

## TOURIST ECOLOGY POLITICS: THE CASE OF CRETE GREECE AND SARANDA ALBANIA

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*Review*

**Stephanos Karagiannis**  
**Antoneta Polo**

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### **Abstract**

The large amount of money spent and the great number of travelers depicts the importance of tourism. Tourists travel to and from all areas around both hemispheres searching for a variety of experiences. Tourism industry has developed positively and has increased in different ways, regarding its type or scale. Therefore, tourists and tourism industry develop accordingly and frequently very fast, so as to change trends or other external factors. Tourism, therefore, is an industry of attracting visitors, taking care of their needs and meeting their expectations.

The area of environmental ecology, however, is characterized by an attempt to solve many complicating environmental issues. Ecosystems and traditional villages, which are fragile and invaluable are affected by factors as the overexploitation and the misuse of natural resources, the lack of organized area planning, the insufficient urban waste management (uncontrolled urban waste disposal etc.) as well as the lack of respect in the marine ecology (pollution, fishing areas degradation etc).

**Keywords:** Tourism, tourism destination Crete, Tourism Development, Tourism Ecology, tourism in Saranda

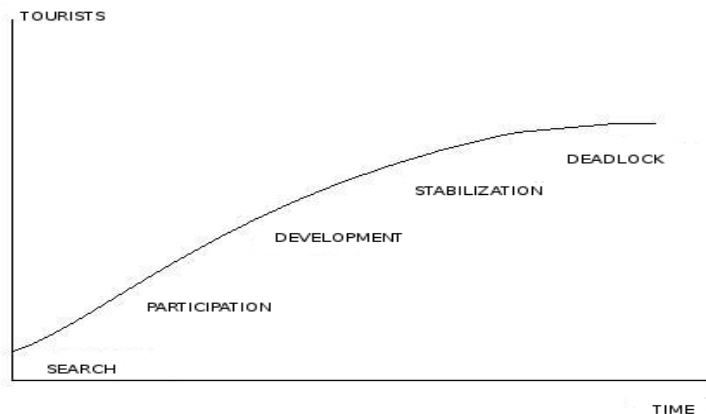
### **INTRODUCTION**

Uncontrollable tourist development appears to be the “root of all evil” regarding environmental issues. In the following we are going to illustrate these problems by focusing on two characteristic, fast-developing tourist destinations in the Eastern Mediterranean, Crete and Saranda.

One of the most well known theories of tourist destination development is the lifecycle model. Despite the fact that the variety of the lifecycle route is described by many authors, we will try to examine the course of the tourist increase model that could be included in the cycle, while through this manner we will be allowed to find the terms of the current development level of the island. The lifecycle model examines what is being applied to each destination, using large time units and the general conclusion is that the limitations imposed by the summation process, limits the circle example to a quantitative framework, in the existence of nothing less than a statistical analysis of the real tourist population. Since Butler (1980) wrote his first article about the potential of a tourist destination, the lifecycle model has been widely discussed, applied and accepted as a notional basis for the analysis of the historical progress of tourist attractions. The steps in Butler's theory are depicted in the following figure: The first step is characterized by few tourists, simple facilities, unspoiled nature and local

communities. The next step includes the participation of the local communities, the development of infrastructure, the institution of tourist authorities and the establishment of the area as a tourist destination with an increasing number of visitors. The next step is the utilization of marketing campaign for further establishment of the area as a tourist destination. The last step includes the decline in the number of visitors in the area for a series of reasons namely: environmental problems, cultural misunderstandings, increase in the number of beds offered that do not meet the needs of the tourists. In the author's opinion this is the stage that the island of Crete is currently in, and therefore there are two options: the continuation of the lack of tourism development resulting in attracting tourists of lower financial capabilities, or the redefinition of the tourism policy including tourist ecology rules.

