



# Coastal and marine tourism: A challenging factor in Marine Spatial Planning



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## ARTICLE INFO

### Article history:

Received 1 March 2016

Received in revised form

8 May 2016

Accepted 17 May 2016

Available online 27 May 2016

### Keywords:

Marine tourism

Coastal tourism

Marine Spatial Planning

Tourism planning

## ABSTRACT

Coastal and marine space is “home” to a constantly growing number of human activities and facilities, the most important of which are those related to coastal and marine tourism. Being one of the largest segments of the maritime economic sectors, as well as the largest component of the tourism industry, coastal and marine tourism often raise controversy regarding the environmental impacts and the compatibilities with other human activities.

Marine Spatial Planning (MSP), is considered to be a promising procedure in tackling developmental and management issues related to the oceans and seas, and thus issues related to coastal and marine tourism. Indeed the present paper argues over the significant role of MSP in organizing and planning coastal and marine tourism activities and especially in ensuring: a) good environmental conditions for the tourism industry to prosper, b) quality of seascapes and coastal landscapes and other resources of importance to tourism, c) adaptation to climate change effects, d) spatial regulations so that coastal and marine space is not overwhelmed by tourism facilities and activities and e) wise allocation of human uses in the coastal zone so as to avoid conflicts and create synergies among sectors.

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## 1. Introduction: the new challenges in marine space

Even though oceans and seas are still considered to be “terra incognita” (in relation to the land), marine space is “home” to a constantly growing number of activities and human uses (Orams, 1999). Indeed, due to improvements in technology, today it is easier than ever to both exploit marine resources found at longer distances and greater depths and to construct resilient infrastructure and facilities in seas, for the development of several economic activities, such as aquaculture, energy production, etc. (Hall, 2001). However, as several studies conducted for the E.U. prove (European Commission, 2014), among all human activities taking place at the sea, the most important and fastest growing one (in terms of financial importance and job opportunities) is the coastal and marine tourism industry, including different kinds of activities related to the water and sea.

Despite the fact that reporting marine and coastal tourism statistics is not identified as an easy and standardised task (Orams, 1999; Miller, 1993; Miller and Auyong, 1991), it is not difficult to

understand why these forms of tourism are considered to be the largest components of the tourism industry, among the largest marine economic activities (European Commission, 2014), with a significant role in national economies (Hall, 2001; Moreno and Amelung, 2009) and with a growing tendency for further development (Orams, 1999). Indeed, more than two thirds (2/3) of planet earth is covered with oceans and seas, whilst the vast majority of the countries of the world are coastal. At the same time, not only do many people live in the coastal zone, but tourists also choose - by far - to visit coastal destinations (Miller and Auyong, 1991). As a result, during the past decades, the tendency to construct new tourism facilities and infrastructures in the fragile coastal zone is still growing.

Given the above facts and trends, concerns regarding the environmental impacts of tourism on the coastal and marine zones keep growing, not only in favor of the marine environment (so as to maintain its capacity to deliver ecosystem services) but also in favor of marine and coastal tourism, the development of which is totally dependent on the health of the coastal and marine ecosystem.

Marine Spatial Planning (MSP), which is a new concept and procedure, is considered to be quite promising in tackling developmental and management issues related to the oceans and seas.

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Being “*about planning when and where human activities take place at sea – to ensure these are as efficient and sustainable as possible*” (European Commission), MSP is therefore considered to be an effective tool in regulating user-user conflicts and user-environment conflicts taking place at the fragile coastal and marine spaces, for some of which the tourism industry is also responsible.

In this framework, the present paper deals with one of the largest marine economic activities and with the most important forms of the tourism industry: coastal and marine tourism. The paper examines the relation of coastal and marine tourism with other human activities (terrestrial and marine) as well as their impacts and conflicts with the natural ecosystem. The ultimate scope of the paper is to explore the role of MSP in organizing and planning coastal and marine tourism activities, in favor of the sustainability of the ecosystem and the economy.

## 2. About coastal and marine tourism

### 2.1. Conceptual approaches and key information

According to Hall (Hall, 2001), coastal and marine tourism – although distinct forms of tourism – are very closely related, due to the water/sea element. Indeed, marine tourism constitutes a form of tourism totally connected to and dependent on the sea and the marine environment (Lekakou and Tzannatos, 2001), although the water element is not the only criterion. As Orams (Orams, 1999) argues, marine tourism requires that consumers travel away from their place of residence and be actively involved with the sea. Marine tourism covers a wide range of activities taking place in the deep oceans, the most predominant of which are cruising and sailing (Diakomihalis, 2007; Honey and Krantz, 2007). Other leisure water-based activities and nautical sports (often carried out in coastal waters), are scuba diving, underwater fishing, water skiing, windsurfing, tours to maritime parks, wildlife mammal watching, etc. (European Commission, 2014; Diakomihalis, 2007).

