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Research paper

Tourism policy and residents' well-being in Cyprus: Opportunities and challenges for developing an inside-out destination management approach

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ABSTRACT

The paper explores how Cyprus can increase its competitiveness, sustaining its magnitude and attractive attributes, and ensuring residents' well-being. The study evaluates the suitability of an 'inside-out' planning approach to island tourism development. Eleven interviews were conducted with tourism policy-makers and stakeholders complemented by documentary analysis of official policy sources. Findings indicate that Cyprus tourism policy addresses only indirectly residents' well-being, and therefore a policy re-orientation focusing on local prosperity is needed. It is proposed that an 'inside-out' approach stemming from the kind of development that locals want for improving their quality of life can foster islands' socio-cultural revitalisation. An 'inside-out' approach can redirect Cyprus tourism policy to focus on alternative forms of tourism such as rural/special interest tourism. However, to reconfigure its tourism product, Cyprus should remedy the 'top-down' and bureaucratic planning processes that create challenges for the sustainable development of tourism. The adoption of an 'inside-out' approach can enable 'bottom-up' decision-making by empowering residents to partake in local communities' tourism planning intending to improve life quality. Broadly, these conditions need to be further examined within the context of small island destinations in order to find the means for implementing their repositioning/rebranding driven by a local focus aimed at enhancing residents' well-being.

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1. Introduction

Islands depending upon their position, physiognomy and cultural features can be considered as attractive destinations of extensive (and sometimes unregulated) tourism development (Bastin, 1988; Boukas & Ziakas, 2013a; Ioannides, 1992). Nonetheless, their small size and special characteristics (remoteness, limited resources, lack of diversified economy, etc) make them over-reliant on foreign investment(s). In this regard, the global capitalist system tends to control decision-making regarding their tourism development (Carlsen & Buttler, 2011; Lewis-Cameron & Roberts, 2010), leaving their future in non-local hands and overlooking the needs and well-being of local people.

At the same time, the majority of these islands are developed mostly as mass-tourist seasonal destinations that strive to be

competitive, thereby sacrificing their precious resources and balanced development. In a highly competitive environment, islands need to face several problems, the majority of them relating to limited resources (i.e. water, space, workforce, etc), segregation, and dependency on the rest of the world (Niles & Baldacchino, 2011). This does not only pose challenges for the sustainability of their local natural, socio-cultural, and economic fabric, but also makes them susceptible to the tensions and crises that manifest at a worldwide level. What seems therefore to be a possible response in the case of islands, and warrants investigation, is to re-orient their tourism policy focus from merely meeting the needs of foreign tourists (an 'outside-in' approach), to catering for the well-being of local people (an 'inside-out' approach). An 'inside-out' approach means that strategies should not be driven from something needed from the outside (tourists) but rather from something that locals want for themselves in order to improve their well-being (Ziakas & Costa, 2010). This has the potential to enhance the tourism infrastructure of an island destination and its overall attractiveness, thereby generating tourist flows and contributing to its sustainability contingent upon the efficient

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deployment of the available destination capitals (Sharpley, 2009).

Cyprus, as a small-island state that exhibits all the characteristics that necessitate a turn in tourism policy in order to resolve the range of problems it faces. Specifically, having invested in mass tourism since the 1960s, Cyprus currently faces problems of decreased competitiveness, lack of service quality in the hospitality sector, monothematic development (almost 2.3 million tourists per year visiting mostly five coastal areas especially during the summer period), reliance on foreign capital, and a decline of tourist flows (Archontides, 2007; Boukas & Ziakas, 2014). As the effects of the global economic crisis in 2008 and the banking collapse of 2013 have dramatically deteriorated the conditions for prosperity on the island, tourism policy-makers and stakeholders have sought to find solutions for the speedy recovery and the re-mapping of Cyprus as a significant Mediterranean island destination. The whole tourist system is still however based on the mass tourism model that for years underestimated the necessity for sustaining its limited resources and created the kinds of problems that threaten the island's future viability and the residents' well-being. In this context, it is relevant to consider whether an inside-out tourism approach is feasible for Cyprus and under what conditions could be developed.

To answer this question, the paper explores how Cyprus can increase its competitiveness and deal effectively with the challenges of the economic recession, maintaining its attractiveness as a destination but at the same time sustaining its attributes for future generations and ensuring the well-being of its residents and stakeholders. In doing so, the paper examines the island's resilience by focusing on the factors that determine the extent to which current tourism development plans, which are primarily responding to crisis, affect Cyprus economic, social and environmental sustainability. This examination can reveal potential linkages between tourism policy and residents' well-being, which can enable an 'inside-out' approach in tourism development strategies. Finally, the paper proposes theoretical and practical implications for islands as destinations with unique characteristics and peculiarities to successfully invest in the qualities that will give them the independence to make their own decisions ensuring the local community's long-term prosperity, as well as their future growth and development.