Graph 1: **Butler's lifecycle model**



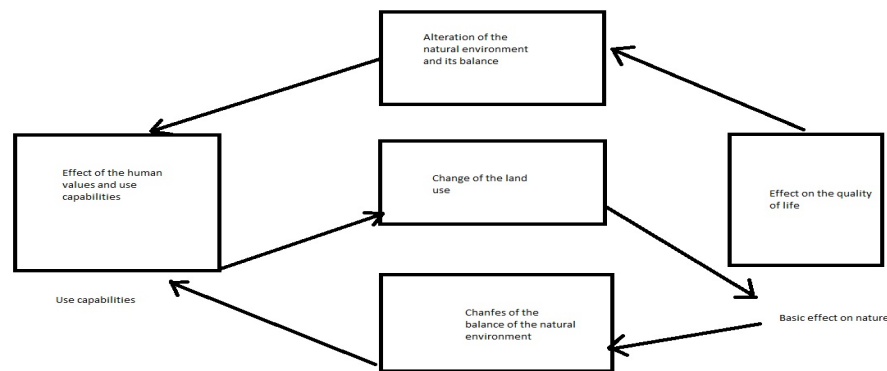
The theories and strategies of development were considered through the use of strategic progress examples, despite the fact that they are considered to be different, due to the variety of the tourist destinations according to their local/regional development. Tourism however promotes the development as a tool of local/regional development [PeDG, 1989a]. There are numerous ideas, in relation to what an efficient development might be in order to sustain the global population without the current problems, since no industry, besides tourism, is so closely related to all the financial sectors.

Briassouli (2003) has developed a set of criteria regarding dimensions of sustainable tourist development, namely economic welfare & diversification, sectoral coordination and integration, state of natural and human resources, intra and inter-generational equity, local self-reliance, local control & participation in decision-making, balance between tourist supply and demand, tourist satisfaction, and balanced achievement of economic and social objectives through tourism. Balance of the local system depends on the harmonized interaction between tourist supply, mode of economic development, pressure on the environment, and sensitivity of the local population.

The retrospection of the development and the concentration tendencies of tourism in certain time periods, in areas with small populations, show a tourist “attack”, through excursions or holidays. The tourism outburst brought in these areas, as well as the national economy, a respective pollution of these areas and their natural resources. At the same time, it should be mentioned that the pollution of the ecological base of the tourist areas is not totally due to tourism. [ScHJ, 1996]. It is difficult to preserve a balanced relation between environmental protection and tourism. Most of the times, everything is overloaded due to tourism and therefore if no solution are to be found, the imminent negative effects should be taken into consideration. Serious environmental problems may lead to serious financial problems. Many fortunes have been acquired through great building works...nowadays the vast plans and the power of the technical means expand profiteering beyond imagination [PSam, 1973].

These problems will at first become obvious in the polluted tourist areas. Many of them however do not react immediately to these changes but on a long term basis. This is why these changes are called “subversions”. In this way pollution is not identified immediately and is gradually converted to environmental pollution. The seasonality of tourism offers a temporary “stop” but tourism leads to the over-estimation of this area. The seasonal over-complement of certain areas shows the rapid rebuilding and the required transportation connection that leads to the loss of free areas. In addition to that, leisure accommodations alter the environment and contribute to the increase of urbanization with all the ecological consequences that arises from it [RuG, 1985]. The Karlen model depicts the balance changes.

Figure 1: **Karlen Model**



Source: Karlen Model: Karlen J.(1978)., Analyse von Belastungen in Berggebieten, in Bauwelt(Stadtbauwelt)

The change of land use is the intervention point of this model. The greater the change the quicker the balance process loses control and with that the balance of the natural world changes. The disadvantages stemming from that, lead to the degradation in the quality of life. The ecological balance is affected more easily in complex ecosystems from the rapid conditions alteration, which are different from the usual seasonal changes, despite the fact that complex systems have greater capability than the simpler ones to absorb changes [Bag-ZaK, 1998]. Hospitality businesses in tourist areas are the

