Sustaining ecotourism in Mediterranean Protected Areas

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April 10th, 2019
AGENDA

• INTRODUCTION(s)
• THE MEET NETWORK AND THE DESTIMED PROJECT
• KEY TRAINING ELEMENTS
  ➢ Local Ecotourism Cluster creation
  ➢ Tour package development and marketing
  ➢ Ecological Footprint calculation
  ➢ MEET standard
• SAMARIA NP PILOT SITE
• CONCLUSIONS AND LESSONS LEARNED
INTRODUCTION(s)
MAIN OBJECTIVES
1. Reduce the environmental and social impacts of mass tourism
2. Promote ecotourism as a sustainable alternative for the Mediterranean region

ACTIVITIES
• Reports and advocacy
• Projects:
  ➢ The MEET Network and the DestiMED Project
• Organization and offer of tourism packages orientated to sustainability
THE MEET NETWORK AND THE DESTIMED PROJECT
Situation of Tourism and Protected Areas in Mediterranean

- The Mediterranean is a biodiversity hotspot, Protected Areas support conservation
- Mass tourism is not going away, overuse of resources, conflicts
- Policy interest in creating a more sustainable tourism sector: policy makers and resources from EU programs
Challenges Faced by Protected Areas

- Lack of resources, capacity and incentive at PA level
- Low quality and difficulty in reaching the market
- Lack of consistent guidelines and tools for monitoring and measuring quality and sustainability
MEET and DestiMED Context

Collaboration to improve ecotourism at local and regional scale while supporting conservation of protected areas

• Improving governance capacity
• Product development guidelines
• Tools for managing and measuring quality and sustainability
• Marketing and promotion under a common brand
MEET (2014-2016)

25 Protected Areas

8 countries: Spain, Italy, France, Malta, Greece, Lebanon, Tunisia, Jordan
MEET (2014-2016)

- A common approach to development of ecotourism packages
- Quality guidelines for product development
- Establishment of regional network and brand
MEET (2014-2016)

- Development of local ecotourism clusters (LECs), with protected areas as catalysts
- Participatory planning mechanism
- Continuous improvement process focused on quality and sustainability
DestiMED (2017-2019)

13 Protected Areas in 6 countries: Spain, Italy, France, Greece, Croatia, Albania

[Interreg Mediterranean logo] Project co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund

PROJECT PARTNERS

[Logos of various partners]
DestiMED (2017-2019)

Standard for Med Protected Areas

Supports the LEC in:

- Management of package quality and sustainability
- Selection of suppliers and improvement of industry practices
- Alignment with MEET Brand
DestiMED (2017-2019)

Ecological Footprint and Monitoring Tool

- Adapting a globally recognized methodology to assess the impact of tourism on resources of PA communities.
- Provides quantifiable data and interventions for the LEC and at regional scale.
What we achieved

1. Create standards and monitoring methods
2. Design ecotourism packages
3. Develop guidelines for sustainable tourism management in protected areas
4. Establish a public-private network for collaboration

DESTINATION MANAGEMENT ORGANIZATION (DMO):
Develop, Manage, and Promote Ecotourism in the Mediterranean.
Network of Med Protected Areas

Working together to conserve the region's natural and cultural mosaic while promoting a new model of ecotourism to the market, through the development of high quality ecotourism products and innovative tools to manage their impacts.
Members and Applicants

- Il Majjistral/Malta
- Jabal Moussa/Lebanon
- Monte Rufeno/Italy
- North Catalunya/Spain
- Port Cros/France
- Samaria/Greece
- Sierra Nevada/Spain
Benefits For Parks

What can members expect?

- Support and coaching throughout MEET process
- Annual General Assembly and other member exchanges
- Full voting and leadership rights
- Training and capacity building opportunities
- MEET Brand, communications, and storytelling
- Advocacy and awareness building
- Joint fundraising
- MEET Conservation Fund
- MEET Guide
Commercial Partnership

**BookGreen** is MEET’s representative to the international markets to sell approved packages.

**BookGreen** will have a contract agreement with local tour operators in each park.
Commercial Partnership

- Sales to English-speaking and other markets
- Expert marketing of the MEET product line: directly to consumers and to international tour operators
- Advisory services on product development
- Consultation and assistance on development of sales support materials, and content creation
Step 1: Applicant Phase

Complete Self Assessment
Park receive Orientation meeting
Constitute and manage LEC
Define draft product

Milestone: Enabling conditions

Submit membership form
MEET Board approves

Step 2: Membership

Ongoing management of LEC
Receive remote or in-situ training on PD and monitoring
Develop MEET product
Organize MEET Auditors test

