Massimo Battaglia
Laboratorio Main Scuola Superiore Sant’Anna

Tiberio Daddi
Laboratorio Main Scuola Superiore Sant’Anna

Francesco Rizzi *
Laboratorio Main Scuola Superiore Sant’Anna

SUSTAINABLE TOURISM PLANNING AND CONSULTATION: EVIDENCE FROM THE PROJECT INTER.ECO.TUR

*Corresponding author:
Laboratorio Main Scuola Superiore Sant'Anna,
Piazza Martiri della Libertà 33, 56127 Pisa, Italy
email: francesco.rizzi@sssup.it

Introduction

The topic of sustainability, brought to world attention in 1992 with the Conference of Rio, at the end of last century, involved significantly the tourism sector since the first World Conference on Sustainable Tourism (WTO, UNEP, UNESCO, EU, 1995). For the first time in this occasion there have been outlined a set of research-driven methods that tend to limit the contradictory effects on the balance of nature (both at local and global level) on the development of an unregulated tourism industry.

Since then, the issue of the consistency between anthropogenic burdens generated by tourism on the one hand, and environmental protection on the other has become a central element at a European level, involving first the technical stakeholders and, subsequently, also featuring the policies promoted by the Community (Examples are the Community measures in this field issued since 2003 onward by the Commission COM(2003) 716 final mentioning “Basic orientations for the sustainability of European tourism”; the COM(2006) 134 final “A renewed EU Tourism Policy: Towards a stronger partnership for European Tourism”, the COM(2007) 621 final regarding the “Agenda for a sustainable and competitive European tourism” ).

Literature shows that tourist activities, in part because of the significant growth rates and levels of dissemination and expansion in the territory, may be considered extremely "pollutants" and can generate complex environmental problems. The environmental impact of tourist flows, although less significant if taken on its own, is still significant at territorial level, given the cumulative effects that are produced in the territory by the tourism businesses therein located [ia: (Holden, 2000 ) (Calabrò, Iraldo, 2002); (Moore et al., 2003), (Hospers, 2003) (De Freitas, 2009)]. Since many years, the tourism sector has shown the need to reconcile development and environment, a vision in which "environment" means that broad set of natural, anthropological, economic and social factors, distinguishing a particular cultural tourist destination and representing the habitat where to graft those activities that enhance (or degrade) it (Calabrò, Iraldo, 2002).

The strong link between this specific sector and the type of eco-systems occurs at two levels: firstly, environmental protection has its raison d'être in the necessity of maintaining intact the environmental capital enabling tourism businesses each year to achieve high turnovers and, secondly, the impairment of this capital may result in the loss of any tourist attraction, which turns negatively on the development of the sector.

Moreover, whereas in all industries and in most services the natural environment is regarded as a public asset (or as a target of outsourcing services arising from productive factors), in tourism this is also a crucial variable in the ratio demand / supply, and potential strategic factor likely to enhance the quality of service provided [(Morgan, Pritchard, 1998), (Borzino, 1999) (Bramwell, Alletorp, 2001), (Ayuso, 2006)]. It is therefore confirmed that in the tourism sector exist a strong correlation between its profitability and the preservation of the "environmental" potentials of the territory where it operates. A potential where the maintenance of the regenerative capacity of resources becomes essential to ensure the survival of the assets located therein [i.a.: (Calzoni, 1988), (Politi, Preger, 1991), (Pearce, 1995), (Cheyne, Barnett, 2001), (Coccossis, Mexa, 2004), (Onnis et al., 2009), (Gülcan et al., 2009)].

This correlation, and the consequent need to preserve the environment as a primary resource for the reproducibility of the service, have quicken a rather slow and feeble dynamics of demand (by amplifying the signals). A phenomenon that, at least initially, expressed itself mainly in those environments jeopardized by excessive tourism pressure [(Anpa, Istat, 2001), (Calabrò, Iraldo, 2002)]. It therefore happened that the first steps towards a sustainable tourism have been made in highly critical environmental contexts, for example due to so-called "overbuilding" of the coasts and human pressure in areas of seaside tourism, or rather due to the propensity of actors to undermine the local ecosystems, and the social contexts in which they operate.

Hence in this respect, in defining pathways of growth marked by the environmental sustainability for the tourism industry, it is necessary to take into account the need to balance the complexity and extent of environmental issues related to it with the criteria and standards of tourism comfort and hospitality. Besides, no less important are the characteristics of the
territory and of other productive vocations and opportunities for development of the target areas and/or of its surroundings (Daddi, 2008).

These factors make it possible to outline the strategies for development of an area that makes of its natural heritage, and of the correct way it is management a lever for growth of the local tourism industry. On the one hand, at the macro level, there is a need to coordinate between the various local development policies where main institutional actors are involved and, on the other hand, at the micro level there is need to act where the sector players manage the potential pressures that their activities may produce on environment more correctly.