most serious form of tourism activity. The length of visitor stay and the financial gain of room letting is different. Agriculture in this case gains from the goods sales to consumers. In this kind of holidays is the so-called "family holidays". Unfortunately, there is a negative aspect in this kind of tourism as well. Tourism and agriculture are on a constant competition. This competition becomes initially apparent in the workforce exploitation, since tourism's main seasonality is on summer when for agriculture it is the season of cropping and gathering. In addition to that, there is a great sense of disaccord since both are financial sectors that need capital investment to develop. Room letting (especially in areas where tourism is at its early beginning) offers on one hand small income, as low offering prices are demanded, but it also have the negative effect of the defamation of this tourist area. This is the case for many small Cretan villages. In these areas the problem is not the insufficient investment but the wrong-placed investment. This leads to an increase in the capabilities of the tourist areas, which is not necessarily required, since it surpasses the real needs. It would be futile, what-so-ever not to invest this capital in agriculture, where the results would be more fertile. The case of complete discrimination between the two financial sectors (tourism and agriculture) and their independency is required. This case however can only be considered locally.

## 1. THE TOURIST CRETE

In the island of Crete one meets a variety of lodging facilities as: Super Lux hotels, Lux hotels, as well as A', B', C', D' and E' class hotels. In total, on an island scale, Crete has 1.244 hotel units, featuring 59.125 rooms and 9.157 apartments, featuring 111.547 beds (In this number the Combing houses and rent-a-room facilities are not included [HU, 2007]). During the last years, an increasing agony is present on the tourist agents of Crete for each tourist season, despite the optimistic predictions, since Crete features endless natural beauties.

There is a very large aggregation of tourist activity (almost 4/5 of the total) on the northern part of the island, along the north axis and a respective aggregation of hotel infrastructure.

Approximately 17,068 persons had been employed directly in tourism according to the 1991 census, comprising 9.49% of the national total (BriH, 2003).

However, tourism has become an investigation medium for socio-economic problems rising in its regional rural areas (thus applying to other similar in features areas) [CavC, 1995a], while the areas considering tourism as a healing measure against the financial declination of the other two sectors are many. In reality, the government's support in tourist development is obvious in subjects relative to tourism and its development.

However, through the tourist activity, a number of problems arose, as the non-existent road signals and the lack of tourist information. The weakest point also relates to environmental protection with problems that have to do with the presence of waste in the street, the communal areas and beaches, in addition to the limited preservation of the traditional architectural character and style of the rural houses, the lack in

infrastructure and the environmental degradation. The latter along with the lack of evolution in the areas of transportation and hotel infrastructure of the island, are projected as the largest threats for the development perspectives of the Cretan tourism. Since all of the above along with the natural landscape constitutes the unique type of a geographical sector, with certain specialties, it is safe to mention that this geographic sector is not the same any more [BuK, 1978].

Through the philosophy of tourist ecology and the environmental protection rules, different attempts are referred to as models with development rules predicted unfortunately only from theory, since ecology is the science dealing with the relationships between living organisms and the environment in which they reside [IsPap, 1994].

Referring to Crete, it is a fact that no complete and systematic approaches on the problems were presented in the sea zones - Crete being an island-, the lowland and mountainous areas. Crete also presents intense problems of tourist overgrowth, with its respective effects on sea and land. In general, its unique elongate geometry its special geomorphology consisting of mild and acute sea-sides, hills, plateaus and mountains affect to a great extent its zoning plan. The zoning plan is also affected by the unorganized (despite some decent attempts) development and expansion of certain towns or sea-side areas, as well as the abandonment and degradation of the mountainous areas.

These zones of the island have been featuring remarkable development capabilities during the last decades (promotion of the natural landscape, alternative forms of tourism, expansion of the irrigation areas, early cultivation etc), despite losing in general their human workforce, that rushes to the developing areas of the north coastline, without however abandoning the ludicrous agricultural activities of exploiting the paternal property, as well as the seasonal use of the paternal house for leisure activities. Last but not least, there are still coast areas in the southern part of the island that expand across underdeveloped coastline zones with many particularities (geomorphology, mild climate) but also vast tourist development capabilities.