Receives improvement plan
Implement Improvement actions
Report on achievements

Milestone: MEET Guide

Receive remote or in depth market readiness
Organize on-site visit
Contract with BG and Park

Transversal: Ongoing Monitoring

Receive orientation meeting
Collect data on suppliers once per year
Sustainability improvement plan
KEY TRAINING ELEMENTS: Local Ecotourism Cluster creation
Local Ecotourism Cluster (LEC)

- **The Park Authority** (i.e. Management Body/NGO/Public Authority)
- **Private sector** (local TOs/service-good providers)
- **NGOs/Local Communities** (local stakeholders)

Ideally the LEC has the identity of a formal/informal committee that aims to promote the product(s) and/or Strategy
Local Ecotourism Cluster (LEC)

One step back...

- Participatory process within a PA
  - SMEs play a key role
  - Common vision among stakeholders
  - Clear goals and objectives through a Strategy of ST and relevant Action Plan
  - Utilization of current legal framework
  - Dedication and consistency by the coordinating body
Local Ecotourism Cluster (LEC)

Participatory process – General guidelines for a stakeholder involvement programme

Phase 1: Early involvement
Phase 2: Initial Planning
Phase 3: Development of a public involvement programme
Phase 4: Implement the programme
Phase 5: Post decision public involvement
Local Ecotourism Cluster (LEC)

Participatory process

✓ **Open** call for participation to all stakeholders (SME’s, public bodies, municipalities, mountaineering clubs, diving centers, TOs **AND** users/visitors…..)

✓ **Introduction** to the “problem”

✓ Present as many as **possible** features of the “problem”

✓ Introduction to “**solutions**” – proposals for discussion

✓ Let stakeholders express their **opinion**

✓ **Document** everything
Local Ecotourism Cluster (LEC)

Participatory process
Local Ecotourism Cluster (LEC)

Basic Principles of Ecotourism Development Strategy and Action Plan in the National Park of Samaria

1st PRINCIPLE STRATEGY - Protection, Support and Enhancement of Quality of Life of Local Society

- Action Plan
  - Development, consolidation and dynamic operation of a Roundtable (forum), consisting of representatives of the local community and stakeholders associated with ecotourism at local and regional level...

2nd PRINCIPLE STRATEGY - Protection and Promotion of the Natural and Cultural Heritage of the National Park

- Action Plan
  - Adaptation of ecotourism products to the management requirements of the National Park...

3rd PRINCIPLE STRATEGY - Development and dynamic improvement of the Ecotourism Experience

- Action Plan
  - Development and integration of short ecotourism activities to the existing mass tourism services...

4th PRINCIPLE STRATEGY - Promoting the Ecotourism Experience

- Action Plan
  - Certification of local ecotourism products within a quality system of certification...
KEY TRAINING ELEMENTS: Tour package development
Product development

Draft an ecotourism product that includes the protected area at the center and responds to the guidelines in the MEET Manual.
MEET USP

- Based in and around protected areas
- Exclusively with local communities and local service providers
- Benefits conservation
- Unique niche-market experience in the Mediterranean
MEET USP

- What do you have that others do not have?
- What does your product offer specifically for our target audience?
- Can you deliver on those expectations?
Greece: Samaria Gorge National Park

From the Mountain to the Sea: Trails of the Gods

Swim in the turquoise waters of the Mediterranean Sea, taste and learn about traditional Cretan cuisine, and meet unique species of plants and animals found nowhere else in the world.

6 days / 5 nights
Core Product Criteria

- Shoulder season, small groups, 3-5 nights
- The package includes agreed and non-invasive cultural immersion activities
- The package tour includes experiential activities that ensure that tourists are active participants in the heritage experience
- The service providers selected for the package are locally owned and operated
- Define a conservation activity for the itinerary or for donations from Conservation Fund
Target Audience

Experiential Traveler: Focused on Soft Adventure and Culture

Motivations include beauty, cultural exchange, and the opportunity to explore deeper and experience nature.

Active, curious and environmentally aware at home and away. They like buckets lists, and they like to discover the next new thing.

Mixed ages, often travel without children/families, tech savvy, higher education level.