Coastal tourism, is also a form of tourism in which the water/sea element is predominant and is considered to be the main asset and advantage. According to Hall (Hall, 2001), coastal tourism is very closely related to marine (maritime) tourism (since it covers activities taking place at the coastal waters too) although it also covers beach-based tourism and recreational activities, such as swimming and sunbathing, coastal walks, etc. (European Commission, 2014; Diakomihalis, 2007). As several scholars argue (Honey and Krantz, 2007; Hall and Müller, 2004), the most important and extended type of coastal tourism is the one related to second homes (second home tourism), organized either as part of urban development projects (second home developments), or within tourism resorts (i.e. along with hotel facilities, etc.), or autonomously (without previous planning).

Marine and coastal tourism are both among the oldest forms of tourism and the largest segment of the tourism industry. Spending time seaside was a favourite activity even in the Roman Era (Orams, 1999). However, trips to seaside resorts in an organized manner started in the early 19th century (in Europe and America), whilst prevalence of cruises began in the late 19th – early 20th century, having mostly as destinations the Mediterranean and the Caribbean (Miller and Auyong, 1991; Honey and Krantz, 2007). At the beginning of the 2nd millennium A.D., more than 30,000 cruises are organized each year, in about 2000 different coastal destinations around the world (Honey and Krantz, 2007).

In 2005, the marine tourism market was estimated to represent more than 10% of the total expenditure of tourism world-wide (Diakomihalis, 2007). In Europe (European Commission, 2014), coastal and marine tourism is estimated to be the largest maritime

activity, employing approximately 3.2 million people and representing over one third (1/3) of the maritime European economy. At the same time, more than four out of nine (4/9) nights spent in accommodation facilities in E.U. countries are spent within coastal municipalities. Similarly, cruise tourism employed 330,000 people in 2012 and generated a direct turnover of € 15.5 billion. The same year, European ports had 29.3 million passenger visits, recording a 75% increase compared to 2006.

Given these facts and trends, it becomes evident that coastal and marine tourism not only represent the largest and constantly growing segment of the tourism industry, but also among the most important (and fastest growing) economic activities taking place at the sea. At the same time – depending on the type of activity – coastal and marine tourism can have a varying nature, ranging from alternative and “eco” activities to activities with a rather mass character. Therefore it is of prime importance that both coastal and marine tourism are subjected to planning procedures so as to assure minimum impacts on the natural ecosystem and on the local economy as well (fisheries, aquaculture, etc).

### 2.2. Spatial patterns of tourism development in coastal and marine spaces

For many centuries now, the coastal zone (marine and terrestrial parts) has been the space where a constantly growing number of recreational and leisure activities take place (Orams, 1999; Hall, 2001; Miller, 1993; Moreno and Amelung, 2009), most of which have lately become components of the so-called marine and coastal tourism industry.

Indeed, as regards marine tourism, while the vast majority of activities take place in the sea, their supporting facilities and infrastructure are usually found on land (Orams, 1999). Such facilities may vary between ports and marinas (serving cruises, yachts, etc.), to one-person operations (e.g. guides, instructors, etc.), moderate-sized private companies, or even large corporations (cruise-ship companies, etc.) (Orams, 1999; Lekakou and Tzannatos, 2001; Diakomihalis, 2007). As these facilities are usually located in urban areas (interacting with other tertiary sector services), most of the marine tourism activities take place in coastal waters at close proximity to cities, since they usually represent ‘day-trip’ recreation. As a result, marine ecosystems close to cities are subjected to increased pressure and “run-offs” not only deriving from over-concentration of human activities and marine uses related to the cities (fishing, navigation, etc.) but also deriving from tourism uses (Orams, 1999). This, however, does not apply in the case of cruises and yachts, which often have distant itineraries, traversing oceans and high seas.

Another pattern identified for marine tourism activities is that they are characterised by an inverse relationship between distance from shore and intensity of use (Earle, 1995). Therefore, not only do the vast majority of marine tourism activities take place close to cities and built environments, but they also take place close to and either side of the shoreline; that is, in zones where the coastal and marine ecosystems are more vulnerable and receive the highest human pressure.

As regards coastal tourism, all relevant infrastructures and facilities (hotels, resorts, second homes, condos, etc.) are also found exclusively on land and usually much closer to the shoreline. Contrary to marine tourism activities that are attracted to cities and urban environments, facilities related to coastal tourism are usually attracted to the world’s most precious coastal natural landscapes (Honey and Krantz, 2007), where estuaries, wetlands, coral reefs and other fragile components of the natural ecosystem are encountered (Orams, 1999). Yet, at the same moment that tourism developments in the coastal zone keep being augmented, coastal

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