From the aforementioned areas, those that suffer the most serious problems and need immediate action, are the north coastline zone areas of the island, which have the most over-developed settlements, with all potential effects, and the largest and most important tourist lodging areas on the coastline. The results of this aggregation of the population and activities, without any fundamental planning, are the pollution of the sea around them, the degradation in the quality of life in urban and rural settlements, and the degradation of the natural environment in the minor cities. These phenomena however, have been dealt with success in other Mediterranean tourist areas (Spain, Italy, France) thirty years ago. Another characteristic of Crete is the unauthorized building of leisure houses along the coastline with minimum infrastructure and the solicited building of tourist infrastructure of every kind and size along the coastline.

The result of this juxtaposition building activity is the creation of a "wall" in contact with the sea, resulting in cutting the sea off not only from the mainland, but also from the internal part of this marine zone, while most of the times the sea and its coast is

polluted and its beaches are deformed by extemporary works that do not foresee on promoting rather than exploiting them. Keeping in mind the aforementioned along with the predictions stating that the international tourism will continue to develop in our century, with arrivals and income reaching 1.6 billion visitors and 2 trillion dollars respectively, serious environmental measures should be taken in the island [WTO, 1998]. The environmental and cultural architecture issues of the island have become one of the main interests of the local population. Citizen show increased sensitivity with the media constantly projecting them. However, the state's unwillingness for coordination, modernization and application policy is detected, in proving the most clarifying of manners that the environmental protection structures in Greece are dated [DorV, 1989].

The idea of progress is an abandoned one, in tourist development. One may perceive in tourist areas an illusion and disappointment, failures and crimes committed by the permanent comrades of the local society that repeat the same story: that they have worked in order for the current tourist development to exist in their areas. This progress however has become obsolete. The most alarming is that hope, desires and "good" ideas are extinct, and inevitably progress has come to a standstill, despite the fact that the popular environmental motivation during the last twenty years, where many of the fundamental ideological roots of environmentalism have been re-discovered [HJG, 1975], has been increased. These were first mentioned in the work of Ernst Haekckel (1834-1919), who gave a definition of the term "ecology". He was the first who proposed the notion and content of the ecosystems since they are not only comprised by many elements but also include moral value from themselves [HaW, 1978].

Nowadays in Crete, environmental crisis has arisen, and we are very close to the environmental destruction, if we don't follow the correct tourism ecology procedure as other countries in the EU has already done.

## **2. THE TOURIST SARANDA**

The coastal city of Saranda is one of the most magnificent tourist places in Albania. Lying along the coast of Ionian Sea, opposite the Greek island of Corfu, it is characterized by the Mediterranean climate and the warm sea water. Due to its location and the warm weather, it remains one of the most impressive coastal cities of Albanian Riviera. Saranda population is about 36 000 inhabitants. Tourism is identified as the main activity. It is currently positioned in relatively high point of the hierarchy of the country's tourist. Is one of the main ports of entry of foreign tourists, mainly from the town of Corfu. Tourism activity has developed with 120 units of service hotel with accommodation capacity of 5 thousand beds. Additionally, tourist capacity functions equally well in family environments. In the summer tourist season of 2009 was frequented from more than 200 thousand tourists, of whom 40% were foreign, from more than 75 countries worldwide.

Figure 2: Albania's map, Saranda is the southeast town



Eco-tourism development is related to objects, monuments and ecosystems, holding peculiar natural values. Taking into consideration the natural richness of the district, Saranda is the one among a number of the eco-tourist potentials of the whole region. Tourists are interested in investigating and knowing all the curiosities of its nature. In order to have the opportunity to explore the beauties of Saranda nature, they have to pay certain fees before visiting it. Its favorable geographical position, its wide access to the Ionian and the Mediterranean sea, its vicinity with the Ionian Islands as one of the most visited touristic points, the beauties of the relief and the numerous historical-cultural riches make the development of tourism greatly favored.

The profits gained by tourism in Saranda are estimated to reach 30 million euro annually. The private business investments, made during the last years in Saranda, are also calculated to reach a sum of some million dollars. A number of almost 120 hotel units operate in Saranda, with an average number of rooms 25-30 and an accommodation capacity of 5.000 beds. Also, there are approximately 5.000 flats let by the inhabitants. In 2009, during the whole tourist season, Saranda was visited by over 200 thousand tourists, among which 40% were foreign tourists from nearly 70 countries. This year, the number will grow considerably. Saranda is not only attractive by the name and the beautiful coastline but it provides the appropriate and necessary assistance. There are 7 tourist agencies that operate in the city and they guide successfully the arrival and accommodation of domestic and foreign visitors, being either one-day, one -week or 15-day visitors.