➢ Accustomed to spend US$150-$300 per day
➢ Expect comfort and cleanliness but not luxury
➢ They prioritize experiences, activities, and meals in their budgets
Components of a Product

- Accommodation
- Tour Operations
- Activities
- Meals
- Transport
Design your ecotourism package

Divide yourselves into groups

Select a PA

Define your USP

What kind of activities, meals, transport, accommodation can you include in your ecotourism package according to the target audience proposed?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. Soft adventure</th>
<th>Physical activities with little risk, that require little to no experience and offers more comfort (recreational cycling, hiking, kayaking, snorkeling…)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2. Cultural activities</td>
<td>Respectful interactions with local in and around PAs (visiting local farms, participating to local events, enjoying local food and art..)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Wildlife-watching (besides birds)</td>
<td>Especially large mammals. Not very common in Med PAs, so better not to include it if hard to see. Consider instead local small fauna and flora as learning opportunity, even if not the central theme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. History and archeology</td>
<td>Important remains and historical monuments. Worth integrating in the product if the are “hidden-gems”, but should not be the central attractor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Scuba-diving</td>
<td>In coastal PAs, there can be important attractions for scuba-diving, although is it a highly specialized that demands specific equipment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Hard adventure</td>
<td>High elements of risk but especially excellent physical conditions (mountaineering, rafting, multi days treks). Highly specialized.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Birdwatching</td>
<td>Very large and specific market segment of nature-oriented tourism. High possibility for Med region, but they are normally not interested in other activities than bird-watching, so not responding to our goals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Beach-related</td>
<td>Can be included as complement to the main theme and be consistent with MEET spirit</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Activities

★ Locally owned and operated
★ High quality
★ Include as much active participation as possible
Ensure that visitors are active participants rather than merely observe (i.e. active cooking show, olive or wine harvesting, dancing etc)
If within local community, they are non-invasive and agreed on by those delivering it.
Represent local living and local culture; are not artificial and crafted for tourism
They support conservation in the protected area or are educational towards protected area conservation goals.
Tour Operations

**Tour Operator**
Like minded, shares vision, willing to work according to the collaborative needs, willing to invest time, knows how to identify the right people for the job, organized, knows how to communicate well

**Group Leader**
Friendly, understands group dynamic, outgoing, like the “mother or father of the tour”

**Activity Guide**
Knowledgeable, engaging, can connect interpretation to the tour
Tour Operations

What to Look For

- Qualifications
- Knowledge and expertise
- Local Connections
- Collaborative and adaptable
- Passion and personality
Meals

★ Primarily local and seasonal ingredients, dishes, and cooking methods
★ Quantity of food is well managed
★ Are carefully planned within the itinerary flow
Accommodations

★ Small-scale lodging
★ Integrated with natural environment
★ Deeply connected with local culture and community
OK!!

- Locally owned
- Respectful with local landscape
- Charming and of high quality
2nd most sustainable tourism chain worldwide... but is it MEET coherent?
Transport

★ Low-impact whenever feasible
★ Meets safety requirements
KEY TRAINING ELEMENTS: Ecological Footprint
Ecological footprint calculation

- **Carbon Footprint**: CO2 emissions associated with use of fossil fuels, electricity and energy intensive commodities, converted into biologically productive areas (such as forest land) necessary for their sequestration.

- **Grazing Land**: The area of grasslands used to raise livestock for meat, dairy, hide and wool products. It includes all grasslands used to provide feed for animals, including cultivated pastures, wild grasslands and prairies.

- **Forest**: The area of forests required to support the annual harvest of fuel wood, pulp and timber products.

- **Fishing Grounds**: The area of marine and inland waters required to support annual catches of aquatic species (fish and seafood).

- **Cropland**: The area required to grow all crop products required for human consumption (food and fiber) and for livestock feeds, fish meals, oil crops and rubber.

- **Built-up Land**: The area of land covered by human infrastructure such as transportation, housing, industrial structures and reservoirs for hydroelectric power generation.
Ecological footprint calculation

MAIN ANALYSIS SECTORS:

1. ECOLOGICAL FOOTPRINT assessment of DestiMED PACKAGES
   (after each test) ➔ SURVEYS

2. ECOLOGICAL BALANCE assessment of the TERRITORY HOSTING THE PACKAGE ➔ EXISTING STATISTICAL DATA

3. ECOLOGICAL FOOTPRINT assessment of REGULAR TOURISTS ➔ SECOND SURVEY
Ecological footprint calculation

**SUPPLY = BIOCAPACITY**
How much bioproductive area is available to us?

**DEMAND = ECOLOGICAL FOOTPRINT**
How much bioproductive area do we use?
1. **ECOLOGICAL FOOTPRINT** assessment of DestiMED ECOTOURISM PACKAGES (after each test) → Through specific SURVEYS

**METHOD:**
- **BOTTOM-UP APPROACH** to evaluate the full supply chain of each service provided to visitors (i.e. accommodations, activities, and transportation providers)

