



SUSTAINABLE TOURISM ON SMALL ISLANDS

with special reference to Malta

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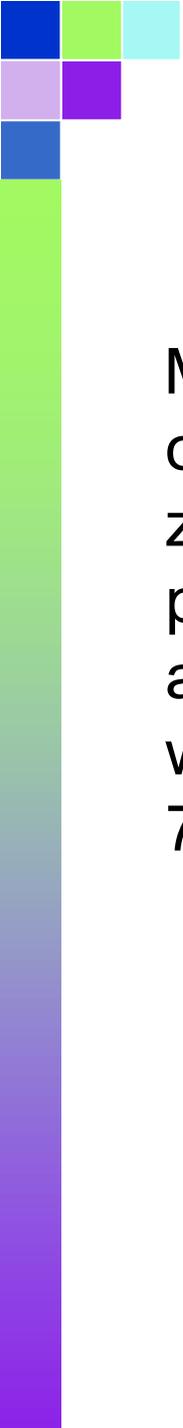
ORGANISATION OF THIS PRESENTATION

This presentation is divided in six sections:

1. Introduction: sustainable tourism
2. Discussion on the economic impacts of tourism on small island jurisdictions
3. Assessment of environmental impacts on small islands jurisdictions
4. Tourism trends on the island of Malta
5. Measures to reducing the negative impacts of tourism
6. Conclusion with an optimistic argument that tourism itself is sharpening our awareness of the evils of environmental degradation, and that this could be conducive towards the adoption of sustainable tourism policies and measures.



Section 1: Introduction



INTRODUCTION

Islands and Tourism

Many small island also important tourist destinations. Most of these islands are located in the tropical and temperate zones. Many have tourist inflows higher than the local population. In the case of Malta, the number of tourists is about three times as large as the local population, which when translated into resident equivalent amounts to about 7% of the population.



INTRODUCTION

Islands and Tourism

Sustainable tourism is a useful concept for all tourist destinations, but it is of major importance for small islands, where tourist densities are high and the carrying capacity is relatively low.

Tourism density is related to the concept of carrying capacity which has been defined by the World Tourism Organisation as 'The maximum number of people that may visit a tourist destination at the same time, without causing destruction of the physical, economic, socio-cultural environment and an unacceptable decrease in the quality of visitors' satisfaction'.



INTRODUCTION

Meaning of Sustainable Tourism

Sustainable tourism has been defined as “tourism which is developed and maintained in such a manner and scale that it remains viable in the long run and does not degrade the environment in which it exists to such an extent that it prohibits the successful development of other activities” (Butler 2002).

This definition highlights the need for a balance between economic and environmental concerns.



Section 2: Economic Impacts of Tourism



ECONOMIC IMPACTS

Benefits of Tourism

Economic benefits of tourism:

1. Direct and indirect employment in tourism activities and other activities associated with tourism.
2. Relatively large multiplier effect due to the fact that its import content is relatively small compared, for example, to manufacturing.
3. For many small island states, it is a major source of foreign exchange earnings.
4. It has considerable indirect economic advantages, including a renewed interest in local arts and crafts, and improvements in leisure, communication, medical and other facilities.



ECONOMIC IMPACTS

Problems

Tourism however, tends to usher in a number of undesirable economic effects.

- Tourists exert demand on the public infrastructure, and if this is deducted from tourism expenditure, the economic contribution of tourism would be smaller than that usually reported.
- Tourism inflows are to a large extent controlled by foreign operators, often with enough bargaining power to dictate prices for accommodation in the host country.
- A related problem is that tourism as an industry depends on the whims and fancies of non-residents.
- It creates pronounced seasonal unemployment.
- It gives rise to rapid increases in the price of land, often accompanied by land speculation.



Section 3: Environmental Impacts



ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS

Inherent Problems of Small Islands

Small Islands tend to have unique and fragile ecosystems.

- Industrial development often leads to a rapid loss of biodiversity in small islands.
- Islands also have a relatively large coastal zone in relation to the landmass. Thus, a relatively large proportion of land is exposed to forces that lead to coastal erosion and, in tropical islands, render them very prone to be affected by extreme events such as cyclones.
- Small islands are also very vulnerable to sea-level rise which would submerge a large proportion of the land mass, including their beaches, which are major attractions for tourists.



ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS

Tourism Exacerbates Problems

Although these environmental impacts are not caused by tourism, they can be exacerbated by tourism.