According to this second perspective, in addition to the extreme fragmentation and capillarity of the tourism phenomena, to make anything but simple, there is to consider that in the evaluation and management of their environmental impacts only a small part of them is generated by the service provider, that is the tourist business. This situation is caused by the significant role that the so-called "indirect" environmental aspects have from a management point of view (Frey, Iraldo, 1999), (Sinding, 2000), (Calabrò, Iraldo, 2002), (Molinas, 2002), (Fusco Girard, 2006), (Font et al., 2008).

In order to establish effective measures of environmental protection it is therefore necessary to adopt tools and actions that are capable of engaging all stakeholders, and to promote approaches based on coordination and cooperation of all the various regional actors, both in institutional and private ones, to support the development of an area in a non-confrontational way face to the protection of local natural resources [i.a.: (Arrighetti, Seravalli, 1999), (Dallara, Rizzi, 2005), (Battaglia et al., 2008), (Polose, 2009), (Dinica, 2009), (Eagles, 2009)].

Besides the importance for the protection of the environment in this specific sector, as described previously, in the recent years an increase of the environmental awareness of tourists must be registered. Simultaneously, the tourist market has expressed, in an ever more practical way, to appreciate new ways through which the "quality of the environment" of the service can be enhanced. Some investigations have clearly demonstrated this trend in the selection displayed by its users, although often the intensification of such sensitivity, significantly recognizable in increasingly large areas of the tourism market, hardly acts incisively to affect the dynamics of the demand [examples are present in (Welford, et al., 1999), (Vernon et al., 2003), (Tzschentke et al., 2004)].

These investigations, therefore, have highlighted the willingness of tourists to "appreciate" the eco-friendly choices that are offered by the tourist industry, without a definite orientation to induce their preferences towards this type of offer. It seems that environmental quality contributes to customer satisfaction in the tourist service, when the tourist is in the position to perceive it clearly, but is not yet able to become a determinant of this decision to purchase. Accordingly, the maturity of a demand for tourism-oriented environmental sustainability should go through awareness raising policies of large segments of the market by offering services that can be competitive with regard to the "traditional" variables (price, comfort, location, etc.) and, simultaneously, able to offer an "environmental" value-added. This competitive element, on equal base of performance, may influence the tourists' choice and reward the quality of the environmental.

Motivations related to the changing demands on the one hand, and the criticality of the environment and the potential compromise of a key resource on the other, have been joined in recent years by some eminently competitive pressures, which have extended the environmental sensitivity to many other stakeholders in order to qualitatively differentiate the service provided [(Brown, 1996), (Hu, Wall, 2005), (Ayuso, 2006)]. While this approach certainly has its own justification in terms of individual strategies of companies, transposing it to a territorial scale, the importance that a system of local tourist services can have in terms of attractiveness of an area's growth, and of its competitiveness, in comparison with a similar vocation, can be immediately understood. Moreover, the experiences to date have shown the efficacy of a responsive service system that represents, in a logic of territorial marketing and distinctiveness of an area, a factor of undeniable advantage. [(Vernon, et al., 2003); (Fusco Girard, Nijkamp, 2009)].

Based on the above preliminary evidence, this contribution will bring the experience of a research conducted under a project co-financed at European level, and that had precisely the purpose of experimenting on a local scale, a methodology aimed at enhancing the potential tourist attractiveness of the territories involved, and outline the growth of tourism consistent with the protection of resources and of the natural heritage.
Research objectives and methodology

What recalled above highlights at least three factors to be taken into account when, locally, the issue of sustainable development tourism is dealt by:

- the need to protect the local natural heritage as a factor of attraction of tourists, and an essential resource in support of this industry;
- the need to integrate the development policies of tourism with other sectors that characterize a given territory (and, of course, with the environmental effects that these other areas produce);
- the need to enhance the environmental performance of the tourist industry at local level in order to create a demand for consumers who can appreciate the special offer produced by firms located in the given territory (e.g. consider a "qualifying" trademark of sustainability for the local businesses in a certain area: consider, for example the "blue flags" of FEE – www.feeitalia.org, or the "orange flags" of the Touring Club, in Italy - www.bandierearancioni.it).

These factors can sometimes seem to contradict each other: environmental protection VS. growth of the tourism sector; support to the tourism industry VS. political recovery of other productive sectors; or rather, the interests of local tourism businesses VS. creation of sensitive customers. In fact, to overcome this contradiction it is necessary that these factors become functional to local governance, and aimed at an integrated development of the capacity to evaluate the environmental effects that the various determinants of growth can produce in the long-term (Halkier, 2009).

In brief, what it is required is the structuring of a development path beginning from a comprehensive awareness of the existing potentialities, and of the critical aspects of a given area and based, in a planning phase, on the active contribution of all stakeholders (public, private, representatives of civil society, individuals, etc..) potentially interested in supporting this growth.

