

Management of Coastal Recreational Resources: Beaches, Yacht Marinas, and Eco-tourism

ANTON MICALLEF

The Euro-Mediterranean Centre on Insular Coastal Dynamics (ICoD) was established within the framework of the Foundation for International Studies, University of Malta in 1988, through an agreement between the government of Malta and the Council of Europe. It forms part of a network of specialized Centres pertaining to the Council of Europe's Open Partial Agreement on Major Natural and Technological Hazards (the EUR-OPA Major Hazards Agreement). Through multi-disciplinary partnerships, ICoD organizes research, training, and educational activities on integrated coastal area management in the Euro-Mediterranean region. The Centre has an office at the University Gozo Centre.

Second International Conference

In 2004, ICoD gave rise to a series of bi-annual conferences addressing the management of coastal recreational resources (MCRR). Between 25 and 27 October 2006, the Second International Conference on the Management of Coastal Recreational Resources (MCRR2) was organized in Gozo at the Ta' Cenc Hotel, Sannat. The main objective of this novel conference series is to focus on selected aspect of coastal management, namely those related to recreational amenities represented by beaches, yacht marinas, and eco-tourism. The conference brought together researchers as well as practitioners and policy makers to highlight and discuss issues of concern while also show-casing appropriate solutions through the exchange of experiences, best-practice scenarios, and innovative management concepts. In this manner, the conference provided an opportunity to consider issues of concern to both tourism and the environmental sector and to address sustainable management practice in these fields by exploring the dependency of tourism on a well-managed environment and, conversely, the negative impact of insensitive tourism on environmental quality.

The conference was conceived to attract a wide audience including, tourism professionals, researchers in the natural and social sciences, project managers, infrastructure investors, and staff from the private

sector and government agencies whose work involves aspects of research into integrated coastal area management practices as well as the development and management of coast-related recreational amenities. The conference series is also of interest to managers of natural resources and environmental agencies; urban and coastal planners; non-governmental organizations (NGOs); environmental economists; and coastal municipalities.



An example of good beach management practice in Spain through the provision of a buffer zone (cycle path, planted area, and promenade) between the beach and vehicular traffic.

With participants ranging from as far afield as Canada, Australia, New Zealand, the USA, and the Euro-Mediterranean region, the papers selected for this conference were diverse but nonetheless focused on specific aspects of coastal recreational resources such as:

- Safety issues on beaches;
- Human recreational and development impacts on beach and natural coastal environments and learning from past mistakes;
- Viable options of converting hard to soft interventions at the coast;
- The intricate mechanics of beach nourishment and enhancement value to degraded coastal areas;
- Conservation of dune areas for both recreational and ecological purposes;
- Innovative aspects of beach management in carrying capacity issues and quality evaluation;

- Actively promoting a bottom-up approach through integration of user preferences and priorities into the management of coastal amenities;
- Identifying workable alternatives to mass tourism through evaluation of diverse ecotourism initiatives (dive tourism, visiting eco-sites, promotion of Heritage Coasts, promotion of biodiversity, and sites rich in cultural heritage);
- Improved management of yacht marinas;
- Promotion of yachting activities.



Sensitively-planned and professionally-run yacht marinas can enhance already developed coastal areas and provide considerable income to local populations

Pros and Cons of Tourism

With increasing leisure time and cheaper air travel opportunities, the tourism industry emerges as a mainstay of many coastal communities, contributing a high economic input to both local and national economies. As would be expected, such a thriving and diverse industry cannot operate in isolation without impacting on the social and environmental fabric of visited shorelines. Of particular concern are negative impacts that include, among other, a trend of increasing development along the coast, degradation of the natural coastal environment (e.g. dune systems), increased dependency on largely seasonal and mass tourism, and erosion of the local way of life and values such as the abandonment of traditional employment (e.g. farming) in favour of higher paying (though potentially short-term) employment in the tourist industry.

Fortunately, there is also a positive side to this otherwise grim equation. Some of the positive impacts of tourism may be seen in the increased opportunity to revive traditional crafts and in the

production and sale of artisanal goods which are so popular with overseas visitors, increased job opportunities, the increased demand for quality tourism, and the search for innovative ways of enjoying new environments (e.g. through ecotourism) and as an incentive to improve local infrastructure and bathing water quality.

An Important Opportunity

In this context, this bi-annual conference series on the Management of Coastal Recreational Resources provides an important opportunity and forum to discuss the impact of increasing tourism on natural coastal resources and to assess what balance may be struck between our desire to derive an increased benefit from tourism and the necessity of conserving that playground in which such tourism activities takes place (environmental conservation). In other words, we participate in the search for that all-important ‘sustainable development formula’.



Rural areas can provide an ideal setting for eco-tourism

To date, this conference series has received a strong local support from a variety of entities namely, the Ministry for Gozo, the Ministry for Tourism and Culture, the Malta Tourism Authority, APS Bank (Malta), the Gozo Centre of the University of Malta, and ONVOL (Malta) internet service providers. Without such support the conference series would not have been viable and the organizers are grateful for such support. Many thanks are also expressed to the management and staff at the Ta’ Cenc hotel who made the latest event a memorable experience of Gozo for the conference participants.

Dr Anton Micallef is Director of the Council of Europe specialised Centre (the Euro-Mediterranean Centre on Insular Coastal Dynamics - ICOD) pertaining to the EUR-OPA Major Hazards Agreement.