- International air and sea transport, for example, are required even in the absence of tourism, but the increased traffic caused by tourism places severe strains on many islands.
- Airports and seaports in islands take up very large areas in proportion to the total space available, posing increased land-use pressure, as well as air and sea pollution.
- In the case of air traffic, flying craft also contribute considerably to noise pollution, often affecting practically the whole population of small islands.



ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS

Tourism Exacerbates Problems ...cont

- Tourism generates a large amount of waste.
- Tourism is generally of a coastal nature, leading to coastal degradation.
- Tourism may also cause inland problems. For example, in islands where eco-tourism is promoted, fragile vegetation and habitats may be damaged
- In islands where cultural tourism is promoted, as is the case in Malta, considerable damage can be caused to historical places through frequent tourist visitations.
- Another problem faced by small island jurisdictions is related to the high population density and limited carrying capacity.



ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS

Tourism May Create Awareness

Tourism can actually be conducive towards the protection of the environment.

- Tourism tends to create an awareness that the country needs to be attractive, that the air needs to be clean and that the sea needs to be unpolluted.
- Also, on a policy level, the dependence on tourism often forces the authorities of the islands to take a more serious view of planning, monitoring and market-based incentives, precisely because in the absence of such measures, the negative effects of tourism on the environment could, in the long run, destroy tourism itself.



Section 4: Tourism in Malta



TOURISM IN MALTA

Inherent Characteristics of the Islands

Malta is characterised by two main features, namely small economic size and insularity. These features pose major economic constraints on the economy of the island (Briguglio, 1995).



TOURISM IN Malta

Inherent Feature: Small Size

Due to its very small size, Malta has a very small domestic market, and has to rely on expenditure by non-residents to generate sufficient income and employment. Malta also finds it difficult to compete in products which require economies of scale for efficient production. This is the case for example for most manufactured products. The island also lacks natural resources. For this reason, Malta has limited options with regard to economic development.



TOURISM IN Malta

Direct Economic Benefits

- Economic activity associated with tourism generates considerable income and employment in Malta, since a high proportion of tourism expenditure goes on transport, food and accommodation, sectors in which the Maltese tend to have a high stake.
- However the contribution of tourism to GDP is not known with any degree of certainty, although it can be about 15% of the GDP of the island.
- With regard to employment, it is known that the number of jobs in hotel and catering establishments amounted to about 10% of gainful employment in 2009, but there were many other jobs in economic activities related to tourism, such as transport, souvenir retail outlets and banking.



TOURISM IN Malta

Indirect Economic Benefits

- Tourism may have been an important factor in the revival of certain traditional arts in Malta and crafts such as lace-making, filigree work and pottery. Demand by tourists for these products has rendered their production economically viable.
- The Maltese Islands, are renowned for their wealth of historical and archaeological heritage, which, before the advent of large-scale tourism, were probably not appreciated enough. The places of cultural importance are, even now, more valued by tourists than by the locals. However awareness of cultural heritage among the Maltese population has increased as a result of tourism.



TOURISM IN Malta

Major Problems: Seasonality

A major problem relates to the seasonal nature of the industry. The bulk of international tourists (about 70%) visit Malta during the summer months, and this gives rise to seasonal fluctuations, with a very high level of demand in summer and very slack demand in the winter and shoulder months.

The seasonal nature of the industry indirectly impacts many other areas of the Maltese economy. This is particularly true with regards the supply side of the labour market.



TOURISM IN Malta

Is Tourism the Worst Culprit?

Although tourism is often associated with environmental degradation, non-tourism economic activities also have major negative impacts on the environment and, therefore, the fact that tourism harms the environment should not be construed as a case for other forms of economic activity.

- Manufacturing industry, with its reliance on fuel for machinery and its high rate of water consumption, may be more environmentally unfriendly than tourism.
- The agriculture sector, with its reliance on pesticides and fertilizers, also causes major environmental damage.
- Construction can also be environmentally harmful.



Section 5: Reducing the Negative Impacts



REDUCING THE NEGATIVE IMPACTS

Should Malta Rely on Tourism:

As already explained, in Malta, the economic benefits of tourism are relatively large and in the absence of tourism income and employment would be drastically reduced. For this reason the authorities, the operators and the majority of the local population would like to see it grow as much as possible without harming the environment and creating social problems.

The issue in this regard is not therefore whether or not a small island like Malta should continue to encourage tourism but rather how best to reduce the environmental and social harm caused by this type of economic activity, respecting the carrying capacity of the island.



REDUCING THE NEGATIVE IMPACTS: Alternative Tourism

Alternative forms of tourism, including eco-tourism and cultural tourism are likely to cause less environmental damage than “mainstream” tourism, principally because the inflow of tourists will be smaller.