It is clear then that the first important element becomes the strategic level of participation and consultation on specific development processes to be defined locally. These decision-making processes must then be based on analyses, evaluation and well defined methodological programmes, and shared by all actors involved, in order to be effective (on the subject, many are experiences and proposed methods, often very different: (Baldizzone, 2000), (Irvin, Stransbury, 2004), (Ayuso, 2006), (Renn, 2006), (EMAS/Ecolabel Italian Competent Body, 2007), (Battaglia, Daddi, Ridolfi, 2008), (Reed, 2008), (Fidélis, Moreno Pires, 2009), (Newig, Fritsch, 2009)].

Additionally, it needs to be considered the importance of implementing appropriate communication systems that allow to transfer externally (and in particular to local groups of companies and tourism intermediaries) the results of local development strategies resulting from the processes of consultation, complementary to their implementation and exploitation face to the possible end-customers.

Based on the above remarks, the main objective that we set it was to assess the adoptability and efficacy of a method of analysis and planning coordinated and shared among multiple actors at local level, able to favour a sustainable development environmentally sound with the tourism sector at local level. Hence, we asked ourselves what were the tools to support the definition of a strategy for sustainable tourism development able to involve as many local actors as possible; and whether those tools and methods were reproducible and acceptable on different contexts. Finally, if these tools were such as to ensure a long-term monitoring of the economic-environmental performance of a given area.

To meet these needs, the first step of the experimental project was to outline a methodological approach that aimed at integrating and connecting the private initiatives with the public policies that, through the involvement of multiple actors operating at local level, were able to

1 These are, for example, the Agencies of Tourism Promotion, the Public Tourist Offices, the Tour Operators.
investigate the characteristics and the extent of tourist pressure, as well as the possible policies for their mitigation.

According to the proposed methodology, two are the elements that must be taken into account and that are the foundation on which to build a detailed plan for any intervention:

- The first element is to define an initial analysis able to offer the current framework of the critical environmental conditions in a given area, and the amount of pressure exerted primarily by the tourism industry on the various environmental matrix;
- The second element relates to the identification of a group of stakeholders representing a broad range of local interests (such as institutional players, and the professional operators in the tourism sector) to outline the criteria to assess the environmental criticalities of a certain area, and engage in defining the actions to mitigate their impact through drafting of suitable plans of action.

With reference to the Initial Analysis of the target area, it must be able to measure the contribution in terms of environmental performance that tourist flows provide to a certain territory. This analysis should draw a clear picture of both the environmental conditions of the area (compared to all environmental matrix), the volume of different types of pressures that weigh on it (with particular reference to those in the tourism sector, although a less detailed survey on other sources of pressure is nevertheless desirable), but also of the perception that the key players operating in that territory have, compared to the environmental conditions. Besides the role that tourism plays if these conditions worsen [on this topic see: (Renn, Rohmann, 2000), (Crucitti, 2008)].

An analysis of first-level must therefore dwell upon the identification and exam of issues and critical environmental conditions of a certain area, by identifying potential pressures on the territory, and the ways through which they exert their action on the sensitive "targets". The framework of indicators potentially adoptable refers to all environmental matrix (waste, air, groundwater, surface water, noise, soil quality, etc.), as measured by the so called "state" indicators to be determined according to one of these consolidated approaches on the existing environmental reports: in this research we made a specific reference to the approach of the OECD PSR / DPSIR (OECD, 1993), (OECD, 1998), (Niemeijer, de Groot, 2008). The first-level analysis determined is a static analysis, which does not connect the sources of pressure to the state of the environmental quality.

Based on the description of environmental analysis of the target area provided by the analysis of first level, we pass to a specific analysis of second level that should focus on the activities existing in the area (with particular reference to those related to tourism), with the goal to drawing connections between them and the impacts and the responsibilities of the different actors. The indicators here considered are of pressure, built ad hoc on the characteristics of the type of tourism in a given area, and whose sources of information must be obtained directly from the actors (eg., data on energy consumption, water, waste production and their quality characteristics, etc.). It is essential therefore to guarantee the participation of the professional representatives of the sector, capable to offer (and validate) the operators on how to treat the information provided.

A third level of analysis also provides for the need to seek information about the perception of the local population in relation to the environmental impacts produced by the tourism industry. It is aimed at providing an analytical and evaluation framework of the environmental problems perceived by local people, and their expectations on the economic, social and institutional actors. This survey can be achieved through direct tools (survey questionnaire direct to the public), or through indirect tools (analysis of complaints to the supervisory or consultation for major categories considered to be representative of the local population).

Having defined the analytical framework, the second element essential to an effective and feasible planning is the setting up of a local permanent forum of consultation representing the public interest and the private sector alike and capable, based on the findings of the Analysis, to share priorities for action and identify tools and ways to affect those issues. The first action that this local committee is called to do is to determine the criteria by which to connect between them three levels of analysis detailed above, with the purpose to define the main weaknesses in the environment. Once identified, these criticalities will provide a framework for information that will:
2. On the one hand to identify directly (for example through the drafting and sharing of a proper Strategic Plans) which may be the action needed to have a positive impact on these criticalities;

3. On the other hand, to assess more broadly the possible effects on the environment of plans and programmes already established at the local level to support the development of tourism.