**OUTCOME:**
- Footprint results **OF EACH ECO-TOURISM PACKAGE** in terms of bioproductive area needed to support all the activities conducted by the tourists during their stay
- Assessment of the major drivers of each package’s Footprint for suggesting adjustments
Ecological footprint calculation

2. ECOLOGICAL FOOTPRINT assessment of THE DESTINATIONS → Through existing statistical data

METHOD:
TOP-DOWN APPROACH to evaluate the ECOLOGICAL BALANCE of the 13 territorial destinations selected by the project. Country-specific data from National Footprint Accounts and statistical databases, documents, and reports will be used

OUTCOME:
• Assessment of the Ecological Balance (deficit or reserve) of the selected destination
• Provide an initial SUSTAINABILITY BASELINE to understand which of the 13 Protected Areas are in need of further promotion of ecotourism activities
Ecological footprint calculation

Map of the DestiMED survey

0. GENERAL INFO OF THE PACKAGE
Where, when, how many people, contact point ...

1. ACCOMMODATION
All info about the hosting facility: characteristic, energy consumption, service provided, etc.

2. FOOD & DRINKS
All about meals and drinks offered in the package

3. MOBILITY & TRANSFER
All about transfers and mobility needed during the stay

4. SERVICES & ACTIVITIES
All about activities offered in the package

CATEGORIES OF RESOURCE CONSUMPTION IN THE ECO-TOURISM PACKAGE
Ecological footprint calculation

**Surveyor Information**

1. Please give us your contact information in case we need to reach you out.
   - Name and surname
   - Organization/body
   - Email
   - Phone
Ecological footprint calculation
**Recommendations from Round 1**

**Accommodation**
- Always favor small-scale traditional facilities with attention for the use of alternative energy.
- Provide facilities with suggestions on how to improve energy efficiency, energy and water savings.

**Food & Drinks**
- Opt for a more balanced diet, low in protein and rich in vegetables, cereals and legumes.
- Reduce the amount of calories and increase share of local food products.
- Limit the consumption of meat to one serving per day.
- Opt for low trophic-level seafood (e.g., sardines, prawns, etc).
- Provide shorter and lighter lunches.

**Mobility & Transfer**
- Opt for alternative modes of transportation (i.e., bikes or e-bike) at least for the short-distance transfers.
- Consider the use of public transportation.

**Activity & Service**
- None of the activities in Round 1 required motor vehicles; this is a good practice to maintain in Round 2.
- Limit the number of employees to a maximum of 1 or 2 persons.

**Implementations for Round 2**

**Accommodation**
- A more eco-friendly facility was chosen for the first night. Other facilities remained the same since they are small-scale.
- All facilities in the area were included in a nationally funded program for reducing energy by substituting appliance, changing windows and doors, initiating small renewable energy sources etc.

**Food & Drinks**
- Most of the served food was produced on farm or locally (up to 60 km and even less).
- Meat and protein food is essential but they were reduced to one meal per day.
- Only one meal of the package was based on low-trophic-level seafood.
- Vegetables and legumes consumption was implemented as well as the "on farm" and local organic food.
- Lunch breaks were slightly reduced in time and portions.

**Mobility & Transfer**
- Presence of PA staff was reduced to lower the total movement of the PA’s vehicles.
- Motor boat transfer excluded from the package.

**Activity & Service**
- PA staff did not participate as much as in Round 1.
KEY TRAINING ELEMENTS:
MEET standard
MEET Standard

Supports the LEC in:

• Management of product performance in areas of quality, sustainability and environmental impact
• Selection of suppliers and improvement of industry practices
• Alignment with MEET Brand to achieve market-readiness
What are we monitoring?

ECOLOGICAL FOOTPRINT (ENVIRONMENTAL)

Main focus for DestiMED

OTHER INDICATORS

SOCIAL

ECONOMIC

CULTURAL

CONSERVATION
## Examples of criteria

### Social, cultural, economic criteria assessment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fair an equal employment practices</td>
<td>Adequate services for people with special needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health and safety measures in place</td>
<td>Raising awareness on environmental impacts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adequate services for people with special needs</td>
<td>Raising awareness on appropriate interactions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health and safety measures in place</td>
<td>Supporting local communities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raising awareness on environmental impacts</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raising awareness on appropriate interactions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supporting local communities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respects regulation to protect cultural heritage</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contributes to preserve cultural heritage</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respect legislation for commercialization of cultural heritage</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrate experiences of living culture</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information and interpretation of cultural heritage provided</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engaging local suppliers</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Promote and mentor local entrepreneurs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employ local population</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial contribution to local conservation activities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The monitoring process