However, given the sea and sun are the major attractions of small islands, and these are the backbone of “mainstream” tourism, it is likely that reliance on alternative tourism would result in heavy losses of incomes and employment in the host island.



REDUCING THE NEGATIVE IMPACTS: Self Regulation to Reduce Harm

The experience in Malta and in other small islands has shown that self-regulation alone may not be sufficient to ensure adequate environmental protection. This is especially so for hotel operators that often pursue short-term gains. It would be wishful thinking to expect, for example, that such operators would not erect structures on beaches if no control by the authorities were in place. There exists a case, therefore, for government intervention of various forms, ranging from planning and monitoring to the introduction of economic instruments.



REDUCING THE NEGATIVE IMPACTS: Legal Controls and Planning

In a small island, where land is one of the scarcest commodities, legal constraints as to land use are indispensable. In Malta, such constraints have, since the early 1990s, been placed within the framework of the national Structure Plan and a series of local plans, with the aim of regulating development.

Before the introduction of the Plan, haphazard tourism development was common.

There is now a general consensus in the Maltese Islands that planning of tourism structures is essential, primarily because of the growing concern about their impact on the environment.



REDUCING THE NEGATIVE IMPACTS: Impact Assessments

Planning generally involves direction-setting on the basis of overarching policies. In the case of land use more specific measures involving a project-by-project assessment, are required. It is generally necessary to examine certain individual project proposals before their commencement, in order to reduce environmental damage.

Environmental and social impact assessments are generally undertaken for this purpose. In the Maltese Islands, environmental impact assessments are required by law for projects that are likely to have a “substantial” impact on the environment. Since the coming into effect of this requirement, there has been a slowing down of developments which harm the environment.



REDUCING THE NEGATIVE IMPACTS: Setting Standards and Monitoring

Many environmental problems arising from tourism are associated with the absence of standards and effective monitoring. Certain activities need to be controlled and monitored on an ongoing basis, and this can be done by setting standards.

The legal and institutional set-up in the Maltese Islands is sufficiently developed to enable the Government to set standards and back them by legal measures, but enforcement is sometimes weak.



REDUCING THE NEGATIVE IMPACTS: Economic Instruments

Given that legislation is not always effective, especially because it requires a well-developed enforcement apparatus, and self-regulation is not always forthcoming from the private sector, economic instruments may need to be put in place to allow the market itself to reduce environmental damage.

Instruments such as taxes, fees and subsidies can be used to actually alter prices in order to cover also environmental costs.

Such instruments may also foster the awareness that pollution has a high social cost, even if this is not usually demonstrated in terms of market prices.



REDUCING THE NEGATIVE IMPACTS: Spreading the Impact

One of the problems associated with tourism inflows in Malta is that these tend to be concentrated in a few locations and over a few months. If tourism inflows can be spread, the impact on the carrying capacity of the Islands would be lighter and the environment less harmed.

- Spreading the impact over space and time however also has its costs.
- In terms of spreading over space, the negative impacts of tourism would then extend to areas which are as yet unspoilt.
- In terms of time, increasing the flow in the winter months would mean that the host community would not have a “quiet” season.



Section 6: Conclusion



CONCLUSION

Costs and Benefits

The paper has argued that:

- The economic benefits of tourism are often very large.
- The negative impacts on the environment on the islands tend also to be relatively large.
- The objective of sustainable tourism is therefore not very easy to attain, and it often involves walking on a very tight rope.

The paper has argued also that a policy of reducing tourist inflows would not find much support – except perhaps among those very keen on environmental protection – in an island where a large proportion of income and employment is generated from tourism and tourism-related activities.



CONCLUSION

Minimising Damage & Maximise Benefits

It was therefore further argued that there is the need to find ways of minimising environmental damage without compromising the current and future economic well-being of the host country.

A few pre-emptive and corrective methods towards this end have been described, although it was shown that their success cannot be guaranteed. Voluntary self-regulation, planning, carrying out impact assessments, setting and monitoring standards, internalising environmental costs through economic instruments and spreading the impact over time and space, are likely to halt the pace of environmental damage, but, as shown above, they also have their downsides.



CONCLUSION

On an Optimistic Note

Fortunately, tourism, being natural resource based, has quickly made the host island more appreciative of the benefits that are offered by the environment. In addition, as goods, such as clean air, clear seas and quiet spaces, previously abundant and free, become scarce, people tend to become more and more aware that environmental degradation is a great loss, not only in terms of long term or sustainable development, but also in terms of current well-being.



Thank you for your attention