The method briefly outlined here tends primarily to develop a comprehensive analytical framework, that can be objective and evaluable over time, and taking into account the physical magnitude, as well as the perception of the issues raised by the major local stakeholders. Secondly, to determine a network of actors involved and empowered to act on those specific criticalities, either directly (eg. decision makers, addressing adequately their policies of government) or indirectly (such as the representatives of professional categories, which may be called upon to promote virtuous environmental initiatives of its associates).

A common interest in enhancing the tourism sector leads and stimulates a conscious and careful demand to protect the environment

**Description of the case study and of the activities being carried out**

This case study reports the experience gained in the European project INTER.ECO.TUR. (Interreg Eco Tourism)\(^2\), co-financed by the European Commission under the EU's INTERREG III-C, under the framework TREND (Opération Quadre Régional – Territoires et Régions Ensemble pour le Développement Local), of one year and a half. This project represented a first attempt to apply the adoption of the above mentioned approach to five different European tourist areas, as part of programme of international cooperation involving three countries: Italy, Spain and Greece. The project aimed to analyse the context of sustainable tourism development within the European Mediterranean area, focusing on five areas presenting tourist contexts where the are diversified environmental pressures and perspectives for tourist development\(^3\).

The specific areas of the three selected countries were:

- The Park of Nebrodi characteristic of Sicily and southern Italy. The park includes the popular tourist resort of Capo d'Orlando, on the Tyrrhenian coast of Sicily, and several municipalities of the hinterland that in recent years have developed a tendency to environmental and rural tourism;

- The Province of Lucca, the Tuscan province likely to offer a wide tourist offer within its territory where there are the coastal area of Versilia, the Park of the Apuan Alps and the inland city of high artistic and architectural value as it is Lucca. Additionally, this area, as well as presenting a varied landscape tourism, is characterised by the interactions arising between the industrial production sectors (Province characterize the paper industry, footwear, shipbuilding and mining) and tourism in a relatively small territory;

- The Island of Crete, whose strategic location at the heart of the Mediterranean puts it in a position to gather tourists from the entire Europe, is also subject to a strong season mass tourism. From the environmental point of view it is also forced to address severe climate and environmental criticalities, as a major shortage of water resources, and the advancing desertification of its territory;

- The town of La Coruña and its surrounding municipalities (part of Terra de Mariñas), in Galicia, northwest Spain. This area is, with reference to tourism, strategically important for those policies aimed at encouraging the development of this industry, promoted by the local authorities in the last decade. Despite a strong market-oriented vocation that predominates in the area due to the presence of an important harbour, La Coruña decided to enhance the potential attractions of its area, that until now almost exclusively related to cruise passengers passing through and to pilgrims reaching Santiago de Compostela;

- The Balearic Islands, one of the major European and Mediterranean areas devoted almost entirely to tourism, with the highest concentration of tourist presences per square km. It is

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\(^2\) See the Project documents: (Battaglia et al. 2007)

\(^3\) In regards to the INTERECOTUR Project objectives, activities and outputs (Manfredini et al., 2008)
subject to a strong mass tourism and, given its peculiar tourist vocation, it is obliged to reconciling the perspectives of growth of its tourism industry, and the policies of environmental and landscape protection policies.

Each geographic area involved in this Project has identified a partner who had the role to promote the project initiatives at the local level, to gather data on drafting the Analysis, and sharing the various project outputs with the other local partners.

The 5 local players that initiated it were:
- Nebrodi Development Coalition, an institution responsible to define tourism development in the Park, and representing its 21 local municipalities;
- The Province of Lucca, who governs a territory of 1773 sq km;
- The Western Crete Development Organization (OADYK), a non-profit organization operating within the protection of environmental resources (and particularly of water resources for agriculture);
- The Universidade Da Coruña (University Institute of Environment), The Public University of Spain, Department of Chemistry, in charge to manage the air quality control units located in the district of La Coruña;
- The “Fundaciò pel desenvolupament sostenible de les Illes Balears”, a non-profit institution supported by the local government, whose objective is to promote sustainable development strategies in the 4 islands of the Spanish archipelago.

These five local players have been supported in developing their activities by two Scientific Institutions (two Universities): The School of Advanced Studies Sant'Anna of the University of Pisa - Management and Innovation Lab, and by the University of Florence – Department of Physical Anthropology.

The first phase of the research envisaged to collect the necessary information to draw the initial Analysis within the five target areas.

The scientific partners of the Project have produced three questionnaires distributed to the local partners to gather data and information.