It is obvious that, Albania remains an interesting country to be visited by the foreigners, especially west countries, but only for 1 or 2 days. According to the representatives of the municipalities in coastal cities, Europeans visiting the coastal cities during the summer time have arrived from Greece to make a one day visit or

sometimes they have anchored their yacht to pass a weekend in the Albanian coasts. Foreign projects and investors are on their way to seriously knocking on the doors of Albanian economy, especially approaching the tourism doors, as a major economic resource. The modern tourist infrastructure has been considered as unapproachable, but recently these projects are very near. This modern tourist infrastructure has been present only in the west Europe, but even in Albania these projects seem to be nearer. Very soon one of the major tourist projects will be implemented in Albania, "Club Mediterane & Riviera sh.p.k" Nivica, in Saranda. It intends to build a tourist village in Kakome, considered as one of the most important infrastructure development of tourism in Albania. At the same time this project will play the significant role in improving the Albanian image, by enlisting Albania among the elite of tourist countries.

Actually, little attention is given to the taxes that have to be paid, under the circumstances when the number of tourists is increasing rapidly. One of the main taxes of tourism is the sleeping tax. This tax remains to zero level in Albania. The tourist operators that accommodate tourists, including mainly the hotel managers, or houses owners refuse to pay the sleeping tax of 5% to the state according to the price they offer. The local authority operators confirm that the level of this tax payment is of a very low level, negligible. This is the one side of the coin, the good one. What about the other side? The pollution, the buildings near the sea without any specialized planning and the drainage remain the most important and serious problems which should not be avoided. These serious problems should be analyzed carefully and concrete precautions should be undertaken in order to provide the necessary solutions.

Illegal constructions and interferences with the water pipes are usually the main reasons for the water supply problems. If it was not transformed into a construction site, concreted over and of a primitive architecture, Saranda would be one of the most picturesque cities in the Mediterranean.

The tendency of many businesses, to open up areas of artificial beaches in front of their hotels by dumping soil and cliffs, seems to be a real massacre for the inhabitants, as well as the problem of seizing the territories and the green areas. The single difference lies in the fact that the sea is moving ahead violently, giving way to the concrete areas meant to be used by the visitors as artificial beaches.

The lack of an action plan for the environment, will not limit the further damage, but furthermore the causes of ecotourism in this priority zone of tourism development, will be inevitable in the near future.

Making use of the sea, by dumping over the solid remnants creates various environmental problems, because the soil deposits pollute even the beaches by staying over the surface of the water. In front of every new hotel, there show up new beaches contrary to the urbanization conditions. The cutting down of green areas and the building of hotels or apartments in this zone will have a negative effect in this city. The trees that previously decorated the picturesque city, at present they are not visible, not existing at all. The constant maltreatment of Saranda coast through the irresponsible building permissions that go contrary to the urbanization criteria does not support the



natural amphitheatre present in this city. This has created a range of problems with the environmental situation in Saranda.

## CONCLUSIONS

It must be made clear that, the calculation of the ecological resistance on the island of Crete has not brought any definite quantitative results. What an association considers as pollution, for another one it may not be worth, while for a third one it might be non-existent. However, indifference to the resistance of the environment has effects on its future exploitation and the resources within the island of Crete. Tourism development should be connected with the need of protection and preservation of the environment so as to maintain a constant harmony. Unfortunately, in many areas of the island there is a sad heritage of problems that result in an excessive development with poor planning

It is high time for Crete to adopt these new tendencies and needs of the tourist customers for a new tourist policy, environmentally oriented. The attempt to fulfill its obligations to the environment, taking into account its small size and increasing number of visitors, must be fertile and constant.

However, it cannot be predicted when the ecological capability will be consumed. One thing is for sure, that certain natural elements on tourist areas depict a low capability, while in certain areas an excess of resistance limits is obvious. This is why tourist ecological research should be intensified more than ever.

