

Researching the development gap between the hinterland and the coast—evidence from the island of Crete[☆]

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Abstract

Past research has demonstrated that island tourism is mainly developed along the coast, and that hinterland areas face inherent disadvantages in developing their tourism industry. Peripherality; rurality; limited infrastructure and facilities; and the increasing demand of international tourists for beach holidays have shown that the alternatives of hinterland areas for ‘touristisation’ and self-sustaining growth are limited. In effect, rural population tends to leave their birthplaces and migrate to the cities and the coastal resorts in the search for better life and employment opportunities. All the above issues reported in tourism literature are evident in Crete. Through a literature review and a statistical analysis it was found that in Crete there is an unequal distribution of tourist spending and accentuated regional imbalances with the vast majority of tourism activity concentrated on the coast and economic activity in the hinterland mainly directed to agriculture. Bearing all these in mind, it is the aim of this paper to study the development gap between the hinterland and the coast and provide recommendations for bridging this gap.

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1. Introduction

The level of socio-economic development is not uniform across all regions of each country. The problem of unequal distribution of income, employment opportunities and economic activities often acts as a powerful stimulus for mass internal migrations from the less to the more developed parts of a country (Karkazis & Thanassoulis, 1998; Nash & Martin, 2003). For example, in countries, such as Italy, Turkey and Greece, it is a common fact that populations move from the economically less developed regions to the more developed in search of work.

Tourism is very often confined to a few attractive regions which benefit significantly from investments and tourist expenditures, while other regions tend to be more or less neglected (Peppelenbosch & Tempelman, 1989; Oppermann & Chon, 1997; Tosun, Timothy, & Ozturk, 2003). Although tourism has been promoted by many governments as a mean of addressing the socio-economic problems associated with the decline of traditional agrarian industries (Sharpley, 2002), numerous studies have shown that tourism can not only stimulate regional development, but can also produce regional imbalances (Bryden, 1973; de Kadt, 1979; Komilis, 1994; Tosun et al., 2003).

Since tourism is the mainstay of most islands’ economy (INSULA, 2000) and nowadays seaside vacationers have multiplied rapidly (Andriotis, 2003a), a development gap has been created between the coast and the hinterland of most insular regions. Although islands hold a particular attraction in tourism research, because they provide excellent ‘laboratory’ conditions

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for the study of international tourism growth, where theories can be tested and processes can be observed in the setting of a semi-closed system (King, 1993; Ioannides, 1995; Andriotis, 2004a), tourism literature has not extensively investigated this gap. Indeed, most past research for islands (e.g. Coccossis & Parpairis, 1996; Saveriades, 2000; Andriotis, 2003a, b, 2004a; Tsartas, 2004) has been focused on coastal areas. Although tourism in the interior can be considered an important theoretical and practical research agenda, the issue of overdevelopment of the coast and underdevelopment of the hinterland has rarely been addressed, mainly due to the difficulty associated with the spatial fragmentation of islands' interior.

According to Irvine and Anderson (2003, p. 229) tourism is likely to be the only growth industry for peripheral geographically isolated rural locations. Bearing in mind that tourism has the potential to combat economic decline and eliminate the loss of population in hinterland areas (University of the Aegean, 2002; Nash & Martin, 2003), the current study was undertaken with the aim to study the development gap between coast and hinterland and provide recommendations for bridging this gap. In doing so, the Greek island of Crete has been used as a case. (Details of the specific survey work, on which the results given in this paper are based, are given in Appendix A.) Crete represents an interesting case of a large, heterogeneous island tourist destination that although enriched with the necessary resources (such as interior mountains and cultural sites) that permit it to sell a diversified tourist product, has nonetheless suffered serious regional imbalances and mass internal migrations towards the coast. As a result, the notion that tourism is a 'magic wand that will speed up economic progress' (Hoggart, Butler, & Black, 1995, p. 36), should be treated with caution for the hinterland of the island. This paper is structured as follows. Section 2 reviews the literature focusing on three main issues: nature of the development gap; causes of the gap; and differential outcomes of tourism on coastal and hinterland areas. Section 3 examines the tourism industry and the existence of the development gap in Crete, taking each of the foci identified in the literature. Section 4 provides recommendations for bridging the gap. Section 5 presents the conclusions of the study.

2. Researching the development gap

2.1. Nature of the gap

Development is a process of change. However, change does not take place in all parts of the world, but there are areas that expand extensively their tourism industry, while others never move from the potential of development. All over the world population has always been

attracted to coastal areas. EU (2001) estimates that more than half of Union's population lives within 50 km of the sea and trends indicate that this percentage will grow in the future. Since most people (residents and tourists) are attracted to the sea, the biggest agglomerations are located in coastal areas (University of Aegean, 2002). In this respect, Goymen (2000, p. 1030) reports that in Turkey a pronounced spatial dichotomy has evolved between a privileged space along the coast and an underprivileged space in the interior, where hinterland locations have been used as complementary attractions to coastal tourism. Likewise, safari tourism in the hinterland of Kenya started as being complementary to coastal tourism (Rajotte, 1987).

With limited exemptions, the greatest development problem faced by islands is that tourism expansion occurs only on or near the coast, and interior areas face inherent disadvantages in developing their tourism industry (Oppermann & Chon, 1997; Andriotis, 2003a). In fact, coastal areas dominate as far as location of tourist enterprises is concerned. For example:

(in Mauritius) only a small number of hotels are situated inland and all of those hotels are to be found in the towns along the major route across the island between the airport and the main town. By 1995, tourism had definitely transformed the landscape along many stretches of the Mauritius coastline and only the south coast remained largely untouched. Yet it is quite obvious that tourism development had not occurred in inland areas and that a large part of the country could be classified as non-tourism space. While tourism may not have attained a dominant status in the overall economy, it certainly appears on its way to be the dominant landscaping industry along the coast (Oppermann & Chon, 1997, p. 54).

In many islands, hinterland areas are in downward transitional states because they are either located far from the centres of economic activity, or their social norms are traditional and conservative (Andriotis 2000, 2003b). As reported by Sharpley (2002):

Over the last three decades, many rural economies have suffered a severe downturn, with failing employment and income levels in traditional agrarian industries contributing to a vicious circle of economic decline and socio-economic problems. In particular, per capita rural incomes have fallen well below national averages, whilst the loss of public services, high unemployment levels and the consequential out-migration of younger, better educated members of rural communities have collectively endangered the fabric and structure of rural areas (p. 234).

In the absence of alternative local employment opportunities, residents of the hinterland tend to leave their birthplaces and migrate to the cities and coastal

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