- Questionnaire 1: *Sustainable development of Tourism*.
- Questionnaire 2: *Demographic information and tourist presences*.
- Questionnaire 3: *Environmental and economic information and local politics of sustainability*.

The first questionnaire was distributed to the local stakeholders and the area partners (opinion leaders) to obtain a complete picture of the perceived level of criticality of the state of the environment, and of the environmental "burden" of the tourist industry in the area analysed. The questionnaire was structured in two modules: the first requested information about the main environmental criticalities, on the possible causes behind these and the suggestions to reduce the relevance of these problems; the second attained the critical issues specific to the tourism sector, and sought to investigate what was the perception of different stakeholders compared to a role within the panorama of the various local environmental criticalities. In order to have a complete and detailed picture as possible, the stakeholders had to fall within the following categories (with a target of at least 2 subjects for each category):

- Local governments;
- Representatives of local business associations;
- Local environmental groups;
- Universities or research centres operating in the area;
- Local agencies for the promotion of tourism.

The second questionnaire was divided into two sections. The first more of a demographic type that is necessary to gather information about the performance of the population in the last century. The second part referred more specifically to tourism, which was needed to gather information about the presence and the tourist arrivals in recent years, as well as to carry out a small census of the existing tourist accommodation facilities. In this phase we also analysed the characteristics of the local tourism offer, and the level of dissemination of schemes for environmental certification.
The third questionnaire was finally divided into five subsections:

- description of the territory, that included data on morphology, climatology and hydrology of the area;
- economic data, containing a collection of data and information on the typology of the main economic activities of the area, the employment rate, and on the existing dissemination of voluntary tools of environmental certification;
- environmental data, here we have investigated the main environmental matrix, in order to find what was the correlation between tourism and environmental criticalities. The environmental issues examined have were: air, quality and availability of the surface and ground water, waste, land use, biodiversity, energy, traffic and transport;
- the level of involvement of the supervisory authorities, in order to have a complete overview of the complaints submitted in the relevant territory, broken down by type of environmental element;
- environmental policies promoted in the last five years, through the investigation of the presence of spatial programming policies, tools for sustainable planning, and development projects within the issue of sustainable tourism.

Once the process of collecting data was concluded, we proceeded to draft the questionnaires. In the preparations phase it was necessary to split the data into three broad/macro categories, to calculate the respective indicators and make them comparable among the different contexts.

In the first category we analysed the indicators of environmental status for the various environmental matrix (air quality, water quality, etc.). In this section we also carried out a focus on tourism flows, aimed at providing a framework of the size of local tourist presences (i.e. n. of yearly tourists, seasonality of presences, etc.), and in regards to the accommodation capacity of territories (eg. number of accommodation facilities in the area, environmental quality of these facilities and services provided, etc.).

In the second category we determined the indicators of environmental pressure by connecting them to the importance granted to the presence of tourists, in order to measure how much the tourist flows impact the change of the local ecosystem (eg. trend of water consumption compared to the level of local tourist attendance).

In the third category were determined the indicators of environmental perception, relating to the survey questionnaires distributed to the various local stakeholders.

With reference to the data on the first and second category of indicators, it was not possible to have complete homogeneity of the information required for all the areas involved in the project. This partly because of differences in the production and presence of these information in the various territories, and partly because of the dissimilar willingness of the various beholders to share their data.

Hence, here it is a summary taken from the “Environmental Inquiry Report” of the Project where, for each area, we have identified the strengths and weaknesses that have emerged from the analysis in terms of determinants of local pressure, of the main negative effects produced on the local environment and, ultimately, the main local criticalities as perceived by the local actors interviewed.
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Determinants of local pressure</th>
<th>Evidences from environmental indicators</th>
<th>Stakeholders' perception</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>La Coruña</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Strength</td>
<td>Number of certified organizations</td>
<td>Positive data concerning quality of air and superficial water</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Good environmental monitoring system</td>
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<td>Weakness</td>
<td>High population density</td>
<td>High number of complaints towards the control authorities</td>
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<td>Improvement of water depuration</td>
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<td>Energy Consumptions</td>
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<td>Low impact of tourist sector</td>
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<td>Electromagnetic Pollution</td>
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<td><strong>Balears</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Strength</td>
<td>Number of certified organizations</td>
<td>High diffusion of protected areas</td>
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<td>Low importance of industrial impacts</td>
<td>Good quality of marine water</td>
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<tr>
<td>Weakness</td>
<td>High tourist presences</td>
<td>High importance of touristic presences for the quality of the environment</td>
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<td>Low sensitization of citizens, tourists and receptive structures</td>
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<td>Occupation of ground</td>
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<td><strong>Crete</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Strength</td>
<td>Low population density</td>
<td>Good quality of marine water</td>
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<td>High diffusion of protected areas</td>
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<tr>
<td>Weakness</td>
<td>High density of receptive structures</td>
<td>Very high water consumption</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Low diffusion of environmental certification</td>
<td>High waste production</td>
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<td>Increase of control activity</td>
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<td>Construction of purification plants</td>
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<td>High impact of agricultural sector</td>
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<td><strong>Lucca Province</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Strength</td>
<td>High diffusion of environmental certification (but not in tourist sector)</td>
<td>Good environmental monitoring system</td>
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<td>Weakness</td>
<td>High impact of industrial sector</td>
<td>High energetic consumptions</td>
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<td>Traffic and transport</td>
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<td><strong>Parco de’ Nebrodi</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Strength</td>
<td>Low diffusion of environmental certification</td>
<td>High diffusion of protected areas</td>
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<td>Weakness</td>
<td>Low number of complaints</td>
<td>Low efficiency in the differentiation of waste</td>
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<td>Increase of waste management</td>
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<td>Increase of infrastructural services</td>
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<td>Good quality of superficial water</td>
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Once that the cognitive framework of each territory has been assessed, based on the indicators that emerged and on the data incoming from the *opinion leaders* who filled in the first of three questionnaires, we applied a set of evaluation criteria necessary to identify the main local criticalities.