GLOBAL/REGIONAL STANDARDS ASSESSMENT

GFN METHODOLOGY

SELECTION OF KEY CRITERIA AND INDICATORS TO FIT DESTIMED’s PURPOSE

MONITORING TOOL
## DestiMED (2017-2019)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PILLARS</th>
<th>CRITERIA (examples)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Enabling Conditions</strong></td>
<td>• Local Economic Cluster&lt;br&gt;• Basic product conditions and alignment with brand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sustainability of the Package</strong></td>
<td>• Socio-economic, cultural, environment (conservation and resource use) aspects of package</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Quality of the Guest Experience</strong></td>
<td>• Quality of transportation, activities, accommodation, tour guides, etc as rated by customer feedback</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Supplier Expectations</strong></td>
<td>• Local ownership and compliance&lt;br&gt;• Fair and equal employment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Continuous improvement

- Creation of Ecotourism package
- Assessment of package Ecological Footprint
- Package tested by international experts
- Package improvement following Footprint assessment and feedbacks from testers
- Re-Assessment of package Ecological Footprint
- Packages with lowest EF value promoted

Bottom-Up analysis

- Continuous improvement (training, little works...)

Top-Down analysis

- Assessment of territory Ecological balance (BASELINE)

INTERNATIONAL UNION FOR CONSERVATION OF NATURE
SAMARIA NATIONAL PARK PILOT ACTION
Samaria Pilot Action

FOLLOW THE LANDSCAPE
SAMARIA NATIONAL PARK, CRETE
Samaria Pilot Action

About the Protected Area

Samaria National Park, also known as Lefka Ori (White Mountains) National Park, is a place where unspoiled nature, highly diverse culture, pure authenticity and leisure meet.

The park serves as the primary keeper of biodiversity in Crete, and is home to hundreds of endemic species and distinctive geomorphologic configurations. Due to its level of importance, the Park has been granted several important awards and distinctions, including the UNESCO Biosphere Reserve.

The landscape of the Lefka Ori region helped to forge the cultural idiosyncrasy of the Cretan people. This cultural identity is visible in all aspects of daily life, whether inside the Park or hundreds of kilometers away.
Samaria Pilot Action

Primary Conservation Objectives

Reduce the impact of mainstream tourism on natural and cultural resources

Prevent the loss of biodiversity due to climate change

Minimize invasive activities that threaten to irreparably harm the landscape features
Samaria Pilot Action

Community Benefits

Itinerary developed with local service providers and families that live within the protected area

Tour Operator specializing in ecotourism

Improved local infrastructure like trail signage and new kayaks
Samaria Pilot Action

Follow the Landscape: Find Yourself Through a New Understanding of the Natural World
Samaria Pilot Action

The Package

*Follow the Cretan landscape. Its uniqueness and power will become yours. Let it be the foundation to build a new life approach*

Goal: introduce visitors to a simple and authentic way of living, just as the Cretan people learned to do over time and under the influence of the landscape.
Samaria Pilot Action

The Package Idea

The philosophy of the package:

1. Interpret, understand and enjoy Samaria National Park

2. Experience the culture by actively engaging with the local population

3. Test the potential integration of eco-therapy activities in the ecotourism package*.

* the tour package was developed in two versions, one more focused on an ecotourism market and one with an eco-theraphy component.
Samaria Pilot Action

Contribution to Conservation

- Package of low energy consumption and environmental friendly.
- All actors involved in the package are locals.
- Part of the fee for entering and experiencing the National Park is returned to the area and will support conservation actions
- The way this package was designed is committed to offer an in-depth understanding of how nature and culture function as a unit.
Samaria Pilot Action

Itinerary

- Day 1: Arrive in Chania
- Day 2: Experience the Gorge of Samaria
- Day 3: Kayak along the coastline
- Day 4: Hike the White Mountains
- Day 5: Hiking/Cooking/Awareness
- Day 6: Departure
Samaria Pilot Action

Good Practice:

Intimate experiences for small groups only

Promotion of environmentally friendly transportation (bicycles/kayaks/hiking)

Itinerary fully supported by local businesses and local people

Cultural activities which allow visitors to actively participate and become one with the locals
Samaria Pilot Action

A glimpse of the package....(video)
CONCLUSIONS AND LESSONS LEARNED
Conclusions and lessons learned

• Importance of participatory process, local ownership, and common decision-making framework
• Products provide destinations and private sector stakeholders with a tangible way incentivize destination management engagement
• Monitoring is key and allows for the continuous improvement process
• Systems and planning mechanisms can be practical and evolve toward effectiveness
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