Ecotourism is just one approach towards seeking sustainable tourism. Responsible and pro-poor tourism are emerging as new specialist approaches. And new initiatives which aim to push the mainstream tourism industry are being built. One example is a new alliance between the World Tourism Organization and UNCTAD aimed at "poverty alleviation through tourism". Model projects and successful multi-stakeholder initiatives, albeit on a small-scale, are also beginning to grow. Even these few examples perhaps prove that tourism has the potential to meet many of the objectives of sustainable development – to revitalize economies, support local communities, protect the environment and even generate cost savings and efficiency gains for tourism companies.

Promotion of sustainable tourism, through the development of policy tools, capacity building and awareness-raising programmes, local involvement, guidelines for good practice and actual implementation remain essential goals. Sustainable tourism should aim to directly support poverty eradication and sustainable production and consumption – in line with the general aims of Agenda 21. Making progress on a larger scale will be a fine balancing act and will require a massive "sea-change" in approach from the entire Travel and Tourism industry but it is an approach that is clearly worthy of support from all stakeholders interested and involved in the industry. It is time now to (re)present the arguments and issues covered in the preview paragraphs, and advance some conclusions and recommendations related to the topic. Tourism has become an integral and increasingly important part of the economies of Albania, generating employment, revenue and new businesses. The move from state to private

management, from centralization and monopoly to decentralization and competition, has been as painful and costly as it was necessary.

Albania is a relatively unexplored country with great potential in developing different types of tourism. The tourism industry is considered as refugee industry for employment of dismissed people coming from declining industries. Here naturally a question is rising up: "Are all these employees coming into tourism because of its positive attractiveness or as the only opportunity to get a future job?" Generally respondents believe that tourism is a good opportunity to increase their income, to be more satisfied, as well as a good opportunity to invest their capital. But, there is a question mark over accuracy of facts gathered from the questionnaire. It is related to seriousness of the respondents in filling out a questionnaire.

Except being target of the investments shifting from the other declining industry, tourism is an attractive industry for the new investments, especially in hotels and restaurants. Compared to other countries experience, when, even in case of ownership or control not separated, entrepreneurs are seeking for prestige tourism developments more than big profits in short term, in Albania they are looking for big profits in shortest time. Also, it has to be considered that some of these businesses are operating as part of informal economy.

The analysis also underlines the problems related to some of the basic components of infrastructure, such as water supply and sewerage. Measures should be taken to specifically target improvements in the sewerage system and water supply in coastal areas. If government and local authorities are not able to undertake or finance such activities, the holiday hotels sector may collaborate and contribute to sponsor several local and small-scale projects and invest for their future business. In addition, considering the main objective of the Albanian tourism to develop as an international tourist destination it is noteworthy to underline the need for establishing a star rating system by Government.

Tourism has an impact, not significant in absolute value but at increase rate through years, in the employment phenomena. It is important to emphasize, that, there is not yet included in the main national statistical sources, the impact of tourism in the GDP(11%), which is the most representative indicator of the tourism contribution. Sustainable Tourism development has to be taken under consideration from strategy design to its implementation.

From the facts, in general, tourism in Albania looks like in the other country described indifferent studies. A better cooperation between the tourism industry and the universities in order to let them know what we offer, and for us to know better what the industry really needs. This would help, firstly, in developing better curricula and syllabus, in a better marketing of the knowledge's of our graduates, and secondly, in the quality of the service of this industry. In line with that our research could be more valuable to the local and national development of tourism. The last but not the least is the importance of political stability in Albania as preliminary condition for a country to be developed and integrated.

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**Stephanos Karagiannis**, PhD, Associate Professor  
Technological Educational Institute of Lamia  
Tourism Faculty  
33.100 Amfissa - University of Central *Greece*  
stephanoskar@yahoo.gr

**Antoneta Polo**, PhD, Assistant Professor  
Economic Department  
Education & Social Sciences Faculty  
Gjirokastra University, Albania  
neta\_polo@yahoo.com