The proposed criteria to be adopted have arisen within the group of Project scientific partners [on the details of this methodology see: (Battaglia et al., 2008), (Daddi, Rizzi, 2008)] that, after being shared by the institutional partners, was discussed and accepted in agreement with the main stakeholders involved in each of the areas studied. The criteria were three:

1. inter-comparison between the areas of reference in terms of performance;
2. comparison with regulatory and quality standards resulting from national or international legislation or regulatory measures, adopted as a benchmark assessment;
3. perception of the local *opinion leaders*, surveyed through the outputs of questionnaires they completed.

By applying the above criteria, through a system of weights that has been otherwise agreed in each of three areas, we evidenced the main critical environmental elements, that have in turn formed the bases to identify the priority actions for improvement in each of the territories involved.

In selecting the priorities, and given the project features, we chose to focus on the environmental pressures created by the tourism industry, by identifying a panel of actions that could be appropriately selected in each area of reference. The categories of actions were the following:

- awareness actions targeting tourists and citizens;
- actions aimed at increasing the dissemination of the environmental certification (EMAS, Ecolabel, ISO 14001), particularly in the tourism sector;
- actions aimed at reducing traffic and the impact related to the transport sector (especially in the tourist season);
- actions to reduce the impact of the farming industry;
- actions to reduce the impact in the industrial sector;
- actions aimed at improving the environmental infrastructure (landfills, sewage treatment plant, recovery/waste disposal plant);
- actions to better manage water consumption and waste production;
- need to implement urban environmental management systems (local A21).

For each area examined we finally provided three levels of priority actions relating to categories mentioned above. Hence, below we summarize the outputs of the consultation processes activated on a local scale.
Subsequently to identifying the priorities for action in each area, the project planned to substantiate these priorities by working on a Strategic Action Plan, especially for the tourism sector, aimed at improving the environmental quality in these areas and encourage the development of the tourism sector. The drafting of the Strategic Plan was carried out by local partners, in collaboration with the scientific partners and various local institutions, and allowed to activate an exchange of information between those engaged in the promotion of the tourist industry, and in favour of safeguarding the environment at various levels, thus bridging the gap of knowledge among the different stakeholders.

Furthermore, the Plan, written by several actors playing different roles, would be a useful tool for future tourism planning in a logical consolidation of the tourist, environmental and cultural developments in the area, and the revival of tourism, too.

In the targeted areas the Strategic Plan has been characterised by a multi-sectoral approach, and was drawn up involving all possible local stakeholders, focusing on the identification of the medium to long term targets. For each goal we also detailed the actions needed to achieve them, defined the person/body in charge of these actions, set the necessary timing, and identified indicators to monitor the progress of the objectives outlined.

An essential element was identified by all partners in the need to ensure over time a regular evaluation and re-modulation of the same Plan, based on monitoring the level of achievement set according to the criteria.

The following wants to be an example: an excerpt of the Strategic Plan for the Park of Nebrodi that included seven goals for the main environmental criticalities:

| Sensitization of citizens and tourists | ++ | +++ | +++ | ++ | ++ |
| Actions to increase the diffusion of environmental certification (Emas, Ecolabel, ISO14001) among tourist structures | ++ | + | ++ | +++ | +++ |
| Actions to improve traffic and transports impacts (also in tourist period) | +++ | +++ | ++ | ++ | + |
| Actions to improve the environmental impacts of agricultural sector | ++ | ++ | +++ | + | +++ |
| Actions to improve the environmental impacts of industrial sector | ++ | n.a. | n.a. | +++ | + |
| Improve environmental infrastructures | ++ | + | +++ | ++ | ++ |
| Improve waste and water consumptions management | + | + | +++ | ++ | ++ |
| Environmental urban management (local A21, etc.) | +++ | ++ | + | ++ | ++ |

