drive for more international travel experiences as a part of formal education can be an outgrowth of this concept. Furthermore, it may determine to a great extent the success of biotourism efforts.

An increasing number of travel agencies and tour operators offer opportunities, such as visits to geoparks, whale watching, bird watching, cultural festivals and events, teaching people about science, geology, history and culture. A major expansion of learning-based tourism will require both participants and the tourism industry to overcome a long-standing bias that recreation and education are opposite ends of the spectrum. Learning activities through tourism can make travelers feel active and engaged, turning the quest for knowledge and understanding into a dominant theme for tourism in the new century.
What is clear is that tourism is growing and will have an increasing impact on the world’s natural and cultural heritage. In its forecast *Tourism: 2020 Vision*, the World Tourism Organization (WTO) projects that environmental and cultural tourism will be one of the most important market segments in the future and, as such, will present an increasing number of challenges like managing the future growth of the industry so as to minimize its negative impacts on the environment and host communities while maximizing the benefits it brings in terms of jobs, wealth and support for local industry and culture.

Development cooperation is an important stimulus for biotourism to succeed. Enhanced development cooperation can serve as a guideline for presentation and communication between tourists and the local population. Working together, governments, the tourism industry, and local stakeholders can play vital roles in this activity. With tourism presenting as the single largest source of investment and employment globally, international development cooperation can facilitate self-regulation within the industry through provision of information to businesses and consumers, as well as by supporting educational and awareness-raising programs. As many countries lack the required range of skills and knowledge that is essential to ensure efficient resource management and a high-quality tourism product, one of the major tasks in biotourism is to ensure that countries and regions have access to capacity building in order to allow them to ensure that they retain their environmental and cultural identity.

Technology can provide quick and irreversible ways for destruction, and, unfortunately, this often becomes a priority for short-sighted institutions and governments. However, technology also offers invaluable tools for education and learning and ways to improve health and quality of life for every citizen on the planet. We can apply these tools to enhance global policy for the protection of health and resources, food sufficiency, and resource security so as to ensure a brighter and more harmonious future.

In the search for inspiration and motivation, the diachronic ideals of the Olympic spirit and cease-fire during the Olympic Games can help society to exit the present crisis and move into a new renaissance. The Olympiads should once again become periods of world peace and occasions for all citizens to celebrate the unifying concepts brought forth by the Olympic spirit. At the same time, the global community can be sensitized to the value of achieving freedom, opportunity, and a better quality of life.

We have unlimited options to halt the advancing damage of climate change, to reverse unemployment, to create dynamic networks of education with the participation of every citizen on the planet. The technology to secure enough food and safe water resources for everyone is also available. Responsibility for the transition to a new society does not only lie with our leaders. We all can and should be involved. Biotourism has great potential to improve understanding and respect among different cultures, and, in a long term perspective, may be regarded as a vehicle for building a society of cooperation and hope.
Harmony

With wings of the soul
I touch the golden waves of infinity
around, heavenly beauty like light
sparkles rays with colors of flowers
whispers the soil, awakens the earth
not like a mother, just like a daughter
of the cycle of wear
and the infinite of the eternal
the melody of the universe
is surrounded by the rhythm of harmony

A. Vlavianos Arvanitis
Oscillations, A Collection of Poems, 1983

References

Panel of speakers at the conference in Prespa

Yiannis Boutaris, Mayor of Thessaloniki, and Dr. Panayotis Koliomichalis
Innovative practices in Biotourism

Ioannis Pediotis, Consul General of Greece in Korçë and Prof. Agni Vlavianos Arvanitis at the cultural conference in Korçë

Memorandum of cooperation signed in Korçë
The conference in Prespa was attended by stakeholders, tourism entrepreneurs and other professionals from the cross-border area.