2. Island tourism and sustainable development: an unanswered query?

Islands' exceptional characteristics, such as their morphology, climate, unique natural and cultural features, landscape and setting made them successful tourist destinations (Carlsen & Butler, 2011; dos Santos, 2014; Lewis-Cameron & Roberts, 2010). Indeed, the fact that islands were always considered to be fascinating places, physically separated from the continent, with many differences and exotic elements, such as 'escape' and 'otherness' (Sharpley, 2012), contributed towards their transformation into unique destinations offering desirable experiences to tourists. Moreover, the economic contribution of tourism was considered by islands' tourism policies to be one of the most important motives to systematically manage tourist activity (Currie & Falconer, 2014; Pratt, 2015; Sharpley & Ussi, 2014; Seetanah, 2011) and capitalise on its financial benefits.

In this regard, islands such as those in Mediterranean, Caribbean and South Pacific have become powerful destinations in the world's tourism sphere (Butler, 2008; Croes, 2011; Hadjikakou, Chenoweth, Miller, Druckman, & Li, 2014; Pratt & Harrison, 2015). For instance, Greek islands have been considered to be top destinations in the Mediterranean (Paci & Marrocu, 2014). Characteristically, from the 12,302,448 tourists that arrived at Greece by air

in 2013, the 7,491,305 (almost the 61%) arrived at just seven island airports (Zante, Heraklion, Corfu, Kos, Rhodes, Santorini, Chania) (Greek Statistics, 2014). This signifies the power of island tourism for the entire country. Indeed, since the 1960s, Greek islands have been considered to be major destinations, mostly for mass summer tourism (Graci & Dodds, 2010; Tsartas, 2003). Due to tourism's economic significance, the Greek islands have been developed in such a way to satisfy mass tourists' expectations. It is quite obvious, therefore, that the majority of island destinations in the Mediterranean area have been planned to satisfy mostly mass tourism needs (Aretano, Petrosillo, Zaccarelli, Semeraro, & Zurlini, 2013). The fact that islands offer all the basic ingredients of mass tourism (sea, sun, sand) led to the creation of a whole industry around this model (resort hospitality industry near the sea). However, the same characteristics that make islands attractive destinations (remote places surrounded by the sea), could also be weaknesses for their overall development. As Niles and Baldacchino (2011) argue, islands are characterised as places with rich and diverse flora and fauna but at the same time they face important resource deficiencies, segregation, and dependency on the rest of the world. The authors conclude that due to this situation, islands struggle to balance two contradictory forces: (a) to keep their ecological integrity, and (b) to strive for the economic development and community quality of life, especially considering the urgent need to preserve their social/spatial characteristics. Within the sphere of mass tourism development, this balance is hard to achieve and be maintained. One the one hand, the contribution of mass tourism to islands' economic development and prosperity is recognised, but on the other hand the negative impacts of this form of tourism such as monothematic development, seasonality, resource depletion, and crowdedness hinder the overall effort involved in reaching an equilibrium. Consequently, islands face problems such as climate change (Keener, 2013), seasonality (Ridderstaat, Croes, & Nijkamp, 2014a, 2014b), and scarcity of resources (Boukas, Boustras, & Sinka, 2012; Stathatou, Gad, Kampragou, Grigoropoulou, & Assimacopoulos, 2015), while dealing with dependencies on the global economy (Sharpley, 2012). This raises challenges regarding the overall sustainable development of islands (Graci, 2013; Graci & Dodds, 2010; Jaafar & Maideen, 2012) and questions whether it is realistic to speak about sustainable tourism in the case of islands, where natural, social and economic resources are all limited.

In economic terms, Lewis-Cameron and Roberts (2010) claim that islands are highly dependent on foreign ownership to foster their tourism infrastructure. Moreover, the authors add that for islands, indigenous people are on the bottom of the pyramid with regard not only to ownership but also employment. The lack of financial power on the part of locals to sustain large-scale projects such as hotels and hospitality establishments contributes to this situation. Along the same lines, Carlsen and Butler (2011) suggest that islands as destinations have several dependencies on external forces and together with the reduction of other traditional economic activities (e.g. agriculture) as well as their geographical isolation, they are more vulnerable to crises. Therefore, the economic sustainability of islands that focus their development on tourism is difficult to be guaranteed and maintained.

In environmental terms, the sustainability of islands is also debatable. As Boukas and Ziakas (2013a) suggest, islands are sensitive ecosystems characterised by limited resources such as geographical disparity, limited space and, in the case of southern island destinations, long dry climate and limited water supplies. Additionally, the excessive development of tourism can seriously alter an islands' carrying capacity and bring several negative impacts, such as deforestation, loss of wildlife (Lean 1994), coastal pollution and reef destruction (Robbins 1994). Moreover, as McElroy and de Albuquerque (1998) claim in their study of

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