+++ → high priority;  ++ → moderate priority;  + → low priority

Tab. 2
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criticalities</th>
<th>Objectives</th>
<th>Targets</th>
<th>Actions</th>
<th>Deadline</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To improve the management of waste and water consumption</td>
<td>Increased management system of waste recycling within the Nebrodi</td>
<td>Construction of two recycling stations inside the park</td>
<td>Construction of a series of stations for the recycling of different types of waste</td>
<td>December 2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tools of urban environmental management</td>
<td>Application and dissemination of the tools of Local Agenda 21 in the territory of the park; use of a monitoring station to control and manage the planning instruments</td>
<td>Application of the instrument of Local Agenda 21 to at least one Municipality of the Nebrodi Park</td>
<td>Promotion and development of planning tools</td>
<td>01/12/09</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Tab. 3

In all the areas involved in the Inter.eco.tur. project the partners have drawn up their own Strategic Plan and, in order to provide all stakeholders a useful tool to verify the applicability and the constant advancement of the objectives of the Plan a particular monitoring procedure was set up, approved by partners and communicated by them to other local stakeholders. This procedure was outlined in a way to ensure the possibility to verify in time in each context the implementation of the planned activities, determine the rate of progress of each of them, and thus to classify the goals based on the state of attainment of outputs. The set up of a monitoring procedure has in fact initiated a process that need to be further consolidated. In this respect, all the Project local partners and the scientific partners committed to pursue what planned, by signing a Memorandum of Understanding aimed at disseminating these initiatives related to sustainable tourism in the respective territories. The agreement of all parties to sign the Memorandum represents a commitment to promote the cooperation between local actors involved at various levels in the implementation of the environmental policies. Their involvement though is on voluntary basis, on the belief that this will enable them to share resources, while likely coordinating more effective actions.

**Benefits and Difficulties Encountered**

The benefits identified by the approach herein adopted, within the INTERECOTUR Project are multiple and relate directly to the areas involved in the project while, indirectly, to the perspectives of enlargement of this experience to other contexts, interested to adopt this same methodology.

Firstly, it should be stressed that those local players, only partly involved in managing the tourism’s burdens until that project phase, have become willing to contribute to the studies and providing information useful in the analysis. Hence, it became clear in the course of action at local level a gradual increase of the interest of the different stakeholders to participate actively in the project activities, so to ensure that the development of the Strategic Plan was the result of a more participated and shared approach possible.

At the meetings organized during the project implementation it has always been guaranteed the presence of local institutional actors, invited to express their views on the proposed methods of analysis, on the results obtained in terms of criticalities and priorities for action, and their commitment to integrate their decision making processes of policy guidelines as emerged in the Strategic Plan.

This approached functioned in all those contexts (4 out of 5, with the exception of Crete) where we organised local meetings, helped to provide directly, by all partners, methods and tools.
In this respect it is also important to recall that, for some of the territories involved in the INTERECOTUR Project\(^4\), this represented their first experience of extended governance where specific groups of stakeholders initiate local structured proposals consequent to an analysis that measure the local characteristics of the specific problems identified.

A second positive aspect relates purely to the methodology applied. On the basis of proposals presented by the scientific partners, and with the contribution of all other partners, it has been possible to develop a method that, despite being suitable more to a single enterprise (where the processes of evaluation and planning of improvements are certainly more widely disseminated) it has proven to be particularly suitable to a local logic.

Eventually, another element worth noting is linked to the replicability of the activities been realized, from a twofold point of view. Firstly, these actions are feasible at any other local context, although not necessarily characterized by a high presence of tourists. In this respect, approaches partially traceable to those applied by this project exist in other Italian and foreign areas, aimed to manage more or less wide territories\(^5\).

Additionally, thanks to the international representativeness of the project partners, it has been possible to adopt and apply a methodological approach that takes into account the dynamics and work patterns of different European countries, thus increasing further the aforementioned replicability of this approach.

From the standpoint of the criticalities encountered, it is clear that the project has highlighted the differences displayed by the various local partners to engage local actors. In the Province of Lucca, where there was an established tradition of collaboration and participation among stakeholders, the Strategic Plan was directly brought to the attention of decision makers, who has integrated it within the Action Plan outlined in the process of Local Agenda 21.

At the Park of Nebrodi instead, the actions encouraged have become a reference to the management initiatives established by the Park since then; as in La Coruña the local Ministry of Tourism has adopted those activities as outlined in the local Strategic Plan.

As in respect to the last two areas of reference, in the Balearic Islands the same Foundation being a project partner, very close to the local government institutions, has launched a series of activities as planned within the INTERECOTUR Project. No result has had the implementation of the Strategic Plan only in Crete.

Despite the involvement of stakeholders in all areas both in the phase of analysis and planning, we witnessed an extreme a variety of actions in different contexts prior to define the Strategic Plans.

It would be advisable that at the local level are established official committees and/or standing working groups, representative of the main local actors, to ensure continuity in the implementation and monitoring of the Strategic Plan and ensure consistency in the pursuit of that report. These working groups should be particularly devoted to help achieve what is set in the plan, so as to ensure its timely implementation.

Another critical aspect that emerged in the Project concerns the non-homogeneity of data and indicators adopted within the analysis, in the diverse territorial contexts. Even in this case the set up of a peculiar body, representing the variety of local players, and capable to interlinking with all institutions and beholders of data, may be a factor of guarantee when collecting the widest possible information.

Clearly, the set up of such a Committee, to be effective, should receive a strong legitimacy by the local actors who constitute it, empowering them with most of the activities within its competence.

\(^4\) An exception is the Province of Lucca which since 2001 had developed projects, within the activities of Local Agenda 21, involving local stakeholders in its decision-making process, and the Foundation for Sustainable Development of the Balearic Islands that, since its inception in 2004, has had the feature to engage representatives of local accommodation and other stakeholders of the tourism sector in development projects.

\(^5\) Examples of this are the experiences given by the application of the Regulation 761/01 Emas to the industrial districts and the homogeneous productive areas: EMAS/Ecolabel Italian Competent Body (2007); (Frey, Iraldo, 2008); (Battaglia et al.2008)
A further feature, related to the previous one and characterising all areas, was the poor level of involvement (often only as mere listeners, and not in the role of actors) of the tourism businesses or of their intermediaries. This might make it difficult to implement those actions of the Strategic Plan that directly involve the SME sector (think about those related to the dissemination of environmental management tools or of eco-labels). In fact, the participation of their representatives is considered essential within any local committee as the type described above.

Finally, an element that the project did not develop, but which should become the central part of a strategy of local development and promotion of the sector, is the set up of a communications and marketing plan. This plan should be in a position to build out the efforts made at the local level, creating the conditions to facilitate the attraction of a locally structured demand for tourism. However, though it has been considered important by all the actors, it was taken poorly into account in the INTERECOTUR Project, thus limiting the communication practices to those required by the project, without giving them a key specific strategic feature.

Conclusions

In the present paper we reported the findings of an applied research, co-funded at European level: the project INTERECOTUR. The objective of this initiative was to provide a methodology and stimulate the involvement and interest of various stakeholders in drafting the Strategic Plan, through activities that have been developed in five areas of the Mediterranean. Here we are briefly summarise the lessons learned of INTERECOTUR.

Firstly, the project has laid foundation to promote sustainable tourism practices across regions, both in the main tourist areas, and in areas only marginally with a tourist vocation (think of the industrial and commercial vocation of La Coruña, or of the specificities of the term "tourism" that qualify the different territories of the Province of Lucca). In sum, the project has thus demonstrated the applicability of a model that does not require specific requirements of homogeneity to be feasible, but has instead offered evidence on the potential to develop this process in diverse areas, subsequent to a proper initial analysis of the context itself.

Secondly, the project has highlighted the importance of local consultation and dialogue to support development practices in the tourism sector, compatible with environmental protection. Practices that have been witnessed in the five areas involved in the project. The effectiveness of the integration process of the proposals that emerged in the project thanks to the local decision-making processes, as highlighted in the paper, has varied from area to area, depending on the background of experience of each of them, and by the level of proximity to the local government institutions of each project partner.

This issue has pinpointed the need for a greater structuring of the phases subsequent to the planning one (those related to implementing and monitoring), by setting up a special Committee, capable of driving the process across the deadlines, without leaving exclusively in the hands of the local government the burden to implement the actions envisaged by the Plan. The project has therefore shown the opportunity to establish a body representing the public-private interests (some sort of Organizing Committee), which is really able to own the results of analyses and lead the activities at the local level; and be entitled to do so by the largest possible number of actors.

Finally, one last lesson learned from the project concerns the close interlink existing between methodological severity of the analysis and the contingency plans. The project has shown the importance of a correct method to identify the problems as a pre-condition to draft functional and feasible proposals for actions of improvement. This severity affects both the selection of indicators of state and pressure related to tourism flows (in this case the selection must be the result of a broader agreement between the parties), as well as the burden put on the perception of local environmental and development issues, that in the INTERECOTUR Project were measured through the questionnaire addressed to the opinion leaders.

Whether we talk of the selection of indicators, and the methodology to investigate the perception, the participation of diverse stakeholders (public and private) is essential to an approach of shared analysis because by this way it is more evident the need to act on certain
issues in the phase of identification of priorities. The INTERECOTUR Project has shown that where this share was tighter (Province of Lucca, Parc de Nebrodi and La Coruña), the definition of the actions for improvement was more practical. Thus it is more likely that what has been planned is actually implemented.

To conclude, we should highlight how, over the next few years, it will be important to verify if and how many of the goals outlined in the various territories have had an actual implementation, and what were the local effects in terms of tourism growth and environmental protection.
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